

A Study on Rural Development by Panchayat in Undivided Midnapore District, West Bengal

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Abstract:

When it comes to local affairs, local government as an institution of local administration emphasises the importance of people participating in creating and implementing development plans for their locality through their elected representatives/leaders on a regular basis. The government at the local level serves as a conduit for communication between elected officials and the general public. The concept of people's engagement in local governance is crucial for a local authority's smooth operation because it creates a channel of communication between the leaders and the people. As a result of the huge territory and population of the Gram Panchayat, West Bengal enacted the Gram Sansad (Amendment) Act, which established Gram Sansad as a grassroots entity. In order to examine rural development communication and development by panchayat, the researcher purposefully chose West Bengal's undivided Medinipur region.

Keywords: Panchayet, Gram Sabha, Rural development, West Bengal

Introduction:

Nowadays, People's Participation in democratic local government means something different than it did in the 1970s, when it simply meant involving the public as recipients of government-delivered benefit programmes. People's participation has undergone a sea change in recent years. As a result, it is now an essential component of all national and international development agencies' programmes. Several countries have seen administrative and planning systems alter since the 1990s in favour of more human-centred policies. There has never been a more crucial time for participatory development than now, as it has gone from being on the fringes to becoming a vital part of the mainstream. The laws of many nations, such as the Philippines, India, Bolivia, Tanzania and Uganda, were changed in the 1990s to create new spaces for people's participation and the design of a participatory development planning process in accordance with people's needs. As a result of increased public participation, governments are better equipped to detect public interests and are held to account.

One-of-a-kind democratic decentralisation experiment conducted by West Bengal's Panchayati Raj Institutions has already changed rural society irrevocably and helped raise awareness among the less fortunate sections of society regarding their capability and capacity for rebuilding their future and bringing the benefits of development within easy reach of everyone [1]. Panchayati Raj, the state's local government system, emphasised community participation in rural development and the emergence of local leaders in the villages and districts [2]. Although it has been a brilliant experiment, several issues have cropped up in the day-to-day or long-term operations of Panchayat bodies that need to be addressed. These must be found and acknowledged without putting the Panchayat system or field workers in any kind of light or official Panchayat public relations in question, both of which are critical to the system's effectiveness and efficiency. To put it another way, the problems with the Panchayat institutions must be adequately identified if the system is to be kept from becoming entropic. Let's take a look at how this grassroots initiative went wrong.

Rural development has seen a shift of power and decision-making authority from elected authorities, which has disrupted the previous 'balance' between officials and non-officials. However, a trial-and-error process, an adjustment process has already begun and there is an increasing appreciation of the viewpoints that power must necessarily be with the people and their elected leaders and the bureaucracy must consciously and wholeheartedly provide the necessary support and assistance in the decision-making process and also in the process of implementation of programmes decided.

Panchayati Raj bodies, on the other hand, lack sufficient managerial or technical staff, and as a result they are forced to serve both their local Panchayats and their department heads. So in some ways, it's unclear who's in charge, and it hinders any attempt at an effective command and control structure throughout programme implementation. The monitoring, implementation, and evaluation mechanism is still being developed. There is no reliable feedback from the field on any of the most important aspects of development. There isn't much of an

information system, in fact. The Panchayats are entangled in a tangle of departmental schemes and programmes, and as a result, coordination is not always realised.

These aren't insurmountable issues, though. Panchayati Raj Minister Debabrata Bandyopadhyaya said: "As an initial stage, we lacked the experience and infrastructure required in the field of rural development and Panchayati Raj. However, with faith and dedication, they may succeed." We are confident that our current deficiencies will be eliminated in the future. All Panchayat bodies, regardless of district or location, face the issues listed above. As a result of my in-depth interviews with B.D.O.'s, District Panchayat Officers, Sabhapatis, Pradhans, as well as other members and officials associated with the Panchayat system (including members of the legislature, members of the legislature, members of parliament, editors of local newspapers in Midnapore district, leaders of various political parties), common citizens, educated masses, etc., I am well-versed in a number of issues that affect Pancha For a variety of reasons, such as lack of workers, resources, supervisors, and experts, funds allocated for a certain development project may not be able to be spent entirely or in whole. To illustrate the point, let's look at an example of money that wasn't used. This Gram Panchayat has received control and management of all vested tanks located in the village for optimal use of the precious natural resources so that they can build their resource base and provide job for fishermen and other workers. This was done by the government's Board of Revenues. Let's have a look at some of the governmental and private development programmes for rural residents in the Midnapore district.

Decentralisation Process in West Bengal:

Self-government requires democratic representation as a foundational element. West Bengal has a long tradition of participatory and decentralised governance. Panchayats of nominated members in villages were introduced for the first time by the Bengal Chowkidary Act of 1870 [3]. The Ripon Resolutions of 1882 suggested the creation of rural boards at the local level. The Bengal Local Self Government Act of 1885 put these decisions into practise in Bengal [5]. A second attempt at administrative decentralisation during the colonial period was the Bengal Village Self Government Act of 1919. This act established a two-tier structure with a union board at the lower level and a district board at the upper level. The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1957, took its place as the successor to this law in the state. This law set up a four-tiered system with GP in each community. The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 ended this four-tier organisation and replaced it with a three-tier one. A pioneering effort in India to establish a three-tier Panchayat system in rural regions is the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 (West Bengal Act XLI, 1973). Each district has a District Panchayat, a Panchayat Samiti, and a General Panchayat (GP) (Government of India, 2011).

West Bengal's experience in local governance under the PRI is unique in comparison to those of other Indian states. The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 (West Bengal Act XLI of 1973) has governed the state's second-generation Panchayat system since 1978. As a result, elections for Panchayats have been held every five years since then. As a result of these changes, local governments now have the authority to collect taxes and fees on behalf of the people (Government of West Bengal, 2009). Changing the representation of women and other underrepresented groups in the political system has been the most important development since 1978. Although the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992 guaranteed reservations for backward classes and women in the PRI system in India, more than a third of PRI members in West Bengal had been women since the 1980s (Government of West Bengal, 2004). It's also encouraging to observe that, through the panchayat system, the poorer sectors of the population have gained significant representation since 1978. According to Webster (1990), the state saw a rise in the representation of small peasants and landless workers in PRI between 1978 and 1988. Women's engagement in the panchayat system as elected representatives is lauded.

Now, the state's democratic decentralisation process includes three levels: village-level government (GP), block-level government (PS), and district-level government (ZP). It is envisaged that GP, PS, and ZP, at their distinct levels of self-government, will formulate and implement plans and schemes to promote economic development and provide social justice for all in their respective jurisdictions, as different self-government entities (Section 19, 109, 153 of West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973).

The Role of the Invited Space in PRI:

It's relevant to mention that the PRI in West Bengal has implemented policy adjustments to create some 'invited spaces,' in order to make decision-making more decentralised and direct. Following are some of the state government's policy initiatives to improve the state's participatory development process.

Participants in community development decision-making processes are seen as a cornerstone of democracy at the grassroots level by organisations like Gram Sansad. It might be claimed that a more democratic system of governance

is one in which the people are more involved in decision-making. Gram Sansad meetings were instituted in 1994 under Section 16A of the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973, to increase participation in the decision-making process [5]. The main goal was to provide a place where people could participate directly in guiding and advising GP on economic development and social justice initiatives that were being implemented or planned in the region

- Gram Sabha.

With the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1992 (Article 243A), an attempt was made to restore Gram Sabha's status as a decision-making body for decentralised governance [9]. Gram Sabha meetings in West Bengal are now required by law, according to an amendment to the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973, passed in 1994. Members of a Gram Sabha must be listed on the electoral roll for the GP in question. When the Gram Sabha meets in December, it's supposed to serve as a forum for beginning discussions and suggestions for development activities based on local requirements. Gram Sabha is supposed to be an apolitical forum where people can participate in planning and decision-making without fear of being swayed by their political views.

- Gram Unnayan Samiti (GUS):

Incorporating GUS into the planning process is another way to increase community involvement (Village Development Committee). The GUS is an apolitical organisation designed to encourage participation from people in all walks of life, not just one or two political parties. The West Bengal Panchayat (Amendment) Act, 2003, introduced the idea of GUS. A GUS is made up of elected chairpersons from the respective Gram Sansads and ex-officio members who secured the second highest number of votes. Additionally, members of Self-Help Groups, local NGOs, retired or active teachers, retired or active government officials, and other village residents are nominated and/or elected through an open voting procedure during a special Gram Sansad assembly called for the formation of GUS. The procedure for forming the GUS has been altered following a recent order from the West Bengal government's Panchayats and Rural Development Department [8]. Instead of open voting, candidates are nominated by elected officials and the people who received the second-highest number of votes.

To ensure people's active participation in implementation, maintenance, and equitable distribution of benefits, GUS is being introduced [7]. A GUS has the right to receive untied funds from the GP due to the implementation of various government-sponsored development programmes and can therefore open an account at a bank or post office.

- Sansad siblings:

The West Bengal Panchayat (Amendment) Act, 2003 introduced the Block Sansad and Zilla Sansad to provide a vertical accountability procedure among Panchayat bodies. To counsel and advise the PS on all development-related issues, the West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1973 requires a Block Sansad, which includes all members of the block's GPs and all PS members convene twice a year [6]. Much like the Pradhans and Sabhapatis, all PS have Sabhapati, Sahakari Sabhapati, and Karmadhyaksas as well as all of the ZP members in a Zilla Sansad. Zilla Sansad holds meetings twice a year to provide guidance and advise to ZP on all subjects pertaining to district development.

- Information Gathering:

All Panchayat bodies, regardless of district or location, face the issues listed above. As a result of my in-depth interviews with B.D.O.'s, District Panchayat Officers, Sabhapatis, Pradhans, as well as other members and officials associated with the Panchayat system (including members of the legislature, members of the legislature, members of parliament, editors of local newspapers in Midnapore district, leaders of various political parties), common citizens, educated masses, etc., I am well-versed in a number of issues that affect Panchayat. For a variety of reasons, such as lack of workers, resources, supervisors, and experts, funds allocated for a certain development project may not be able to be spent entirely or in whole. To illustrate the point, let's look at an example of money that wasn't used. All of the khas and vested tanks located in the village have been handed over to the concerned Gram Panchayat by the Board of Revenue so that the precious natural resources can be used to their fullest potential while also creating jobs for the local fisherman and other workers.

I.R.D.P.:

This framework uses a multi-purpose strategy to address multiple issues at the same time. Self-help and community involvement are critical in this process. As stated by R. N. Azad, "Integrated Rural Development could well be described as an attempt to implement Gandhiji's Sarvodaya concept, which is to promote the well-being of all rural residents while also ensuring accelerated development and well-being for the most vulnerable groups, including the poorest and most vulnerable among them." I.T.D.P.'s intended audience is as described by the Projects Officer, I.R.D.P. Midnapore.

Small farmers, marginal farmers, landless people, agricultural labourers, bargadars and pattadars, and rural craftsmen make up the bulk of the agricultural workforce in the region.

The beneficiary's yearly income cannot exceed Rs. 3,500/-. The I.R.D.P. Midnapore has implemented a number of initiatives to aid those marginalised populations. Here are a few examples of creative business models.

Bullock carts to pull ploughs	Betel-vine	Cultivation
Three-wheeler carts	Mat-stick	Cultivation
Polugh bullock scheme	Cajuput	Cultivation
Irrigation Dams	Banana	Cultivation

In order to choose beneficiaries for the most appropriate plan, act as a guarantee for bank loans, and ensure prompt loan realisation, all of these programmes and projects require the active and wholehearted involvement of Panchayats. The Panchayat members are rural people's immediate neighbours, hence they are well-versed in rural needs. Because of their ongoing monitoring and oversight, they may produce the best results. The goal of the I.R.D.P. project is to bring 600 families from each Midnapore district block under the initiative's umbrella each year.

As a result, by the end of the Sixth Plan's required five-year timeframe, 3000 (600 X 5) families from each block are projected to be covered by the project. A good argument has been made about the importance of keeping three sides of a triangle in mind for I.R.D.P.'s success:

1. The programmes,
2. Bureaucracy and other Implementing agencies,
3. The people and people's institutions.

BETEL-VINE CULTIVATION:

Even though betel-vine agriculture has a long history and holds great potential for generating foreign exchange, neither the government nor agricultural universities have given it the attention it deserves. When land is under too much pressure from people, a little plot of can produce a decent return by cultivating. It has caught the eye of planners and economists that Uttar Pradesh and Hariyana have had success with betel-vine cultivation. Although having a very good dcope, West Bengal has only had occasional attempts to develop this cultivation. Only a few particular companies have accomplished these improvements. Professor Gajendranath Si's initiative to develop this agriculture scientifically under the aegis of the Panskura Banamali College Science Club is an encouraging exemplary case. Prof. Gajendranath Si stated in an interview that a land with a 10 decimal area yields a net profit of Rs. 4000/- annually, giving work for three people throughout the year. Prof. Gajendrath Si estimates the following initial costs:

If adequate plant protection measures are implemented after thorough investigation, maintenance costs can be kept to a minimum. Pakistan, Bangladesh, Cylon, the United States of America, and countries in Southeast Asia are major markets for betelvine exports. In addition, the industrial and other uses of betel-vine stems, leaves, and roots are also quite wide open. Exhibit Fairs in various nations throughout the world can help companies reach new consumers. Tamluk I and II, Ramanagr I and II, Sutahata I, Mohanpur and Egra are among the well-known betel-vine farming areas in Midnapore district. Government Si, Agricultural Universities, and Cooperatives all have important roles to play in improving this type of farming, according to Prof. Gajendranath Si. For this reason, the above-mentioned organisations should step up. The I.R.D.P. of Midnapore has already acknowledged it and has lately extended loans to betel-vine producers.

D.R.D.A, Nationalised Banks, and cooperatives can all make loans to growers who meet their criteria. Direct government loans and subsidies can be given to cultivators by the Panchayats or the Industrial authorities at the Panchayat Samiti Level. Panchayats can support financial institutions by selecting loan recipients and assisting growers with loan repayment. cooperatives are "Growers Organisations" that supply raw resources at fair prices, remove marketing issues, ensure transportation facilities, pack and bleaching, and so on. For the development of a modern agricultural "package of practises" and for the popularisation of cultivation and its uses throughout the Midnapore areas generally, the government and agricultural colleges might create arrangements for research and teaching.

Conclusions:

Finally, it may be claimed that West Bengal has not yet fully benefited from decentralisation despite being a pioneer in democratic government in the country. Local people's participation in governance is still a severe hindrance. Everything here might be a severe hindrance to improving efficiency, transparency, and accountability as intended by the PRI. Promoting 'invited space' by local authorities could be an effective way to combat this problem. A greater participation of the general public is essential to PRI's success since it is built on a foundation of devolution of power to the people at the grassroots level. As a result, all measures must be made to guarantee the same in West Bengal.

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