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Decentralised planning and district planning committees (DPCs): A case study of Rajasthan

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Abstract

In the process of bottom-up planning, DPCs provide very pivotal link for both – horizontal and vertical purposes. The institutions take time to take roots and social stakes grow gradually. There has been consistent effort from the beginning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to draw people's participation in planning process and the 73rd Amendment provided the institutional back up by introducing a DPC. DPCs across the states have a mixed composition of elected representatives and bureaucracy and hence raised the concern for bureaucratic predominance in making of people's plans. Secondly, the effective performance of DPCs requires permanent and continuous support from the upper level of governments and civil society. Therefore, it is desirable and very relevant to study the role of DPC for inclusive growth and realization of grassroots democracy in India. Rajasthan has been taken as a case for analysis as it has a long experience of working of PRIs with challenging social-economic background.

Keywords: Decentralised Planning, District Plan, District Planning Committees (DPCs), Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)

Introduction

The Decentralized planning is an essential activity of local government in India as envisaged in the Seventy-third Constitutional Amendment and District Planning Committee (DPC) has been entrusted with this task by 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (243ZD). Before this constitutional amendment, there were some disjointed and sporadic efforts for the district planning as various commissions and committees like Administrative Reform Commission (1967), C H Hanumanth Rao headed working group (1984), GVK Rao Committee (1985) and Sarkaria Commission (1988) recommended for district-formulated decentralised planning for itself. It is a mandatory part of the provisions made by Part IX (The Panchayats) and Part X (The Municipalities) of the constitution, which is 'to consolidate the plans prepared by the panchayats and the municipalities in the district and to prepare a draft development plan for the district as a whole' ^[1]. So, DPC are to be constituted across the states and Union Territories (UTs) with few exceptions. Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, J&K and NCT of Delhi are not required to set up DPCs.

There has been consistent effort from the beginning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to draw people's participation in planning process and the 73rd Amendment provided the institutional back up by introducing a DPC. The state legislations are to lay down its composition, manner of filling up the seats and functions related to planning. DPCs across the states have a mixed composition of elected representatives and bureaucracy and hence raised the concern for bureaucratic predominance in making of people's plans. Secondly, the effective performance of DPCs requires permanent and continuous support from the upper level of governments and civil society. Therefore, it is desirable and very relevant to study the role of DPC for inclusive growth and realization of grassroots democracy in India.

The then planning commission in its report in 2008 noted, "District Planning Committees (DPCs) are not functional in most of the States. In a few States, they are not yet even been constituted, while in most of the States they are constituted but not as constitutionally required." ^[2] The planning commission gave a push in this direction by linking constituting DPCs with approval of the annual plan and access to Backward Region Grant Fund - BRGF scheme.

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Table 1: Initiation of DPCs in Different States

| S. No. | States/UTs | DPC Formation in Mid 2006 | DPC Formation by the end of 2009 |
|--------|------------------|---|--|
| 1. | Andhra Pradesh | Done by Andhra Pradesh DPCs Act 2005. | As per the AP DPCs Act, ZP President is Chairperson of DPC, which has 4 nominated members by the state government. Instead of SEC, it is the state Govt which conducts its elections. In July 2007, DPC elections were held. |
| 2. | Assam | Formed & issued guidelines for the functioning in Aug 2007 | All districts, which are not in sixth schedule districts got their DPCs. Like AP, here also the ZP President Chairs the DPC |
| 3. | Bihar | Formed | Zilla Parishad Adhyakshas are DPC Chairpersons and the DDC is the member secretary |
| 4. | Chhattisgarh | Formed. The State Government issued guideline under Section 11 of the Act for district planning. | DPC. 4/5 th of the members are elected from among the elected representatives of Zilla Panchayat and Municipalities. The Chairperson of a DPC can be an in charge Minister and District Collector is the Member-Secretary. |
| 5. | Gujarat | Not yet constituted. | The Gujarat District Planning Committees Act, 2008 provides for DPCs with Minister-in-Charge of the district as the chairperson and the District Panchayat President as Vice-chairperson. |
| 6. | Goa | Not yet constituted | DPCs were formed for each District in Goa. The Zilla Panchayat President is the Ex-Officio Chairman and the Chief Executive Officer of the Zilla Panchayat is the Ex-Officio Member Secretary. |
| 7. | Haryana | Formed in every district. | In Haryana, the notification for formation of DPCs were brought by the Urban Development Department. |
| 8. | Himachal Pradesh | Formed with Minister as Chairperson of DPC. (Section 184 and 185 of the HP Panchayati Raj Act, 1994) | No change. |
| 9. | Jharkhand | DPCs provided in the state panchayat act, but could not be constituted because the elections for local bodies were due. The act also provided for Standing Committees in Panchayats for planning and implementation of allotted subjects. | No change. |
| 10. | Karnataka | Formed, with Zilla Parishad President as Chairperson. (Section 310 of 1993 Act) | No change. |
| 11. | Kerala | Formed, with Zilla Parishad President as Chairperson. | No change. |
| 12. | Madhya Pradesh | DPCs put in place, with Minister-in-Charge of District as Chairperson. | No change. |
| 13. | Maharashtra | Not yet constituted. | DPCs put in place, with Minister-in-Charge of District as Chairperson. and the District Collector as the member-secretary |
| 14. | Manipur | Not yet constituted | Section 96 of the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 provided for DPCs. Zilla Parishad Chairperson is the Chairperson of DPCs. |
| 15. | Orissa | 26 Districts had DPCs with Minister as Chairperson. | All 30 districts had DPC. |
| 16. | Punjab | The Punjab District Planning Committees Act' has been enacted in November, 2005 and the 'Punjab District Planning Committees Procedure of Transaction of Business Rules' has been notified in July, 2006. Not formed yet | DPCs formed with Ministers as chairperson. |
| 17. | Rajasthan | Formed with Zilla Panchayat President as Chairperson. | No change. |
| 18. | Sikkim | Not yet formed (Guidelines for functions under 127 of the Sikkim Panchayat Act, 1993) | Formed with Zilla Panchayat as President and District Development officer-cum-Panchayat officer as Member Secretary. DPC co-opts all ZP members. |
| 19. | Tamil Nadu | Formed, Zilla Panchayat President as Chairperson. | No change. |
| 20. | Tripura | Not yet formed | A DPC was put in place for Dhalai District, which is a BRGF District. With the approval of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, Executive Member of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (Sixth Schedule areas) Chairs that DPC. |
| 21. | Uttar Pradesh | The UP District Planning Committee Act 1999 made provision, but the notification had not come yet. | DPCs had been constituted for 70 districts. |
| 22. | Uttarakhand | Uttarakhand District Planning Committee Act, 2007 has been passed, but not notified yet. | Not formed |
| 23. | West Bengal | Formed with District Panchayat President as Chairperson. | No change. |

Source: Report of Expert Group on Grassroots Planning & PRIA Data Bank in Manoj Rai, Status and Functioning of District Planning Committees in India, Occasional Paper, November 2009, https://www.pria.org/knowledge_resource/1547543966_DPC.pdf (emphasis added)

Composition: The number of members and its rural-urban distribution depends on the size and urbanisation of a district. The composition and mode of membership through elections and nominations have been left to the state

legislations. As per the constitutional provision, four-fifth of its members is to be elected, but the states set their own individual mixes. Another state level variation has been found in the agency authorised to conduct the elections for DPCs, which may be District Collector/District Magistrate/Deputy Commissioner or State Election Commissions or Secretary of Department of Rural Development (as in case of Sikkim). Keeping the elections within the ambit of the state administration makes the process of the elections opaque. "In Gujarat, for example, elections were supposed to be held but some of the 'members' are not aware of their membership in DPC. Similar is the story in Haryana. In Chhattisgarh, in spite of the existing legislation, elections were not held at all^[3]."

There are seats reserved for SC, ST, OBC and women in DPCs, but their proportion depends on individual state panchayat act or state DPC act. There are states in which a particular percentage of seats in DPC have been earmarked for women. For instance, five seats out of 25 (or 20%) are reserved for elected women panchayat representatives in Himachal Pradesh, while the states like Haryana, Rajasthan and Kerala have no women reservation in DPCs.

There are some states like Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra Odisha and Chhattisgarh, which provide state cabinet minister/minister-in-charge as chairpersons of DPCs. The other practice is to appoint the President of Zilla Panchayat as the chairperson and municipal head as the vice chairperson. Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal are the states in which a Zilla Parishad President heads DPC. Third stream in this regard can be seen in Haryana where Deputy Commissioners head DPCs. The provision for a minister or a deputy commissioner as a DPC chairperson cast a shadow over the popular participation in grassroots planning process and encourages bureaucratic trend. As reported in case of Odisha, in the presence of a minister as the chairperson, suggestions from other members did not get due cognisance. Hence the members remained silent over suggestions pushing for local priorities and the decisions mostly followed the state policies. Whatever practice the states follow, it should be ensured that the decision-making should be autonomous and dialogical.

The complexity of the planning process and task of consolidating rural-urban plans require the expert input, but that should not hinder the popular aspirations and priorities. Some suggestions were made on this issue for proper balancing act. The people with the technical knowhow or specialisation can be hired as a part of the team on a regular basis or job specific or part time basis. More is the devolution to PRIs and municipal bodies in the state; more is requirement for the experts to be involved in planning process. As smaller and intermediate sized towns have started expanding rapidly, issues like solid waste and sewage disposal demand more attention and are complex in nature. Hence there is a growing need for experts to deal with such complex issues and for the urban rural consolidation^[4]. It is not necessary to hire only local expert resources, though priority can be given to them. In the process of their appointments, voluntarism and diversity of opinions should be given priority.

The secretarial assistance for DPCs is also lacking across the states. This must be upgraded for proper technological and data input and handling in the planning process.

Functioning: For the sub-state level planning, DPCs are focal and coordinating points for grassroots planning which starts from the Gram Sabha. For instance, while making the annual plan and Jawahar Rozagar Yojana plan in Karnataka, the Gram Sabha outlined the works to be undertaken. Gram Panchayat came out with an action plan on that basis and sent to Taluk Panchayat. A taluk panchayat then combined all panchayat level plans and then submitted to Zilla Panchayat. All taluk level plans were then taken up by the standing committee of Zila Panchayat and subsequently passed on to its General body for approval. Sectoral planning is the basis of planning of all these levels involved. For effective role of DPCs, financial and personnel reforms should be initiated by the states. Mostly the funds disbursed to PRIs and municipalities are tied up in nature as centrally sponsored schemes and state sponsored schemes are their main sources. The tied up nature of funding limits DPCs' ability for determining and addressing local priorities. There are states where the actual realisation of allocated funds under CSS does not happen for the grassroots institutions. MPLAD and similar funds for the state legislators further restricts decisional space of DPCs. The state budgets need to make neat distinction between district and state sectors otherwise the mismatch between funding and statutory responsibilities of PRIs continues. Some states are allocating funds to the district sector without preparing district plans.

Another concern is quality of district plans being churned out by DPCs in their respective states. Instead of consolidating and synchronising the plans being submitted from the lower levels, mere mechanical collection of schemes and works can describe their actual functioning in most of the cases. Lack of sufficient time restricts the space for meaningful debate in panchayat bodies and gives leverage to the bureaucracy. The guidelines for consulting and coordinating remain largely on paper. In some states, there are provisions for the district development committees, which try to dominate over DPCs. After formation of DPCs, the district development committees consisting largely of elected representatives of MLAs/MLCs and Members of Parliament and some nominated members, sometimes including elected representatives of Panchayats, is not in consonance with the spirit of decentralised planning.

The need for personnel reforms for capacity building of DPCs has also been identified in several studies. The officials with requisite skill and knowledge to support in planning are not available at the Intermediate and Gram Panchayat levels.

DPCs in Rajasthan

Rajasthan has 32 districts with 4 districts of Banswara, Dungarpur, Jhalawar and Sirohi are BRGF districts. There are 8 districts under scheduled area of Rajasthan with around 70% of total population of the area being tribal. Banswara, Chittorgarh, Dungarpur, Jaipur and Udaipur are five districts of Rajasthan, in which more than half (54.5%) of the state's tribal population reside. 17.2% of its population is scheduled castes. Out of 23 Indian states ranked for Human Development Index (HDI), Rajasthan was placed on 17th rank. With this socio-economic background, the quality district plans for economic development and social justice become very significant.

After 73rd amendment, necessary laws and rules were

promulgated for DPCs by inserting section 121 of the Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 and Rajasthan Municipalities (Second Amendment) Act, 1994. Rule 350, 351 & 352 of the Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Rules, 1996 lay down the detailed scheme for to constitution, election, powers & functions of DPCs. After putting statutory framework in the place, Rajasthan went ahead with constituting DPCs across its districts. For the first time in the state, the grassroots initiatives in this direction was taken for preparing perspective 11th Five year District Plan 2007-2012 and District Annual Plan 2007-08, which were essentially an officer-based exercise. The participatory component was difficult to gauge despite the procedures were followed.

17 sectors have been selected for preparation of District Plan, which is to contain the statement of resources and their allocation amongst those sectors. These sectors are Rural Development, Urban Development, Education (Higher, Technical & Elementary), Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Energy, Ground Water & Drinking Water, Medical & Health, Sanitation, Industries, Roads and Bridges, Nutrition, Forest, Cooperative, Public Distribution System, Water Resources & Others like Banking Sector. The urban and rural local bodies are to undertake the separate planning for the tasks assigned to them by state rules and regulations and schemes entrusted to them by the central and the state

governments. Then these two separate plans are integrated with the elements of state plan.

The State Government fixes the ceiling on budgeted amount within which DPCs prepare sectoral and spatial plans. The departmental heads proposed works and then funds were allocated as per approval of works. The plans had be cleared through the local bodies and both – rural and urban plans were integrated into Block level plans. Then they were submitted at the district level for making a district plan and also sent to state government. At the district level, Chief Planning Officers consolidated them into the district plans. For garnering expert and technical inputs into local and district planning, various measures were adopted by the state government. The consultants for this purpose were allowed to be hired by DPCs. The participation of the departmental heads at in DPC meetings can also help in this direction. The minutes of the meetings of Karauli district show the same.

In a study of Karauli, Tonk and Jhunjhunu, it was found that these districts had witnessed regular meetings of DPCs and they could provide their information. In a study, it was found that 3-4 meetings per year could take place in these districts. There was a certain place where their meetings took place. In the case of Jhunjhunu, DPC met after the approval of DC ^[5].

Table 2: DPC Meetings in Karauli, Tonk and Jhunjhunu Districts

| Meeting details | Karauli | Tonk | Jhunjhunu |
|--|---|---|--|
| Meetings for which details are available | One (dated 25.8.07) | Two meetings dated 9.7.07 & 1.9.07 | Two meetings dated 15.7.07 & 24.7.07 |
| Venue | Panchayat Samiti Hall | Collectorate Meeting Hall | Zilla Parishad Hall |
| Issue for discussion | Untied Fund utilisation | Untied Fund utilisation was the issue in both the meetings. | District plan and Annual Plan (2007-08) & 11 th plan |
| No. of members present | 18 out of 25 | 16 & 15 respectively out of 25 | 17 & 14 respectively out of 25 |
| Other attendees | Information not available | Information not available | ERs, Officials of district administration and line departments (14 & 22 respectively in the 2 meetings) |
| Decisions taken | Proposals have been received from Panchayat Samitis (PSs) on utilisation of untied funds. These are not as per guidelines hence they should be redrafted by the PSs and then finalised by CEO of ZP. One work should be allotted to each Panchayat. | Information not available | 1. Details of Sectoral plans within the annual plan & 11 th plan were presented before the DPC. The amount budgeted for the district under the 2 plans was approved after some discussion. 2. Progress under each sector plan was discussed with departmental head / representative. |

Source: Manoj Rai, *op.cit*, p.32-33

The records show around 50% attendances in the meeting with discussion focusing on ‘schemes and works’. They took more in interest in the projects undertaken by untied fund. With sectoral planning in vogue, the participation of different sectoral heads gain prominence. On the basis of the records available for these districts, rural-urban plan integration was missing and DPCs show little sign for consolidating them ^[6].

Like other states, DPCs in Rajasthan were focused towards implementation of central and state schemes and distribution untied funds, whereas local setting up of priorities were relegated to the rulebooks only. Hence, DPCs here took

avatars with more responsibility of implementation and disbursement of funds rather than that of preparing a consolidated district with proper rural-urban linkage.

Findings and Suggestions

In the process of bottom-up planning, DPCs provide very pivotal link for both – horizontal and vertical purposes. The institutions take time to take roots and social stakes grow gradually. There is a need to enhance the capacity of DPCs by effecting required administrative, financial and personnel reforms. The budgetary allocation for untied fund for the local bodies should be increased. Without sound secretarial

assistance, producing quality district plans is a difficult task. There should be separate sections within DPCs for municipal planning, panchayat planning and data and research support. Planning is a complex enterprise which needs elaborate and efficient organisational set up. There should be efforts to create awareness among the stakeholders for utilising opportunities provided by decentralised planning process under the aegis of DPCs. They should not be allowed to be another site for bureaucratic expansion.

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5. Manoj Rai, op. cit 32.
6. Ibid 33, 35.