



## Chapter 14

# People's Participation

According to UNDP (1993:21), "Participation means that people are closely involved in economic, social, cultural and political process that affect their lives". Therefore, participation is a process by which the beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of a development programme to enhance prosperity in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values that they cherish.

The Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in the Constitution, entail two dominant goals of economic policy; (i) increase the national income; and (ii) ensure equitable distribution of the national income among the members of society. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment is based on the same goals; (i) to prepare plans for economic development with social justice; and (ii) to implement schemes of economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them, including those related to matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule.

These goals are reflected in economic policies enunciated in the Five Year Plans. People's participation is the core factor in the approach paper of the Tenth Plan, where much importance is given to it in the promotion of agriculture, food and nutritional security, providing safe drinking water, primary health care, universal primary education, housing and connectivity to all, containing the growth of population, ensuring environmental sustainability, empowerment of women and the socially disadvantaged groups, promoting participatory institutions like Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), co-operatives and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and building self-reliance.

Implementation of any development project is not possible without the active and widespread participation of the people. It becomes the responsibility of the administrative authority to spot active persons in the

local population, awaken their interest and mobilise their initiative.

The government of Himachal Pradesh has accepted the concept that the top-down model of development may not be successful in the state. The poor and underprivileged sections of society such as the small and marginal farmers, the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women cannot fully benefit from the poverty alleviation and development programmes under this model of development. Non-participatory bureaucratic approach and non-involvement of the people in the planning process has created an attitude of depending on the government, and a lack of effort on the part of the people. It is realised that there will be no development unless the people are involved in planning and controlling the development process. Therefore, decentralisation of development planning and governance has become a precondition to the mobilisation of the untapped growth potential. Only a decentralised structure of governance can facilitate direct participation of the people, which is based on local socio-traditional knowledge. To make it successful, the government has strengthened the *Panchayati Raj* system. *Gram Sabhas* have been empowered to prepare and implement plans at the local level.

Local level planning with people's participation has the capacity to transform a centralised planning system into a decentralised participatory planning one. It promotes participation of the people at the grassroot level and pays attention to resource mobilisation at the local level for a particular development project. Participatory planning involves the people in the process of problem identification, prioritisation and plan preparation. This process promotes the sense of transparency and accountability of the stakeholders. The government of Himachal Pradesh has taken the

initiative to promote the people's participation under the following programmes:

**Local District Planning:** This scheme was introduced in 1984-85 for the development of infrastructure at the grassroot level. It envisages allocation of untied funds to the districts, based on a formula: 60 per cent on the basis of area. Infrastructural schemes benefiting at least five families with no recurring liability can be taken up under this scheme. Upkeep and maintenance of the assets created is either the responsibility of the user community or the government department concerned. Development works such as construction of school buildings, rural water supply schemes, motorable roads, ropeways, minor irrigation schemes and multipurpose community centres come under this scheme.

**Vikas Mein Jan Sahyog:** To ensure effective people's participation, the state government in 1991-92 diverted some funds from the Local District Planning allocation to launch a programme '*Gaon Bhi Apna Kam Bhi Apna*'. It was renamed '*Vikas Mein Jan Sahyog*' in 1994. Under this programme it was ensured that if the people contributed 30 per cent of the cost of a development project, the government would contribute the remaining 70 per cent. The maximum limit of this development scheme to be sanctioned by the Deputy Commissioner was kept at Rs. 70,000/- in 1995. The government's share was raised to 75 per cent and the maximum limit to Rs. 1 lakh. It was further raised to Rs. 3 lakh in 1997 and to Rs. 5 lakh in 1999. However, for tribal areas, backward *panchayats* and areas predominantly inhabited by the SCs, STs and OBCs, the ratio of contribution between the community and the government has been set at 15:85 per cent. Even an individual can get a public asset constructed as a philanthropic activity to commemorate his or her ancestors by contributing 50 per cent of the cost of the work. Works are required to be completed within a specified period under the close monitoring of local committees constituted by the Deputy Commissioner. The community has a leading role in selecting the implementing agency and both the community and the government are liable to contribute 10 per cent additional funds for the maintenance of the assets. Projects such as construction of government schools buildings, multipurpose community halls, motorable roads, ropeways, irrigation schemes, drinking water schemes, public health services and provision of missing links such as three-phase transmission lines, transformers, ambulances and X-ray plants are being sanctioned under this programme.

**Sectoral Decentralised Planning Programme:** Under this programme, five per cent of the funds from approved outlays under selected heads of development are taken out and allocated to non-tribal areas, 60 per cent on the basis of population and 40 per cent on the basis of area. There are 14 selected heads under this programme which has been in operation since 1993-94. The districts have the discretion to identify projects under this scheme irrespective of sectoral bounds. The only constraint is that no diversion is allowed from outlays earmarked for rural water supply schemes. The Deputy Commissioner is required to get the scheme's approval from District Planning Board.

**Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme:** Introduced in 1993-94, this scheme authorises Members of Parliament (MPs) to recommend small works of capital nature in their constituencies. Each MP has the choice to suggest development works worth Rs. 1 crore every year (the amount was raised to Rs. 2 crore by the Government of India in 1998-99) in his constituency. The cost of each suggested work should not exceed Rs. 10 lakh. The Planning Department has been made the nodal agency for implementing this scheme in co-ordination with the Deputy Commissioner concerned. Development works such as construction of school buildings, drinking water facilities, village roads, bridges, common shelters, buildings for cultural activities and hospitals, social forestry, farm forestry, horticulture, gardens on government and community land, desilting of ponds, irrigation canals, common *gobar* gas plants, non-conventional energy, small irrigation bunds, lift irrigation schemes, reading rooms, crèches and *anganwadis*, public health-care buildings, cremation or burial grounds, public toilets, bathrooms, drains and gutters, footpaths, pathways and foot bridges, civic amenities such as electricity, water, public toilets in slum areas, worksheds for artisans, residential schools in tribal areas, bus stops and veterinary-aid centres are taken up under this scheme.

**Forest Development:** The state government through its Forest Department has adopted structural empowerment and contribution strategies to promote participation in and operationalize the participatory mechanism. The Forest Department launched '*Sanjhi Van Yojana*' (SVY) in 1998-99 for the protection and promotion of the forest cover. Already there were several local village level institutions, directly or indirectly linked with forestation and its protection. Direct linked forest institutions were Village Forest Development Societies (VFDSs), Village Forest

Development Committees (VFDCs), Village Eco-Development Committees (VEDCs) and Village Development Committees (VDCs), set up under externally supported forestry projects and with the support of the Forest Department. Non-forest related village institutions, linked indirectly with forestation, were PRIs, *mahila mandals*, youth groups, *devta* committees, *mela* committees, village committees, parents-teachers associations, village education committees, mothers-teachers associations, self-help groups and co-operative societies. Both types of institutions initiated the process of involvement and collection of people around tangible issues of their interest. However, the multiplicity of committees is confusing the people about their functional role and responsibilities.

Except the *Panchayats*, *devta* committees and one or two others, most of these committees often become defunct with the passage of time, as they are *ad hoc* in nature and their activities are limited. Money is the binding factor in their working and the leadership usually comprises interested community members.

These participatory programmes involve active, collectively organised and continuing efforts of the people in setting goals, pooling resources and taking action, to improve the living conditions of the people.

Development works, under various people's participation schemes in 2001-02, prove the success of the participatory model. Achievements under various programmes are as under:

(a) Distribution of rural toilets	: 1244
(b) Construction of houses under Indra Awaas Yojana and Gandhi Kuteer Yojana	: 3259
(c) Construction of irrigation tanks	: 365
(d) Construction of school buildings	: 3092
(e) Repair of school buildings	: 937
(f) Construction of <i>panchayat ghars</i>	: 79
(g) Construction of <i>mahila mandal bhawans</i>	: 466
(h) Repair of <i>mahila mandal bhawans</i>	: 155
(i) Construction/repair of other development of streets, kuhl, bowlies water supply schemes, playgrounds, culverts bridges, rain shelter and milk booths, community centre buildings, check dams, boundary walls, health centre buildings, etc.	: 5588

### People's Planning in Kerala

Kerala is the state where the government has recognised the planning process with people's participation in the form of "People's Campaign". According to *World Bank Report (2000)*, "The programme was formally inaugurated on August 17, 1996. More than one lakh people turned up for the training programmes and 30 lakh people all over the state participated in the special *gram sabha* and municipal ward meetings to discuss the planning issue. The primary objective of the people's campaign has been to motivate and empower local self-government to take up the new challenges of development planning. It was sought to be achieved by mobilising people regardless of their political affiliations, religion, caste or gender to help the local governments in all stages of development planning, from plan formulation and implementation to maintenance".

For giving meaningful direction to decentralisation process, there was need to transfer an appropriate budgetary outlay to local bodies to help them prepare and implement their need-based plans. The Kerala government has proposed to transfer 35-40 per cent of their budget outlay to these bodies.

The participatory development process goes through a number of stages. These are;

- (i) Discussion on the problems of development and identification of needs in *gram sabha*/ward committee meetings.
- (ii) Sector-wise discussion on socio-economic indicators shown in "Panchayat Development Report", through development seminars.
- (iii) Constitution of task force for all sectors in order to convert into action programmes, the solutions suggested in the development seminars.
- (iv) Formulation of plans for the local bodies.
- (v) Integration of local plans and formulation of block and district level plans.
- (vi) Appraisal of technical feasibility and financial viability of the projects and plans through Voluntary Technical Corps (VTCs).

### People's Planning in West Bengal

Having almost the same characteristics, West Bengal has formulated village-based people's planning, with the followings steps;

- (i) Identification of a place for discussion.
- (ii) Identification of problems and issues for discussion.
- (iii) Identification of local resources/assets through planning map.
- (iv) Formulation of problem-solving measures through effective and efficient use of local resources.
- (v) Prioritisation of these measures.
- (vi) Programme formulation.

The 73rd constitutional amendment seems to have generated great expectations from grassroot level democracy in the form of PRIs. Therefore, there is need to review the interlinkages and sustainability of village-level committees with the PRIs. In the given situation, the PRIs have emerged as the common point of intervention, where the possibility of convergence of all local/village level institutions of different nature with the PRIs seems plausible. However, to make this convergence and assimilation meaningful, effective and workable, some basic issues have to be addressed. Standing committees at all the three levels and mechanism to ensure interaction and inter-linkages between various departments can create a developmental atmosphere. The district planning committees shall have to be made more functional. As the state government has transferred some functions of 15 departments to the PRIs and efforts are being made to operationalise the district planning committees (DPCs) and other standing committees, it is felt that the PRIs have not been able to establish their credibility due to procedural and systemic delays. To make the representatives aware of their functions, powers and responsibilities, there is need for building their capacity through training and education.

In the present situation, it is important to have an organic linkage of the village-level institutions with the PRIs regarding the area of operation such as the ward or the *Panchayat*. The micro-plans developed by various institutions/committees should be integrated with the panchayat level micro plans and the *panchayat* vigilance committees should be made responsible for monitoring activities in the panchayat area, irrespective of the project or department.

To promote people's participation, there is also need for effective governance, which relies on accountability and transparency. This form of governance can be possible when there is decentralisation of powers and there are elected bodies at the local level. Now, after the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, the local bodies (PRIs and ULBs) have been made constitutional entities to function as the institutions of local self-governance, thus enabling the people at the grassroot level to participate in the democratic process. Local bodies ought to ensure the flow of timely information to the people and enable them to take informed decisions as well as make plans at the grassroot level. Thus, the relevance of information has increased in the context of local self-governance. There is need to set up information centres at the local level to provide timely and relevant information to the people and their elected

representatives. These centres can perform the role of catalysts to agents of development.

#### **Panchayat Resource Centres: Agents of Change**

In order to empower and enhance women's participation in decision making, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) and its partners initiated a joint action programme to strengthen PRIs as institutions of local self-governance in Himachal Pradesh, PRIA has promoted setting up "panchayat resource centres" (PRCs) in the state as a way to bring simplified information within easy reach of local citizens. With a participatory perspective on local self-governance, the organisation facilitated PRCs initially in collaboration with its partner, Samaj Seva Parishad (SSP) a local NGO, in three *gram panchayats* – Tatwani, Ambadi and Dadhamb in Rai Block of Kangra. These PRCs have taken up the task of creating awareness among citizens and enhancing participation of women and marginalized sections in local governance to a large extent. The experience of Tatwani PRC reveals the frequent visits of the local *Mahila Mandal*. This group of 33 members met every Sunday to discuss local problems of the village and pass resolutions to solve the problems. The *Mahila Mandal* took an initiative in April 1999 to construct a *pucca* path (tar road) through a cluster of agricultural fields and passed a resolution, sent it to the *gram panchayat* to undertake the activity. The *gram panchayat* neglected this issue. Frustrated by the *gram panchayat's* inactivity, the *Mahila Mandal* began to collect money from amongst themselves and the community (who had a stake in the creation of the *pucca* path). All together, the *Mahila Mandal* collected more than Rs. 7000. They deposited this sum with the Deputy Commissioner who, through a matching grant scheme called *Vikas Mein Jan Sahyog*, was able to donate the rest of the funds needed for construction. Finally, they were able to construct the *pucca* path. Currently, the *Mahila Mandal*, the community and *gram panchayat* together are successfully running the Tatwani PRC.

The community has realised the importance of PRC and its implications towards better local self-governance. The experience and learning in Tatwani was used to set up PRCs at the block level in collaboration with New HOPE, an NGO in Kangra district. Currently, three PRCs are running in three blocks namely Sulaha (Kangra), Sujanpur (Hamirpur) and Bharmour (Chamba) in collaboration with PRIA.

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In accordance with the provisions of the constitutional (73rd and 74th) amendments, multilevel decentralised planning has become the major agenda to promote people's participation in the development process. To promote participatory planning and its implementation, the following steps shall have to be taken:

- *Gram Sabha*/Ward Committee meetings have to be held regularly and with the required quorum for effective participation of the people belonging to all sections of society.
- Pictorial presentation of the *panchayat*/ward plans to be displayed at a central place in the village/ward.
- Collection of essential data through participatory methods from each *panchayat*/ward and its updating from time to time.
- To ensure authenticity and holisticity of the *panchayat*/ward plan, smaller meetings should be organised at ward/*panchayat* levels.
- Concerned data, map list of beneficiaries, plan documents, budget and other related documents should be available to everybody.
- Exposure visits of representatives of local bodies to *panchayats*/organisations where participatory planning initiatives have already been taken.
- Organisation of block- or district-level melas in collaboration with voluntary organisations, government departments for spreading the concept of people's participation in development planning.
- Capacity building of PRIs, NGOs and VLWs on various participatory planning techniques and other relevant methods.
- Government officials should take the initiative to carry out participatory planning in their departments and the assessment of their performance could be linked to the local bodies' plans to promote the concept of accountability.
- Incentives for those who are promoting the concept of people's participation in development and contributing to the preparation of participatory plans.
- Inclusion of participation planning course in the curriculum of training institutes who are imparting training to elected representative of local bodies and government departments.

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