



Need For Strengthening Of Decentralised Planning Through Activation Of District Planning Committees (Dpcs) In India

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Citation: Dr.R.Aruna Jayamani, et al. (2024), Need For Strengthening Of Decentralised Planning Through Activation Of District Planning Committees (Dpcs) In India, Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, 30(8), 150-155
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i8.7187

1. Background of the DPC

The institution of District Planning Committee (DPC) as envisaged in the 73rd and 74th Amendment of the Indian Constitution is the realisation of consistent and conscious effort towards decentralised planning since the process of planned development began in the country. The desire for decentralised planning was first expressed way back in the first five year plan, when it was suggested to break the planning process into national, state, district and at community level. However, the idea was given a concrete shape with the establishment of the District Development Council to consolidate plans prepared at the village level through a participative process. The newly established Local Self Government Institutions at the village, block and district level were to help prepare these plans. The Administrative Reforms Commission in its report of 1967 stressed on the need for meaningful planning at the district level especially focusing on local variations in development. Consequently, the Planning Commission issued guidelines for district planning in 1969, which led to several states formulating district plans. The widespread suppression and curtailment of powers of Local Self Governing institutions across the states during late 1960s and 70s led to the choking of district planning process as well. The problem was examined again in 1984 through the Working Group on District Planning headed by C.H. Hanumantha Rao. The Working Group recommended greater decentralisation of functions, powers and resources for meaningful district planning. It also recommended the setting up of district planning bodies of about 50 members with Collector as Chief Coordinator. This planning body should be assisted by planning officers and technical experts at various levels. Other notable recommendations on strengthening planning and administration at the district level came from the G.V.K. Rao Committee on Administrative Reforms for Rural Development (1985) and the Sarkaria Commission for Centre-State Relations (1988). However, all these efforts at strengthening decentralised planning were met with consistent failure due to several reasons. Given this background of efforts at decentralised planning in India, the 73rd and 74th Amendments were milestones since they provided the much needed constitutional legitimacy to local governance institutions, defined their functional domains and provided for financial devolution to these institutions and mandated the establishment of District Planning Committee (DPC) as the formal body for preparation of the District Development Plan by consolidating the plans prepared by the rural and urban local bodies.

2. Composition of the DPCs

a. Elected Members: While the composition of the DPC and the manner in which the seats are to be filled have been left to the states, article 243ZD stipulates that four-fifths of the total number of members of DPC will be elected by, and from amongst the elected members of the Panchayat at the district level and of the municipalities in proportion to the ratio between the population of rural and urban areas in the district.

b. Nominated Members: Nominated members usually represent the State & Central Government agencies including line departments. A larger proportion of nominated members could imply greater interference and control in DPC functioning by the State and Central administration. All states with the exception of Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka, have a ratio of about four fifths or 20 per cent nominated members in the DPC. In Himachal Pradesh the ratio of nominated members is only 8 per cent, and in Karnataka it is 15 per cent. The extreme is in Chhattisgarh, all members are nominated. Through nominated members and special invitees officers of district administration as well as members of the Central and State legislatures find representation in the DPC. Special invitees generally include local MPs and MLAs, district

administration officials, representatives from line departments. These invitees do not have voting rights but participate in its deliberations.

c. Powers of DPC

The DPC is envisaged to play a nodal role in the district planning process by consolidating rural and urban plans prepared by the villages and towns in the district and then preparing a draft development plan for the district on the basis of the plans so received from within the district. DPC is thus crucial to the function of 'planning for economic and social justice', which is now a mandated local function, it provides the vital link between rural and urban plans as well as sectoral plans. In this respect, it is important that the DPC has an understanding of the planning process and, if required, the assistance of qualified planners and technical experts. As per Article 243 ZD, DPCs should also pay special regard to issues of common interest between Panchayats and municipalities, such as spatial planning, sharing of physical and natural resources, infrastructure development and environmental conservation. Since the states have modeled their own legislative provisions for DPCs on Article 243 ZD, the role and functions of DPCs in the State Acts are similar.

d. Functions of DPC as given in State Acts

In all the states, the DPC has the pivotal role of preparing the district perspective plan. In addition to this, variations of powers given by the states are given here.

- **Andhra Pradesh** - Ensure that each local body in the district prepares a Development Plan & consolidate plans prepared by Panchayats and Municipalities in the district. Review implementation of Development Plan periodically & monitor achievements.
- **In Assam**- Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Orissa, Rajasthan, Sikkim - Consolidate the plans prepared by the Panchayats and the Municipalities and to prepare a draft development plan for the district.
- **In Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala**- the chief function of the DPC works devoted for consolidation of rural and urban plans and preparation of draft development plan for the district. Besides, the DPC shall perform any other functions relating to district planning, as may be assigned to it by the government.
- **Bihar** - consolidate plans prepared by Panchayats and Municipalities in the district. Prepare a draft development plan for the district as a whole. Incorporate the demands of district in national and state level programme. DPC would prepare details of socio-economic indicators on the basis of collected data, details of resources available in village, block, town and district and to prepare the employment plan for the district.
- **Madhya Pradesh** - Consolidate the plans prepared by the Zila Parishad, Panchayat Samitis, Gram Panchayats & the Municipalities in the district. Prepare draft developmental plan for the district as a whole and also prepare employment plan for the district. Monitoring, evaluation & review of all schemes and programmes being implemented in the district and submission of periodic progress reports to the state government on the district plan.
- **Maharashtra** - Assess the five year plan and perspective plans prepared by the panchayats and the municipalities and coordinate, prepare draft five year plan for entire district. Consolidate the Plan prepared by Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, Zilla Parishad and Municipalities.
- **Uttarakhand** - Consolidation of plans prepared by the panchayats and the municipalities and preparation of draft development plan and employment plan for the district. Collect, compile and update information relating to natural and human resources of the district to create a sound database for decentralized planning and preparation of district and block resources profiles and mapping of amenities at village, block and district levels. Allocate sectoral and sub-sectoral outlays within the overall framework of the district development plan and Ensure participation of people and other institutions in overall development process. Monitor, evaluate and review progress under the schemes and programmes being implemented.
- **West Bengal** - Consolidate the plans prepared by the Panchayat bodies and the municipalities and preparation of draft development plan for the district. The budgetary provision for various departments for district-level items are disaggregated and disbursed to the DPC. Within these budgetary parameters, which have come to be known as divisible outlay, the DPC has the power to formulate its own plan on the basis of the "district-specific schemes" drawn from district-level sectoral plans and the "block and municipality-specific schemes" appearing in block and municipal plans.
- The **Punjab** DPCs Act of 2005 envisages responsibility for overseeing implementation and monitoring of development schemes and projects.

3. Institutional arrangements for DPC

DPC can take the support of institutions as well as technical experts in the process of consolidating plans and preparing the draft development plan. Technical experts can also be nominated as members of the DPC. In Haryana, for example, the district town planner is a nominated member in 20-member committees and an eminent economist is also a nominated member in 25-member committees. Chhattisgarh also provides for the membership of Economic and Statistical Officer of the district as a nominated member of DPC. In Kerala, the DPC is assisted in scrutinizing plans and projects by Technical Approval Committees (TACs). The TACs

have sectoral sub-committees to study the respective chapters of the district plan – for example the Municipal TAC for urban plans, under the guidance of District Level TAC. The DPC also consults with their working groups of technical experts as and when necessary. In Rajasthan, different means have been adopted by DPCs for technical support. Plan consolidation work is being carried out by the Chief Planning Officer of the district. The DPC can also hire experts as consultants. Heads of all line departments are often invited in DPC meetings. Thus different arrangements have been made for DPCs to obtain technical support for performing their functions. In Karnataka, DPCs can constitute expert committees, and can also hire technical experts if they feel the need.

4. Approach for Integration and Consolidation of Gram Panchayat Plans and Block Plans in to District Plan

The process of Decentralized Planning has to start from small group discussion in each and every ward to consolidate ward plan, similarly each ward level needs and demands have to be consolidated at the Gram Panchayat level to be called GPDP. The draft GPDP has to be developed by many functional sub-committees at the GP level and it has to be presented in the Gram Sabha for detailed discussion and approval. At the next level the Gram panchayat plans are consolidated at the Block level by the Block Panchayat Development Committee with the help of official mechanisms at the intermediate level. After discussing the issues and regions specific problems among the GPs, the Block Panchayat have to be approved the Block plan and submitted to the Zilla Panchayat. It is pivotal role of the ZP to request and guide the DPC to study and analyse the Block Plans received within the district and also plans from ULBs for the purpose of working out the vision of the district and has to identify priority sectors and workout the strategies for implementation. While making district plan, the DPC has to study various issues, problems and needs of the people. It can engage number of institutions and departments at the district level to get guidance and technical support in preparation of district plans. The compilation process of the district plan has to emerge through presentation and serious analysis on the plans of Rural and Urban local bodies issues and priority needs. For the purpose, the draft plan has to be presented to the public through development seminars, subject expert group discussion, technical teams evaluations and finally the plan has to get approval with the unanimous consent of all the members of the DPC as well as elected representatives at the district level.

As per the Manual of Integrated District Plan developed by the MoPR and then Planning Commission, GoI, the district planning has to follow certain stages of process for preparation of effective plans. It starts with vision building, situation analysis, data collection, institution building, resource inventory, fund envelop, convergence possibility and consolidation of rural – urban plans.

If the above said process need to be strictly followed the practical difficulties arises among the various level of PRIs. Even though the powers and functions are clearly mentioned in the Urban Local Body Act about the DPC is responsible for preparation of district plan but in reality the DPCs are instructed to compile the block plans along with plans of Urban Local Bodies. In this context, the controversy arises whether the DPC has to prepare a separate plan considering the guideline given in the Manual of Integrated District Planning.

An appropriate strategy would be, all the institutions namely Gram Panchayats, Block Panchayats and Zilla Panchayat along with DPC have to come together and work together with coordinated effort from the line departments to bring comprehensive integrated district plan. It is possible either including representation of DPC members from GP as well as BPs and also institutional representatives including various departmental heads. Before the planning process at the Grass root level the district has to make efforts to disseminate the importance of district plan preparation and give adequate awareness to the people as well as people's representatives on the necessity of participation and representation of ideas to bring a better plan. The higher level institutions should also involve in the planning process of the gram panchayats wherever they represent to contribute necessary strategical and technical support to prepare realistic plan. The district at the preliminary stage has to develop district vision based on the situation analysis and development seminars at various levels before compiling the district plan.

5. Problems in functioning of the DPCs:

5.1 Non-availability of centralized database on the existing assets and infrastructures due to the multiplicity of agencies undertaken works which leads to duplication of works without chances to prioritization of works.

5.2 Regarding the formation of DPC, It is found variations among the states but in majority cases Zilla Panchayat members are the members of DPC. Some states include MLAs, MPs and Mayors belonging to the constituencies representing the districts. In majority states ZP president chairing the DPCs, in few states the district minister lead the DPCs.

5.3 DPC being an important body regarding preparation and consolidation of district planning requires more number of subject experts either from the sectoral departments or from any other institutions to bring innovative ideas and to think appropriate strategies to bring development in the district. Mere representation of political members without subject expertise hurdle the process of district planning and even members also reluctant to participate due to lack of subject expertise.

5.4 Almost all the State acts related to PRIs provides important role, power and functions to the DPCs namely preparation or consolidation of District development plan, Monitoring and review of development schemes implemented in the district. But in reality it is not happening in any of the state. It is due to lack of awareness among DPC members on powers given to them. Even the members who know their role also showing less interest on initiation and participation in preparation of district plans. Majority members expressed on lack of recognition and monetary incentives. Illiteracy also a major factor hindering participation of DPC members.

5.5 Power conflict among the elected representatives like Chairman of the Zilla Panchayat and Mayor of ULBs and also between the officials and elected representatives. Suppression of expression of views and ideas of DPC members by the senior political leaders as well as by the local minister chairing the DPC also severely affect the consolidation process

5.6 Majority states are not interested to conduct the DPC meetings; the preparation of district plan process is dominated by the District Administration. The District Collector / Deputy Commissioner instruct the sectoral departments and other agencies working in the district to list the activities to be carried out department wise subject to the funds availability and expected. These activities are compiled and approved as a district plan in the DPC meeting without detailed discussion on the importance and priorities.

5.7 Lack of capacity and skills on the process of planning and lack of technical knowledge and expertise on sector based planning among DPC members is an another major bottleneck in the decentralised district planning.

5.8 Lack of political will by the state government in strengthening DPCs creates mere havoc in conduct of meetings as well as bringing systematic planning. The state has to make initiatives in making vibrant institutions with appropriate directions. But in reality majority states do not have interest to disturb existing administrative arrangements as well as sectoral departments. Therefore DPCs are less taken care.

5.9 Strengthening of DPC requires utmost attention on formation and functioning of sub committees and standing committees on various subjects to help DPCs to plan for the district in a better manner. The filed realities shows majority cases committees were formed only on paper not in action.

5.10 It was reported by various studies the existing numbers of DPCs in almost all the states were not given adequate awareness generation trainings or role clarity and subject specialization programmes.

5.11 Lack of coordination among the DPC members and development departments and lack of convergence approaches also a major factor for defunct of DPCs. It also leads to duplication of assets and waste of public money.

5.12 Lack of administrative mechanism, infrastructure, man power and funds for the operating DPCs is one of the most important problem in better functioning of the DPCs.

6. Suggestions for Vibrating the DPC

The NIRD&PR in its efforts has been making number of initiatives to build the capacity of the members of the DPCs all over the country. It conducted a number of training programmes exclusively for DPC members and officials attached with the Zilla Panchayat on the subject related to the powers, functions and approaches for improving the performance of the DPCs. It also conducted the few studies on functional status, problems, institutional support and capacity need assessment. Further it conducted national level seminar as well as workshop to understand the functional status and challenges faced by the DPC members and arrived viable suggestions and presented in this approach paper for policy interventions if any needed to strengthening the district planning process.

6.1 Capacity building

☞ More than 91% DPC members from the study region have suggested to provide adequate awareness on the role and responsibilities of the members and their importance towards contributing to their district development.

☞ It is also essential to impart subject relevant trainings on financial management and on importance of Rural Development. Since the villagers rely on agriculture and allied sectors, trainings on those subjects is very much need for the people who are involved in planning process. Planning process requires expertise in the field of incorporating gender issues and strategies for gender mainstreaming and women empowerment. The line department representatives and officials of supporting DPC are also need to be oriented and awareness to be created about the roles, functions and powers of DPC.

☞ More than 94% from all the states requested for conduct of more number of trainings with short span of intervals on various subjects for the purpose of building required capacity related to the district planning. Therefore, creating awareness, provision for monetary benefits and capacity building are very essential.

☞ Capacity Building for imparting skills on planning as well as orientation on identification of problems as well as needs of people within the district also gets importance which is lacking to the majority of the members of DPCs in all the study states.

☞ Complete understanding of various projects and schemes of different department of the state government should be given to the members of DPCs.

6.2 Incentives

- ☞ Similarly, around 95% suggested for provision of financial incentives in terms of honorarium or sitting fees to the members which will attract more people attending DPC meeting and contributing to the cause. Sitting allowance to the tune of Rs 2000/- per meeting may be allowed for a non-government member of DPC which will increase the attendance of the members as well as built the responsibility.
- ☞ Provision should be made for adequate incentives to panchayats for preparation and submission of their development plan in time. Inter alia provision should also be made that the panchayats falling in preparation of annual development plan may be arranged certain percentage of the allocation from the state government.

6.3 Attention in Composition of DPC

- ☞ It is essential to consider by the state governments to appoint Chairman of the ZP as Chairman of the DPC instead of putting Minister chairing the DPC. It will help to have better coordination of various departments and also it will facilitate to have meaningful discussion by all the members and will avoid dominance in decision making.
- ☞ It is interesting to note that the political members themselves advocated for selection of DPC members. It is essential to include apolitical membership giving due importance to the subject expertise from the sectoral departments.
- ☞ More financial powers as well as supervising role have to be given to the DPC which will improve the responsibility to the implementing agencies.
- ☞ The composition of DPC should possibly include members from all the levels of PRIs, mainly representation from Gram Panchayats Sarpanches as well as members and also chairperson of the block panchayats which is missing at present.

6.4 People Participation

- ☞ More interactions with the people while conducting the planning process at the Gram panchayat level to understand the real nature of problems and seeking appropriate strategies to fulfill the needs of the community.
- ☞ It is very much essential to present the draft plan or activities proposed in the district plan in front of people or representatives of people from different institutions. Even though it is cumbersome activity which will give lot of insights on the proposed activities for finalization and avoid duplication. This activity is part and parcel of participatory planning process but in majority cases the districts are reluctant to convene public forums to discuss the draft plans before approval.

6.5 Rope in Institutional support

- ☞ More partnership with the locally available institutions as well as reputed institutions at national level can be involved in capacity building as well as facilitating of planning process at the district. Initially National level institutions may be contracted for a short term period (maximum one year) to assist the DPC in preparation of Integrated consolidated District plan.
- ☞ Provision of permanent manpower and creation of office accommodation exclusively for DPC will improve the performance level.

6.6 Financial Support

- ☞ Earmarking of funds for administrative expenses of the DPCs.
- ☞ The plan submitted by the DPC should be seriously considered by the State government and necessary sanction / approval accorded in time. The DPC budget must be reflected in the state budget.
- ☞ It may be considered to root-through all the development activities with the approval of DPC and periodical overall monitoring the CSS as well as state schemes by the DPC.

6.7 Process of DPC Meeting

- ☞ DPC meeting should be held at least twice in a year and not more than six months shall intervene in between two meetings. It should be made mandatory and the state government has to make initiatives to ensure conduct of meetings and has to be linked with the annual fund allocation or release.
- ☞ Notice for DPC meeting is issued 4-5 days in advance but sometimes they do not reach on time. It becomes difficult for members to be present at a short notice. However all DPC members are telephonically informed 2-3 days in advance. Efforts must be ensured to inform the members well in advance through modes of communication for better reach.
- ☞ The draft plan / agenda which is to be discussed during the DPC meeting is not always shared with the members before hand as the practice should be which gives very little time to the members to read and react. This practice should change and give adequate time to read and understand the technical feasibility and social acceptability of the activities proposed in the draft plan.
- ☞ The present process of district planning is, DPC meetings are basically instances of departmental reviews with 2-3 departments being reviewed during every meeting with targets been set for the next quarter. Members discuss local problems based on petitions they receive from their constituencies. Line departments represented by the district heads or their representatives take a note of the issues and problems put forth by

the members. Annual plan preparation process is basically collection of activities, schemes, requirement of departments through decentralized planning. This process has to be changed in to realistic manner as proposed in the guidelines or manual of Integrated District Planning issued by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

6.8 Constitution of Sub-Committees and TSGs

☞ The sub-committees of the DPC have formed officially on paper, but even members are not aware about the same. According to the state acts, there should be five to seven standing committees of the ZP and meetings to be conducted at the committee level before finalizing the draft plan..

☞ The TSG is comprised of personnel from a few line departments like the ANM, AWW, Sub-engineer, NGOs, and intellectuals, who collect the information in standard formats. ZP and JP members are also part of TSG. However priorities can be changed and are often changed by line department heads depending on resources, priorities set by the Govt., political considerations etc.

☞ There is a TSG for every 3-4 GPs which collects demands from the GP. However there is no guarantee whether the Gram Sabha has prioritized those demands or it is been put forth by the Sarpanch and the Secretary or those demands are at all listed in the approved GP plan.

☞ It was noticed poor monitoring at the district level by the line department and the DPC members are not well aware of how to monitor programmes. Some of them do not actually bother to monitor even if they can. There is no TSG at the DPC level and no sub-committees have been formed.

☞ The District Statistical Handbook is not used by the DPC or the line departments as every data is online. The DPC discusses only about the state plan. Many departments however do not share their plans with the DPC until or unless that department is included in the meeting agenda.

☞ As per the present practice, the ZP President has literally no role to play and is present only as a member in the states having the state minister heading the DPC. Similarly, the DPC or the DPO has nothing to do with the GPDP which comes under the ZP and is looked after by the Addl. CEO in charge of Rural Development.