

RURAL POOR'S PARTICIPATION IN DECENTRALISED MULTILEVEL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Sitakanta Sethy•

Abstract

After enactment of the Constitution's 73rd Amendment Act, 1993, the weaker, excluded and disadvantaged sections of society are empowered to participate in the local level development decision-making process. People's participation in local level decision-making and development process has become a challenging task for the stakeholders in rural development process, because here both the actors and the agencies participate in different capacities. This article is an attempt to analyze people's participation in decentralized multilevel planning and development.

Introduction

Reoch (1994) defines people centered development as 'a means for enlarging peoples' capabilities in terms of skills, productivity and inventiveness'. This necessarily implies that empowerment allows participating actively in their development process. Development in these terms is something that is done *by* people rather than *for* them. Article-1 of the Declaration on the Right to Development adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1986 states that 'people are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development...' This is further clarified as '...the fuller realization of the right of people to self-determination...'

The idea of people's participation¹ (PP) has been part of development thinking for a pretty long time. However, it gained clout in the mid-seventies, when social scientists, activists and development practitioners undertook action research as an alternative approach to development planning. Like development, participation is a process; it is a process of learning, sharing ideas, experiences and action. In the participatory development process, the actors and agencies involved listen to the people, share their views on certain issues on development.

Junior Research Fellow in Development Studies, Institute for Social and Economic Change, Dr VKRV Rao Avenue, Nagarbhavi PO, Bangalore-560 072, E-mail: sitakantasethi@yahoo.co.in Thanks are due to N Sivanna, D Tripathi Rao and B S Bhargava and the anonymous referees for their comments and suggestions. Any error or deficiencies are, of course, the author's responsibility.

Various studies² on participation theory, methods and practices advocated local solutions to the local problems. The principles in favor of which they argue encourage professionals to share feelings of the local people and respect their ideas and opinions on local development-linked problems. PP in facilitating development decisions at the village and higher levels drew the notice of development planners. The case for PP in development at the village and higher levels has been growing rapidly. The main argument is that both political participation and development participation should go simultaneously to promote self-help and self-reliance in society. Enactment of the Constitution 73rd Amendment Act, 1993, is considered as an optimistic and imperative step in this regard.

One of the important objectives of Decentralised Multilevel Planning³ (DMP) is that local people should actively participate in the decentralised decision-making process to promote equity with social justice. Information that flows between local people and the rural local-self governments (RLSGs) may improve the latter's responsiveness to articulate and meet local needs and priorities. The objective of DMP is also to lessen the gap between people and their elected leaders. Working of different participatory and interactive mechanisms between the RLSGs and the people can help to meet the local demand and would also work as a motivating force to take up development challenges.

Before going into the finer points of the process and opportunities for DMP, it is imperative to know what PP is. Rietbergen et al (1998) defines participation 'as a process where the stakeholders⁴ share, control and influence the development decisions, resources and initiatives which affect them'. Development professionals also contend 'participation as a means, where people are closely involved in the social, economic, cultural and political development process that affects their life'. The central point is that people who need social, economic and political power should have access to the local resources and development decisions, which affect them. In a participatory process, people can participate both as individuals and groups. DMP is very often considered as one of the best means of promoting PP.

Limitations of Conventional Development Process

Since Independence, many plans and programmes have been implemented through various approaches for poverty alleviation. Authentic participation of the rural poor who are excluded and disadvantaged in terms of caste, community, age and sex has been more an ideal than a reality. So there is a perceptible need for implementing need-based and participatory development programmes with active coordination and cooperation from both the development agencies and administration. As far as the allocation of rural development fund is concerned, it is not sufficient to achieve the ambitious objectives set forth under different programmes. Another

Chart 1: Multilevel Planning System in India

Area/ Level	Planning and Decision-Making Mechanism	Co-ordination Mechanism	Participatory Mechanisms	
			Democratic	Community
National	Cabinet, National Development Council, Planning Commission, Economic Development Board, Planning Cells in the Ministries	Ministry of Finance Inter-ministerial Committees Sector Policy Committees	Consultative Committee of Parliamentarians	Interest Groups (IGs) and People's Organizations (POs)
Regional	State Planning Commission, Regional Development Council, Sectoral Planning Cells	Regional Budgeting, Sectoral Planning Groups, Task forces, Programme Coordination Division	Consultative committee of elected leaders	IGs and POs
Local	District Planning and Development Council, Block, Panchayat and Village Planning Council/Gram Sabha	Joint Committees for Planning & implementation, Subject Matter Committees	Association of elected leaders in the Joint and Subject matter Committees	IGs/NGOs/ POs/User Groups/ Joint Management Committees

Source: Developed from Sundaram, KV, (1983), 'Multilevel Planning: The Indian Experience' in Lata Chatterjee and Peter Nijkamp, *Urban and Regional Policy Analysis in Developing Countries*, Gower Publications Company, England.

concern, as the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) for the Union Government⁵ points out, is the unauthorized diversion and misuse of funds by the State Governments⁶. At present, the capacity to do effective monitoring is limited, and often it does not exist, due to absence of any central organization to do the job. There is neither the will nor the capacity for monitoring the Central Sponsored Schemes (CSSs). The condition of the other development programmes is even worse (Planning Commission 1987). Schemes have been implemented from the early 1960s/70s without having any evaluation done as to their shortcomings and impacts, etc.; while doling out money, due consideration is also not given to the likely delivery of inputs (Jha 2001).

To be more specific, the Employment Assurance Scheme⁷ (EAS) has failed to achieve its major goals of providing assured employment of 100 days a year to the needy person seeking employment in the backward areas of the country during the agricultural lean season. Proper planning and effective control over execution of activities was lacking in most of the states. Implementation of the public work projects was continued without even consulting the local people for whom those are intended. It is a precondition that the PRIs should formulate their annual action plans with issuing a family card and proper registration of the people needing employment. The C&AG Report also says that the contractors/middlemen have executed works under the EAS in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Pondicherry, Punjab, Orissa, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Karnataka, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Kerala, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Beneficiary surveys not only highlights the high influence and active involvement of the labour contractors for execution of the employment generating public work projects, but were also instrumental in identifying the projects to be executed and getting the beneficiaries mobilised to provide cheap labour. It was revealed that nearly 30 percent of the beneficiaries worked under them. About 28 percent reported that the contractors identified the projects; nearly two-fifths reported that the labour contractors arranged labour and nearly five percent of the beneficiaries took the help of the middlemen to get registered under the programme. Influence of the middlemen was found to be relatively high in Orissa, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh (C&AG Report 2001). Generally, monitoring and evaluation of the public works are considered a prerequisite for effective development administration; the report says that these measures hardly take place at all levels, be it the center, state, district or block. As the report reveals, EAS on an average provided only 18 and 16 days employment during 1994-95 and 1995-96 respectively. There are indications of misappropriation, incomplete/abandoned work and heavy unspent balances (<http://planningcommission.nic.in>).

The details of the funds released under the EAS and utilised by the states and UTs show that a large portion of the funds remained unutilised (Table 1). The percentage of utilisation (as shown in the parentheses) indicated that the development administration has to improve the programme implementation process for utilising the allocation. The other side of the story is that whatever funds allocated for rural poverty alleviation hardly reaches the vulnerable sections of society. Here, the role of development administration is central for management and sharing benefits. On the one hand the government and non-government development agencies are accusing the government for shortage of development funds, and on the other hand they are incapable of utilizing the allocation properly.

Identification of the below poverty line (BPL) families and implementation of a number of programmes has become a big headache for the development administration. As many as thirteen states and union territories such as Orissa, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam, Goa, Tripura, Manipur, Uttaranchal, Nagaland, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Pondichery, Chandigarh and Lakhsadweep have failed to identify the BPL families. The situation became so grim that in some states, to check starvation deaths the Supreme Court directed the respective governments to identify the families within three weeks and lift their grain quota from Food Corporation of India (FCI) and implement the Food for Work Programme⁸. The Divisions Bench, comprising Justice BN Kripal and Justice Ashok Bhan, referred to the State's behavior in identifying the poor as a tragicomedy. At the time when the buffer stock is much more than the requirement and as many as nine Central Schemes⁹ are there to meet the basic minimum needs like food, no satisfactory results were achieved.

Table 1: Allocation and Utilization of Funds under EAS during 1993-1996

(Rupees in crores)

Funds released by the governments				Utilised	Unutilised
Year	Central	State	Total		
1993-94	493.10 (80.01)	109.66 (19.99)	548.76 (100.00)	183.75 (33.48)	365.01 (62.52)
1994-95	1128.52 (80.02)	281.73 (19.98)	1410.25 (100.00)	1235.45 (87.60)	174.8 (12.4)
1995-96	1705.69 (80.01)	425.95 (19.99)	2131.64 (100.00)	1582.19 (74.22)	549.45 (25.78)
Total	3273.31 (80.01)	817.34 (19.99)	4090.65 (100.00)	3001.39 (73.37)	1089.26 (26.63)

Source: <http://www.planningcommission.nic.in>

Note: Figures in parentheses show the percentage.

Utilising the allocations and returning the Utilisation Certificates (UCs) have become a difficult job for the development administration in a number of states. For example, in Orissa, by mid-February 2002, out of thirty districts only ten were able to send the certificates and hence the second instalment could not be released in time.¹⁰ Here, the administration has also failed to demand the next instalment of the allocation. The case for failing to demand the instalments in time may be one of the reasons for articulating the needs of the area and its people by the local administration as well as the PRIs. If this is the case of the supply side, it could be more revealing to analyse the implemented public works in rural areas. Every year enormous sums have been poured into development programmes of all hues with no tangible results. Jean Dreze (2001) found that:

In western Orissa, particularly in Kalahandi, Bolangir and Koraput, starvation deaths took place due to a crisis in their traditional livelihoods, rampant corruption and exploitation by the elite. It hardly happens due to shortage of resources. The predictable 'Contractor-Trader-Official-Politician' nexus regularly siphons off the development funds and calamity relief funds. The nexus usurps the development and other financial allocations, which have been documented in a series of Legislative Committee Reports.

To substantiate his statement, he had cited an example. In Bhawanipatna (comes within the undivided Kalahandi district), one graduate (from St. Stephen's College in Delhi) turned contractor gave a candid account of the commissions that were 'due' to various officials at the block level. Out of the Work Order for any rural development work, three percent goes to the Block Development Officer (BDO), five percent to the Junior Engineer, five percent to the Gram Panchayat Extension Officer, five percent to the Panchayat Samiti Chairman and two percent to the cashier dealing with the transactions. In exceptional cases, if the BDO is honest he will stick to three percent. After the end of the financial year, the local development administration has to paint the income and expenditures accounts for public notice. However, even after the publication of the expenditures about the failed programme, hardly any meetings or discussions take place at the village level.

Conducting gram sabha meetings has become a ritual and it could be considered as one of the factors behind the abysmal condition of the rural infrastructure and the other construction-related development programmes. It so happened that when starvation deaths were taking place in Orissa, the calamity relief expenditures were soaked up quickly, whereas the allocation for implementing development programmes by the government agencies remained unutilized. Take the case of the implementation of the rural development programmes by the Integrated

Tribal Development Agencies (ITDA) in Orissa. The main objectives of the ITDA are to see that different tribal development programmes are implemented effectively. The situation became worse and that the High Level Review Committee warned the Project Administrators and asked them to utilize the allocation by the end of March 2002 and produce the UCs.¹¹ The central government has also issued threatening letters to cut allocations in case of their failure to utilise the funds in time.

The report says that the ITDA of Phulbani, Keonjhar, Paralakhemandi, Panposh, Baripada, Gunpur, Koraput, Karanjia, Jaypore and Thuamulrampur had utilized only 40 to 50 percent of the grants provided to them. Out of the 21 ITDAs, only five, i.e., Baliguda, Kaptipada, Rairangpur, Nilagiri, and Champua utilised more than fifty percent of their allocation. In a poor state where people die of starvation, not a single ITDA was able to utilise the financial assistance in full. The development fund utilization in the ITDA of Nawarangpur 23.04 percent, Banei 26.21 percent, Malkangiri 32.99 percent, Rayagada 38.44 percent and Sundargarh was only 40.14 percent by the day the report was published (Table 2). On an average, 32 percent of the total funds allocated have been spent. The overall picture of fund utilisation in among all the 21 ITDAs of Orissa is not rosy; out of 4604.54 lakh, only 201.95 lakh rupees (around 4%) were utilised by the end of January 2002. The remaining allocations have to be spent by the end of the financial year. So the crux of the problem is that time would certainly determine the quality of public works.

Table 2: Implementation of Development Programme in the Selected ITDAs in Orissa during 2000-2001

(In lakh rupees)

ITDAs	Total allocation	Utilized
Nawarangpur	286	65.91 (23.04)
Banei	304	79.70 (26.21)
Malkangiri	515	169.94 (32.99)
Rayagada	155	59.59 (38.44)
Sundargarh	359	144.11(40.14)

Source: www.dharitri.com.130202/default.htm

Note: Figures in parentheses show the percentage.

Table 3 shows the specific expenditures made in the various sectors of rural development by the ITDAs in Orissa. By the end of January 2002 hardly any programme had crossed the 50% achievement mark except for infrastructure building. During the period for building infrastructure, only 25.03 percent of the total allocations were spent, whereas by that time it covered almost 99 percent of the total number of

public works. In the same way, for promoting agricultural activities 18.58 percent of the total allocation was spent, for soil and moisture conservation measures 27.93 percent, for village and cottage industries 31.56 percent, in poverty alleviation 20.25 percent and for drinking water supply 25.10 percent were spent. Programmes like land development and fisheries were not even started, which shows the flippant attitude of the tribal development administration. In case of the cooperative sector, which desired more allocation as well as active beneficiary participation, the fund utilisation rate was as low as 5.42 percent. Training and extension activities are always considered vital for better outcome, but the report says that during the financial year, out of the proposed 1898 training programmes only 588 (30.98 percent) were held. Analyzing figures, it could be concluded that resources for ensuring adequate food as well as generating gainful employment for the rural poor was never a big problem for states like Orissa.

**Table 3: Sector-wise Programme Implementation
by the ITDAs in Orissa during 2000-2001**

(In thousand rupees)

Particulars	Financial		Physical*	
	Total allocation	Money Spent	Target	Achievement
Agriculture	8105842	1506247	7802 (18.58)	2526 (32.38)
Horticulture	5160049	2084224	13099 (40.39)	3976 (30.35)
Land development	164580	Not utilized	80	No
Soil conservation	6001762	1676179	1737 (27.93)	283 (16.29)
Fishery	2016975	Work not started	438	No
Village & Cottage Industries	4061191	1281686	922 (31.56)	248 (26.90)
Small irrigation projects	137740318	41072191	19158 (29.82)	4124 (21.53)
Cooperatives	1259580	68278	8465 (5.42)	1707 (20.17)
Training	9344250	2007,727	1898 (21.49)	588 (30.98)
Poverty alleviation	70061600	14185923	8267 (20.25)	1909 (23.09)

Particulars	Financial		Physical*	
	Total allocation	Money Spent	Target	Achievement
Infrastructure building	92845443	23243835	345 (25.03)	340 (98.55)
Road construction	63470147	26368886	354 (41.55)	76 (21.47)
Drinking water	22547469	5660072	511 (25.10)	116 (22.70)
Electric connection to tribal hamlets	6828327	1845958	75 (27.03)	25 (33.33)
Construction of school buildings	—	—	405	123 (30.37)

Source: The Dharitri, Bhubaneswar January 8, 2002 and www.dharitri.com.090102/default.htm

Note: Figures in parentheses show the percentage.

The above facts and figures echo the inefficiency and weakness of the development administration. The main job of the administration and the elected representatives is to ensure that rural poverty alleviation programmes are implemented and reach the needy people in time. Another alarming reality is that even after fifty years of independence, the rural poor do not have a strong voice to attract the attention of the development administration and elected leaders. As a result, local need is hardly included during formulation of the programmes. The need of the hour is to properly identify and articulate local needs and aspirations in the form of participatory development projects and club these projects at the subsequent higher levels. Due to administrative apathy, lack of demand from the local people and little/no collaboration from the local development agencies and NGOs are major bottlenecks for initiating a successful development process (Narayan et al, 2000).

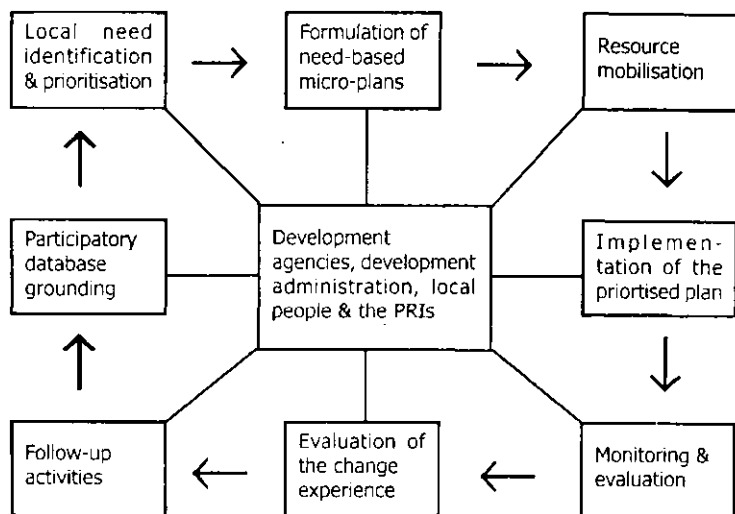
We have come a long way from centralised to decentralised planning for achieving growth, equity and social justice. Plans and programmes have failed to achieve the targets to reduce rural poverty and even prevent the starvation deaths because both the primary¹² and secondary¹³ stakeholders who are supposed to act together to achieve the goal have failed to do so. A wide gap still prevails between the beneficiaries and benefactors; formulation of the need based plans and its implementation process. Involving the rural poor, especially the women, in the local area development process is considered one of the basic ways to get to the bottom of the problem.

Building Participatory Structures and Processes

The Constitution's 74th Amendment Act, 1993, under its Article 243ZD, directs the panchayats *'to constitute the District Planning Committee (DPC) to consolidate the plans prepared by the local self governments and to draft a district plan for the district as a whole'*. The Article indicates that the gram panchayat (GP) and panchayat samiti (PS) could also formulate their plans, which could be consolidated at the district level. The Act has also specified that the gram sabha (GS) or the village assembly should convene at least twice in a year to discuss the ongoing, as well as the implemented programmes and prepare the annual action plan. The GS has an important role in activating the democratic process at the grassroots level and inculcating the community spirit, building political awareness, strengthening developmental orientations, educating the rural people on administrative and political processes and also enabling the weaker sections to progressively assert their views. Above all, with all its potentialities and powers, the GS could be recognised as a vital tier in the PRIs structure. The Constitutional provisions as well as the available institutional structures should be utilised effectively to involve the rural poor in the development decision-making process. To ensure all this, the role of the development administration is considered most vital.

From the point of view of mass participation, planning and review of the local development programmes directly, GS would be the most appropriate place for participatory planning and development. Micro-plans¹⁴ prepared on the felt-needs of the local people at the GS could be improved and integrated at the next higher levels to make multilevel planning a success. PP in local development planning includes collection and crosscheck of participatory data for each village, identification of the felt-needs of the area and its people, formulation of micro-plans, mobilisation of the required resources for implementing the micro-plans on a priority basis. The other steps are monitoring, evaluation and follow up action of the implemented plans and programmes. The most important function in the above process is that both the people and the local development agencies¹⁵ participate actively (Figure 1). This is the only way to fulfill the vital objective of development so that 'the common men who are oppressed, exploited and weak in terms of resources get a voice and greater control over their lives (Narayan ed, 2002). The emerging consensus regarding pre-condition for effective participation requires people's involvement, not just as individuals but also as a collectivity, such as a village community (Agarwal 2001).

Figure 1: Participatory Planning and Development Cycle



Capacity Building for Participatory Planning and Development

Launching new programmes would not ensure PP automatically, rather people should be motivated to come forward and make the most of the given choices. Always it should be the attempts of the development agencies to provide the rural poor the most appropriate choices and opportunities for sustainable and participatory development.¹⁶ Participation is a plant that does not grow easily in the human environment (Human Development Report 1993). However, against all odds, the disadvantaged sections of society have to grow and voice their need. While the rural poor possess unique characteristics that facilitate their active and direct participation in the local area development process, it is also true that the rural elite dominates the local power structure, leaving hardly enough space for initiating the participatory planning and development process.

The Community Development (CD) programme initiated five decades ago, was based mainly on three principles¹⁷ viz., participation, felt-needs and self-help. Since the 1960s, participation has become a prominent theme in political discourse, especially in the fields of public policy and political philosophy. Participation is the omnipotent term encircling the principles of felt-needs and self-help. Identification of the felt-needs is often used as a strategy by development agencies to

understand the needs of the poor, to plan and implement local development programmes and projects. Finally, 'self-help' has been used by development agencies to limit expenditure by providing matching a grant. The philosophy behind this is that the reference groups would contribute and share both the benefits and the risk, during which the beneficiaries would become self-reliant and not abjectly dependent on others. The CD programme failed to achieve its goal because the development agencies could not act collaboratively to identify the needs of the people and their area, involve the rural poor in the participatory development¹⁸ process, promote self-help and self-reliance on a massive scale. In this regard it becomes essential to know why the rural poor, especially the women do not participate in the development process.

A study undertaken to identify the factors and forces that encourage or discourage people to participate in the individual, as well as the community development process, found that the vulnerable sections of society possess certain social, economic and behavioral characteristics (Chart 2). Whatever the rural poor earn, they use up for meeting their basic minimum needs, leaving hardly anything to save for future use. During the study, to some of the queries, people responded by saying, 'I don't know, you better know'. It is a pre-conceived notion among the rural poor that people who are smartly dressed and come from the urban areas know everything, even about their area, culture and lifestyle etc. During interaction it was revealed that mass illiteracy, lack of awareness, exposure, education and lack of wealth do not help them to maintain high self-esteem. Due to ignorance, the rural poor, particularly Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women face humiliation in their day-to-day activities (Narayan et al, 2000). These characteristics do not allow them to overcome powerlessness and poverty.

Chart 2: Characteristics of the Rural Poor

Behavioural	Social	Economic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependence on government & non-government development programmes • Low self-esteem • Immediate need gratification • Fatalistic attitude • I don't know, you know & I am not OK, you are OK • Culture of silence and submissiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community life • Caste feeling • Mass illiteracy • Lack of knowledge about development programmes • Hard working • Lack of public amenities • Traditional beliefs & practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low productive assets • Seasonal unemployment • Migration for work • Class division • Low savings & investment • Lack of entrepreneurial quality • Traditional work • Hunger & mass poverty

The social characteristic of the rural poor is that they are hardworking. Fellow feeling, traditional belief and practices are still widely prevalent. The rural poor do not have minimum information about the potential benefits from the government and non-government development programmes. Rural development experts and consultants with their strong educational background generally feel that the rural poor being illiterate, exploited and disadvantaged do not have the solutions, so they go on imposing their expert solutions upon them. Sethy (1999) found that people do have faith in God and hope that by the blessings of God they would overcome their misery one day and God will punish their exploiters. This discourages them to commit as well as oppose injustice in all forms. They are vulnerable¹⁹ to the loss of their productive assets such as cows, goats and any earning member of their family. Crop failure due to untimely monsoon and other natural calamities aggravates their problems to a great extent. The rural poor also possess characteristics such as honesty, spirituality and simplicity, which provide space for the successful implementation of the local area development programmes. Strong community²⁰ feeling still persists in rural areas to strengthen the social structure. The blueprint approach or expert solutions may not help until and unless the rural poor fight out their own problems both individually and as a community. The powerful upper class, elite and the consultants 'think they know what is right and real for those below' (Chambers 1997). This notion has to be altered and the rural poor have to be encouraged to come forward and participate in the local development decision-making process and solve their problems.

As regards the economic characteristics of the rural poor, the study (Sethy 1999) revealed that they possess low productive assets to augment their income and social status. Having no opportunity to earn during the lean season, they face unemployment and so migrate to distant cities to earn their livelihood. At the same time, much dependence on traditional works does not help them to earn more and save for further investment. Class divisions persist to maintain a gap between the rich and the poor. Taking all the above problems into account, the only viable and immediate task that could be taken up seriously is to provide gainful employment throughout the year. Building durable community assets, forestation and implementation of the Food for Work and the Employment Assurance Schemes could be taken up extensively to enhance their income. The other fact is that the rural poor are caught up in a number of unproductive expenditures such as marriage, death and birth ceremonies, cultural occasions and celebrations throughout the year. Most of the above characteristics are considered as the contributing factors for persistence of poverty in rural areas. Adding to this, there are environmental factors such as the depletion of the natural resources and accidental evils also making their social and economic condition worse (World Bank 2001).

Persistence of mass poverty dilutes the achievement of the development programmes. To remove rural poverty, there is an urgent need to enable or empower the rural poor to take up different self-help and asset-building programmes. 'Empowerment' and 'Capacity building' are the catchwords in development literature, the main objective of which is to make the rural poor self-reliant. In India, 2001 was observed as the 'Year of Women's Empowerment' and as far as political empowerment is concerned, India is the first country to elect one million women to PRIs, whose main objective is a strategic shift in the development activities. Empowerment is defined as 'strengthening people's capacities, which can only be achieved through full participation of the people themselves' (Stratton 1980, Stifel et al 1994, Chambers 1995, Kaufman et al 1997); it could be social, economic and political. Teaching people to catch a fish is better than providing them with one each time, which may build a dependency attitude. So helping the rural poor to help themselves is the most appropriate approach for any development intervention for poverty alleviation. The concept of empowerment implies devolution of substantial power by an external agency rather than people from below seizing it in the course of their struggle (Mohanty 1995). In this case, the external upper agencies are the various constitutional provisions, which include Article 40, under the Directive Principles of the State Policy and the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, 1993. Goethe's anecdote on how to build capacity in the rural poor seems to be relevant here:

'Treat people as though they were what they ought to be and you can help them become what they are capable of being'.

Under Article 243G of the Constitutional Amendment Act, 1993 *'the panchayats can prepare area plans for economic development and social justice and at the same time implement the schemes as entrusted by the central and state governments from time to time'*. Under the 11th Schedule, the Amendment Act empowers the Local Self-Governments with 29 subjects²¹ to take up various village development programmes. However, strengthening of capacities is crucial to the liberation of the oppressed. The existing age-old socio-structural constraints hinder the empowerment process. Without PP, it would be difficult to deliver development assets and services to the needy people. To function efficiently, the PRIs need a simple, reliable and authentic database so that the newly empowered elected representatives would be able to exercise their power. The asset and wage employment schemes are the programmes to initiate the participatory planning and development process. All communications²² related to the local area development have to be participatory in nature to make the rural poor understand the secondary stakeholders, their approach, policy and programmes. It is necessary that the prime actors (the potential beneficiaries or the primary stakeholders) should know the powers and functions of the GS and at the same time their possible role during and after the meetings.

The GS has the power to build durable community assets and enhance the income of the rural poor by implementing different schemes such as the EAS and the Swarnajayanti Gamin Swarojgar Yojna. So the GS is the vital link between the rural poor, elected leaders and development administration. It hardly happens that the rural poor assert themselves for better service delivery. By asserting themselves, the local people can make the secondary stakeholders accountable for the failure of the development programmes and help the system work effectively. Enhancing the functioning of the GS and developing a positive approach towards social audit are also necessary for building mass awareness, transparency and accountability in the system. Development administration, elected representatives and the local leaders have to spare their generous time and work harder to coordinate the proceedings of the meetings at the grassroots level. They can also motivate the excluded and deprived sections of society to actively participate in village meetings in large numbers. So the ultimate aim of development is to see that the poor help themselves would become a reality.

In the absence of PP in the development decision-making process, the elected representatives get a free hand to decide the needs and interests of their respective constituencies. To be more precise, in the name of popular participation they exploit every opportunity for their own benefit. As a norm, it so happens that the government development agencies form different committees and take poor people as members. Sometimes the members of the local organisations and committees such as the Farmers Associations, Water Users Associations and Forest Protection Committees, etc., are only informed of the decisions *ex post facto*. During the meetings, the people merely sit silently and listen, and on behalf of them decisions are taken. It is also true that mere consultation with the beneficiaries would not bring the expected outcome. Whatever may be the case, for achieving social transformation the intended beneficiaries have to be at the centre of the local area planning and development process. For this purpose, the rural poor have to be motivated so that they themselves would volunteer and undertake specific tasks to achieve the developmental goal. Literature on participatory development²³ argues that implementing programmes without PP would build a dependency mindset with the vulnerable sections of society.

Since the implementation of the first five-year plan, people have hardly participated directly in the government-initiated development programmes. The rural poor are hardly consulted for the purpose; their needs or demands are never integrated, therefore making the programmes ill-suited and unsustainable for the removal of poverty. Few non-governmental development organizations²⁴ (NGDOs) are successful in implementing rural development. However, the number of successful NGOs and their area of operation are limited. They work in a small area and with little resources. Development from within or *antodyaya* practiced by

few selected NGOs is found to be successful and popular. This approach could be adopted by the development agencies to enable people to help themselves to overcome misery and gain self-esteem. The main objective of the development agencies should be to strengthen the receiving system instead of delivering the development goods and services, thinking that it will very well suit to their need.

Gram Sabha's Role in Promoting Participation

Within the DMP framework, the GSs could be strengthened as the vital institution for preparing the participatory database, articulation and prioritisation of the local needs, micro planning, resource mobilisation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the need-based programmes. Once the participatory database is prepared for each village, then local developmental planning and administration becomes easier and cost effective. However to make the GS a planning institution, a great deal of challenge, commitment and devotion is needed from all the development agencies. Possibly, subsequent amendments have to be brought in the respective state legislative assemblies. Kerala and Karnataka are the leading states in this regard. Article 243 A of the Constitutional Amendment Act says that a '*Gram Sabha may exercise such powers and perform such functions at the village level as the Legislature of a state may by law, provide*'. While most of the states Amendment Acts have outlined the institution of GS in conformity with the Constitution's 73rd Amendment Act, the scope, functions, and dispensation to this body vary from State to State. In general, it is intended to facilitate direct PP in local developmental activities.

The Constitution's 73rd Amendment Act says that, the GS should meet at least twice a year and the *sarpanch* would preside over the meeting. In his absence, the *ward member* or even the *villagers* may select somebody from their village to preside. The panchayat secretary of the concerned GP will write down the proceedings. Here the problem is that the panchayat secretary having been appointed by the Panchayati Raj department, might take his own time and interest to convene such a meeting, particularly when the quality of the development work is questionable; ultimately PP in the local area development process is disrupted. It is up to the people of the locality to take the initiative. A synthesis of various powers and functions assigned to the PRIs assigned in different state (Jain, 1997) reveals that the GS can:

- Select development schemes, beneficiaries, location of the projects, mobilize voluntary labor, contribution in cash and kind, examine the annual statement of accounts and the audit reports and also review the ongoing and new programmes of the GP;

- Scrutinize the completed development works, seek clarification from the sarpanch and the *ward member* about any work or function related to the panchayat, consider the annual budget prepared by the GP and above all maintain a complete register for all development works undertaken by the GP.
- Discuss report on the administration of the preceding year; even consider proposals for imposing fresh taxation or the enhancement of the existing taxes.

In reality, the development agencies have made little attempt to build critical awareness about the development programmes and policies. The members of the PRIs are yet to be mobilized. They lack awareness, and hence are not able to articulate their rights and demands in an effective manner (Subha 2002). It is also true that there is no simple and authentic database available either with the administration or with the PRIs to manage the rural development programmes effectively. The DPCs still use the Census Data for all purposes, including the district development planning and its management. Without proper knowledge on the development policy and programmes, it would be futile to expect that the rural poor would volunteer themselves to co-operate the development administration or agencies.

GP is considered as the lowest but the most important development decision-making body in the PRIs structure. In the GP meetings the elected representatives include their self-identified public works in the Annual Action Plan. GS hardly takes place to discuss the progress of the implemented programmes and formulate the Plan (Sethy 1999). Without convening the GS, it is impossible to initiate PP, identify the felt-needs of the people or formulate need-based programmes for the betterment of the area. Effective management of the Public Distribution System (PDS), providing affordable shelter, all-weather roads and health for all is a challenging task before the PRIs, rural development administration and the NGOs. To make planning and development participatory, there is a greater need for co-ordination & co-operation among the development agencies, PRIs and the line departments. In Stage I (Chart 3), before delivering the goods and services, the development agencies and the PRIs have to do their groundwork so that the rural poor would volunteer to participate in the local development decision-making and its management process. Participatory Planning for Local Area Development A major reason of the failure of the major CSSs is adoption of the 'top-down' and non-participatory development approach. There is no special monitoring, evaluation and follow up agency for the purpose. The existing provisions of the Programme Evaluation Organisation (PEO) do not make the observations/recommendations binding on the concerned Ministry/Department that is administering the schemes. Above all, the sanction of the schemes should be demand-driven (Jha 2001).

Without implementing need-based schemes, the administration might have failed in its attempt to build good rapport with the rural poor. During the 1940s, China promoted large scale PP for rural development. The ideology and more particularly, the steps they needed for promoting mass participation were very clear. The same approach (quoted from New Educator by Jemmie Yen) has been adopted to train the young and aspirant administrators in India to:

'Go to the people, live with them, serve them, respect them, plan with them, start with what they know and build on what they have'.

Development administration in India lacks the attitude of sitting, learning, discussing and planning with the poor for rural development, which, in a participatory process is needed urgently. PP is necessary for the successful implementation of rural poverty alleviation and infrastructure building programmes. The rural poor possessing the unique social, economic and behavioral characteristics need to be motivated to take part in the local development decision-making process. So there is a greater need for facilitation²⁵ for the stakeholders to make people participate in the development process. The task is challenging because the development agencies have to come forward and help the newly empowered PRIs as well as the rural poor at their level to prepare a simple and reliable information base and then formulate and manage need-based projects. Information regarding the infrastructure building and poverty alleviation should be made public.

Peer group monitoring has to be encouraged to make beneficiaries accountable for their non-performance. Participatory evaluation and public discussions should be held frequently on the monitoring and evaluation reports of the implemented programmes at all levels beginning from the hamlet/village. Social audit is a vital component of participatory planning and local area development. GS is the appropriate institution for promoting mass participation for planning and local level development. The micro-plans formulated and prioritised at the GS could be integrated at the subsequent higher levels, well within the DMP and development framework (Stage II in Chart 3). PP in planning and development can stop middlemen implementing the development programmes. The other objective of participatory planning is to implement need-based programmes, which might help them to understand it properly, come forward and demand for better service delivery.

Exigency of Direct Development Participation for Overall Development

Promotion of self-help and self-reliance is certainly the most challenging tasks before the development professionals and agencies today. Self-

help is founded predictor on the belief that the people themselves can and should solve their problems. This is the first necessary step for them to exert themselves. Self-help is a natural propensity of human endeavor. The main job of development agencies should be to engage people concerned in the process so that they themselves can identify what the problems and the possible solutions are and 'own' the programme afterwards. Self-reliance would not be difficult when people are cognizant and able to carefully assess their problems and prospects. So, within the DMP framework, the rural poor should have the opportunity to participate in preparing the local level information base, identify problems, plan, mobilise resources and implement at least in few selected areas such as education, housing, village community center and building durable community assets (Sethy, 2000a).

It is hoped that participatory planning and management of the local development programmes would meet the basic minimum needs of the rural poor. Ownership of productive and durable assets should be ensured so that the vulnerable section could multiply their income. There is an urgent need to provide insurance cover on the productive assets possessed by the disadvantaged sections of the society. There is a greater need for cooperation and coordination among the development administration, PRIs and the development agencies (Stage III in Chart 3).

Chart 3: Demand for Better Service Delivery and Local Area Development

Stage I	Stage II	Stage III
Programmes delivery	Demand for need-based programmes	Overall development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory communication & awareness building • Authentic & simple information base on the villages • Need-based programmes • Free & compulsory primary education for all • Population education • Environment Management • Running effective PDS • Health & shelter • Cooperation & co-ordination among the development agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulation & implementation of need-based micro-projects • Peer group monitoring • Participatory monitoring & evaluation • Public discussion on the evaluation reports and action • Building community assets by local people & ownership • Exclusion of middle-man in programme implementation • Integration of the top-down & bottom-up plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting the basic minimum needs effectively • Possession of productive & durable assets • Insurance cover on the productive assets • Technology support for agriculture & other activities • Coordination & cooperation among development administration, NGOs, PRIs & line departments • Promotion of self-help and self-reliance intensively • Better life

Conclusions

Participatory development communication and effective facilitation by development agencies are required for better development participation of the weaker sections of society. NGOs, User Groups, People's Organizations and the Community Based Organizations, known for their popular approach, skilled personnel and other resources could be involved in the process of awareness building, need identification, articulation and implementation of the development programmes at the grassroots level. Close coordination is very much required among the development agencies and the PRIs for successful development intervention. To implement need-based or demand driven rural development programmes, the development participation process has to be facilitated carefully so that the beneficiaries would come forward to contribute in the form of voluntary labor, cash and kind. Withdrawal from any development intervention is another important aspect to make the community help themselves and be self-reliant. In this way only development participation could be institutionalized. The 11th Finance Commission, has recommended grants totaling Rs 10,000 crore for local bodies during 2000-2005 to be utilized for maintenance of civic services (excluding payment of salaries and wages), of which Rs 1600 crore and Rs 400 crore respectively are for rural and urban local bodies per annum. Total Rs 20000.00 lakh (Rs 19706.28 lakh for PRIs and Rs 293.73 lakh for urban local bodies) have been allocated for creating a reliable and simple database. From the allocation, the PRIs could use the funds for preparing the participatory database, which would be the first and the most essential step towards initiating DMP and development. For this purpose, organizing GS regularly with a definite motive to involve the rural poor, especially the disadvantaged, excluded and women is a great challenge for development agencies and new panchayati raj dispensation.

Notes

- 1 People's participation in development, popular participation and development participation have been used in this paper interchangeably.
- 2 For details see various issues of PRA Notes, Institute for Development Studies, Sussex and some selected issues of International Institute of Environment and Development, London, Chambers (1992) and Mukherjee (1992).
- 3 In India, through financial, administrative and advisory devices, a network of relationships comprising the center, the states, the local-self bodies and the private sector executes decentralized multilevel planning. In this decentralized planning framework, the Zilla Parishad/ the District Planning Committee is the apex development planning body for a district. Gram

panchayats are also empowered to plan and implement projects at their level. For more details see Sundaram (1997-2000). Mishra (ed. 1983) suggest that in multilevel planning, the lowest unit allowed to plan and implement every project that can be performed most effectively at that level and only the residual left to the higher levels.

- 4 The people for whom the development programmes are intended and the agencies that wanted to see the projects and programme a success.
- 5 The C&AG's Report lay before Parliament during the year 2000. The report says 'there are more than 200 CSSs with a total budgetary allocation of Rs 20, 734.40 crore, which comes to about 47 percent of the Gross Budgetary support allocated for Central Plan expenditure during 1999-2000. There are 23 ministries/departments responsible for overseeing the implementation of the schemes'. For details see Jha (2001).
- 6 For details, see Report No.3 of 1998 - Performance Appraisal.
- 7 The scheme launched on October 2, 1993, is implemented in 3206 identified blocks in 393 districts of the 23 States and 4 Union Territories situated mainly in the drought prone, desert, tribal, flood prone and hill areas.
- 8 For details, see 'State's Behaviour in Identifying Poor is a Tragic Comedy: Supreme Court' in Deccan Herald of September 18, 2001.
- 9 Sampoorna Gramin Rojgar Yojna, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Supplementary Nutrition programme under Integrated Child Development Scheme, National Benefit Maternity Scheme for BPL pregnant women, National Old Age Pension Scheme for destitute over 65 years of age, Annapurna Scheme, and Antodaya Yojna.
- 10 For details, see 'Inefficient Development Administration' in Dharitri, Bhubaneswar February 19, 2002.
- 11 The article 'Tribal Development Fund goes Unutilized' on January 9 and 'No Utilization Certificates, No Funds' on February 13, 2002 was published in Dharitri, Bhubaneswar.
- 12 The rural poor, for whom development programmes, are intended and with whom that have been implemented.
- 13 The government and non-government development agencies that wanted to ensure development.
- 14 For direct participation of the rural poor and women, initiation of the micro-plans are most appropriate due to their characteristics viz. flexible, simple, realistic, useful, participatory and sustainable.
- 15 When we say development agencies, it includes not just government but also the non-government development organisations, District Rural Development Agency, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Co-operatives and Banks, government departments such as Health, Agriculture, Forestry, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry, etc. The paper argues for their working together to see that participatory development takes place.

- 16 This means building capacity of the people to order their world (Giddens, 1984), that is the capacity to create, reproduce, change and live according to their own meaning systems, the powers effectively to define themselves as opposed to be defined by others.
- 17 For details see Bhattachajya (1998).
- 18 In a participatory planning and development process people can participate by being member of a group, organization or institution to express their concern or opinion individually or jointly, by providing information, contributing cash, kind or labor for the purpose.
- 19 Vulnerability means defenselessness. It has two sides, the exposure to shocks, stress and risk and the lack of means to cope without damaging loss. For details see Chambers (1995).
- 20 Here, the reference is to MacIver's (1949) view that 'a community is any group of human beings, large or small who live together, share all the basic conditions of life and has some degree of social coherence'.
- 21 Broad areas like agriculture and land reforms, water management, animal husbandry and fishery, forestry, small scale industries, housing, basic infrastructure, poverty alleviation and welfare programmes, education, health and sanitation, management of the Public Distribution System (PDS), and building community assets.
- 22 It is a process, which provides access over development messages and forms the basis of knowledge for action for social transformation. Participatory communication engages both media and the development agencies for a purpose beyond the mass communication of information.
- 23 For example Chambers (1992, 1995, 1997) and Cernia (1985) also reflected the same idea.
- 24 NGOs prefer to base themselves at grassroots level. They respect peoples' ideas and opinions and implement local need-based development programmes with the people and sometimes successfully manages programmes with local contribution. For details see Sethy (2000).
- 25 Good facilitators are sensitive to the differences in gender, age, wealth, social and religion grouping. See Robert Chambers, "Foreword" in White, Shirley (ed., 1999).

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