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A gestalt of rural development with the perception of “Good governance and people’s participation”

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Abstract

The leading objective of rural development is to improve the quality of life of the rural people by alleviating poverty through the instrument of self-employment and wage employment programmes, by providing community infrastructure facilities such as drinking water, electricity, road connectivity, health facilities, rural housing and education and promoting decentralization of powers to strengthen the Panchayati Raj Institutions. In terms of rural development the government's policy and programmes have also laid emphasis on poverty alleviation, generation of employment and income opportunities and provision of infrastructure and basic facilities to meet the needs of rural poor. Even, as a measure to strengthen the grass root level democracy, the government is constantly endeavoring to empower Panchayati Raj Institutions in terms of functions, powers and finance. At a standstill, till date various rural areas in India are undeveloped, and struggling for their basic rights and requirements. More often than not, this is an issue of mismanagement and complete failure of governance system. The argument of this paper is that, an effective people's participation enhances the transparency of the development works, the accountability of the implementing authority, and compliance with the local laws, which consequently establish good governance. Hence, there is need of good governance, and in the context of good governance and rural development, the participation of the people is considered necessary for better implementation of rural development programmes. Thus, the two issues of “good governance” and “people’s participation” in rural development is the center of this paper.

Keywords: rural development, governance, good governance, people’s participation

Introduction

Normally, the general objective of the rural development is to liberate the energies of the rural people, especially the poor, so that, the poor villagers can realize their potential and thus improve their capacity as well as commitment to development, organize and govern themselves towards the attainment of a better standard of living for the individual and for the entire community. Therefore, the local government institutions came up to serve as agencies for liberating the energies of the people living in villages. But, as per the existing research, the local government institutions are also failing to reach that extent and various rural areas like KBK districts of Odisha are still rolling under poverty. Here, the issue of significance of good governance and the question “is there any need of local people’s participation and their knowledge in rural development” comes up.

In India, rural development and local self-government have a long history. Kautilya's Arthashastra and Megasthenes' writings on the Administration of Pataliputra have mentioned a few, the functioning of local bodies in the villages during 300 B.C. They also talk about selection process, qualification and disqualification of the members. Thus, almost every village in ancient India had a self-governing body to look after its own development. However, all this self-governing bodies underwent a change due to the collapse of the Moghul Empire and the advent of British Administration.¹ In other words, the firm establishment of British Administrative system gradually reduced the village communities, specially the institutions of headman, the accountant and other functionaries at village. Even, once they were representatives of the village communities. But, later the British made them

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¹ Venkatarangaiya, M., and M. Pattabiram. 1969^[3]. Local Government in India. Mumbai: Allied Publishers. P.p. 1-76.

mere salaried officials.² It was only after 1858 that the British thought seriously about the desirability of creating institutions of local self-government to take care of the activities like public health, roads, education, and irrigation and so on. Still, the development programmes in India are failing to bring development at the grass root level.

Rationale behind the failure of rural development programmes

Development of rural areas and the poor population of the villages has been one of the most crucial policy issues in India since independence. India has opted for multiple approaches and pro-poor governance programmes to rural development keeping in view the multi-variety needs of the people living here. However, over the last 50 years the experience of rural development has been almost a failure. The rural poor have not experienced any significant change in their living conditions. The perusal of these programmes reveals that these could not deliver adequate results and hardly have any impact on rural poverty. Hence, failure of IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme) and later poverty reduction programme is largely due to:³

- Weak Governance System: More often than not, the rationale behind the failure of pro-poor governance programme is only for the lack of accountability, lack of responsiveness, corruption and lack of transparency of bureaucrats. Services provided by the government can work, but too often they fail. This is because of the weak governance system.
- Bureaucratic Malpractices: The bureaucrats most of the times keep in priority on their own interests, rather than the poor people (normally they ignore the poor people and their interests). In this context the KBK administration of Odisha is an alive example. The governments implement various short-term and long-term development programmes and schemes, but maximum of those fail (why this is so because of the carelessness of bureaucrats). The government pathology (as corruption, lack of accountability, red tapism) is highlighted, so it very difficult of success of those pro-poor governance programme.
- Absent of pre and post Implementation Management Plan: The integrated rural development and poverty reduction programmes failed due to improper management plan. In reality those programmes do not have the proper pre and post implementation plan.
- Inconsistent Support Staff: The staffs that control those programmes are unskilled; sometimes they failed to implement that in a proper way. As a result the outcome of the programme is less for which that has implemented.
- Lengthy Bureaucratic Procedures of Implementation: It is an age old problem which is responsible for the failure of a development programme.
- Bureaucratic ignorance.
- Disregard of Local People's Participation and their Knowledge by the Administration in Decision-making Process.

² P.p.6.

³ Currie, Bob. 2000^[4]. The Politics of Hunger in India: A Study of Democracy, Governance and Kalahandi's Poverty. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

All the above mentioned issues have a concern in terms of governance, good governance and rural development. More often than not, all of them have stand as an obstacle in the process of rural development.

A theoretical understanding of "Governance" and "Good governance"

The term 'governance' is wider than government. It encompasses the relationships between the three actors' state, market and civil society, and how these actors organise themselves and make decisions according to a set of informal and formal rules. The concept 'governance' refers not so much to what institutions do but how they do it. In other words, the ways and means by which an institution sets its direction and organizes itself to fulfill its purpose is known as governance. It can be understood generally to involve "the distribution of authority and functions among the units within a larger entity, the modes of communication and control among them". 'Governance' is a new term, but the issues it addresses are age old like bureaucratic malpractices, accountability, transparency, corruption and people's participation. It is a transition from government, and the transition from government to governance is not all about the administration; it is more about the process of management⁴. As a result of which labels such as 'good governance', 'entrepreneurial government', and 'efficient administration', 'reinvention or as Al Gore⁵ elaborates "a government that works more and costs less" is effective governance. In this context, according to Osborne and Gaebler⁶ (1992)^[7], government should steer the process, rather than providing services. At the same time government should encourage and empower communities to solve their own problems rather than simply delivering services. For good governance or management the government should also concentrate on earning money rather than spending it and should solve problems by influencing market forces rather than creating public programs (Osborne and Gaebler 1992)^[7]. The emphasis on speed and efficiency during the presidential elections of Bill Clinton in United States in 1993/2001 gives relevance to the changing nature of government. Mostly the "third way philosophy of governance"⁷ suggested by Clinton came to epitomize his two terms (1993-2001) as President of United States. His policies on issues such as the North America free trade agreement and welfare reform have been described as centrist approaches. He provided over the largest period of peace-time economic expansion in American history, which included a balanced budget and a reported federal surplus. In this way, there are numerous interpretations of what the term 'governance' actually describes. For instance; the

⁴ Here the process of management refers to the management of economic, political and administrative authority for development and wellbeing of the common people. Peters, B. Guy, and John Pierre. 1998^[9]. Governance without Government? Rethinking Public Administration. Journal of Public Administration on Research and Theory 8 (2): 223-243.

⁵ Gore, A. 1993^[6]. Creating a Government that Works Better and Costs Less. New York and Harmondsworth: Plume Books and Penguin.

⁶ Osborne, David, and Ted Gaebler. 1992^[7]. Reinventing Government. London: Wesley Publications.

⁷ A political position which attempts to transcend left-wing and right-wing politics by advocating a mix of some left-wing and right-wing policies is refers to the third way philosophy of governance. Its approaches are commonly viewed as representing a centrist compromise between capitalism and socialism. Gier, Nick. 2007^[8]. Social Democracy and 'The Third Way'. p.3.

www.tomandrodna.com/Nick_Gier/Danish_SocDem_010207.pdf

UNDP (United Nations Development Program) defines governance as “The exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences” (UNDP 1997). Governance is “a set of values, policies and institutions by which a society manages its economic, political and social processes at all levels through interaction among government, civil society and private sector”.⁸ The World Bank refers to governance as “the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised for the common good.”⁹ This includes the process by which those in authority are selected, monitored and replaced. The capacity of the government to effectively manage its resources and to implement sound policies is known as governance.”¹⁰ Citizen participation, accountability, transparency, rule of law and stability are common elements in many definitions of good governance. Some definitions of good governance go beyond these components and include the adoption of specific policies, such as policies promoting private-sector led growth, as elements of good governance. So, in one way “governance is understood to include not only the political and administrative institutions of government (and their organisational interrelationships) but also the relationships between government and civil society.”¹¹

On the other hand ‘Good governance’ has itself a little bit of practical kind of sketch. As follows:¹²

- It underpins and supports the mission and purpose of the institution. Without such shared intent in purpose and delivery a board of governors (BoG) will be weak.
- It creates a sound, ethical and sustainable strategy, acceptable to the institution as a whole and other key stakeholder.
- It oversees the implementation of such strategy through well considered processes and procedure in an open, transparent and honest manner.
- It is essential to the grant or assertion of autonomy. Boards of governors, by embracing good governance approaches, accept unequivocally their own collective and individual responsibilities.
- It is not optional.

By and large, good governance facilitates decision-making which is rational, informed and transparent, and which leads to organizational efficiency and effectiveness.¹³ In other words in terms of good governance decision-making should ensure that varying interests are appropriately balanced, that

⁸ Cheema, G.S. 2006 [5]. Good Governance: A Pathway to Poverty Eradication. UNDP.

⁹ That is true that the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised for the common good called as governance, but the term ‘common good’ make some confusion (in reality). Because in reality most of the governance systems are not working for the betterment of the poor people or common good, for which day by day like the transition of government to governance, the governance itself is converging both to pro-poor and anti-poor governance.

¹⁰ World Bank. 2005 [12].

<http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/about.html#approach> (Accessed on 15th of February, 2012).

¹¹ McCarney, P. L., eds. 1996 [11]. Cities and Governance: New Directions in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Toronto: University of Toronto.

¹² Blom, Andreas, and Cheong, Jannette. 2010 [10]. Governance of Technical Education in India: Key Issues, Principles, and Case Studies. Washington DC, USA. P.p. xii.

¹³ Trakman, L. 2008 [14]. Modelling University Governance. Higher Education Quarterly 62 (1/2). P.p. 63-83.

the reasons behind competing interests are recognized, and that one interest is not endorsed over others on arbitrary grounds.

Democracy also has a different space in the sphere of governance and development. It is a mode of governance and there exists a symbiotic relationship between the concepts democracy and good governance. Good governance can therefore be seen as an umbrella term for a functioning democratic system where freedom of expression and a sound juridical system is in place. The concept of good governance is not readily defined. UNDP, in a comprehensive policy document from 1997, states that good governance is characterized by participation, the rule of law, effectiveness and efficiency, transparency (built on the free flow of information), responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity, accountability, and strategic vision. According to DFID, good governance centre upon three main concepts (DFID, 2006) [16]: As follows;

- State Capability: The ability to get things done, to formulate and implement policies effectively.
- Accountability: A set of institutionalised relationships between different actors that might help bring about responsiveness.
- Responsiveness: When a government or some other public authority act on identified needs and wants of the citizens. Similarly, the Asian Development Bank defines the four elements of good governance as accountability, participation, predictability and transparency (Coffey, 2007) [17]. Why is good governance important? Simply put, poor governance will not lead to a society’s development. Inefficient use of State resources, corruption and unstable systems will not lead to poverty reduction. Poor governance threatens not only the countries sociopolitical sustainability but also the environmental and economic sustainability. However, good governance is not the sole determinant of sustainable development but it sure makes a difference. William Easterly (2006), Professor of Economics at New York University, states that “badly governed countries are poor countries” (p.130) and that “good governance tend to come together in packages, so it is hard to tell which one is causing economic development” (p.131). It is proven that access to information and communication in its own right plays an important role in promoting good governance (Coffey, 2007) [17]. Further, information delivery to public is a key task of government and it is their responsibility to keep citizens informed of what is happening around them. In a policy note, DCERN (Development Communications Evidence Research Network) concludes that if “we accept the view that governance requires an inclusive public space based on informed dialogue and debate – an environment in which voice and accountability are central – then it is clear, in theory at least, that communication must have a positive impact on good governance” (DCERN, 2007, p 5) [18].

People's participation and importance of their indigenous knowledge

People’s participation is viewed as a dynamic group process in which all members of a group contribute to the attainment of common objectives, share the benefits accruing from group activities, exchange information and experience of

common interest, and follow the rules, regulations and other decisions made by the group. Need for people's participation is articulated in terms of efficiency and/or cost-effectiveness, equity in distribution of benefits, sustainability and empowerment of the people. India has a history of civilization built on irrigated agriculture in the river basins and rain-fed cultivation combined with small scale irrigation works on the drier plains. For thousands of years rural people farmed in a sustainable manner that maintained the traditional agriculture systems and conserved soils and water resources. The farmers' local knowledge of their environment followed by healthy resource management practices continued to meet people's need without any significant threat to environment. In nutshell, the ancient Indian agricultural practices had in-built mechanism for sustainability of natural resources base at community level. In recent years the notion of sustainable development has emerged as a reaction to the highly technological and centralized processes that have governed thinking on development, the green revolution being a classic example. The process of sustainable development envisages that people should not merely participate, but be in charge of their own development. Some initiatives in India have grappled successfully with this complex process, and different models of people driven development have emerged. Perhaps the most notable of these is the remarkable work of Mr. Annasaheb Hazare in Ralegan Siddhi village of Maharashtra. When he first returned to his village in 1975 it was an extremely degraded village. There was large scale migration, ill health, low productivity and a flourishing business in the illegal distilling of alcohol, resulting into violence especially against women. Today Ralegan is unrecognizable. Productivity has increased manifold. There is a sense of community and sharing among all the people, and complete self-sufficiency in food grains. Ralegan only demonstrates what village people can do when they take control of their own development. It serves as a testimony to community interest taking precedence over self-interest.

Government of India has recognized the need and importance of people's participation for the successful planning and implementation of the development programmes, and accordingly the Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-1997) emphasizes that people's initiative and participation must be the key elements in the whole process of development.¹⁴ The role of government also should be to facilitate the process of people's involvement in developmental activities by creating the right type of institutional infrastructure in rural areas. Even, people's participation is being recognized as the basic approach in designing the rural development programmes.¹⁵ For instance, the State governments of Andhra Pradesh's development programme 'Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (REGS)' and the participatory approach in planning & implementation process. The case of Kerala's People Plan Campaign/Programme¹⁶ (PPP) is also based on participatory approach in terms of development. Indeed, participation can be viewed as both a means and end. As a

means, participation is used to achieve some predetermined goal or objective. On the other hand, participation as an end is a long term process which aims at developing and strengthening the capabilities of rural poor to intervene more directly in development initiatives. Anyway, people's participation is not a one off event. It is a continuous process through which participants are empowered gradually. The use of instruments for people's participation also varies with the variation of the participation stages.

People's participation as a constituent of good governance

Citizen participation like of accountability, transparency, rule of law and stability is an essential element in many definitions of good governance. In the context of good governance and rural development, there are various ingredients of participation. As follows:

- Efficiency
- Effectiveness
- Self-reliance
- Coverage
- Sustainability
- Equity

In the light of above those ingredients of participation in terms of governance, peoples' participation has a greater role in the sphere of good governance and rural development. In reality, rural development can be achieved through peoples' participation as a means of good governance. So, peoples' participation is an indispensable constituent of good governance. Here, this argument thus recognizes that the level of good governance increases through people's heightened participation in development programs. Good governance is the foundation of participatory development inasmuch as it provides the government roles needed to encourage participation and create the environment in which people can participate effectively. Effective people's participation enhances the transparency of the development works, the accountability of the implementing authority, and compliance with the local laws, which consequently establish good governance. The above discussion thus indicates people's participation and good governance are inseparable from each other.

The significance of people's participation in good governance and rural development

Decentralization has been one of the reform efforts to improve community development programs in rural areas to better serve the needs and concerns of the local people. A number of studies and pilot tests have been conducted, but none persuaded top policy makers to truly decentralize their power. It is widely recognized that decentralization will increase the efficiency and responsiveness of local government. Locally elected leaders know their constituents better than officials appointed from the central government. They can provide the public services the local people required. Technically and physically, it is easier for local residents to hold local officials accountable for their performance. On the other hand, it is widely recognized that true and sustainable development takes place when the stakeholders of a community equally and democratically share ideas and visions, as well as participate and take responsibilities together to steer and implement development activities. This creates a sense of ownership as

¹⁴ Bob, B. Sam. 1998^[15]. Participation of the Poor in Rural Development Programmes: Selected Case Studies. New Delhi, India: Discovery Publishing House. P.p.14.

¹⁵ Ibid. p.p.14.

¹⁶ It ensures peoples' participation in terms of development through Gram Sabha, development Seminars, and NGOs.

well as partnership in development. Thus, through people's participation and involvement in planning and decision-making processes, a local authority with good local governance can be produced.

Barriers in participatory development process

Although people's participation has been recognized and identified as an important ingredient to the success of development projects, it has been realized that it is susceptible to a range of obstacles. As follows:

Structural

This kind of obstacles in participatory development process can be attributed to political environment, within which development intervention has been attempted. In other words, a centralized political system, legal system, and prevailing ideology do not encourage citizen comments and state maintains the direction and decision making in the affairs of the country. In fact in most countries the dominant relations of power, production and ideological values legitimizing them constitute powerful obstacles to the promotion of participation.

Operational or administrative

It refers to the over centralized planning, inadequate delivery mechanisms, inappropriateness of project technology, irrelevant project content, lack of effective local structures and so on.

Cultural and social

The most frequent and powerful social obstacle to the participation of rural poor in development projects is a mentality of dependence which is deeply ingrained in their lives. The rural poor have become accustomed to leaving the decisions and initiative to the local elite.

Conclusion

To sum up, rural development has nowadays acquired special significance in the planning scenario. Everybody has raised a hue and cry for the uplift of the rural poor. Academicians, politicians, policy-makers, administrators and members of different non-government organizations through their active deliberations in different national and international seminars, workshops and symposia are trying to make a deliberate attempt on the different aspects of rural development. Rural development like the issues of communal violence, terrorism, extremism, social conflict, regional rivalry which are raising its heads nowadays in Indian polity is because of failure of the governance, illusionary vision, short-sightedness and agreed to temporal power among the political class of the country. And this political class is the product of present social climate where everyone has become a self-seeker and is in search of gaining something at any cost. Indeed, this misgoverned process leaves the great social and economic demands of the masses left, and temporary unwanted demands of the organized elite class get an opportunity to have a priority over the masses. That afterward becomes the cause of concern and then leaving wider social and economic domain out of the orbit of governance. Thus, in terms of rural development, there is need of proper management of all kinds of political, social and economic resources or affairs with the involvement of local people and their indigenous knowledge. Last but not the least, in practice, however, real

people's participation in planning their future and in development processes seems unobtainable as long as administrative power and resources are in the control of the central offices and the elite class people. In other words, governing agencies, that is, officials that are working in local governing institutions, also need to change their attitudes to welcome people to the decision making tables.

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