

Status And Process Of Gram Panchayat Development Plan In India : State Specific Field Based Observations

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1. Introduction

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) across the country have differential performance based on (a) the devolution of 3Fs (Funds, Functions and Functionaries) (b) their capacity building and (b) the efforts made by PRI leadership as well as by the community. The FFC award of fund has created an opportunity for responsive local governance at the cutting edge institutional level of the Gram Panchayat (GP). The guidelines issued by Ministry of Finance for the release and utilization of the local bodies grant stipulate that proper plans are to be prepared by the GPs for the basic services within the functions devolved to them as per State laws before incurring expenditure under the FFC award. In the context of the Constitutional mandate, these plans have to be participatory plans involving the community, particularly the Gram Sabha, in the formulation of priorities and projects and will also have to ensure the mandates of social justice and economic development mentioned in Article 243G. The Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) is to have a clear component addressing vulnerabilities of poor and marginalized people and their livelihood opportunities through an integrated poverty reduction plan that converges with the labour budgeting and projectisation exercises under MGNREGS as well. The GPDPs are also an opportunity for the community to be engaged in setting local development agenda and finding local solutions to development issues.

In this context, the present paper has made an attempt to understand the status, how the GPs are preparing the plans, how people are mobilised and what are the problems and challenges are based in collective decision making in selected states and the field observations are presented for better understanding the readers, researchers and policy makers.

2. Acknowledgement

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3. State specific Observations

The following state specific observations were drawn from the field observation in few states, information gathered from secondary sources of literatures and views of the experts met from various research organisations.

3.1 Maharashtra: In the state of Maharashtra, the conduct of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) activities are not properly implemented for sensitization of need and importance of planning and development. It is observed that most of the Gram Panchayats in the State are simply informing the public about the date and venue of Gram Sabha meetings but are not circulating the agenda. Hence, people are losing interest and not attending Gram Sabha meetings of the Gram Panchayats in the State.

- The data collection process of PRA generally has been conducted without understanding the purpose of doing the same. Hence, it ends with no data compilation and documentation. People are also not aware about the data collection process and its importance in the preparation of GPDP.
- The Mission Antyodaya gaps were not taken into consideration for planning.
- Resource Envelope was not prepared by exploring various potential sources and the plan activities in the Gram Panchayats are listed for the Central Finance Commission Funds only.

- The activities of most of the Gram Panchayats through GPDP are confined to delivery of basic services only.
- Mismatch in fund estimation and actual expenditure is found in most of the Gram Panchayats which affects their functioning. Hence, proper resource mobilisation and orientation of people on financial planning is required.
- Capacity building efforts of Gram Panchayats are very weak in the State, the SIRD trains the MRPs, and in turn MRPs conduct one day orientation to the Officials of the Gram Panchayats at the district level which is inadequate and technical aspect of the planning is totally missing. The Functionaries of Gram Panchayats have also said that training on technical aspects of planning and implementation has been inadequate and hence it is to be upgraded.
- The participation of people including marginalised sections in the planning process of most of the Gram Panchayats in the State is very poor. Hence more emphasis should be given on conducting meetings at the ward as well as Gram Sabha meetings by enhancing the participation of people including poor and vulnerable groups such as SCs, STs, women, children and disabled.
- Evidence-based planning needs to be encouraged at Gram Panchayat level. It should be based on ground reality captured through the data collection process. The capacity of the Gram Panchayats needs to be enhanced to analyse the data for deciding the priorities and expectations of people for preparing a comprehensive and holistic Development Plan.
- In many cases, the plan becomes a matrix showing how much funds would be utilized for what activity. It appears that the Gram Sevak prepares the Development Plan in most of the Gram Panchayats in the State.
- Planning groups are not aware of their roles and responsibilities. They do not participate in the planning process.
- Transparency in planning and wider dissemination of Gram Panchayat Development activities through appropriate methods especially to the Ward members, existing SHGs, NGOs, line departments and also to residents will develop interest among them and hence they participate in the planning process. Similarly, the approved plan needs to be disseminated to the people. This may be done by reporting key features of the Development Plan in the Gram Sabha held after approval of the Plan and writing the key features of the Plan on the walls in public places.
- The Convergence of programmes such as MGNREGS, Watershed Development programmes, SBM (G), NRDWP, SRLM etc. with GPDP is highly necessary and hence, it is to be ensured by all the Gram Panchayats in the State.
- The Status of collection and creation of sources of OSR is poor in respect of many Gram Panchayats in the State. Hence, proper measures should be taken to collect or mobilise own sources of revenue as it is highly needed for undertaking developmental activities.
- The institutional functioning of the Gram Panchayats needs to be strengthened with more participation of the officials of the line departments.

3.2. Punjab: In the state of Punjab, it appears that around 50% of the Gram Panchayats in the State do not have their own Panchayat buildings. Only one or two files are kept in the offices of Gram Panchayats while all the remaining files are kept in the Sarpanch's house. The post of Secretary in the majority of Gram Panchayats is vacant. It appears that a single Secretary is given charge of more than 10 Gram Panchayats to perform as Secretary which affects the functioning of Gram Panchayats. The size of the Gram Panchayats is very small because every hamlet is considered as Gram Panchayat in the State. As the jurisdiction of Gram Panchayats is small, they receive less funding and hence, they are not in a position to undertake any major works. The priority of activities of the majority of Gram Panchayats is to provide drinking water, roads and drainage only. The devolution of powers and functions to the Gram Panchayats in the State are very limited. Majority of the decisions of Gram Panchayats are taken at the district level and the data operation is done at the block level.

The Gram Panchayats elected representatives are no longer understood the importance as units of local-governance in Punjab, because major services are handled by the Block and District Administration. Therefore, people do not rely on Gram Panchayats. Further, the elected members including Sarpanch are not much aware about the role of the Gram Panchayats in the context of village development. Generation of awareness and Capacity building related to GPDP is found to be very weak in most of the Gram Panchayats except a few successful Gram Panchayats. It is observed that there is no link between Mission Antyodaya gaps in most of the cases. Even Gram Panchayat profiles are not available in majority of the Gram Panchayats in the State.

The suggested process has not been followed in the preparation of GPDP by the majority of Gram Panchayats. In fact, the Development Plan of many Gram Panchayats consists of 3 or 4 activities which are written as resolutions in the Gram Sabha Minutes. It is a half-page resolution. The Gram Panchayats are not serious on conducting the GPDP process and people are totally disconnected with the preparation of GPDP. The selection of candidates for the post of Sarpanch is done by the State and being elected as Sarpanch is a prestige for the leaders in the village level.

The Gram Panchayats do not have any system for complaints, grievance redressal and service delivery. People's dependency on Gram Panchayats for various works is meagre because of higher self-reliance of the

households and may be due to better economic conditions of people. One may conclude that the State Governments' policy is very important to improve the grassroots democracy and participatory planning. Massive revival of the Gram Panchayat system and sensitisation of people about the importance and role of PRIs in local governance are very much needed in Punjab for effective functioning of local self-government.

3.3. Andhra Pradesh : Andhra Pradesh is one of the best Performing states in terms of decentralisation of planning and implementation of development programmes and activities for fulfilling the needs of people. The government has given immense importance to the Gram Panchayats and encouraged them to play a vital role in coordinating various line departments to work closely to fulfill the livelihood requirements of the people. The State deployed adequate manpower in Gram Panchayats and they are entrusted with different responsibilities. Further, some activities at Gram Panchayat level have been carried out by people who are specialised in different fields such as women and child care by the 'Women Protection Secretary', and women safety services by the Mahila Police etc.

- For dealing health related issues and delivering services, multi-purpose health workers have been appointed in every Gram Panchayat in the State. Further, various initiatives related to controlling seasonal diseases and fulfilling people's nutritional needs have been taken from time to time.
- A village surveyor specifically appointed to deal with land related disputes and settlements. The same employee also conducts land survey, soil survey and irrigational sources. As a result, many disputed lands are amicably settled through mutual consensus or legal adjudications.
- An Agricultural Specialist was also appointed for advising the farmers on land preparation, crop selection, crop rotation, value addition and marketing of agricultural products through State agricultural marketing and also through Farmers' Cooperative Societies.
- An important portfolio of digital services is looked after by the digital assistant who has the expertise in computer engineering. He was also entrusted to deliver around 532 services pertaining to various offices, departments and ministries.
- A Village Revenue Officer was also posted in Gram Panchayat who is responsible for revenue related services even though he / she is supposed to report to the Mandal Revenue Officer.
- Welfare and Education Assistant is in-charge of overall welfare of the people with specific objective to encourage children's education and also to conduct sports & cultural activities for the welfare of village youth.
- It may be noted that, on the whole, a total of Officials ranging from 11 to 33 are deployed in each Gram Panchayat and their work is coordinated by 1 to 3 Panchayat Secretaries along with Computer Operators.
- Interestingly, there are enough volunteers ranging from one volunteer to every 50 households who vigorously work on problems and needs of the people. In fact, visiting every household by the volunteer every day is a vibrant move in developing good relations between the Gram Panchayats and the concerned people.
- The suggested process has been followed by all the Gram Panchayats for the preparation of their Development Plan. However, in most of the cases the GPDP is confined to 3 to 5 activities subject to the quantum of funds received through the Central Finance Commission.
- Various Programmes of the State and Central Government are implemented by the respective departments. However, MGNREGs is implemented by the Gram Panchayat with a separate plan of activities and labour budget which is not included in the GPDP.
- People are adequately mobilised for the Gram Sabha meetings and the process followed with adequate discussions for selection of works and beneficiaries.
- All though, Gram Panchayats prepare their Development Plan subject to availability of Central Finance Commission funds but they do have their own annual plan of action for carrying out other activities with their own sources of revenue.

3.4. Telangana State: In the State of Telangana, almost all the Gram Panchayat offices are located in their own buildings with minimum administrative machinery consisting of Panchayat Secretary, Computer operator and subordinate workers.

- Gram Sabhas are periodically conducted and minimum quorum of people's participation in the planning process is ensured in every Gram Panchayat.
- The State Government encourages the Gram Panchayats to create and mobilise Own Sources of revenue and allow them to utilise the same for development purpose as well as maintenance of administration.
- The GPDP guidelines are followed for the preparation of village Development Plan but end up with the few activities subject to the anticipated funds from the CFC.
- The mechanism of monitoring Gram Panchayats is strengthened at block level, divisional level and district level.
- The delay in release of funds by the State Government is a big problem in selection and implementation of works pertaining to the state matching grant as well as MGNREGs funds.

- The Gram Panchayats which are located in urban regions are able to generate a good volume of income through collection of property tax and utilise the same for fulfilling the basic needs of the people.
- The Gram Panchayats are given responsibility for construction and maintenance of roads, supply of drinking water and maintenance of sanitation only in the villages.
- Capacity Building activities of Gram Panchayats are very poor and especially they are unable to cover all the elected representatives which lead to lack of awareness on their powers and functions.
- The allocated fund is divided among the available wards and the works are planned subject to the availability of funds in respective wards.

3.5. Karnataka State: Karnataka has a strong Panchayat Raj system with qualified manpower and well experienced elected representatives assisted by the Panchayat Development Officer (PDO). In the State, Gram Panchayats are mainly responsible for planning and implementation of activities related to supply of drinking water, construction and maintenance of roads and provision of sanitary facilities.

- The Gram Panchayats are very efficient in collection of property taxes and user charges for the services like water supply, disposal of solid waste and use of public latrines etc.
- The Gram Panchayats are having a Perspective Plan prepared for the purpose of Fourteenth Finance Commission and activities under Annual Action Plan are derived from the Perspective Plan. Further, every Gram Panchayat is generally preparing 3 separate plans for 3 different sources of funds i.e. Central Finance Commission, Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) and MGNREGs. In addition, they also plan and implement activities related to maintenance of street lights and public utilities along with supply of drinking water and provision of sanitary facilities by using their own sources of revenue.
- Majority of the Gram Panchayats have been working on providing basic services such as road connectivity, drinking water supply, street lights, solid and liquid waste management and strengthening of infrastructure at various educational institutions.
- The plan of activities are uploaded in the State Panchayat Portal i.e. Panchathanthra and linked with work codes for selection and implementation through decisions of Gram Sabha.
- In most of the Gram Panchayats, the convergence of NRLM and SHG works with GPDP is very high and hence members of these programmes participate in the Gram Sabha meetings in large numbers and discuss their activities for effective implementation.
- The Gram Panchayats are playing a vital role in construction and maintenance of waterways and irrigation structures along with water conservation structures through MGNREGA which both directly and indirectly contribute to strengthening agriculture and livelihoods of village people.
- Committees on various subjects such as finance, education, health & sanitation, Planning, women development etc. are appointed in every Gram Panchayat and these Committees periodically meet and discuss development of their concerned subject and rationale spending of available resources.
- Majority of the Gram Panchayats in the State are collecting more than 90 percent of property taxes of which 40 percent is used for meeting administration expenditure and the remaining used for providing basic services.
- The Gram Panchayats are maintaining proper records and the transactions are digitised having different portals i.e. E-Katha, BabhujiSeva Kendra, Panchathanthra and E-Gram Swaraj where financial transactions are maintained through E-Katha, basic services are delivered through BabhujiSeva Kendra and OSR collection and expenditure are booked under Panchathanthra. On the other hand, the activities of Gram Panchayats relating to 15th Finance Commission Grants are uploaded in the E-Gram Swaraj portal maintained by the MoPR, Government of India.
- The Gram Panchayats are also involved in improving the quality of education, supervising PDS and maintaining educational institutions like anganwadis, schools and colleges.
- The office administration of the Gram Panchayats consists of One PDO, One Panchayat Secretary, One accountant, one Bill Collector, One office attendant and sweepers, pump operators.
- The Elected Representatives are committed to serve the people of their villages and they were given adequate training for understanding the powers and functions of Gram Panchayats.
- The Planning process has been followed as per the GPDP guidelines for the preparation of Perspective Plan and majority of the suggested components are included. However, Annual Action Plans contain few activities derived from the Five Year Perspective Plan.
- The State is in the process of planning and implementing a second level of development works beyond the providing the basic services in order to achieve work for social, economic and sustainable development in the State.

3.6. Tamil Nadu State: Most of the Gram Panchayats in the State of Tamil Nadu prepare GPDP with adequate preparatory work like awareness generation, formation of Committees and sufficient efforts on capacity building through conduct of training for all the stakeholders. The state is putting enormous efforts on the People Planning Campaign and mobilising adequate people for the Gram Sabha meetings. Every

year, the majority of the GPs in the State prepare good GPDP by including all the components needed for local development with priority of selection for implementation.

i. Bihar : In the State of Bihar, Many Gram Panchayats do not have their own buildings, however 500 new buildings have been built recently with the assistance of a World Bank funded project. Further, most of the Gram Panchayats suffer from shortage of Secretaries, where a single person is made in charge of at least two Gram Panchayats. Regarding the status of Devolution of Powers, about twenty departments have transferred 79 functions to the Gram Panchayats. However, such transfers of functions are more in the form of “delegation” and no substantial responsibilities and resources were given. The transfer of functionaries to PRIs was not done and devolution of funds by the State Government was not effective. Recently in the year 2020 further devolution of powers has taken place. Works related to water supply and sanitation has been handed over to the Panchayats. However, the Gram Panchayats lack capacity to carry out the functions devolved to them due to shortage of manpower and resources.

- Own Sources Revenue (OSR) of the Gram Panchayats is negligible in the State. Because the State Government has not yet notified maximum rates of taxes, tolls and fees, etc. to be imposed by them. The Gram Panchayats are asked to work for the development of agriculture but without any guarantee for funding and staff. Some controlling power over the existing staff of the department is proposed to be given, but it is not substantive.
- In respect of some sectors, responsibility given is only for beneficiary selection. In some other cases only agency functions have been given. These do not count as devolution of powers.
- In respect of Anganwadi centers, where management control remains with the department, but panchayats have been given some administrative powers over some staff. This type of decentralisation creates only confusion.
- The Gram Panchayats should have been given more powers in implementing poverty alleviation schemes by allocating sufficient grants as in other states but this has not taken place.
- Gram Panchayat in the State has five Standing Committees viz., 1) Finance and Coordination Committee, 2) Social Justice Committee, 3) Public Health, Family Welfare and Rural Sanitation Committee, 4) Education Committee and 5) Public Works Committee but not functioning.

3.7. Status of GPDP in Bihar

In the State of Bihar, the Gram Panchayats have been preparing multiple Plans concerning different departments and as per their needs. There is no practice of preparing comprehensive and holistic Development Plans.

- Training for the preparation of GPDP, the Master Trainers at the State level are only trained by the representatives of MoRD but not the representatives of Gram Panchayats. Village Organisations do identify various needs of the village, but as of now they function as a parallel body, and do not play any effective role in the institutional functioning of the Gram Panchayat.
- Jeevika and Village Organisations are not integrated through GPDP process and not given any institutional role in the Gram Panchayat. However, Ward Sabha and Gram Sabha meetings regularly take place in every Gram Panchayat as stated by the Gram Panchayat officials. The Gram Panchayat does not have much control over the Officials of the line department. Mukhia and Ward Members are part of the School Management Committee.
- In majority cases, the Mukhiya of the Gram Panchayat does not have any idea about the functioning of the Gram Panchayat and is not aware of the funds received through the Finance Commission. There is very little information with villagers on what GPDP is and why it is being initiated.
- The guidelines were followed to some extent for the preparation of GPDP in letters, but the spirit was missing. The elected representatives are generally unaware of the data collected and the needs prioritised. There is perhaps a Plan in existence, but none of the elected representatives owns it.
- For implementation and monitoring of GPDP, the State has constituted a State Resource Team (SRT) consisting of Program Officers of MGNREGs, Jeevika Representatives and CSO members and provided training. The team is entrusted with the task of further training the District Resource Team (DRT). Quality of documentation at the Gram Panchayat level is weak. There is at present very little connection between the data collected and the Plan prepared.
- Recently Ward Sabha has been given legal status in Panchayati Raj (PR) Act and funds being transferred directly to the Ward Sabha. Also, the elected members from the Ward were given freedom to decide on the funds to be spent for development within the Ward.

3.8. Puducherry : Majority of the Gram Panchayats do not have office buildings except a few Gram Panchayats which are very close to the capital of the Union Territory or district headquarter have newly constructed office buildings under RGSA funding. However, in the case of few Gram Panchayats, a part of the building is used by the SHGs, Civil Supplies Department, and Community Service Centres (CSC) and for revenue officials of the UT administration. Some of these buildings are unattended and hence they are

getting damaged due to lack of maintenance. The UT is having two separate departments to look after rural development i.e. i. Department of Local Administration ii. Department of Rural Development.

The Local Administration Department is supposed to coordinate the panchayats and administer the schemes related to the basic services. But, due to non-availability of elected bodies, the panchayats do not get any grants or funds from the union government or UT government. On the other hand, the DRDA under the Department of Rural Development implements all the centrally sponsored rural development schemes without having any administrative mechanism at the village level. The DRDA is not coordinating with the Gram Panchayats for implementation of the schemes.

Manpower Availability: Since Gram Panchayats are not functioning properly, no manpower exists at the Gram Panchayat. Generally one Panchayat Secretary is made in-charge of two or three Gram Panchayats and he attends works allotted by the Commissioner of the Commune Panchayat.

Status of Elected Representatives: The Union Territory of Puducherry has two tier systems of PRIs viz., Gram Panchayats at the bottom level and Commune Panchayats at the block level. The election for local bodies was held in the year 2006 after 38 years of gap. However, the term of the elected body ended in the year 2011 and again for the past 10 years, the elections were not held due to various political reasons. In the year 2018, the Honorable Supreme Court of India directed the Union Territory to conduct elections to the PRIs. Following the mounting pressure for holding elections, the Election Commissioner was appointed and the process of electoral roles was completed but due to the administrative issues in the UT, the elections were further delayed. Meanwhile the Legislative Assembly elections took place in April 2021 and hopefully local body elections may be conducted after the formation of a new government.

Capacity Building: There is no capacity building institutions for the Gram Panchayat. Very recently the NIRDPR has conducted few programmes in the UT for panchayat functionaries. **People Planning Campaign is not conducted in any of the GP and Planning Process & Gram Sabha are also** not effective but the list of needs of people are collected by the Panchayat Secretary and sent to the concerned department but no follow-up action takes place.

3.9. Lakshadweep: The Union Territory of Lakshadweep is having two tier systems of PRIs i.e. a) Gram Panchayat and b) District Panchayat. As per the first schedule of the Regulation, there has to be 10 village (Dweep) Panchayats, one in each of the inhabited ten islands and a District Panchayat for the whole of Lakshadweep. The first Village (Dweep) Panchayat and District Panchayat were constituted during 2002-2003. The Gram Panchayats are very efficient in mobilising Own Sources of Revenue (OSR).

- The Gram Panchayats of this Union Territory have been facing a major financial crisis because of the fact that the Central and State Governments do not provide any financial assistance to them. Even scheme based funds are also not given to the Gram Panchayats. Further, the PMAY is not implemented because no eligible beneficiary is available due to higher income and problem of nativity. SBM is implemented by the district administration. However, MGNREGS is not implemented due to lack of demand for employment and also huge variation between market wage and minimum wage under MGNREGS. NRLM is well implemented but coordinated by the BDO.
- The Gram Panchayats collect House tax only and involve in collection and disposal of household garbage and cleaning of drainages.
- The Gram Panchayats meet the office administrative expenditure and salary of 3 employees consisting of one Panchayat Secretary, one engineer and one computer operator through revenue collected from house tax. Therefore, Gram Panchayats do not prepare GPDP.
- The elected members of Gram Panchayats do not have any power and functional responsibility and hence they are facing a lot of criticism from the people for their inefficiency in delivering works. Further, due to resource crunch, the Gram Panchayats were unable to accomplish any construction related works like construction and maintenance of roads and culverts, drainage and provision of street lights etc. in villages.

4. Conclusion : It is essential to disseminate and sensitize the people, Elected representatives, line departments and other stakeholders on the need and importance of creation of local governance institutions and their role and responsibilities in local development. The capacity building efforts are also very important for all the stakeholders on the planning and development process. The state governments are also required to give more devolution of powers and functionaries for strengthened local administration.