

People's Estimate¹

Introduction

Development of the rural hinterland requires the creation of basic rural infrastructural facilities in the form of roads, schools, health facilities, water supply & water harvesting structures, community halls etc. Public works constitute a major part of government expenditure and several engineering departments are involved in executing public works. They are carried out on an extensive scale by the Irrigation and Command Area Development, Panchayat Raj, Public Health, Roads and Buildings, Tribal Welfare, Housing and other departments. However, the execution of public works by government departments reflects significant inadequacies such as poor quality, time and cost overruns, rampant corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, low relevance to local needs among others.

To address these inadequacies, it is necessary to evolve participatory mechanisms at the local level to conduct public works. People's Estimate as a participatory device has been experimented in the East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh with success.

The concept of People's Estimate

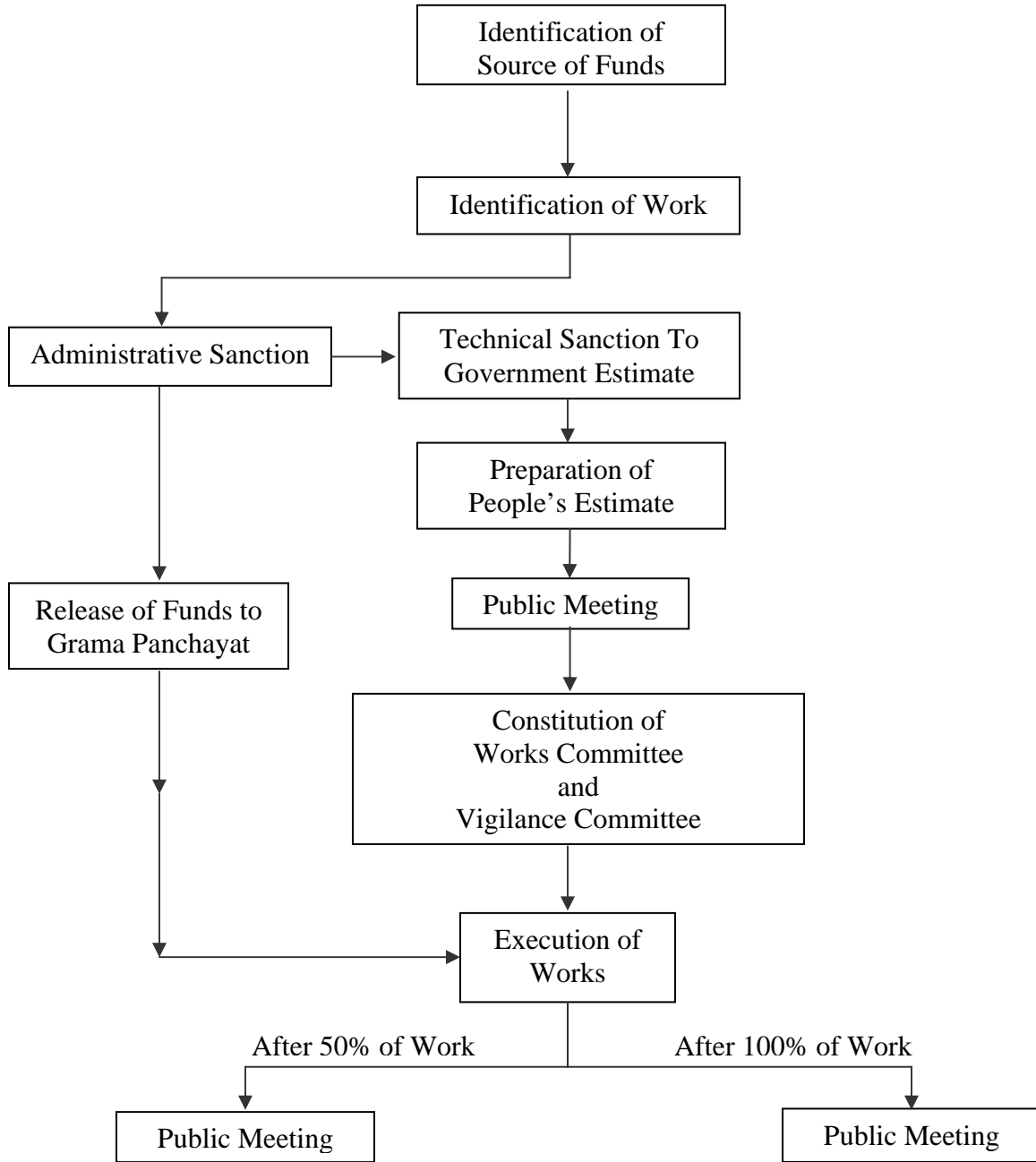
The People's Estimate is an estimate that can be prepared in local language through a participatory process by using similar standard specifications but based on local market rates and local units. Execution of public works through the People's Estimate entails a participatory process whereby public works can be undertaken at the local level through people's participation in estimate-design, execution and monitoring of works.

The process of preparation of People's Estimate and subsequent monitoring and execution of rural works can:

1. Ensure greater participation and ownership by the local people
2. Make the process more comprehensible to the local people.
3. Enable more realistic estimates based on local rates
4. Ensure better quality of public works
5. Enable adherence to timeframe for work completion
6. Check corruption
7. Enhance accountability and transparency in the execution process

¹ Document prepared by Centre for Good Governance, Hyderabad, India.

Flow Chart of Activities



Identification of the source of funds

At the outset, the various sources of funds for the works proposed under the purview of Grama Panchayat need to be identified. These sources could be general funds from the Panchayat, State Scheme funds, Central Scheme funds, relief funds, Decentralized Plan Funds, Finance Commission Funds, community funds etc.

Identification of works

Soon after the source of funds is identified, the work should be identified by the Panchayat, based on the immediate needs of the village. The following minor works under the purview of Panchayat can be taken up by people themselves by forming Committees:

1. Link roads, Internal roads
2. Drains
3. School Buildings, Library Buildings, Community Halls
4. Anganwadi Buildings
5. Community Latrines
6. Protected Water Supply Schemes, Water Harvesting Structures
7. Bore wells (for Drinking water)
8. Vegetable Markets
9. Minor Irrigation Sources, Percolation Tanks, Check Dams
10. Maintenance of assets already created.

Preparation of government estimate & sanction for works

Government estimates would need to be prepared for each work identified by departmental engineers according to the standard specifications and the basic schedule of rates.

Administrative sanction must be obtained for each of the works being undertaken from the funding authority namely, the Grama Panchayat, the Mandal Parishad, the Zilla Parishad or the District Collector. After obtaining the necessary administrative sanction, technical sanction to the Government Estimate should be accorded by the departmental engineers as per the powers vested in them.

The required funds should be credited to the account of Grama Panchayat immediately after relevant administrative sanctions are accorded. This will help to complete the works within the specified time frame.

Preparation of the People's Estimate

The People's Estimate is prepared after administrative and technical sanctions have been accorded to the government estimate.

1. The people's estimate should be prepared in local language through a participatory process by using similar standard specifications based on local market rates and local units;
2. The same engineers preparing the Government Estimate should prepare the People's Estimate also;
3. The market rates for the required construction materials should be ascertained with the cooperation of the committee members;

4. Consultant engineers can also be entrusted with preparation of the Government Estimates as well as People's Estimates;
5. Minor works under the purview of Panchayat can be taken up by people themselves by forming committees.

Organizing a public meeting

The first public meeting should be organized soon after obtaining administrative sanction for any work. In this public meeting,

1. All the provisions made in the Government Estimate and People's Estimate should be displayed on a board before all the participants.
2. The participants should be informed about the market rates indicated in the People's Estimate to and their suggestions should also be taken into consideration.
3. People's committees should be constituted, by identifying capable persons from the community
 - a) A works committee to undertake the work in the village
 - b) A vigilance committee to monitor and inspect the works undertaken

Constitution of People's Committees

Works Committee

A Works Committee should be formed to take full responsibility for the execution of work(s). The jobs such as land acquisition, holding discussions with the engineers, purchase of required materials at market rates, safe storage of materials, ensuring quality of the purchased material, bargaining with the labour about skilled personnel, supervision on them and on the work and ensuring quality of the work are all the responsibilities of the Works Committee. It is the sole responsibility of the Works Committee to complete the construction within the agreed time frame.

The members of the Works Committee identified during the first public meeting should elect a President. All residents of the village are eligible to become members of the Works Committee. The committee should consist of at least 2 women members. The Sarpanch or Panchayat members cannot be made members of the Works Committee. Additionally, the Works Committee should not sub-let the work to a contractor under any circumstances.

Vigilance Committee

Similarly, a Vigilance Committee should be formed to keep watch on the style of functioning of the Works Committee, to ensure proper quality of works and to identify/rectify lapses, if any. The members of the Vigilance Committee should be selected during the first public meeting. The members of the Vigilance Committee should be selected from the beneficiaries only. It is better to select only knowledgeable villagers as members from the lanes/area where the works are being proposed to be taken up. It is also essential to encourage women to become members of the Vigilance Committee.

The key responsibility of the Vigilance Committee is to ensure high quality standards in the execution of works. The Vigilance Committee should help and guide the Works Committee while assessing the market rates. If the directions given by the Vigilance Committee are not honoured

by the Works Committee, such issues should be brought to the notice of the community during the public meetings.

Agreement

In the process of taking up and completing a work, an agreement must be signed by the two parties (the authority ordering the party to do the work and the party doing the work) called the 'Articles of Agreement'.

For the works taken up with the Panchayat funds, one party would be the Grama Panchayat and the other party would be the Works Committee. For all other works, one party would be the Deputy Executive Engineer, and the other party would be the Works Committee.

One of the most important clauses of the 'Articles of Agreement' is the time frame for completing the work. Both the parties signing the agreement should cooperate with each other to complete the work within the agreed time frame.

Execution of works

Execution of works can only take place after technical sanction and after constitution of Works and Vigilance Committees. The Engineer preparing the Government Estimate should work out the schedule of number of instalments for making payments and the amount to be paid for each instalment and incorporate the same in the agreement before the agreement is signed by the Works Committee. Along with the estimate, the plan, reinforcement required, etc. for various phases of the construction should be prepared and approved as per standards, and the copies of the same should be handed over to the Committee on the same day of concluding the agreement. The efficiency of the workers and labour should be assessed from time to time and necessary action should be taken. Necessary training should be imparted to the committee members to assume the responsibility of taking up works.

Second public meeting

After completing 50% of the work, an estimate of the work should be prepared. Similarly, a work-estimate as per the concept of People's Estimate, should also be prepared. The difference between the Government Estimate and People's Estimate can be known and also whether it is possible to take up any extra works with the savings.

The second public meeting should be conducted in the same public place where the First Public Meeting was conducted and the details of the work-estimates should be written on a big board and kept before the meeting for the perusal of the public. These details should be explained and all doubts should be cleared in the meeting.

The meeting should approve the market rates indicated in the People's Estimate. The details of materials purchased, their costs, utilization and balance should be discussed. The additional works to be taken up with the anticipated savings should be decided after completion of the work and a resolution should be passed to that effect.

The style of functioning and performance of the Works Committee on the basis of the work completed so far should be reviewed in detail along with issues related to quality and timeliness of construction.

Third public meeting

After the completion of construction, the third public meeting should be organized. The meeting should ascertain whether there was total transparency in the functioning style of the Committees. Detailed discussions should be held about the materials used, their cost, remaining balance etc. The meeting should also discuss the details of receipt of funds and expenditure incurred.

The value of total work, as per the measurements and as per expenditure incurred by the Works Committee based on market rates, should be worked out and payment should be made only for the lowest value of the two. The meeting should also certify the quality of construction. If it is not satisfied, the persons responsible should be identified and actions be taken for lapses, if any.

The meeting should satisfy itself about the role of Vigilance Committee during the process of construction and evaluate its performance. If any petitions are received during the process of construction, the same should be discussed and proper remedial measures should be taken.

Maintenance of public assets

Creation of public assets is as important as maintenance of the assets created. It is the responsibility of Grama Panchayat to arrange required funds for the maintenance of the assets.

For better maintenance of assets, the details of the assets should be maintained in an assets register. Full details of repairs on the assets, expenditure incurred should be entered in the register from time to time. The assets register should be placed before the community during the Grama Sabha/public meetings.

Key success factors

Political will and administrative cooperation are basic factors required for institutionalizing the people's estimate as a process for execution of rural public works. At the same time, it is important to recognize the fact that the role of the community is central to the success of this social accountability mechanism. As partners in this process, the community should involve itself by taking ownership and working in a cohesive manner.

People's Estimate in East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh

The experience of 'People's Estimate' in East Godavari district can provide key inputs for facilitating people's participation in rural public works. Under the leadership of the District Collector, the administration in East Godavari initiated a large number of works with people's participation in 2001.

The entire district administration and Panchayat Raj Engineering Department were involved in the exercise. At the request of the District Collector, the Hon'ble Members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assembly also participated and extended their support. The then Hon'ble Speaker of Lok Sabha also participated in the public meetings and helped to accelerate the pace of taking up works under the concept of People's Estimate.

As a result, many rural development works were successfully taken up in East Godavari District under the concept of People's Estimate. Though all the payments were made by the Panchayat Raj Engineers, all other activities under the concept of People's Estimate were carried out by the People's Committees. The positive experience of this concept from East Godavari clearly provides a case for extending it to other parts of the state and the country.

The Panchayat Raj Department of the Government of Andhra Pradesh passed a government order in 2004 making people's estimate mandatory for all rural works below Rs. 25000.

References

CGG, People's Estimate – Procedural Guidelines, 2005