People’s Participation and Decentralization: The Emerging Areas in Rural Development

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Rural development has been the major focus of India’s Year Plans to raise the standard of living of the rural sector which constitutes 80 per cent of the Indian economy. Removal of poverty, illiteracy and diseases are the three major problems of India in general and its rural sector in particular. A plethora of projects and programmes were formulated and launched to attain this objective. A number of methodologies were adopted for the success of these programmes. Experiments were conducted in various Five-Year Plans to test these methodologies. The experience, by and large up to the Tenth Five-Year Plan, has been that much success has not been achieved. It was felt that people’s participation is lacking in most of India’s rural development programmes. Unless this is assured, there is not much hope for any breakthrough on the rural development front.

To ensure people’s participation and decentralization in the planning, implementing and decision-making process a new experiment has been initiated in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-12) of the government of India. This experiment is the scheme entitled “Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF).”

The main objective of the present chapter is to evaluate the theory and practice of this experiment in decentralization and peoples’ participation and effectiveness.

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participation in rural development programmes. The case study relates to the functioning of BRGF programme in District Sirsa in Haryana. Its critical evaluation will throw valuable suggestions for future programmes. The whole chapter is divided into three sections. First and second sections deal with theoretical issues in peoples’ participation and decentralization in the Indian context. The last section is devoted to the main objectives and critical evaluation of BRGF programme and its functioning in district Sirsa in Haryana.

PEOPLE’S PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT

People’s participation in broader sense means their total involvement with development agencies in deciding the programmes and activities, fixing up priorities, taking up initiative and carrying out the projects as partners by contributing their ideas, material, money, labour and time. The whole philosophy of rural development is based on the assumption that the government machinery is inadequate to achieve the social and economic needs of the society. The rural development personnel are merely catalytic agents. The entire developmental programmes should proceed with peoples’ participation and the involvement of beneficiaries of the programme under the overall supervision of the government functionaries. The philosophy is based on the democratic principle that the programme is for the people, by the people and of the people.

People’s participation is basically an educational process to involve people in the project, making it their own. It is to create a sense of awareness, a sense of participation and a sense of belonging. The objective is to develop self-confidence, self-reliance and managerial abilities to enable them to discover their strengths and needs. The major facilitators to ensure peoples’ participation are:

1. Motivating the people through their needs. They should be assured that their participation will be helpful in meeting their basic needs of life. There is direct relationship between the fulfillment of needs and peoples’ participation.
2. People will enthusiastically participate in any government programme if it makes best utilization of a situation. For
example, when government aid is prompt and efficient at the time of famines, floods, earthquakes and many other such exigencies, the affected people will come forward to make the programme successful.

3. Involvement of large majority of beneficiaries in inviting the programme from grass root level in identification, planning, implementing and decision making process.

4. Involve all leaders of the community for the sake of participation of all sections and factions of the community.

5. Appropriate and adequate use of media always enhances peoples’ participation. Rural people are generally unaware of the various programmes meant for them. Awareness programme will go a long way to convince the concerned people to ensure their participation.

6. The dependency syndrome should be broken. Education, training, sensitization programmes will help in realization of the fact that everything should not be left to the government. The people and the civil society should take initiative in solving their own problems rather than looking up for the government to solve their problems.

**DECENTRALIZATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

There has been a lot of controversy about centralization vs decentralization as a strategy of rural development among economists and planners. Socialist countries such as the erstwhile U.S.S.R. and now China made rapid economic development through centralized planning strategy. The same model was also copied in India during the decades of 1950s and 60s under India’s Five Year Plans. However, soon it was realized that in a democratic country like India the strategy of centralized planning for rural development is not suitable. The majority of rural development programmes were not so successful because the top-down mode of decision making was quite opposed to the principles of democracy which India adopted. Peoples’ participation was lacking and the dependency syndrome that everything will be left to the government and people
have no role in the process became a deep-rooted believe among the people.

Consequently, the planning and its implementation led to widespread corruption, mismanagement, wastage of resources and many other defects. Income inequalities sharpened. People were disillusioned with this type of development strategy. The entire rural development programme became a routine work of the bureaucratic system controlled by the government. It lost the essence of a community-driven plan in which the community not only owns the programmes but benefits from them also.

With this experience, policies and programmes were formulated to reverse it Centralized planning was being gradually replaced by decentralized planning. It was also in accordance with the democratic system of governance which India adopted. A number of empirical research findings also favoured decentralized planning and peoples’ participation in development projects. Studies showed a close and positive relationship between decentralization and economic development and political governance. It was established that development policies that are sensitive to particular regional and local needs for infrastructure and even human capital are more effective in promoting economic growth than are centrally determined policies. A more decentralized state apparatus is more exposed and therefore more sensitive to local needs and aspirations. It produces a system of governance that is more effective and accountable to local people.

Studies of decentralization have also shown that devolution can enhance rural livelihoods in a number of ways. First, the local communities possess the knowledge, information and incentive to manage and conserve the resources on which they and their families depend. Second, collaboration between public agencies and local resource users can produce “Synergistic” outcomes in which citizens and civil servants co-operate to provide goods that would be unobtainable, were they acting alone. Third, the democratization and empowerment of local administrative bodies can enhance participation in decision making, particularly among groups that have been traditionally marginalized by local processes.
History of Decentralized Planning in India

Decentralized planning or the “Bottom-up-Planning” is now recognized as an important form of planning for the local area development. It is remarked that planning at the sub-national level, formulated in an integrated manner, can be more effective in tackling those problems than national planning shaped on the basis of national averages (Patnaik 1985). However, lip services have been paid to the concept of decentralization from the very inception of planning in India. The First Five Year Plan (1951-56) recognized that there is a need to break up the planning exercise into national, state, district, and local community levels. The two new components of decentralized planning came into picture in the Second Five Year Plan namely, the establishment of the District Development Council and the drawing up of Village Plans. The planning commission in 1969, communicated guidelines to the states for formulating district plans, details of the concept and the methodology of drawing up such plans within the framework of annual, medium term and perspective plans.

The Administrative Reforms Commission (1967) and Working Group (1982) appointed by the planning commission highlighted that the district planning needed to be focused in those areas where local variations in the pattern and process of development were likely to yield quick results in terms of growth. In 1978, M.L. Dantwala laid stress on Block Level Planning to form a link between village and district level planning. In 1984, Hanumantha Rao Committee recommended for decentralization of functions, powers and finances and setting up of district planning bodies and district planning cells. The approach paper to Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90) had spelt out the rationale for decentralized planning in following words: “to achieve the twin objectives of effective implementation of the anti-poverty programmes and ensuring a balanced regional development at least in respect of minimum needs, it is essential that the planning process is decentralized.”

It is worthwhile to mention here that several Committees formulated for strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions in the country such as Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, Hanumantha Rao Committee,
GVK Rao Committee and also Administrative Reform Commission have emphasized on the need for decentralized and local area planning. The 73rd and 74th amendments to the constitution, which gave constitutional status to local self governments, has provided a new, more politically underpinned and universalized platform for decentralized planning from below. Article 243 G of the constitution provides for devolution to empower PRJs to function as institutions of self-governing for the purposes of: (i) making plans for economic development and social justice for their respective areas regarding subjects devolved to them; and (ii) implementing these plans subject to such condition as the state may, by law, specify.

The National Planning Commission has decided that the “district plan process should be an integral part of the process of preparation of state’s Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012) and the annual plan 2007-08 and onwards. With this spirit of planning commission, Ministry of Panchayati raj has started a new programme called Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF). According to the BRGF Guidelines, integrated development planning should be compulsory for each BRGF district based on a diagnostic study of its backwardness, including a baseline survey. This would be followed by preparing a participatory district development perspective plan to address this backwardness during the years 2006-07 and the period of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan. Under BRGF, the Panchayats at the village, intermediate and district level, referred to in Part IX of the Constitution, will undertake planning and implementation of the programme, in keeping with the letter and spirit of the Article 243G, while the Municipalities referred to in Part IX A will similarly plan and implement the programme in urban areas in conformity with the letter and spirit of the Constitution’s Article 243W, read together with Article 243 ZD.

**Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF): A Mile Stone in the Process of Decentralisation**

Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF), a special programme was launched by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) in the year 2007 with the objectives of removing the barriers to growth
and improving the quality of life of the people by using the decentralized planning process.

On the occasion of launching of the BRGF in 2007, the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh expressed optimism that the BRGF would bridge critical gaps in district planning and its implementation paving a way towards strengthening the Panchayati Raj system. He mentioned that: “the scheme is a major shift of power from the Centre to the district level. People who have first-hand knowledge of issues of an area will be involved in the BRGF. The scheme will accelerate delivery of services assigned to Panchayati Raj Institutions and strengthen its functions”. According to the BRGF Guidelines, the programme will provide financial resources for supplementing and converging the existing development inflows into identified backward districts, so as to achieve the following objectives:

(a) Bridge critical gap in local infrastructure and other development requirements that are not being adequately met through existing inflows.

(b) Strengthen, to this end Panchayat and Municipality level governance with more appropriate capacity building, to facilitate participatory planning, decision making, implementation and monitoring etc.

(c) Provide professional support to local bodies for planning, implementation and monitoring their plans.

(d) Improve the performance and delivery of critical functions assigned to Panchayats and counter possible efficacy and equity losses on account of inadequate local capacity.

The BRGF Programme has two components namely: a) Developmental Fund (DF) and b) Capacity Building Fund (CBF). The first has an untied nature so that a full autonomy for the planning and use of fund can be provided to PRIs as well as Urban Local Bodies (ULBs). The developmental fund has Multi-objectives perspective. It can unfold some creative chapters in the field of integrated development. Panchayats, in majority of states, get their fund in sectoral segments and central sponsored flagship programmes. Since these development funds are of tied nature, the
Panchayats (PRIs) and ULBs have no major role in their planning process. The basic planning process starts from the untied nature of fund which encourages and provides the rights to the basic unit/institution of an economy in the form of prioritising their needs and convergence of the available resources. So, Developmental fund under BRGF could be taken as a part of the same process. Further, the CBF is visualized as a fund for rural and urban transformation in the area of decentralized micro planning. The experience of PRIs in majority of states shows that we could not succeed in achieving the goals of grassroots democracy in the absence of proper, practical and productive capacity building process. So, CBF is meant for upgrading the human and physical capacity with the specific and mass level trainings, workshops, orientations, visits and infrastructural facilities. Hence, capacity building exercise is the need of the hour. It has following objectives:

I. To enable the elected representatives of PRIs to upgrade their knowledge and skill to perform their responsibilities in a better way~

II. To orient the key officials associated with the three tier PRIs to better function as technical advisors and trainers, be more receptive and learn from the ground level experience of the elected representatives~

III. To sensitize the media, political parties, representatives in the legislatures, civil society organizations and citizens to promote Panchayati Raj as an effective level of local government~

Here, in this study we make an endeavour to evaluate the performance of Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) in the context of decentralization. It is inherent in the process of decentralization that political, administrative and fiscal responsibilities are transferred to lower units (Crook and Manor, 1998; Rondinelli et al., 1989; Meenakshi Sundaram, 1999). This analysis makes some reflections on some basic functioning of planning authority:

- Has the panning authority behaved according to the perspective of decentralization in allocation of financial resources?
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- Has the planning authority followed the needs of people (as reflected in the Gram Sabhas) in the implementation of the programme?
- Has the planning authority made sincere efforts regarding enhancing the capabilities of the decentralized institution?

The indicators have been chosen so as in the absence of these a successful planning process could not be visualized.

**CRITICAL EVALUATION OF BRGF IN DISTRICT SIRSA IN CONTEXT OF DECENTRALISATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

The most important element of BRGF can be recognized in the form of Comprehensive Development Planning (CDP). CDP inculcates the feeling of the ownership among stakeholders, particularly among the local bodies. According the perspective of the CDP, the process of decentralized planning would involve the following steps.

- Need assessment and priority setting through participatory forums like Gram Sabhas.
- Situation analysis using locally available data through Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) techniques.
- Resource assessments from the various sources of funds available to them including from various centrally sponsored schemes.
- Formulation of a vision as well as strategies of development by PRIs through a process of interaction with stakeholders and local experts.
- Prioritization of proposals
- Allocation of resources according to the prioritized proposals.

The above mentioned steps are not new, because most of it is enshrined in Article 243 ZD but the BRGF emphasized on it categorically. In Haryana the districts of Sirsa and Mahendergarh were selected for the implementation BRGF. In this paper we make an endevour to evaluate the BRGF programme in District Sirsa in context with Decentralization and Development.
Performance and Impact Assessment of BRGF with Reference to the District Perspective Plan

In the beginning of the process of Comprehensive Development Planning (CDP), the district administration of Sirsa prepared a vision document called “Perspective Plan of District Sirsa” with the help of Centre for Research in Rural & Industrial Development (CRRID) which was the Technical Support Institution (TSI) for the district. The perspective plan highlighted the critical gaps in broad consultations with the community, setting the targets and allocation of resources accordingly. It further emphasized on the people’s participation. So the present paper makes an endeavour to assess the performance and impact of BRGF in the context of perspective plan in selected sectors (Agriculture sector, Literacy & Education and Social Justice, Women & Children) and then draw conclusions about the effectiveness of decentralization as the process of development.

Performance Appraisal of Agriculture Sector

The suggested strategy by Perspective Plan included a variety of steps to be taken under the BRGF plan for enhancing the productivity of agricultural sector. But these issues have not even been touched in all annual plans. After almost three years, the only issue that has been included under BRGF in the district planning is the enhancing of the irrigation facilities. The administration has provided funds only for the water channels. However, expenditure on irrigation channels has shown a high level of impact. Ignorance of the Perspective Plan and the other needs that came out through the Gram Sabhas is a weak aspect of implementation of BRGF in district Sirsa.

Performance Appraisal of Literacy and Education Sector

The strategy of Perspective Plan, in the sector of literacy and education, indicated a number of issues which should have been incorporated in different annual plans. These issues addressed the quantitative as well as qualitative aspects of formal and informal education of District Sirsa. But the experience of the past three years shows a complete ignorance of the recommendations of the
Perspective Plan. The only issue which has been addressed during the implementation process is that of construction of the rooms. Although, construction of the rooms was a pivotal recommendation of Perspective Plan but concentration only on this aspect reflects the deviation from the path suggested in the plan. It shows that the district administration adopted a narrow vision, absence of creativity and ignorance of the peoples’ needs.

**Performance Appraisal of Social Justice, Women and Children Sector**

The funds have been allotted for construction of Anganwaries in different GPs at the initial stage. The entire fund for construction of Anganwaries came from the BRGF. The district administration seems to have failed to identify such other sources as departmental outlay that could have been converged in building up of Anganwari Centres. It was only in the last year that some outlays have been made for the purchase teaching-learning materials in the Anganwari Centres.

**Impact Assessment of BRGF Through Comparison of Sector Wise Projected Outlay and Actual Outlay**

A large portion (about 40 per cent) of the total BRGF fund was projected for the health sector but the actual outlay has been only 3.87 per cent of the total outlay. Similarly, the fund for Women & Child development and improving safe drinking water facilities had been projected to be 5 per cent each, which both these sectors have received only 20.09 and 28.63 per cent respectively. Only the education sector and agricultural sector have been provided their due share 21.90 per cent and 25.51 per cent respectively which is marginally higher than projected share of 20 and 25 per cent respectively.

The comparison of projected and actual outlay for ULBs also reveals deviation from the Perspective Plan. The projected fund for roads and streetlights was 30 per cent but almost two third (75.85 per cent) of the total actual outlay has been spent only on this particular sector. The Perspective Plan suggested 20 per cent each for sewerage system and sanitation, 15 per cent each for water...
supply and solid waste management but all these sectors got marginal or negligible portion of actual outlay.

**Impact Assessment of BRGF through Comparison of Block wise Projected Outlay and Actual Outlay**

Dabwali, Nathusari Chopata and Sirsa blocks have got more funds (18.40, 21.45 and 24.29 per cent respectively) in comparison to their suggested outlay (16.89 14.94 and 16.88 per cent respectively). On the other hand Ellenabad, Odhan, Rania and Baragudha blocks have got reduced share (09.16, 06.62, 11.37 and 8.71 per cent respectively). These blocks were supposed to get a share of 12.50, 10.63, 14.14 and 14.02 per cent respectively. The entire analysis shows that distribution mechanism developed in Perspective Plan has not been followed by the district administration.

**Impact Assessment of BRGF through Comparison of Projected Outlay and Actual Outlay between PRIs ULBs**

In District Sirsa, PRIs got 90.24 per cent of the total fund distributed so far, while, ULBs received only 09.76 per cent against their marked share of 20 per cent. This shows an over preference towards the RLBs.

**Assessment of BRGF through Comparison of Projected Outlay and Actual Outlay among PRIs**

Due to the overflow of the funds in these villages, some of the villages had to sacrifice their share because they had little political influence, awareness and the decentralization in general and about BRGF in particular.

**Evaluation of the Process of Building Capability of the Gram Panchayats and ULB’s for Planning and Implementation**

*The issue of providing adequate functionaries for the Panchayat for planning and implementation*

In case of [Clause 3.22 (a) and 3.23 of BRGF Programme guidelines: it has been found that none of the villages has got a trained Community level person for agricultural extension for
improving the productivity of agriculture sector (Details in table 8). However, 100 per cent of the sample villages have reflected the need for such type of functionaries. None of the sampled villages in district Sirsa has engaged gender empowerment community leader or volunteer. All the 100 per cent of sampled villages have ignored the need of filling up the critical gap in engineering capacity. Almost, all villages Panchayat Sarpanchs have expressed the need of trained barefoot engineer. The subsection 3.23 (d) emphasized the professional support under BRGF for planning and implementation. None of the Gram Panchayats have recognized this particular need. All the six sampled villages of both sampled blocks have done nothing in filling up the critical gaps that existed in the handlooms, handicrafts and rural industries sector.

The Issue of Providing Technical Assistance and Services of Resource Persons to support PRIs as well as Gram Sabhas in Decentralized Planning Process [Clause 3.22 (b) of BRGF Programme guidelines]: The district administration has not established such extension or resource centre at intermediate Panchayat levels from where the Gram Panchayats could seek the required technical assistance. In case of the services of resource persons and professional, all the villages have no reach to them. They are not even aware of these concepts

The Issue of Providing Sufficient Office Infrastructure, (including office buildings wherever required and connectivity to these offices through roads, telephone, power supply and e connectivity) [Clause 3.22 (c) of BRGF Programme guidelines]: It is another important area that enhances the capability of the PRIs and ULBs in planning and implementation. None of the sampled villages have got any support for enhancing physical infrastructure facilities under BRGF. Although some of them already had such facilities. The other area concerned with this particular aspect is acquiring computers, providing interface equipment with broadband connectivity and training in software use at Panchayat level. No Gram Panchayat has received such type of equipments. In case of the telephone connectivity, only one village out of all six sampled villages has such facility in working condition.
The Issue of Providing Adequate Training

It could be expected that the administration of district Sirsa should have followed the training perspective. But the data collected from the sampled villages present a reverse picture. All the Sarpanchs have reported in negative regarding imparting of trainings as per the requirement of the National Capability building framework. They also denied about any type of Help Lines from where the members of the Gram Panchayats could have sought helps in plan formulation and implementation process. Another very important issue in implementation is that of sharing and discussing Annual District Plan with all the heads of the Panchayats in district. It is essential to enable them provide their suggestions for betterment. But, in district Sirsa, no such efforts have been made in this direction. Only one member out of 68 of the sampled PRIs had participated in the training programme under BRGF.

The Issue of Conducting of Surveys, Studies on Backwardness and Development of a Baseline Databank.

One important issue concerned with the capacity development is that of conducting survey, studies on backwardness and development of a baseline databank in each village. It has been found that none of the sampled Gram Panchayats have entered their data on the National Panchayat Portal. These Panchayats have also not developed GIS based database.

The Issue of Securing Assistance for Panchayats for Preparing and Consolidating Plans.

At the Gram Sabha levels, there is need to create and strengthen the planning cell/unit. The study found that none of sampled village has got such assistance for preparation and consolidation of plans. While, the PRIs members of the sampled Gram Panchayats reflected need for their capacity development needs in term of the training and awareness of all Panchayat members about all schemes including BRGF, availability of Guideline of BRGF in Hindi, well equipped Panchayat Bhawans, having furniture and other infrastructure including computer facilities are also needed.
Evaluation of Planning and Implementation Process of BRGF Scheme

The issue of Bridging critical gap in local infrastructure and other development requirements

a) BRGF expenditure for agricultural sector reflects the absence of creativity in absorbing the critical gaps other than enhancement of irrigation: The prepared Perspective Plan had recommended a number of steps for enhancing the productivity of agricultural sector. But, as already mentioned, the administration has included just one activity to enhance the level of irrigation in agricultural sector. But other issues have not been touched in all annual plans even through convergence.

b) The expenditure for Social Justice, Women and Children concentrate only on building of new Anganwari centres: It was identified in the perspective plan that enhancing the level of social justice, empowering the status of women and children should be prioritized in the plan formulation in district Sirsa. There was a need to incorporate a mixture of activities so that all critical gaps could be filled in this most sensitive area. The entire fund for construction of Anganwaris came from the BRGF. The district administration seems to have failed in identification of other sources such as departmental outlay that could have been converged in building up of Anganwari Centres.

c) The expenditure for Education sectors concentrate only on construction on school rooms: The planning authority of District Sirsa has allotted the entire fund of education head for school rooms to enhance the level of education standard in the district. It has not only lacked the creativity on behalf of the district administration but also ignored the people’s reflected need in education sector.
The issue of appropriate capacity building, to facilitate participatory planning, decision making, implementation and monitoring

Lack of awareness regarding micro planning in the members of Gram Sabha: The study shows that 97.70 per cent of the total surveyed beneficiaries or shareholders having the views that they do not know the concept of micro planning under BRGF. Similarly 97.70 per cent of the sample says that nobody has elaborated the general masses about the Gram Sabha for the planning proposes. The study found the same plight condition in case of the dissemination of information about the Gram Sabha organized in different villages. 70.50 per cent of the members of the Gram Sabha pointed out that they did not get any information regarding Gram Sabha in villages for planning purpose. All these show that the concerned administrative authority is not sensitive toward organizing the Gram Sabha in desired manner.

a) Absence of skills in Panchayat members/village secretaries/officials about the consolidation and formation of village plan: The study found that officials are not only reluctant about the micro planning but also because they have no skills or knowledge about what should be done after identification of needs. Consolidation and strategy formulation needs extensive trainings and orientations with the use of modern technologies suggested in BRGF guideline such as PLAN SOFTWARE.

b) Ignorance of officials regarding the perspective of micro-planning: The entire democratic set up of village and administrative machinery involved in the process did not know about such perspective plan. So, even in the villages where sincere efforts have been done in the process of micro planning, only annual bases plans could be visualized by all the concerned.

c) There is Casual attitude of district planning authority towards formation of village plans: The officials such as Gram sectaries, BDOs and employees of line departments invest
their time as a token. They perceive the entire planning process as their own disempowering process. So they paid less attention and time devotion otherwise it could be turned in to as a real peoples’ empowering process. Officials organized the Gram Sabha meetings in the private place such as Sarpanch’s house generally in the absence of proper information to the members of the Gram Sabha about time and place. When a small number of people gathered for the cause, all the process becomes a mockery in short time.

d) Ignoring/superseding the micro-planning done at Gram Sabha level: The needs reflected in gram Sabha get no attention from the district planning authority. People reflect their heart felt needs in Gram Sabha when they are being asked to reflect. But these get a small space in district plan. District authority incorporates the activities what they think better at their own (macro level). They distribute the funds accordingly, which is highly against the perspective of decentralized planning.

e) Ignoring the District Perspective Plan, while, implementing annual BRGF plan: In district Sirsa, BRGF plan incorporated activities around a few sectors such as ICDS, education and agriculture. Ironically, even the activities under these sectors narrowed down to one or two activities. All these show a complete Ignorance of the District perspective plan, while, implementing annual BRGF plan.

f) Ignorance of peoples’ living conditions by master trainers while they impart training programmes: When the research team investigates the occurring process of micro-planning in the field, the trainers found to believe that these were the members of Gram Sabha who were responsible for less effectiveness of PRIs, so far. They were lacking a critical approach about the people’s participation. If you find only the cynicism of responsible people for what is not happening in right perspective, this will only lose the people belief in you. It is not a balanced approach.
g) Lack of Community Involvement in Planning Process: The planning process in district Sirsa comes, so far, does not seem to be from the bottom level. Actually, it came from the apex of the district that is the district planning office. Most of the Gram Sabhas scored a minimum number of gatherings in comparison to the total members of Gram Sabha.

The issue of improving the performance and delivery of critical functions

a) Element of delay in physical performance: The district administration took up 302 physical units in hand in 2007-08 out of which none could be completed, while only 0.33 per cent was in progress observed in situation analysis survey carried by CRRID. In the last year (up to January 2010), 34.57 per cent of the projects taken in hand have been completed, while, remaining 65.43 per cent are in progress. All these show that the beginning year of the programme remained just futile regarding the implementation process. Further, the study also reveals the weakness of concentration of utilization of fund in last months of the financial years.

b) Delay in Grants Received: The implementation process of a plan could be effective only when the availability of financial resources could be ensured on time. The study shows that more than 43.48 per cent of grant units have been received after the gap of one year. It also shows that 17.39, 6.52, 10.87 and 21.74 per cent of the grant units have been delayed for less than 3 months, 3 to six months, 6 to 9 months and 9 to 12 months, respectively. All this analysis shows that the Gram Panchayats of district Sirsa are facing a serious problem of delaying the grants.

The issue of inter-se allocation of BRGF Fund to Panchayats/ULBs

a) Distribution of fund between RLBs and ULBs: The total fund in district Sirsa has been visualized to be distributed in
the proportion of 80:20 between RLBs and ULBs, respectively. In District Sirsa, PRIs got 90.24 per cent of the total fund distributed so far while ULBs received only 09.76 per cent against 20 per cent. This shows an over preference to the RLBs.

b) Vertical Allocation across the PRIs: According to the recommendation of the 1st Finance Commission of Haryana, the criterion ratio of fund distribution, between districts/ Zila Parishads (ZPs), Block Samities (BSs) and Gram Panchayat (GPs), is 10:15:75. In district Sirsa, this recommendation of the Finance commission has been ignored.

c) Political intervention in distribution of the fund among villages: After examining the village level fund distribution of all three annual plans, the study team found that villages having less backwardness got the higher share comparatively. There are some villages in district Sirsa which were inhabited or dominated by influenced politicians. These villages got a big share almost in all sectors. It seems that influences on administrative and planning authority have decided the virtue of the villages not the existing critical gaps.

As discussed earlier, various studies have established a strong link between decentralization and enhancement in rural livelihoods through a number of ways. BRGF, with decentralization as its core concept, has fallen a prey of bureaucratic, political hassles and stereo-tapism in District Sirsa. The study reveals a lot of deviations from the perspective of decentralized planning.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS AND WAY FORWARD**

It may be inferred from the analysis of the performance of BRGF that the activities selected under BRGF in district Sirsa pertaining to agriculture, education and the women & children are not in coherence with the perspective plan. All the sectoral allocation has been concentrated around one or two activities. The same phenomenon could be seen in case of capacity development fund
where one could find lack of creativity. So, there is a need of infusing creativity, as required in BRGF guidelines issued by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (Government of India). The study suggests the following measures to enhance the effectiveness of BRGF as a process of decentralization so that the dream of rural development (based on the people’s felt and real needs) can be fulfilled:

- Ensuring timely planning
- Ensuring community involvements
- Creating awareness prior to starting the planning process
- Providing technical supports to local governments for planning
- Need of reorientation and monitoring of officials of line departments
- Ensuring the inclusion of people’s needs (Reflected in Gram Sabhas) in the annual district plan
- Need of curbing delays in flow/transfer of funds
- Ensuring equitable distribution of BRGF fund
- Making convergence a requirement from above (Planning Commission and State government)
- Development of need of common programme management framework
- Need of developing District Centres of Excellence for Capacity Building
- Need of ensuring coordinated strategy of trainings
- Ensuring mitigation of delays in implementation
- Providing adequate functionaries for the Panchayats
- Providing sufficient office infrastructure
- Ensuring training of illiterate elected representatives

Legislation alone cannot empower people. People need to be enabled through, education, motivation, empathy and support from political and professional communities that work on their behalf. The formal structures of local governance therefore need the support
of people-based community organizations to make decentralization work for the people. Decentralized development should be linked to the poor and marginal households through a participatory mechanism so that the poor can take part in the development process. With maintaining the real variables of decentralised planning in the implementation of BRGF, the firm relationship could be established between decentralisation and development.

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