

Grassroot Planning- from Conceptualisation to Institutionalisation

- A case study of *Madhya Pradesh, India*

Abstract

There is growing acknowledgment that state interactions must take place in a democratic context. This has been accompanied by attempted to foster forms of democratic governance that can provide scope for citizen participation in the development process. However, due to vast inter- and intra-country differences, no single model has emerged for out countries to follow, even if each such effort has contributed to further deliberation and discussion.

Democratic reform efforts in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh have progressed from conceptualisation to mobilisation to institutionalisation. For the first time in Madhya Pradesh development history, Madhya Pradesh's state government has shown the courage to interact with communities in making village-level development plans. The Madhya Pradesh State Planning Commission has created a tangible plan for working more closely with communities.

This paper outlines the nature of this initiative and analyses the adequacy of the framework for decentralisation and the mechanism of governance adopted by the Madhya Pradesh government for achieving the desirable goal of participatory democracy. In particular, the paper assesses the state model of decentralisation planning, its operational framework, and ongoing efforts. It also presents the status of village-level planning in the state, including how villages are interacting with one another and with governmental entities outside the state.

Key words

Decentralized District Planning, Inclusive Growth, Convergence, Micro Planning, Madhya Pradesh State Planning Commission.

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1. Introduction

From the launching of first Five Year Plan in 1951, Government of India has made a number of attempts to establish decentralized planning. During the last 62 years, planning process of the nation has undergone several changes, Though broad objectives remained more or less same, strategies and techniques varied from plan to plan to meet the needs of the time. In spite of all these changes the basic system of centralized and departmental planning remain old-fashioned, practically it worked in a top-down manner, thereby losing significant amount of local and sometimes expert information.

Prof. D. R. Gadgil, former Vice Chairman of National Planning Commission of India once remarked, "The present mood is to talk about village democracy but to deny real power even to the states. Planning at the state level means official compilation of schemes which may prove acceptable to the centre. of course, non-official workers, experts or productive enterprises, are nowhere in the picture in their own region." I think this is one of the reason why planning has not been able to meet the basic needs of the people. There has been a continuous struggle towards evolving a way of democratic governance that can provide scope for citizens' participation in the process. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments made it compulsory to constitute the District Planning Committees in the State and State Finance Commission together with the constitution of three-tier Panchayat system and constitution of Urban Local Bodies. Similarly, Under Article 243 (z) (d) of the constitution, district planning committees have a mandatory function of formulation of district plans, and monitoring at district level. Thus District Planning Committees have a mandatory and critical function of formulation of district plans, monitoring and evaluation at the district level.

1.1 Gram Sabha ; Constitutional Provision and historical records.

- The Constitution of India – Local Self Government

April 24, 1993 is a red-letter day in the history of Panchayati Raj in India as on this day the constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 came into force to provide constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj institutions. Parts IX and IX-A of the Constitution concern local self government. Part IX was added to the Constitution by the 73rd amendment (Panchayati Raj Amendment Act) in 1992, and Part IX-A by the 74th amendment (Nagarpalika Amendment Act), also in 1992. Before this, the Balwantraji Mehta Committee in 1957 had recommended that all development and welfare work should be carried out by institutions at local level e.i. village level. These recommendations were accepted and the government tried to put into place a system of Panchayati Raj. However, this was done through the state government and there was a lot of diversity in the country in how Panchayats were organized. The salient features of the Act are as follows:-

- To provide 3-tier system of Panchayati Raj for all States including Madhya Pradesh having population of over 20 lakh.
- To hold Panchayat elections regularly every 5 years.
- To provide reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women (not less than 33%)
- To appoint State Finance Commission to make recommendations as regards the financial powers of the Panchayats.
- To constitute District Planning Committee to prepare draft development plan for the district as a whole.

1.2 Panchayati-Raj System

The Constitution provides for a three-tier Panchayati Raj system for overall development perspectives; village, intermediate block level, and district levels. At the village level, there are two main bodies in the Panchayati Raj: the Gramsabha and the GramPanchayat. Madhya Pradesh took the lead in implementing the *Panchayati Raj* system as envisaged in the 73rd Amendment and was the first state to conduct elections to *Panchayats* in 1994.

1.3 Gram-Sabha

The Gram Sabha consists of all persons registered as voters in the village electoral roll. It meets once or twice a year. In the Panchayati Raj set up, the Gram Sabha, the general assembly of villagers, has a key role for effective functioning of Panchayats. In the Gram Sabha meeting, the rural poor, the women and the marginalized people would now get an opportunity to join in decision making on matters affecting their lives. Active functioning of the Gramsabha would ensure a participatory democracy with transparency, accountability and achievement.

- Gramsabha should meet at least in each quarter preferably on Republic Day, Labour Day, Independence Day and Gandhi Jayanti.
- Decide developmental work to be undertaken by Panchayats based on needs assessment.
- Suggest remedial measures for economy and efficiency in the functioning of the Panchayats.
- Question and scrutinize the decisions of Panchayats in the meeting of Gramsabha.
- Discuss the Annual Financial Statement of Gram Panchayats.

Under the Panchayat Act 1996, Gramsabha has been vested with powers for -

- Ownership of Minor Forest Produce
- Development plans approval
- Selection of beneficiaries under various programmes
- Consultation on land acquisition
- Manage minor water bodies
- Control mineral leases
- Regulate/Prohibit sale of intoxicants
- Prevent alienation of land and restore unlawfully alienated land of STs
- Manage village markets
- Control money lending to STs
- Control institutions and functionaries in all social sector.

The *Gram Sabha* could be the most powerful foundation of decentralized governance by ensuring elected representatives are directly and regularly accountable to the people. The

aim of the government of Madhya Pradesh has been to strengthen the *Gram Sabha* by introducing favorable policy changes..

The Gram Panchayat is elected by the Gram Sabha, and may have between five and 40 members. It is led by the Sarpanch. The Gram Panchayats have tenure of 5 years. Members are elected directly from territorial constituencies. The minimum age is 21 years. Elections are to be held at the end of every five years. Elections to Panchayats are conducted by the State Election Commission. In every Panchayat, seats shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, according to their percentage in the population. Out of these seats, 1/3rd shall be reserved for women from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

The offices of the Chairpersons of the Panchayats in a particular state shall also be reserved for Scheduled Caste and Tribe candidates, according to their percentage of the population. One third of the Chairpersons of Panchayats in a state should be women.

Powers and Responsibilities of Panchayats

According to the Constitution, Panchayats shall be given powers and authority to function as institutions of self-government. The following powers and responsibilities are to be delegated to Panchayats at the appropriate level :-

- Making rules and regulations
- Preparation of development plan for economic development and social justice.
- Implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice in relation to 29 subjects given in Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.
- To levy, collect and appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees.

1.4 District Panchayats

This is the body at the district level. Its members include the heads of the Zila Panchayat Samitis and also sometimes other elected members. Members of Parliament or of the Legislative Assembly of that area are also often members. There are also reservations for members of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, besides the one-third reservation for women.

Functions of the Zilla Parishad include

- (1) Supervising and coordinate the work of the Panchayat and Block level.
- (2) Planning and development schemes for the area.
- (3) Administering development schemes, etc. This includes setting up institutions for secondary education, vocational education, etc.

The Zilla Parishads receive grants-in-aid from state or central governments. They also can levy some taxes and fees for their income.

1.5 District Planning Committee

The main function of a District Planning Committee is to coordinate the plans of the municipalities and panchayats and to prepare a development plan for the district as a whole. State has been a pioneering in constituting district planning committees. All 50 districts today have duly constituted DPCs in Madhya Pradesh.

In recent years, a lot of emphasis is laid on grassroot level planning to restructure the overall development and inclusive growth of Madhya Pradesh. State government of Madhya

Pradesh institutionalized district level planning as the critical instrument to achieve the overarching goal of inclusive growth. MPSPC emphasizes that this optimum outcome in terms of balanced development could be attained with convergence of resources and enforcement of inter-sectoral priorities. In this context decentralized district planning seeks to improve the planning process.

The State Government of Madhya Pradesh has initiated decentralized planning process from the financial year from 2001-02. Till Now the state has gone ahead with decentralizing the planning even below the district level to Ward and Gram Sabha level. Now some questions about the process quality, effect, sustainability, equity, and long-term effects on the service delivery and overall system will only be answered in twelfth five year plan period.

2. Operational Framework, Status, Efforts and Outputs of Decentralized Planning -

The structures of grassroot institutions of rural and urban both need to be empowered to improve the development indices accelerate the rate of socio- economic growth and to ensure inclusive growth. The real involvement of Panchayat Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies in development planning, monitoring and evaluation is major milestone to be achieved. The presence of mature institutions of local self governance in the state provides a unique opportunity to translate budgetary outlays in to better outcomes. The Preparation of integrated district plan in decentralized manner is the major step in this direction.

The State has constituted its steering committee headed by the Chief Minister to undertake the decentralized district planning in Madhya Pradesh. This committee provides overall policy guidelines and direction for the implementation. The operational details and overseeing of the implementation would be done by the working group headed by the Member Secretary of the State Planning Commission. The structure of the decentralized district planning at the district level for rural and urban area is as per the flow charts below.

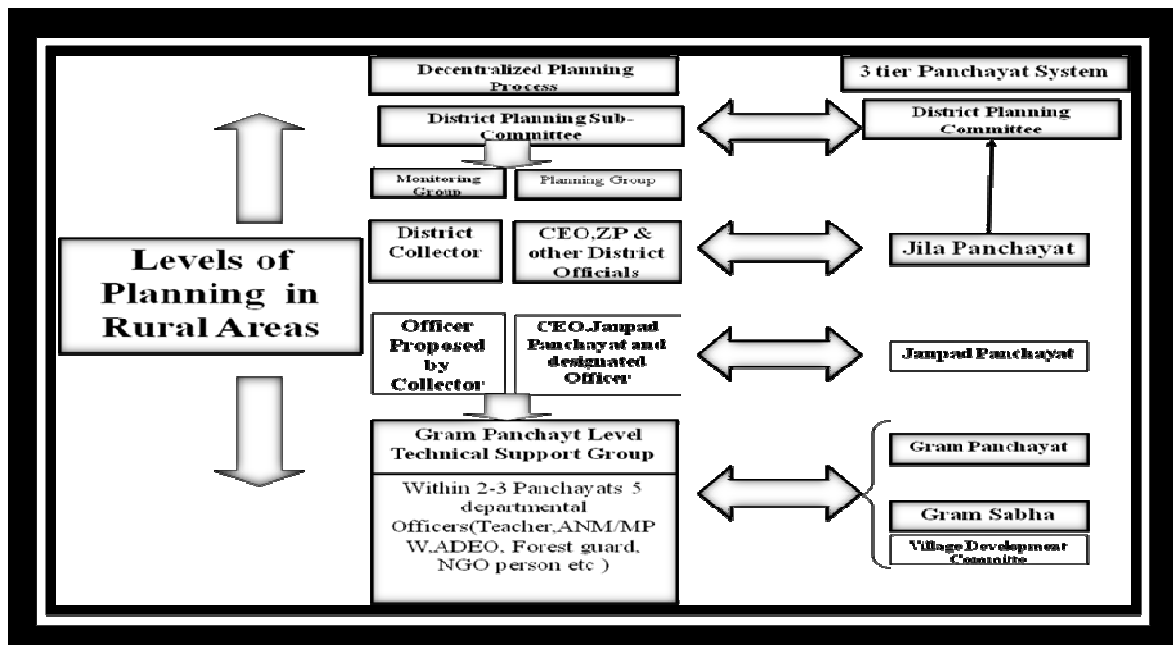


Fig A – Rural Decentralized Planning flow chart

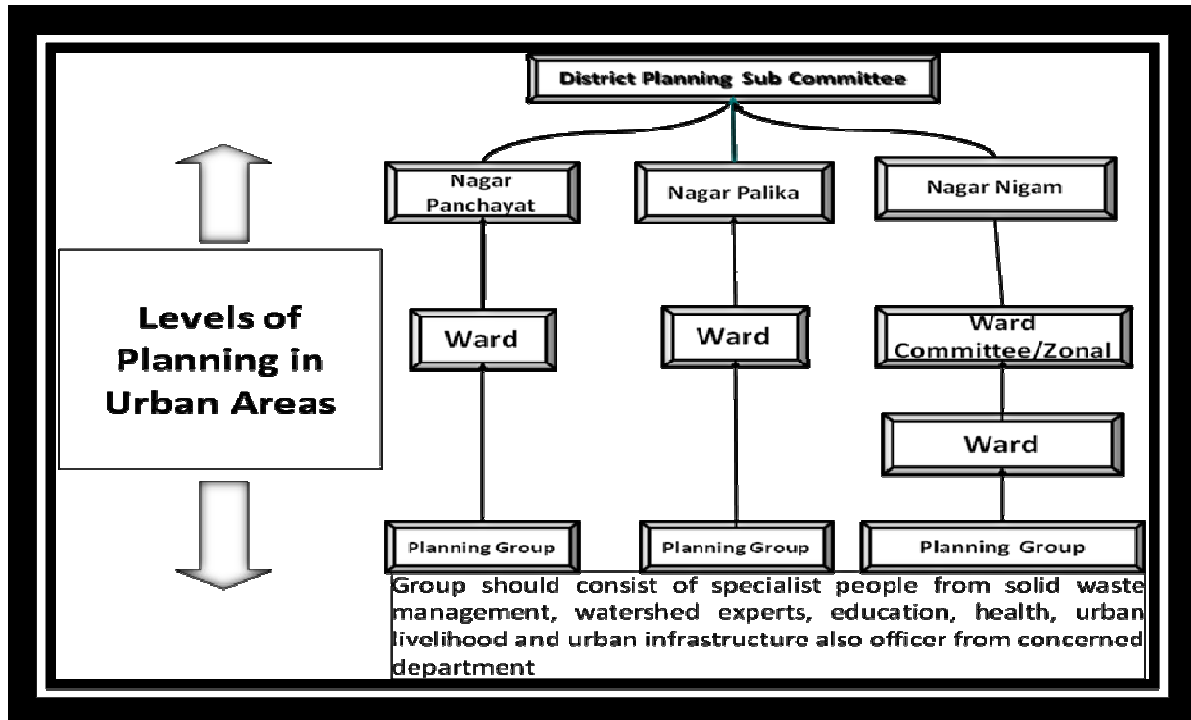


Fig.B –Urban decentralized planning flow chart

State Planning Commission of Madhya Pradesh has provided guidelines for preparation of decentralized plan covering all critical processes and activities. The main features of guidelines are as follows:-

- State Planning Commission will provide support and direction for preparation of district plan and allocate plan ceiling of the districts.
- DPC in consultation with subject matter specialists, Government officials, Volunteer Organizations and other stakeholders will determine plan ceiling between rural & urban segments and formulate strategy to prepare and integrate plan proposals of local bodies.
- Rural plans will be prepared by Panchayat Raj Institutions and urban plan proposals will be prepared by local urban bodies with support from the *Technical Support Group (TSG)* constituted for each of the Gram panchayat and Ward. (TSG – Technical Support Group, were developed over 3-5 gram panchayat, and comprised of 5-6 Grass-root level government functionaries who supported the village development committee of the Gram Sabha in the planning process. TSG proved to be a good example of 'convergence of govt. functionaries at the village level' for planning purpose.)

- Local bodies are expected to come up with vision of development based on local needs and specific strengths.
- The plans prepared at gram panchayat wards/ urban wards are integrated and consolidated at each subsequent level finally to be consolidated at the district level by District Planning Committee. This is further submitted to the District Planning Committee for approval and consolidation.
- All the line departments will be grouped into key sectors. Further working groups will be constituted for each sector for preparing proposals keeping in view the needs and possible inter and intra sector convergences. Working groups will also prepare positioning paper for the achievement of MDGs at their levels.

Sector	Concerned Department /Agencies
Education	School Education, Higher Education, Technical Education, Non-formal Education, Vocational Education.
Health & Nutrition	Public Health and Family Welfare, Public Health Engineering, Woman and Child Development, Food & Civil Supplies.
Livelihood	Agriculture, Horticulture, Forest, Panchayat, and Rural Development, Veterinary and Dairy, Village Industries, Social Justice, Water Resource, Fisheries, Handloom, Cooperation, Sericulture, Welfare of SC, ST and OBCs.
Infrastructure Management	PWD, Rural Development, Rural Engineering Service, Water Resource, Energy, Planning.
Energy Management	Energy, Rural Development, Electricity, Forest, Planning.
Civil Right Protection	Land Reform, Social Justice, Women and Child Development, Revenue.

Fig.3: Sector Specific Convergence among Selected Departments

With the learning's of field work, the unique process in the preparation of district plans has been rolled out as followings;

2.1 Preparation of village micro plan- Empowering and Mobilizing Local Actors to Participate in Governance

- Each Gram Sabha followed a participatory process with the help of Technical Support Group (Grass-roots functionaries, Specialists & Development workers) to come up with "Vision of Development" based on local needs.
- The Gram Sabha prepared their proposal for different sectors in consultation with all the stakeholder(s) especially with poor villagers, SC, ST and women.
- The proposal of each Gram Sabha was consolidated for preparing plan proposal of Gram Panchayat. Similarly, Janpad Panchayat consolidated the plan proposals of all concerning Gram Panchayat including the interventions of Block.
- In addition to the district level interventions, plans prepared by Janpad formed the basis for consolidation of plan at Zila Panchayat level.

2.2 Preparation of urban micro plan

- Urban local bodies formed Technical Support Group (TSG) or working groups comprising urban local bodies' functionaries, Ward Parshad, retired government staff, individuals from ward to provide technical support to Mohalla Samiti in the process of participatory urban planning.
- The participatory micro plans prepared at the mohalla and the ward level were consolidated at the Urban Local body level with integration of interventions spreading over more than one ward or sectors.

2.3 Plan Integration and Consolidation

The District Planning Committee (DPC) after receiving rural and urban micro plans consolidated all plans at the district level with the help of district level planning group. The integrated plan finalized by DPC will ensure clarity on the roles of various departments. The plan will be submitted to State Planning Commission (SPC) after due deliberation in district planning Committee. To support the consolidation at the higher tiers of rural and urban local bodies customized software was also been developed.

3. State's leadership towards Decentralized District Planning: 'From conceptualization to institutionalization'

- Steering Committee formed at the state level under the chairmanship of Chief Minister and working group headed by the Member Secretary of the State Planning Commission. Steering committee has provided policy support, guidance for the effective plan implementation.
- Drafted state specific manuals, training modules, planning input formats keeping in view the requirement of the software application. Were developed for each level (Village, Gram panchayat, Janpad, Urban ward etc.)
- Selection of state level Technical Support Institutions who are domain expert of decentralized planning process in various developmental activities. Around 11 No. of TSIs has been identified for training and capacity building activities throughout the planning cycle.

- Micro Planning workshops and TOT were conducted in all districts and block level with the technical support of resource organizations like Poverty Monitoring and Policy support Unit, UNICEF, UNDP, and DFID etc.
- Resource persons identified and training design finalized for the block level master trainers Trainings imparted to the master trainers of the districts (rural and urban separately), and around 70,000 functionaries including TSGs have been imparted training as part of this year's roll out.
- Planning software was developed to facilitate the data entry and analysis of data at each level of planning.
- Offline and online module has been developed for web based IT application to facilitate grassroot level Planning, Implementation and Monitoring. The modular approach for development of application software and deployment is proven very helpful for effective implementation.
- Improved Website launched <http://mwh.mpforest.org/DCPNEW> which is now facilitating further analysis, planning and monitoring in online mode. This web based software enables in generating plans for district, Janpad, Gram panchayat, urban local body level. The segregated plans for particular sector, department, and schemes are also available through this software.
- Planning process (details in the manual) was initiated; sector- wise data analysis was done and activity- scheme linkages were made keeping convergence in the centrality
- Inclusion of the information generated through village/ward plans into appropriate departmental plans.
- Consolidation of the plans at higher planning unit levels and finally approval from the District Planning Committees.
- State level workshop on sharing the learning's of decentralized district planning process was inaugurated by the Honorable Finance Minister, Government of Madhya Pradesh.
- National Planning commission has also appreciated and suggested other states to replicate the unique process of planning adopted by MP State planning commission.

5. Decentralized District Planning: A powerful tool of accountability and convergence.

Based on the learning experiences, MP State Planning Commission has scale up process and rolled out the decentralized district planning in all 50 districts of the state in the year 2010-11 onwards. Government institutionalized the decentralized planning process by allocating about 38% of state financial resources to districts, known as "District Plan". The total allocation for District Plans for the financial year 2012-13 is about 37 % of total size of the state plan. A No. of 42358 rural and urban micro plans were prepared in bottom-up manner starting from the grassroot level i.e. village in the rural and ward in the urban areas with participation of the community and facilitation by the government functionaries.

We may, therefore, conclude by saying that questions about quality, sustainability, equity, and long-term effects on the service delivery and overall system will only be answered in due course.

On the basis of our national and international experience, we see a potential benefit for Decentralized Planning with optimum level of participatory process that encourages demand push for service in community. Strategies should, however, be designed to take into account best practices and evidence, and they should promote equity and rigorous monitoring and assessment should be built in and the initiatives should not be allowed to simply political generosity.

Once this planning process rolls out in all districts in quality terms, following outcomes would be achieved:-

- This will strengthen institutions of local self governance in the state as per the provisions of the Constitution.
- This will build the capacity of the institutions of local self governance in implementation of the programs and delivery of essential public services.
- The increased ownership of the works will ensure better operation and maintenance
- This will also streamline the process of planning being undertaken under centrally sponsored flagship programs like- NREGS, BRGF, SSA, TSC, NRHM etc
- The convergence between programs at the grass-root level will ensure better allocation of resources and increased outcomes
- The advance planning will improve the fund utilisation capacity of the state.

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