

## **Participatory planning**

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### **Introduction**

Decentralisation can be viewed as a process with varying degrees of devolution of functions and finances to the local bodies. The objective of decentralization programs is usually to improve resource allocation and service provision by bringing decision making process closer to the citizens. Participatory planning is part of the decentralisation process and it aims to identify the critical problems, joint priorities, elaboration and adoption of a socio-economic development strategies. The use of participatory methods and tools has become common practice in the field. The process mainly involves: appraisal, needs identification, restitution, organization, planning, implementation and evaluation. As stated by Olthelen (1999), participatory planning is the initial step in the definition of a common agenda for development by a local community and an external entity or entities. Over the period, this initial step is expected to evolve for the parties concerned towards a self-sustaining development planning process at the local level.

The objectives, salient features, common tools and steps involved in the participatory planning along with the best practices followed in Kerala are summarized in this section.

### **Purpose of participatory planning**

The purpose of participatory planning is to create a platform for learning rather than plunging directly into problem solving. The process is expected to enhance

- (1) Identification of the felt needs of the people
- (2) Bringing forth consensus
- (3) The empowerment of local disadvantaged groups
- (4) Integration of local knowledge systems into project design
- (5) Two-way learning process between the project and local people
- (6) Political commitment and support
- (7) Accountability in local governance

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## **Salient features**

The planning process should produce two sets of results:

1. In the short term, the tools of participatory planning should generate a two-way learning process, which will shape project interventions to local needs, opportunities and constraints.
2. In the long term, this learning process should lead to local empowerment and effective support at the institutional level.

These are considered preconditions for strengthening both institutional capacity for decentralized planning and local planning capacity.

The common tools available include:

*Rapid Rural Appraisal methods (RRA):* RRA can be defined as a qualitative survey methodology using a multi-discipline team to formulate problems for research and development. It involves external experts teaming up with local community in a process of knowledge sharing.

*Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA):* Participatory rural appraisal evolved from rapid rural appraisal—a set of informal techniques used by development practitioners in rural areas to collect and analyze data. PRA is a label given to a growing family of participatory approaches and methods that emphasize local knowledge and enable local people to make their own appraisal, analysis, and plans. This tool is efficient in terms of both time and money. PRA work intends to gather enough information to make the necessary recommendations and decisions.

Even though these tools have been standardized and defined, they have to be tailored to the local requirements. Importance has to be given to what extent these methods contribute to a process of self-analysis, at both local and institutional levels and whether they facilitate local planning and proper designing of project interventions.

## **Steps in participatory planning in Local Governance**

1. Conduct gram sabhas to identify the needs of the people
  - Mobilization of people
  - Adopting small group approach
  - Preparation of a model agenda for gram sabhas
  - Adopt a Semi-structured questionnaire approach derived from the PRA techniques for discussions

2. Assessment of the local resources and problems and accordingly formulate development reports
  - Generate a comprehensive database for every locality for local level planning
  - Identification of significant ecological variations in the village through RRA and PRA
  - Preparation of development reports that includes the information about the local economic, social, geographical and human resources information
3. Preparation of project proposals through specific task forces
  - Preparation of a common project format that clearly defines the objectives, beneficiaries, activities, organizations involved, financial analysis, assessment and monitoring arrangements
4. Formulation of local plans by elected bodies
  - Choice of the projects and programmes to be included in the annual plans
  - Design the structure of plan document and the procedures for its adoption by the decision makers
  - Adoption of resolution by the elected representatives of the local bodies that enunciates the inter-sectoral and the intra-sectoral priorities
5. Formulation of plans at the higher levels
  - Higher levels have to coordinate, integrate, and fill in gaps of the local plans
  - Integration of local level plans with the block or district level plans
6. Appraisal and approval of plans by an expert committee

### **Who can use the toolkit?**

The use of participatory approaches in Local Governance is now well established especially in Kerala. The decentralisation programme in Kerala is based on the principles of participatory planning. Participatory planning is applicable to all the projects where community involvement in planning, design and implementation is essential. This is especially true in rural development where participatory approaches form the entry point for understanding local society

and their construction of local reality, with the view of tailoring interventions which have greatest possibility of acceptance.

### **Best practices in Kerala's decentralization process**

#### *Kerala's unique decentralization process – People's Campaign*

The people's planning campaign was launched to empower the local elected bodies with departmental officials, experts, volunteers and the people rallying around them.

#### *Planning as an instrument of social mobilization*

In Kerala, planning has been made an instrument for social mobilization in support of decentralization. One of the characteristic features of the decentralization process was the emphasis placed on mass participation and transparency.

#### *Campaign for the creation of a new civic culture*

The people's campaign followed a highly participative approach aimed at creating demand for the democratic reforms from below and to actively nurture a civic culture that promotes grassroots democratic institutions.

### **Application of the Toolkit**

Participatory planning is applicable to community-based projects that require involvement of local people and make the project more purposive. This tool will also help in making the implementing agencies more responsive to the felt needs of the local community.

### **Risks involved and key success factors**

The major risk in participatory planning is that any failure in the implementation of a project results in disinterest among the community which in turn shuts down any possibility of further participatory planning process with the community. Hence, the participatory planning process should try to focus on those issues which can be solved with the available resources and gain the confidence of the community. Therefore, the key factor for successful participatory planning is to build a relationship of mutual trust and then start the planning process.

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