



INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY
Initiative in Education & Lifelong Learning

Appreciation Programme

Participatory Integrated District Planning in Local Government

Module - IV

The development of Appreciation Programmes has been made possible through the technical and financial support of DVV International, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Swiss Development Corporation, University of Victoria (UVic) and PRIA

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INTRODUCTION

The previous modules have looked at an approach that enhances the process of democratization through the participation of people in the process of planning. But, like any other paradigm shift, this too, comes with its own set of challenges that can be capacity-related, institutional, data and resources related, technological or participation related. With the help of examples from different parts of the world, we will be able to understand how these challenges arise and examine ways to tackle these challenges. . Democratization entails an inculcation of democratic values, once absent in hierarchical societies like India. Change has to come at the level of the community in terms of creating awareness, attitude change and finally practice of the changed ways of functioning. This paradigm shift also means a change in the perspectives of governing bodies and a reformation of their structures, to better fit these newer needs and inclusive ways of functioning.

OBJECTIVES

On the completion of the module, the learner would be able to analyse:

- The challenges faced in terms of participation or lack of it, institutional structures, lack of capacity etc.
- Areas that need to be reformed
- How this reformation can happen to tackle the challenges and move ahead in a focused direction

Unit 1: Issues and challenges in Integrated District Planning

1.1 Introduction

The goals of integrated district planning are to improve participatory democracy, promote a culture of participatory planning and improved service delivery. Since the early 1990s governance structures have substantially changed, especially in global south (India, Indonesia, Uganda, Philippines, and South Africa etc.) due to the processes of decentralisation. In this section we will try to understand the issues and challenges in integrated district planning. Manor (2003), summarised lessons learned on local governance and highlighted indicators for decentralisation that work 'well' and those that work less well. He argues that democratic decentralisation seldom works well. This is mainly because lower elected bodies do not have substantial resources and powers; that bureaucrats are not accountable to elected representatives and further down the line, elected representatives are not accountable to the people. Kothari (1996), elucidated that there is no consensus on the issue of decentralisation across countries and political ideologies. In some countries, leaders are afraid of decentralising the power within different levels of governance system and in some others, the fear is that if power is decentralised it may end up in the hands of the dominant, who may try to advance their own interests. It has also been argued that decentralisation would soon become an alternative system of governance, where a people centred approach to resolving local problems is followed, to ensure economic and social justice. However, the process of participatory planning has many challenges associated with it. These challenges are diverse can be categorised as participation related, capacity related, institutional, data & resource related and those falling under technological issues.

1.2 Participation related challenges

Generating and sustaining the participation of different stakeholders, is a real challenge in the process of integrated district planning.

- a) In many East Asian countries, participation in planning and implementation of development projects is still very low. There is dearth of community awareness and mobilisation. Attendance and articulation of demands by the most marginalised sections of society is still very weak. In Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia, participation has been observed to be the lowest, with marginalised groups, barely taking part in the discussions, let alone putting forward their demands.
- b) In the Philippines, participation of people largely ends with identification of programmes and projects and does not continue further during the stages of implementation and monitoring of local plans.
- c) Illiteracy and low levels of awareness, is also seen as a big challenge to the participation of certain sections of the community.
- d) Village assembly (*Gram Sabha*) meetings in India are not convened for purposes of planning and have limited attendance, especially of women and marginalised sections of society. Even if their participation is ensured, these groups get little space or encouragement for their raising their issues and concerns.
- e) In urban areas participation of the community in the area and the ward assemblies (*Sabhas*), is a big challenge because of diverse issues that affect different people and groups. Participation is also a very new process for the urban community, covered by municipalities, as compared to the *Gram Sabhas* in rural areas.

1.3 Capacity related challenges

The capacities for undertaking integrated district planning are severely limited. The entire process of decentralised planning requires a tremendous amount of capacity building and dissemination of required information. Such a process has to be carefully conducted, in order that replication or scaling up does not compromise on the quality of the outcomes.

- a) Capacity building programmes generally target development of individuals and not institutional strengthening, such as establishment of stronger planning cells at the district and local government institution below district.
- b) Most of the capacity building attempts and trainings programmes, do not address real issues and problems.
- c) Sustained capacity building efforts for local government representatives and functionaries, including capacity building of standing committees of these institutions are missing.
- d) Stakeholders in participatory processes of planning should have the basic knowledge and skills needed to make this happen. A study has observed that local governments have not prepared themselves in acquiring such basic knowledge, tools and techniques of participatory planning process (Bandopadhyay, Sinha, Jha, & Gupta, 2010).
- e) In India, there is a lack urban governance and capacity building of elected representatives and functionaries of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).
- f) State Institutes of Rural Development (SIRDs) in India are not adequately trained to assess the capacity building needs of the stakeholders, and besides training activities are confined to discussion of guidelines and information dissemination.

1.4 Institutional challenges

Integrated district Planning is a process where a set of institutions work in a coordinated manner to achieve desired results. These institutions range from Planning Commissions at the national level, to village *panchayats* or other grass-root planning units, at the local level. They are either directly involved in the process, or support the process indirectly. But there are several issues and challenges attached to the constitution and functioning of these institutions which are affecting the process of planning.

- a) In India, states are reluctant to take a long term view of the process of participatory integrated district planning, which take a longer period of time and prefer quick-fix, short term solutions, even if they are not sustainable. This affects the quality of the plans and the final results are programme specific plans, with a list of activities mostly related to infrastructure development, and based on programme guidelines and availability of funds. In many states, the District Planning Committees (DPCs) are not functional in their truest sense. In most states they have been constituted but not in the manner intended way and not in keeping with either the letter or the spirit of the law. Further, they have not been able to effectively enable rural and urban linkages (PRIA, 2009).
- b) Experiences of many African countries confirm that council structures and processes also do not encourage civic participation in decision making (Matovu, 2006). In Ghana, non-functioning of the area councils and the paucity of the technical staff, of the decentralised departments at the districts, is a big hurdle as it is they who are responsible for the constitution of capacity building teams and give technical support for implementation of the process.
- c) In East Asian countries, participation in planning and implementation of development projects is still very low, though there are examples of a few good practices. This is due to a discernible gap in the administrative capacity, as well as a lack of commitment to facilitate participation.
- d) In case of Mongolia, a detailed process of participatory planning has not been laid out by government and hence people's participation in planning is absent.

- e) Across countries, it has been observed that the myopic approach of institutions involved in spearheading the process has resulted in lack of attention to the strategies, modalities and processes of participatory planning. This has led to either exclusion of stakeholders or non-compliance of the planning process at national or sub- national levels.

In Cambodia, the planning meetings are organised in July, which is not an appropriate period from the viewpoint of participation, due to agricultural activities.

Similarly, in case of India most of the states have not clearly detailed out the planning calendars, to synchronise with the planning processes at state and national level. This has resulted in the preparation and submission of plans by the districts, after the meetings of the state planning bodies with the national planning commission on plan negotiations has already taken place.

- f) Another major challenge to the process of decentralisation is seen in the establishment of parallel system and structures. In case of Ghana, the entire concept of decentralisation, appears to have been compromised by the establishment of autonomous services like the Ghana Health Service and the Ghana Education Service.

Similarly, in India, the introduction of the parallel structures, sometimes termed as para-stats, under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) or Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) programmes, have compromised the whole idea of decentralisation, as the local governments are mostly outside the gambit of the functioning of these structures.

- g) In India, Metropolitan Planning Committees (MPCs) meant for the preparation of participatory plans, in cities with populations of 10 lakhs/1 million or above, have not been constituted in many out of the 28 eligible states, even though the enabling laws have been passed by all the states.

- h) In municipalities in India, there has been an ambiguity surrounding the planning process. Land use planning is often centralized under the town and country planning departments and the municipalities only carry out annual budgetary planning.
- i) There is hardly any coordination between the state planning boards and commissions, the state level *Panchayati Raj* and the state urban development departments. This is also attributed to the fact that bureaucracy still prefers to maintain status quo and follow age-old procedures, as bringing in change is too inconvenient and implies putting in more effort in this direction. For example, the planning process of schemes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), SSA, NRHM and Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewable Mission (JnNURM), wherever undertaken, is often independent of annual planning at the panchayat or municipal levels, which nullifies the concept and philosophy of participatory decentralised planning.

1.5 Data and resources related challenges

- a) Non- availability of disaggregated data down to the lowest unit of planning is a major challenge in carrying out the process of participatory planning.
- b) In many East Asian countries, there is big gap between aspirations of the people and resources available to the local governments. The development backlog, coupled with lack of community's awareness regarding available resources results in communities proposing and demanding development, which are not always realistic, neither are they always linked to the overall futuristic vision of their specific area. Non-realisation of these unrealistic demands, in turn has a negative impact on participation and confidence in the local governments.
- c) In Indonesia, a large proportion of the annual budget goes in maintaining administrative structures, and hence only 20-30 per cent funds are available for development works. The number of projects demanded exceeds the budget estimation and hence it is impossible to fund them. Further, the micro nature of these proposals, are a reason why they do not get converted into strategic plan proposals.

- d) In India, limited dissemination of information to local governments in rural and urban areas, prior to the planning process does not allow for prioritization of the scarce resources and this skews the planning process.
- e) Financial resource mapping is very difficult, due to the fact that the departments do not have the requisite information down to the lowest planning unit, neither are some willing to share the same.
- j) In the absence of the transfer of financial powers (including revenue raising) and untied funds, local government institutions in India (PRIs and ULBs), are unable to carry out their function of participatory planning. Besides, PRIs generally lack the physical, human and technical resources to effectively take up the process of decentralised planning.
- f) DPCs in India are struggling with the dearth of human resources, both in the form of technical and professional expertise and financial resources, so critical to support decentralised planning processes.

1.6 Technological challenges

- a) Lack of Internet connectivity in the villages and other planning units, is a big constraint in adoption of available technology. This hinders the process of convergence and integration of plans among various levels of local governance.
- b) Shortage of trained manpower and technical experts remains a constant challenge.

PlanPlus- Software for district planning in India

PlanPlus is web based decision making software, developed by National Informatics Commission (NIC), India to simplify and strengthen the decentralized planning process.

It helps in decentralised planning with the following objectives:

- ✓ Convergence of rural and urban plans, to generate an integrated district plan
- ✓ Supporting need/ activity based planning, rather than scheme driven planning
- ✓ Capturing the planning workflow
- ✓ Converging flow of funds from different centrally sponsored and state sponsored schemes
- ✓ Acting as a decision support tool through the use of supporting GIS and graphs.

Key features of PlanPlus

- ✓ Supports local languages
- ✓ Enables intelligent convergence of funds
- ✓ Enables sectoral integration
- ✓ Provides facility for vertical and horizontal integration
- ✓ Captures the workflow of plan creation-evaluation-modification-finalization
- ✓ Generates various views of the plan including sectoral, schematic and the holistic plan
- ✓ Generate graphical and GIS reports
- ✓ Easy adaptability to the variations across states
- ✓ Available offline for general public viewing, to ensure transparency

(Planning Commission, 2008)

- c) PlanPlus software, introduced in India, is a tool to facilitate the planning process under the Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF). However, the reality is that none of the districts have used PlanPlus as a planning and prioritization tool, in the annual or strategic planning exercises. It is only perceived of as BRGF specific software (World Bank, 1999). Panchayati Raj Institutions perceive PlanPlus more as a reporting and disclosure tool, than a genuine planning and prioritization tool.

Dear learner

Try to find out challenges to the process of participatory planning in your country and prepare a list based on the above framework.

Unit 2: Ways Forward

2.1 Factors for effective integrated planning processes

The successful implementation of an integrated district planning process requires a legal and an institutional framework, as well as an enabling social and political environment. The ability of various stakeholders to participate in the process is what determines the success of an integrated plan. A study in India, revealed that community awareness, mobilisation, acceptance of people's genuine demands enhances participation (Bandopadhyay, Sinha, Jha, & Gupta, 2010). In India, it has also been witnessed that community meetings at sub-village (ward) level, prior to meetings of village assembly (*gram sabha*) has enhanced participation substantially.

Matovu identified that capacity building in various forms should be the principle vehicle, for strengthening participatory planning processes and action (Matovu, 2006). Further, capacity building institutions must facilitate the achievement of the goal. Experiences across countries, as also seen in earlier modules, reveal that legal and institutional frameworks are the backbone for the integrated planning process. But, it is also argued that the mere existence of these frameworks does not guarantee success of such processes. Other factors like, strong and vibrant community, involvement of civil society organisations and other social and political elements are major contributors to the success of these processes.

The Philippines has been able to implement participatory planning because of an enabling socio-political environment, as well as a legal framework which is conducive to such processes. However, Vietnam failed to do so. Even a relevant legal framework exists since 1945; other enabling factors are absent (LogoLink, 2002).

Experiences of the Solo municipality of Indonesia revealed that success of participatory planning can only be achieved through maximising the roles of all development stakeholders (Widianingsih, 2005). Here the direct involvement of community in all stages of the planning processes has created a feeling of inclusion and a sense of purpose.

During these processes new relations between different ethnic groups began to develop and people participated as one community. The experience in the Solo municipality further validated the importance of changing attitudes of local governments, to develop new relations with community and other development stakeholders. In the absence of effective sequencing, decentralisation reforms can fail (Surie, 2010).

In Uganda, the lack of sufficient funds and staff has hampered the effectiveness of local governments in carrying out tasks assigned to them. Yet, on the other hand, decentralisation in Switzerland has been more effective, as cantons have sufficient administrative and fiscal autonomy to effectively guide local development processes.

2.2 Decentralisation in the Indian Context

In India, line departments, as well as officials and administration, are accustomed to the present centralized system of planning. It provides them authority, as well as ownership. This is one of the reasons why decentralised planning processes face resistance. In many instances, line departments, even deny the constitutional mandate given to DPCs. Hence, it is imperative to sensitise different stakeholders, especially functionaries, at various levels, to accept the paradigm shift in the approach towards planning and to develop their capacities. . There needs to bring about a change in attitudes, perspectives and institutional structures.

In 2007, the Seventh Round Table, state ministers of the Panchayati Raj adopted several action points related to training and capacity building. The National Capacity Building Framework (NCBF) was designed to train elected representatives (ERs), officials of panchayats, pressure groups within the gram sabha, such as self-help groups (SHGs), community based organisations (CBOs) and also officials from higher levels of government. The framework divides the training content and training programme into three thematic parts:

- i) Building the right mindset
- ii) Basic skill building for planning and implementation
- iii) Consolidation through interaction and networking

The Manual for Integrated District Planning also recognises, that the transition to decentralised planning cannot be merely mandated (Planning Commission, 2008) and that change management through rigorous and periodic training will be necessary. The dynamics of such a change process in the district will typically cover the following:

- Ensuring convergent action at the community level, by bringing together line departments and local governments with an active, involved and better informed communities
- Establishing an interface between the community and service-delivery systems

- Ensuring convergence in policy formulation, planning and implementation
- Strengthening service delivery systems by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of individuals and systems by self-sustaining change efforts
- Improving the capabilities of all stakeholders including government officials, local governments, NGOs and CBOs

Resistance to any kind of change may also arise if stakeholders are not aware of their roles and responsibilities. Thus, it is of immense importance to understand what different stakeholders think about the process and their roles in its given circumstances. Lack of knowledge about the procedures that constitute integrated district planning may also discourage different stakeholders and have an adverse impact on the process.

There must be a strong desire to participate and support change in the planning process. While, this is related to the attitude of the individual attitudes, a sincere intervention is required to make this happen. Hence the focus should be on enhancing individual capacities, in order that that different stakeholders gain the confidence and courage to bring about a desired change. Such an environment would help the stakeholders to work as process drivers, rather than process inhibitors. Further, experience shows that training related to such process intensive activities, requires sustained effort over a long period. It further necessitates that the people engaged in training are required to be given a short orientation every year on the planning process and related issues.

According to Sharma (2008), policymakers and governments should keep in mind the following key principles when developing blueprints for decentralisation:

- i) Finance should follow function
- ii) Informed public opinion, that is, access to Right To Information should be easily accessible to enable local community to develop meaningful opinions and prioritise issues of concern
- iii) Mechanisms for making known local priorities should be in place
- iv) There should be incentives for people to participate
- v) Local priorities must be adhered too.

vi) There should be compelling incentive for politicians to be responsive and accountable.

vii) Local governments must be given incentives to become fiscally responsible.

viii) Instruments of decentralisation should be designed to support political objectives. There is also an immense need for improved institutional and regulatory frameworks for participatory planning. This is especially true when such mechanisms are missing or not in operation. Experiences from various countries show that participatory planning is successful in its truest sense, only where there are clear cut legal and policy frameworks. Success is ensured with proper facilitation, capacity building support and participation of all stakeholders.

Dear learner

Try to detail out the possible solutions to various issues and challenges identified by you in the previous exercise

Summary

Participatory integrated district planning has emerged as a paradigm shift to the traditional approach of planning. While experiments with the processes in different countries have showcased many successful models and examples, there still is much room for improvement. Currently, new initiatives and expectations are expanding the role of local governments around the world. Citizens in the villages and cities are visualising the role of local governments in service delivery and they are demanding more accountable local government institutions. There is an increased interest in the responsibility of local governments in economic development and social justice.

Capacity building, both in terms of human resources and financial support, is the major impediment in furthering decentralisation processes. There is a need for capacity building and technical assistance, as well as practical lesson sharing. While there has been progress in this area, more needs to be done. Use of technology in participatory planning, is still in its nascent stages barring few success stories. This gap needs to be fulfilled on priority basis. Though decentralisation is a challenging and complex process, that requires patience and dedication on the part of all the stakeholders, it also promises to be a mechanism for improved democratic governance and sustainable human development.

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