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See Hindi Version of the [Summary](#) (available from 05 January 2011)



## Decentralization Community



### Solution Exchange for the Decentralization Community Consolidated Reply

*Query: Inputs for the Approach Paper to the 12th Five Year Plan - Examples; Advice*

Compiled by [Joy Elamon](#), Resource Person and [Tina Mathur](#), Research Associate  
Issue Date: 30 December 2010

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From [Arun Maira & Dr Pronab Sen](#), Planning Commission, Government of India

Posted 26 November 2010

You might be aware that the Planning Commission of India is preparing the Approach Paper for the XIIth Five Year Plan. We are going through a series of consultations to gather inputs for the development of the Approach Paper. The Commission has identified 12 groups of challenges to be included in the Approach paper. You may see a listing of these challenges at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111001.pdf> (Size: 79 KB). This is still an evolving approach and we may revise the list of challenges after consultations.

These challenges have been identified through consultations and several reviews, including the Mid-Term Appraisal of the XI Plan.

It is to be noted that 'Decentralization, Empowerment and Information' is considered as a key challenge. As part of this challenge, the Commission has included Vibrant Grassroots democracy, Democratizing Information, Social Justice for All and Improving the Quality of Services. The Approach paper would focus on how these challenges impact various sections of society in the development context.

We seek your suggestions for addressing these challenges, given the several constraints that have already been identified through innumerable studies and discussions on the Decentralization Community as well as other Communities of Solution Exchange. Examples of approaches that have yielded significant results are especially welcome. Additionally, we are especially interested in suggestions on how these challenges need to be addressed differently for improving the quality of life for different sections of the society.

In this context we request members to give your specific suggestions on how to address the following challenges so as to strengthen Decentralized Governance:

1. How to build Vibrant Grassroots Democracy which includes making decentralized governance work and capacity building for decentralized planning
2. How can we ensure Social Justice for All especially addressing the issues faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, Women, Children, Old Aged and Disabled. How decentralized governance could be organized and capacitated to achieve this?
3. Improving the Quality of Public services has been a challenge for years and how this could be achieved, especially through decentralized governance
4. What are the approaches to be taken to democratizing information so as to reach the masses through information and using media for development

It would be easier for us in processing your suggestions, if you could list them according to each sub-challenge.

Your inputs would be useful for the Planning Commission in the run-up to the preparation of the Approach Paper to the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan.

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### Responses were received, with thanks, from

1. [Anthony Chettri](#), Caritas India, Kolkata
2. [Ashok Kumar](#), School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi
3. [Rahul Banerjee](#), Indore
4. [Venkatesh Srinivasan](#), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), New Delhi
5. [Anita Inder Singh](#), New Delhi
6. [Kalika Mohapatra](#), Bhubaneswar
7. Srinibas Pathi, Mizoram (Central) University, Aizawl ([Response 1](#); [Response 2](#))
8. [K. Rajasekharan](#), Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), Thrissur
9. [B.P Syam Roy](#), West Bengal
10. [Amitabh Mukhopadhyay](#), Office of CAG, New Delhi
11. [Jos Chathukulam](#), Centre for Rural Management, Kottayam
12. [Prasanta Kumar Dash](#), CARE India, New Delhi
13. [Pardeep Kamboj](#), National Institute of Health & Family Welfare, New Delhi
14. [Geethakutty P.S.](#), National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad
15. [Debraj Bhattacharya](#), Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi
16. E. Venkatesu, National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad ([Response 1](#); [Response 2](#))
17. [K.K Pandey](#), Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi
18. [Sumarbin Umdor](#), North Eastern Hill University, Shillong
19. [V.A Vasudevaraju](#), Indian Institute of Community Development, Puducherry
20. [Ashok Kumar Sircar](#), Rural Development Institute, Kolkata
21. Dhirendra Krishna, New Delhi ([Response 1](#); [Response 2](#))
22. [Rajan M Karakkattil](#), Thiruvananthapuram
23. J.B Rajan, Kerala Institute of Local Administration, Thrissur ([Response 1](#); [Response 2](#))
24. [M. Neelakantan](#), (Formerly of National Sample Survey Organisation), Thrissur
25. [D.C Misra](#), National Informatics Centre, New Delhi
26. [Tarun Sharma](#), Rishikesh
27. [Bidyut Mohanty](#), Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi
28. [Tushar Dash](#), Vasundhara, Orissa

29. [P.V Indiresan](#), New Delhi
30. [Nandini Sen](#), KIIT School of Rural Management, Bhubaneswar
31. [Anju Talukdar](#), MARG, New Delhi
32. [Piyush Ranjan Rout](#), Local Governance Network, Bhubaneswar
33. [Abha Singhal Joshi](#), New Delhi
34. [Mahi Pal](#), Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi
35. [Jacob John](#), KDS, Delhi
36. [Naimur Rahman](#), One World South Asia India, New Delhi
37. [Indrajit Roy](#), University of Oxford, United Kingdom
38. [Vibha](#), New Delhi
39. [Democratic Governance Team](#), UNDP India, New Delhi
40. [Subhash Mendhapurkar](#), SUTRA, Jagjit Nagar, Himachal Pradesh
41. [Pratishtha Sengupta](#), MANTRA, Kolkata
42. [K.J Kurian](#), Idukki, Kerala
43. [Ratan Ghosh and Jayanta Choudhury](#), Tripura
44. [Niranjan Upadhyay](#), Department of Management Studies, Sikkim Manipal University, Sikkim
45. [Shiv Kumar Acharya](#), Bikaner
46. [Chandan Datta](#), Kolkata
47. [Kris Dev](#), Life Line to Citizen, Chennai
48. [Harsh Singh](#), NOIDA
49. [Trinadha Rao](#), Laya, Rajahmundry
50. [Avanish Kumar](#), Management Development Institute, Gurgaon
51. [S.K Biswas](#), Port Blair
52. [Vishwanath Azad](#), [Binni](#), [Amarnath Abz](#), Samuel Hahnemann Associates & Research Centre, Hazaribag
53. [V.R Ghorpade](#), SHIRDI Foundation, Bangalore
54. [Tomojeet Chakraborty](#), Kolkata
55. [Anima Sharma](#), New Delhi
56. [Alka Singh](#), AMRITA (Agency for Multidimensional Research, Implementation, Training & Advocacy), Allahabad
57. [Tina Mathur](#), UNDP, New Delhi
58. [P.P Balan](#), Centre for Research in Rural & Industrial Development (CRRID), Chandigarh
59. [Bishal Rai](#), SIRD, Sikkim

*\*Offline Contribution*

*Further contributions are welcome!*

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[Summary of Responses](#)

[Related Resources](#)

[Responses in Full](#)

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## Summary of Responses

Members responded enthusiastically to the query inviting inputs to the Approach Paper to the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan. They gave several suggestions on the themes identified by the Planning Commission viz. vibrant grassroots democracy, ensuring social justice, improving the quality of public services and democratizing information. The suggestions are summarized below.

## **VIBRANT GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY**

### **Overall approach, concepts, roles clarity**

- Make Decentralized Governance the central feature of the XIIth Plan
- Implement the recommendations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Administrative Reforms Commission (**ARC**) and the Commission on Centre-State relations
- Clarify the **Concept, status and roles** of various players and institutions in decentralized governance
- Consider **local governments as governments** and not as agencies
- Pay considerably enhanced attention to **Urban governance**
- Revisit, restructure and implement **PESA** in letter and spirit
- Strengthen decentralized governance in the **North Eastern region** based on a proper study of its diversities

### **Roadmap for effective decentralized governance**

- Prepare a **Roadmap** for ensuring devolution and effective decentralized governance jointly with State governments
- Ensure every local government has in place an organizational **structure, with office, staff, systems and role clarity** of each functionary.
- Give mandatory **taxation powers** and other resource mobilization powers have to local governments.
- Complete **activity mapping**, a detailed functional mapping, review of the **status of conformity legislations** and contradictory legislations at State and Central levels
- Focus on **social justice and local economic development** as key mandates of local governments.
- Integrate institutions like **Nyaya Panchayats, missions/programmes** on health, livelihoods, food security, employment etc with the local government processes
- Develop simple, minimum, measurable **indicators** of decentralized governance.
- Strengthen the role of the **State governments** in all these processes

### **Centrally sponsored schemes, Untied funds**

- Reduce number and quantum of Centrally sponsored (**CSS**) and State sponsored schemes (**SSS**) especially in activities where **subsidiarity** principle could be applied.
- Give more **untied funds** with broad guidelines considering the national and State goals too
- **Earmark funds** for local governments as has been done by the XIII Finance Commission, with States taken into confidence.
- **Make CSS and SSS flexible** to the local context and give local governments the key role in planning, monitoring and implementation.

### **Strengthening Gram Sabhas**

- **Define roles, responsibilities** and power of Gram Sabha, outline clearer responsibilities in planning, implementation and monitoring of most of the local level interventions by all tiers of governments.
- Focus on the potentials of **youth** in local governance.
- Clarify roles of various sub committees of the local governments

### **Capacity Building**

- Strategize capacity building on the basis of **technological and institutional** interventions.
- Build capacities not only the elected representatives but also other **functionaries and Gram Sabha**, women elected representatives and those from the disadvantages groups.
- Go **beyond training programmes** and also beyond government programmes, rules and regulations. Include issues of social justice, discrimination etc as well as skill development on local governance.
- **Involve institutions other than ATIs/SIRDs**- civil society organizations and academic institutions Build capacities of training organizations and provide **untied financial support** to them to develop by themselves.

### **Decentralized Planning, District Plan and DPC**

- Ensure plans at all levels evolve from the village with local government plans, the suggestions **going upward**.
- Base all plans on **human development approach**
- Introduce **gender planning and budgeting** at all levels
- Tap the potential of the network of **SHGs** especially that of women and various disadvantaged sections
- **Incentivize** decentralized planning and monitoring.
- Provide **untied funds** and power for **resource mobilization**
- Make available reliable **local level data** for planning, disaggregated to the Panchayat level including the **downward information flow** on national and State plans, schemes, funds, fund flow and opportunities.
- Make available advance information on **resource envelope**
- Ensure District Plan is a **single district plan** and not in silos. Departmental and local government plans have to be integrated with the district plan.
- Strengthen District Planning Committees (DPCs). Constitute DPCs in every district, define their **roles, structure including the membership and status, enhance** their capacities where they exist. Provide Technical **support system, secretarial assistance and resources** for planning to all the DPCs by the beginning of XII Plan.

### **Other Suggestions:**

- Develop a **policy on parallel bodies and missions, or minimize their number** and integrate with local government and district plans
- Do away with **MP/MLALADS** or strictly integrate with local and district plans
- **Do away with several separate committees** by each of the Mission and scheme at the local level; instead entrust the various committees of the local governments and Gram Sabha with the functions, powers and responsibilities.
- Specific guidelines to be prepared for **Local government – Private Partnership**, enabling the local governments to tap the potentials

## **ENSURING SOCIAL JUSTICE**

### **Identifying and measuring exclusion**

- Analyze who are the marginalized, what are the processes excluding them should be.
- Measure inequality through an **inequality index** on the lines of the global one, adapted to the local government context.
- **Train local governments** to measure inequality, understand and work in social justice areas.
- Develop **Performance indicators** at local level to include issues of disadvantaged groups, social justice and equitable sharing of resources.

### **Inclusion of the Excluded**

- **Sensitize** all organs/institutes/officials of the State including government officials, police, prison officials, public prosecutors, legal service authorities, legal aid lawyers on laws and issues relating to vulnerable groups as well as on the potentials and role of local government in these.
- Develop guidelines to **strengthen Gram Sabhas** for better representation in decision making and sensitize them on issues related to marginalized people.
- Build capacities of **elected women representatives** on issues of social justice
- **Create platform, networks and issue-based alliances** for dialogue between duty bearers and rights holders.
- Ensure the launch of **Nyaya Panchayats**, which in a way could address many aspects of social justice.

### **Funds, monitoring and Citizen Charter**

- Increase **budgetary allocation** in plans at district, block and village level for SC, ST, women, old people, children and minorities.
- **Engender plans** at various levels.
- Create **Social Justice Committees** and **Social Justice Funds** in each village with members taken from the excluded groups to improve utilization and create accountability.
- Streamline the **MIS** with regard to excluded categories to have GP level data.
- Let local governments address issues related to **BPL list** with specific guidelines and monitoring system.
- Give local governments the responsibility of ensuring the marginalized get access to service delivery
- Ensure **Citizen Charter** at all levels
- Develop **clear accountability mechanisms** for local governments

#### **Marginalised in governance and PESA**

- **Revisit, rework, restructure and implement PESA** as a key tool in addressing challenges in social justice in tribal areas.
- **Organize the marginalized** on the lines of SHG movement
- **Address land rights issues** separately as in the case of people in conflict areas, migrants, dalits, adivasis, fisherfolk etc.
- **Give strong role to local governments** to address these issues of diversity
- Let the 12<sup>th</sup> Plan be a **Plan on Social Justice**, let the decentralized governance be the **overarching framework** for achieving it.

#### **IMPROVING QUALITY OF PUBLIC SERVICES**

##### **Quality, norms and standards for service delivery**

- Ensure **Universalization of access** to public services
- Refrain from setting targets, **focus on actual delivery** and its quality.
- **Define 'quality'** of services.
- **Analyse bottlenecks** in implementation and delivery of services. Undertake studies analysing the bottlenecks and cross sectoral governance issues in implementation of government programmes for addressing practical issues of service delivery.
- Identify **parameters of quality**, develop **norms and standards** for services and link these to **budget provision**.
- Reduce the number of **Centrally Sponsored Schemes**
- Let **sectoral allocations** consider data from District Human Development Reports.
- Increase the proportion of **untied funds** to districts with accompanying **guidelines**.
- Ensure measures to ensure that Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies are given their rightful **responsibility** along with the necessary resources for delivering public services.
- Correct **Contradictory laws** and regulations pertaining to service delivery by local governments
- Ensure **State governments pass the necessary laws** so that local governments can carry out their service delivery responsibilities.

##### **Human Resources, Infrastructure and Delivery Mechanisms**

- Undertake a study of the frontline service delivery institutions in order to assess the **staffing issues** at the ground level.
- Consider **Redeployment, 'rightsizing' and staffing** to assist in improving quality of services.
- Ensure **basic infrastructure, adequate space, provision of computers** and other items crucial to service delivery are in place.
- Actively pursue the model of **Community Driven Development (CDD)** for improving service delivery alongwith enabling policies and institutional sanction, scope for enhancing capacity and access to required resources.

- Ensure **Process Simplification** for improving quality of services, for instance in departments and institutions having direct public interface.
- Put in place Citizens **Charters at all levels**.
- Undertake **convergence between various services** which are similar in nature or where interlinkages are obvious to improve quality.

#### **Performance Measurement and Monitoring Service Quality**

- Develop a **performance management framework** in a participatory manner and assess performance against the set standards to bring a positive orientation of **service culture**.
- Put in place **systems of monitoring** and ensure their institutionalization
- Ensure **feedback mechanisms** for services delivered so that corrections could be undertaken.
- Set up **online monitoring systems** for tracking such aspects as category- wise, sector- wise fund allocation and utilization.
- Ensure **accountability of the service providers** to the citizens.
  - Place the **Gram Sabha** as the central platform for ensuring accountability at the lowest tier.
  - Take steps to **institutionalize Social Audit** across all tiers of government.
  - Provide mechanisms such that regular form of **internal audit** can reinforce the social audit.
  - Make social audit reports public documents.

#### **Use of technology in service delivery**

- Explore options of village kiosks, mobile based information sharing, reporting and tracking, Web Swan connectivity
- Ensure **single window service delivery systems, online record keeping and grievance handling** systems.

### **DEMOCRATIZING INFORMATION**

#### **Use of Media**

- **Create awareness** among citizens for using media for disclosure of information.
- Ensure **government collaboration with media** to share development challenges and success stories.
- **Collect and disseminate** Acts/laws pertaining to information availability to citizens to local bodies.

#### **Right to Information**

- Implement RTI Act in letter and spirit, especially the **public disclosure** clause.
- **Train** elected representatives on RTI stipulations.
- **Create an escalation scale** for RTI requests such that those that those which can be dealt at the RLB/ ULB level should only reach the next level if they remain unaddressed within a given time frame.

#### **Information Dissemination Mechanisms**

- **Collate, index relevant documents** relating to government orders, circulars, statutes etc. and make them available through public libraries and at Block and Village level offices.
- Put in place a system ensuring **regular flow of information on fund flow and schemes** to the Panchayats
- Create a **National Data Bank** by way of collecting, preserving, disseminating and sharing vital information (particularly relating to the prevailing best practices in the field of planning and developmental initiatives) from the local communities and local governments for democratizing information.
- Train **Frontline service delivery workers** such as ICDS workers, primary school teachers as well as Civil Society Officers to provide information to each household on

benefits available to the poor from the Panchayats and block offices and how to access them. This would require convergence between some departments at the district level.

- Use **Folk media, nukkad natak and community radio**, radio/television extensively to provide information to citizens.

#### **Information Technology**

- Set up **Computerized facilitation centers** to disseminate information.
- Set up **Touch Screen kiosks** in offices with greatest public interface like local governments.
- Upgrade **Websites** at regular intervals.
- Link programmes such as **Plan Plus** of NIC to schemes such as MGNREGA as well as line departments so that local governments can access information regarding allocations, projects, changes in rules and regulations and notifications quickly.
- Analyze and tap the potential of **National Panchayat Portal**.

#### **Information and Accountability**

- Ensure that the push of information is enough to enable citizens to **hold government accountable**.
- Ensure Social Audit is carried out at every tier of government to the highest levels.

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## **Related Resources**

### *Recommended Documentation*

#### **Governance and water crises in Delhi** (from [Anita Inder Singh](#), New Delhi)

Article; by Anita Inder Singh; The Tribune; 6 January 2006

Available at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111002.pdf> (PDF; Size: 22 KB)

*Analyses Delhi's water problems and reflects the broader crisis of governance caused by multiplicity of governing authorities*

#### **Decentralized Governance Monograph: A Global Sampling of Experiences** (from [K. Rajasekharan](#), KILA, Thrissur)

Draft Paper; Management Development and Governance Division, United Nations Development Programme; September 1998

Available at

[http://www.mekonginfo.org/HDP/Lib.nsf/0/C56DD733E2F48D8D47256D90002981E1/\\$FILE/UND%20DECENT%20GOVERNANCE%20MONOGRAPH%201998.pdf](http://www.mekonginfo.org/HDP/Lib.nsf/0/C56DD733E2F48D8D47256D90002981E1/$FILE/UND%20DECENT%20GOVERNANCE%20MONOGRAPH%201998.pdf) (PDF; Size: 697 KB)

*Aims to provide development practitioners the opportunity to examine the concept of decentralization from theoretical perspective and practical implications*

From Dhirendra Krishna, New Delhi; [response 1](#)

#### **Right to Information Act, 2005**

Act; Government of India; New Delhi

Available at <http://persmin.nic.in/RTI/RTI-Act.pdf> (PDF; Size: 389 KB)

*Act provides for setting out the practical regime of Right to Information for citizens to secure access to information under the control of public authorities*

#### **Section 4 of the RTI Act**

Section of Act; Government of India; New Delhi; 2005

Available at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res12120801.doc> (Doc; Size: 38 KB)

*Section of the Right to Information Act that mandates proactive disclosures by public authorities and the types of information to be disclosed*



**Footpaths** (from [Tarun Sharma](#), Rishikesh)

Film; Indian Institute of Journalism and New Media; Bangalore

Available at <http://www.pagalguy.com/2010/11/of-diamonds-footpaths-war-widows-the-3-best-entries-at-confluence-2010-short-film-competition/>

*A feature on urban problems highlighting challenges faced by citizens and policymakers response- a means of democratizing information*

From [Tushar Dash](#), Vasundhara, Orissa

**Natural Resource Governance: Early Gains From Forest Rights Act**

Article; by Tushar Dash, Vasundhara, Orissa; August 2008

Available at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111003.pdf> (PDF; Size: 75 KB)

*Experiences on implementation of Forest Rights Act and the role played by it in strengthening grassroots governance*

**Forest Rights Act: A blueprint for future conservation**

Article; by Tushar Dash, Vasundhara, Orissa; InfoChange News and Features; April 2009

Available at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111004.pdf> (PDF; Size: 26 KB)

*Provides evidence from Orissa that the Act is being used by local communities to strengthen their conservation initiatives*

**The Forest Rights Act: Redefining Biodiversity Conservation in India**

Article; by Tushar Dash, Vasundhara, Orissa; Policy Matters 17; 2010

Available at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111005.pdf> (PDF; Size: 1.5 MB)

*Documentsexperiences with the implementation of the Forest Rights Act in the State of Orissa*

**Developing Civilized Slum free Cities** (from [P.V Indiresan](#), New Delhi)

Text of Talk; by P.V Indiresan; New Delhi

Available at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111006.pdf> (PDF; Size: 502 KB)

*Contains text on a talk on developing cities of the future, relevant for urban governance*

**Capacity development for strengthening local governance** (from [Democratic Governance Team](#), UNDP India, New Delhi)

Note; Democratic Governance Team; UNDP India; New Delhi

Available at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111007.pdf> (PDF; Size: 168 KB)

*Summarizes lessons learned from UNDP interventions and/or UNDP supported studies, and recommendations for capacity building of elected representatives*

From [Harsh Singh](#), NOIDA

**Public-Private-Panchayat Partnership for inclusive growth**

Article; by Harsh Singh; The Hindu; 27 April 2010

Available at <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/article412609.ece>)

*Explores ground-level realities in local governance issues of agricultural productivity and value addition, and the role that the business sector could play in rural transformation*

**Creating Vibrant Public-Private-Panchayat Partnership (PPPP)**

Book; by Harsh Singh; Academic Foundation

Available for order at [http://www.academicfoundation.com/n\\_detail/615.asp](http://www.academicfoundation.com/n_detail/615.asp)

*Presents case studies which show the success of partnership models in rural transformation*

### **From Trickle Down to Triple Bottom Line of the Aam Aadmi**

Article; by Harsh Singh; NOIDA

Available at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111009.pdf> (PDF; Size: 21 KB)

*Argues that replacing the 'trickle-down' model with one that strengthens 'triple bottom line' of aam aadmi's livelihood will require strategy based on creation of sub-urban assets*

From the [Resource Team](#), Decentralization Community, Solution Exchange

### **Index of Consolidated Replies, Decentralization Community**

Index; Decentralization Community, Solution Exchange; UNDP; New Delhi; December 2010

Available at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111014.pdf> (PDF; Size: 214 KB)

*Provides titles, links, descriptions of the Consolidated Replies of the Decentralization Community from July 2005 30 December 2010*

### **National Consultation on Approach Paper to 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan**

Minutes of Consultation; by Joy Elamon; UNDP; New Delhi; 6 December 2010

Available at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111011.pdf> (PDF; Size: 80 KB)

*Minutes the proceedings of the National Consultation organized by the Decentralization Community at UNDP, New Delhi on the Approach Paper to 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan*

### **Key Points from the Discussions on Decentralization Community Since 2005**

Presentation; by Tina Mathur UNDP; New Delhi; 6 December 2010

Available at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111010.pdf> (PDF; Size: 180 KB)

*Extracts of the main suggestions emerging from Community discussions on grassroots democracy, social justice, improving quality of services and democratizing information*

### **Regional Consultative Meeting Jabalpur**

Minutes; by Joy Elamon; UNDP; New Delhi; 19 November 2010

Available at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111012.pdf> (PDF; Size: 36 KB)

*Documents the proceedings of the regional meeting of Decentralization Community, Jabalpur where issues to be addressed in Approach Paper to 12<sup>th</sup> Plan were discussed*

### **Regional Consultative Meeting Kolkata**

Minutes; by Joy Elamon; UNDP; New Delhi; 26 November 2010

Available at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111013.pdf> (PDF; Size: 44 KB)

*Documents the proceedings of the regional meeting of Decentralization Community, Kolkata where issues to be addressed in Approach Paper to 12<sup>th</sup> Plan were discussed*

## ***Recommended Portals and Information Bases***

**National Panchayat Portal, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, New Delhi** (from [D.C Misra](#), National Informatics Centre, New Delhi)

<http://panchayat.gov.in/>

*Portal providing information on Panchayati Raj system in the country including Panchayat data, reports etc.*

**Transparent Chennai, IFMR, Centre for Development Finance** (from [Tarun Sharma](#), Rishikesh)

<http://www.transparentchennai.com/buildamap/>

*An attempt at democratising information, contains details of maps, data, infrastructure, schemes and their status for the urban area of Chennai*

## ***Recommended Tools and Technologies***

From [D.C Misra](#), National Informatics Centre, New Delhi

### **Plan Plus**

Software; National Informatics Centre, New Delhi. Permission Required

Available at <http://panchayat.gov.in/planplus>

Contact Mr. D.C Misra; [dcmisra@nic.in](mailto:dcmisra@nic.in)

*Open source software to assist demand-based, convergent planning rather than scheme based on line of Planning Commission guidelines; incorporates options for local variations*

### **PRIAsoft**

Software; Owned by National Informatics Centre, New Delhi

Available at <http://AccountingOnline.gov.in>

*Software for Panchayat level accounting, based on CAG prescribed model accounting formats*

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## **Responses in Full**

### **[Anthony Chettri](#), Caritas India, Kolkata**

I would like to thank the Planning Commission for taking this initiative.

In this context of the request my specific suggestions on how to address the following challenges so as to strengthen Decentralized Governance are:

1. How to build Vibrant Grassroots Democracy which includes making decentralized governance work and capacity building for decentralized planning?  
*The vibrant grassroots democracy can be built only when the government with full political will endorse the Administrative Reforms Commission recommendations. Secondly Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) need to be given full powers of local self government and not work as the implementing agency of the Central and State government.*
2. How can we ensure Social Justice for All especially addressing the issues faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, Women, Children, Old Aged and Disabled. How decentralized governance could be organized and capacitated to achieve this?  
*Decentralized Government can ensure social justice only when a proper platform is made for the people like SC, ST etc where they can come and share their views independently. Not just clubbing them in one Gram Sabha.*
3. Improving the Quality of Public services has been a challenge for years and how this could be achieved, especially through decentralized governance  
*At present the PRIs are scheme centric and not service centric. So the local bodies need to come out of the schemes implementer mind set and be more of service providers.*
4. What are the approaches to be taken to democratizing information so as to reach the masses through information and using media for development  
*NIC has come up with beautiful software but of no use. How can a common man use them when first of all they are illiterate secondly no broadband connection, no computers. There are so many traditional ways to democratize information. Kindly strengthen those traditional channels of communication. Secondly I would like to say please revive the local and small newsletter in the district. These newsletters are on the verge of extinction. They are the form of livelihood for many in the villages. Thirdly*

*encourage the community radio in the village. If the approach in this regard in what I propose then only we can democratize information or else we will alienate the people from local governance.*

The approach of the Planning Commission with regard to decentralization needs to make the PRIs really a local government, giving them all the powers as any State government has.

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**Ashok Kumar, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi**

This is a response to Mr. Arun Maira and Dr. Pronab Sen (Planning Commission, Government of India).

Social Justice remains the critical aspect of development of the people of India. The big question is how to create conditions for arriving at a 'just society'? It is a complex issue and economists and philosophers have spent a great deal of energy and time answering this question. Beginning with Kant and moving on 'A Theory of Justice' by John Rawls, the debate has not ended as responses to Amartya Sen's latest book 'The Idea of Justice' show.

My understanding of justice, among others, is greatly influenced by these three great authors and philosophers on the subject. In a small email like this I would like to make the following comments:

Justice is relational i.e. society could be 'just' only when all of us treat each one of us fairly and justly. At the most basic level this would mean that all of us deserve to be treated with respect as equal human being and not discriminated on the basis of caste, religion, region and gender. This implies that justice begins with individuals but does not end here because collectivities could also promote justice. State remains central to this endeavor.

Establishment of 'just institutions' has been time and again emphasized. In this direction, the Indian state has a critical role to play by devising, implementing and monitoring policies, which are genuinely responsive to peoples' needs and aspirations.

Markets could be used in almost all economic spheres as mechanisms of economic growth, but sole reliance on market does not help in the long run. Sectors such as housing for all, access to potable water, decent education, sanitation facilities and the like are some of the provisions, where state must play the pivotal role. It is not about how much the nation spends on social goods, it is about what the nation does to ensure that all of us have access to these critical services within our given means. The lowest income gainer should have access to securing decent housing and critical services. Justice for all can not be achieved if people continue to live in squatters, at present estimated between 30 to 50 percent in major cities.

Policies should create conditions for just distribution of social goods such as housing and infrastructure. If all Indian citizens will have to stand as equals and contribute to the process of nation building collectively, alternatives must be found out by policy makers for "fair" distribution of "capabilities". Nations which have historically engaged in strengthening the "agency" of their people (Norway) have found themselves on the top of the HDI listing whichever way we measure it.

My best wishes for nation building.

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**Rahul Banerjee, Indore**

The biggest problem is that of the violation of the provisions of the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, Wildlife Protection Act, Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forestdwellers (Recognition of Rights) Act regarding the paramount powers of the Gram Sabha in Scheduled Tribal Areas. Legally the Gram Sabha's consent has to be taken for implementing any project in a scheduled area but this provision is being flagrantly violated by both private and government agencies. So the Planning Commission must ensure that the tribal Gram Sabha is properly consulted and no force is used against it in pursuing development.

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**Venkatesh Srinivasan, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), New Delhi**

My response is as follows:

Q.No. 1: How to build Vibrant Grassroots Democracy which includes making decentralized governance work and capacity building for decentralized planning

Many government programmes such as in health and education have established committees at the village level as the Village Health and Sanitation Committees to act as the interface between the system and community in better articulating the needs of the communities, facilitating provision of services and to also act as the eyes and ears to the larger system. However their empowerment in terms of their knowledge to function has not been well addressed. The other aspect is the space and importance placed by the system to ensure that the roles assigned to these committees, needs to be increased.

Such processes should be supported and given importance by ensuring discussions at district, state and national level review meetings so that the officials at the operational level give sufficient importance to such community level processes. Aspects such as expansion of the roles of these in planning and implementation of services, should find prominence in the future. As these committees have elected representatives, the orientation of elected representatives towards their effective functioning should find importance. The current one time support of training of elected representatives should be supplemented as a more continuous activity and the expanding IT networks should be used for such purposes, along with the engagement of NGOs who could undertake these tasks.

Q.No.2: How can we ensure Social Justice for All especially addressing the issues faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, Women, Children, Old Aged and Disabled. How decentralized governance could be organized and capacitated to achieve this?

Every programme, in this country, plans to address these vulnerable groups. But we are still not satisfied in the way programmes deliver to these groups. Entrusting this responsibility to districts and lower levels is needed but not sufficient. For large systems, such as the government systems to deliver, it is critical that decentralized approaches should be constantly reviewed so as to ensure that the objectives of decentralization are being achieved. Meaning at each state level meeting one agenda should be to hold a discussion how services are being reached to the marginalized groups. Remedial measures that are needed to problems should be discussed and needed directions to the districts to follow as well as making changes in the policies and programmes at the state level. The focus on inclusion, which is a hall mark of the 11th plan, should be actualised on developing an annual report, based on MIS and a report once in 2-3 years based on evaluation data, and placed before the Parliament. Such a report should form the basis of at least one discussion in the various sub-committees of the parliament that have been formulated.

With regard to the aged (and may be for others also), the policies such as National Policy for Old Persons, should be adopted by each State Government and programmes formulated. Funding for

these programmes (as has been done for Minority programmes) should be stepped up which not only benefits the needy but also good bureaucratic talent to manage the larger size programmes, which are very small to attract the attention of officers of high calibre.

Q.No.3: Improving the Quality of Public services has been a challenge for years and how this could be achieved, especially through decentralized governance

Public services over the years have been trying to achieve the scale that is needed to provide services. Having made strides in this direction, now it should be the focus of the government systems to improve the quality of services. As has been done in some programmes, quality assurance should form part of the M&E strategy of programmes. Approaches of internal quality assurance should form part of the programme implementation. Needed corrections in the organization structure, especially of social sector programmes, should be undertaken. It is common knowledge that most government structures do not have quality assurance teams or managers, whose responsibility primarily is to establish processes for quality assessment and to over the implementation the recommendations of these assessments. Additionally, as most government programmes face huge HR shortages, well defined contracting processes should be developed to bring Public Private Partnerships. For these to succeed it is important that government systems should build capacities to engage private providers as partners in a transparent and effective ways.

In the light of the above, with increased funding to social sectors, by this government it is important that needed changes in the programme structures are made so that engagement of the private sector and community level units as well as critical processes such as quality assessments are better accomplished both to provide services efficiently and also to ensure that government has the wherewithal to pay and seek services of high quality.

Q.No.4: What are the approaches to be taken to democratizing information so as to reach the masses through information and using media for development?

It is not an easy task to engage the media on using information to write articles, especially on development issues/programmes. However there has been some change in the last few years with few media houses even aspiring to carry stories at MLA/MP constituency to report on progress attained through government funding. Government should actively seek such collaboration with the media rather than some enlightened groups volunteering to do so. It is important for large programmes, such as of the government to interact with the external environment, of which the media forms a major part. It should be the endeavor of the government to establish a process of providing information and case studies/stories of success as also challenges, to the media so that media use these inputs for writing reports that they deem fit. Such a mechanism seems to exist at the national level where each Ministry or a group of Ministries have press briefings, once year. However such briefings should be undertaken more frequently with good preparations, where stories that would interest the media are shared. Additionally such approaches should become part of the functioning in each state. For such tasks to be accomplished there is also a need to consider the competencies of the media units in the government such as the DAVP and Department of Public Relations at the state level and suitable capacity building initiatives for capacity augmentation should also be undertaken.

It is very good to note that government funding for the social sector is increasing and is bound to increase more. However concomitant changes in the way in which the government systems function, such as focusing on quality, managing grassroots processes, engagement of the media and the private sector, are very critical to derive full benefits from the enlarged funding.

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**Anita Inder Singh, New Delhi**

My response is with reference to provision of public services.

There is a general lack of accountability regarding the failure to deliver essential services like water (and power) though in Delhi these are managed by the public and private sectors respectively. That doesn't seem to make any difference to the suppliers because they don't know what good governance and accountability are.

More broadly there is no culture of delivery - delivery on time - delivery in terms of quality - and the two are related in the water sector in Delhi. There is also no mechanism to ensure - consumer or government - to ensure delivery.

These factors should be taken into account when discussing decentralized governance.

I am attaching an article I wrote for the Tribune on Delhi's water governance crises in 2006, on the basis of my project at the Centre for Law and Governance at JNU. I think the conclusions have a broader significance and I hope the article will be of interest. Please see <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111002.pdf> (Size: 22 KB)

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**Kalika Mohapatra, Bhubaneswar**

The followings is my response to the Approach Paper for Planning Commission:

1. How to build Vibrant Grassroots Democracy which includes making decentralized governance work and capacity building for decentralized planning

As per the Constitution's mandate we have to delegate the responsibility to the local Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) system along with clear cut accountability. To deliver the responsibility effectively, one technical support either in terms of institution or group of people to be attached with the PRI system. PRI members to be paid for their work and their election should be based on the development orientation/ agenda and not for making money.

Secondly, sufficient capacity building programme is required for effective and vibrant democracy at grassroots level for both PRI members and the administrative functionaries, who are the guides and philosophers of the PRI members.

More awareness is required among the community to choose right people as their representatives and keep track on the performance of the PRI members.

2. How can we ensure Social Justice for All especially addressing the issues faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, Women, Children, Old Aged and Disabled. How decentralized governance could be organized and capacitated to achieve this?

Gram Panchayat is a small area and Gram Panchayat Office has to have the data of all above mentioned groups and prepare various activities/plans. All activities have to be approved in the Gram Sabha. For example in Orissa Sarpanches have the responsibility to provide food for three days, if anybody is in distressed condition, without any higher approval. The Sarpanch is also keeping track on the availability of food in his/her Gram Panchayat and condition of the poor people otherwise severe action would be taken against him/her. After delegating the responsibility it seems that the starvation deaths in tribal and western areas has been reduced drastically. Similar type of accountability has to be fixed with the local self governance to reach the unreached people.

Secondly, people also should know these are the roles and responsibilities of the local self government. So that people can keep track on each group activities and problems and monitoring PRI members activities.



There is a need to change the orientation of development, if you talk about development with PRIs, they only refer to construction of buildings and roads. Nobody thought of any social issue to be taken as one of the developmental issues. It could be part of their capacity building programme so that social issues can be taken as developmental issues.

3. Improving the Quality of Public services has been a challenge for years and how this could be achieved, especially through decentralized governance.

More transparency and accountability would bring quality services. Regular capacity building can also contribute towards quality services.

4. What are the approaches to be taken to democratizing information so as to reach the masses through information and using media for development

Each Panchayat has to have their own website and all information should be shared with everybody. Websites should be updated at regular intervals and for this Gram Panchayats would require technical people to support them.

More awareness and education is required on the available resources and their accessibility for using them.

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**Srinibas Pathi, Mizoram (Central) University, Aizawl**

- Unilinear model of decentralized / grassroots governance in India ( like either urban or rural) may be supplemented / replaced by an open ended system of grassroots democracy as more and more areas in different parts of the country witness a peculiar syndrome where it is very difficult to categorize these areas as purely urban or rural. For instance, Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, has got its first ever Municipal Council during the first week of November, 2010. But the fact remains that the Village Councils continue to function in Aizawl even today. There is a view that such rural structures may not be disturbed even after the constitution of Urban Local Bodies i.e. like Aizawl Municipal Council. Such a situation exists in many parts of India including the North Eastern Region.
- The capacity building efforts for the elected representatives in rural areas as well as urban local self government institutions need to be addressed in a more systematic way. It may require institutional and technological interventions and also greater coordination among the governmental agencies, academia, and mass media.
- District Planning Committees need to function as per the Constitutional and legal provisions both in letter and spirit.

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**K. Rajasekharan, Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), Thrissur**

This refers to the first and probably the fourth part of the query.

Building up of vibrant grassroots democracy requires a lively group of pro-active promoters of decentralization who know the theoretical nuances and practical strategies of decentralizing governance in each State, particularly in the capacity building institutions. One cannot see many of such people even in the front runner States it seems. Unless someone promotes decentralization with passion and by taking efforts, decentralization will stay stagnant. The capacity of our capacity building institutions, so far I know, is at stakes and requires a lot of redesign to work properly and the incapacity would remain as a major roadblock in our



decentralization if things continue this way. A close and critical look at the publications, annual report or even their claims will reveal more about their weaknesses than strengths, I believe.

Also, there should be a nucleus of people who have clear thinking and practical knowhow on decentralization strategies at the State level for local governance at the policy making level - not even as Minister, but as his think tank group - to push and coordinate everything so as not to work at cross purposes. If the Ministry is more focused on distribution of largesse or patronage even in the form of improper appointments or simple assignments in the capacity building institutions, the one thing that will be sidelined is decentralization. Capacity of such a resource group of the State will have a profound influence in deciding the track on which decentralization moves ahead during that period. If a State resource group shows ability deficit, furthering decentralization is impossible.

Easy to learn materials, including audio and video documents, that start from simple to complex topics to serve as good building blocks is an essential need in awareness generation and taking people to the more difficult pathway of intense learning on decentralization. Most of our materials as of now are mere repetitive ones and many of them, because of the poor design and content, will dispel a new reader away from the subject. Writing well requires improvement both in the craft and creative imagination. The former can be learned substantially and the latter can be refined somewhat by undergoing training. So there is a need to build skilful writers on decentralization, on training them on the craft and creative thinking.

Identifying pro-decentralization individuals/NGOs from the public and promoting their activities strategically can do a lot .But the fakes dominate this area and that needs to be changed by strategic promotion of right ones.

Meaningful workshops or discussions, with focus on content rather than on inauguration or bring those in power to make it a show, can do a lot when our media remains growing in size, reach and technological excellence as in Kerala.

Laws, with clarity, right content and discernible meaning on the theme, are yet another requirement as we are struggling to develop local jurisprudence. Much of our legislation is poorly drafted and cannot be understood properly by the stakeholders. Availability of up-to-date laws on local governments is another deficit. Even in the front runner Kerala, most of the time, an up-to-date printed copy or digital copy of the local government or allied Acts is not available due to frequent amendments and delay in printing by the private printers. Not only the ineffective printing of Acts, but the timely law making on many aspects of decentralization has more stakes in decentralization building process.

Promotion of well written books on the subject that one would love to read passionately and institution of lively discussion everywhere possible can do a lot of changes in building up a desired change in decentralizing governance.

Now the problem is that we have many of these things, but with a negative orientation or as a farce. That is more dangerous than having nothing.

As UNDP says in the document titled "Decentralized Governance Monograph: A Global Sampling of Experiences"

([http://www.mekonginfo.org/HDP/Lib.nsf/0/C56DD733E2F48D8D47256D90002981E1/\\$FILE/UNDP%20DECENT%20GOVERNANCE%20MONOGRAPH%201998.pdf](http://www.mekonginfo.org/HDP/Lib.nsf/0/C56DD733E2F48D8D47256D90002981E1/$FILE/UNDP%20DECENT%20GOVERNANCE%20MONOGRAPH%201998.pdf) ), it seems that one of the most critical perquisites to translate decentralization from theory to practice is a clear

understanding of the concept and to be able to better envision what decentralization means, how best it can be planned and implemented, what its intricacies are, and how its challenges can be overcome, the practitioners should be equipped with tools that could provide an analytical knowledge of decentralization from a conceptual viewpoint accompanied by real and field-tested examples of the concept in practice.

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**B.P Syam Roy, West Bengal**

My understanding on each of the items are shared for appropriate use for the Approach Paper for the Twelfth Plan:

Preface: The overarching focus of the Twelfth Five Year Plan may be real devolution and its institutionalization in the local governance of the country.

1. How to build Vibrant Grassroots Democracy which includes making decentralized governance work and capacity building for decentralized planning

1.1 The first step to build up Vibrant Grassroots Democracy is role clarity at the level of policy makers and also of all programme partners down the lines. The provision in the Constitution of India is very clear on this point but the understanding of the policy makers on interpretation of the related provision has been rather different during the Eleventh Five Year Plan. As a result in spite of very specific provision in Article 243G for devolution of functions and responsibilities at the appropriate level of Panchayats (i.e. Gram Panchayats, Block Panchayats and Zilla Panchayats), the historical concept of PRI as an entity continues along with its linked subordinate relationship among the tiers of Panchayat. The first requirement is, therefore, to treat each tier of Panchayat as independent and separate unit of local self government and empower it accordingly.

1.2 Devolution has one to one correspondence with empowerment. Depending on real devolution, empowerment and the resultant character of local governance will emerge and get shaped. Unfortunately again, clear understanding and direction on way forward for devolution have not been available during the Eleventh Plan. It is often equated with assignment of schemes and agency function of implementation of schemes. Further, tier specific functional devolution is not even advocated; it is rather consciously avoided. Therefore, the second requirement is clear functional devolution in favour of each of the tiers of Panchayats and the scope for any confusion arising out of concurrent jurisdiction among the tiers of Panchayat is removed from the decentralization/devolution scenario.

1.3 As a corollary to the tier specific real devolution, it is felt that each of the tiers of the Panchayats (i.e Gram Panchayat ,Block Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat) across the States(even considering that it is prerogative of the State to decide) need to have tier- specific common devolved items to plan and implement them, after working on functional mapping (and not activity mapping) and having regard to the subsidiarity principle, as relevant. In other words, ownership of dedicated functions for each of the tiers of Panchayats should be the basis of vibrant functioning.

1.4 The empowered functional items for each of the tiers of the Panchayats need to be distinct, focused but limited e.g. under livelihood security programme, wage employment related function could be the responsibility of one tier of Panchayats and self-employment and skill related functions could be the responsibility of another tier. Similarly, distinct role for each of the tiers of Panchayats for functions connected with Right to Education Act needs to be worked out and devolved, and so for others.

1.5 Capacity Building needs to be linked with devolved responsibilities of the given tier. In view of differentials in age, education, experiences etc., the role play related models of capacity building might be the best option.

2. How can we ensure Social Justice for All especially addressing the issues faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, Women, Children, Old Aged and Disabled. How decentralized governance could be organized and capacitated to achieve this?

2.1 At the first instance, it has to be sorted out the relevant role of the departments of the State Government and the roles of the decentralized bodies- 3-tier Panchayats and Municipalities- on these areas. All are destined to have defined roles under the Constitutional responsibilities. Incidentally, under the State Plan, there exist sub-plans on TSP and SCSP. There is provision to capture Women component in the State Plan. There is also provision to capture social justice programmes being undertaken by the voluntary sector. Such sub-plans etc have not formally come up as yet in the plans of the local governments for various reasons including the maturity status to handle them. Needless to mention, some of the local bodies have been addressing them within the limits of the organization.

2.2 The women reservation at 33% and above calls for dedicated programme on women for each of the tiers of Panchayats and Municipalities. It is also desirable to enlist women- linked children programmes for such local bodies. Since the welfare of the physically and mentally challenged children tops the priority for social justice, it needs to be taken up as a priority programme to arrest further growth of fatalism in the country.

2.3 It is suggested that too many sub-plans need not be encouraged at the grassroots level not only from the consideration of operational and management angle, but also to ensure that social cohesiveness and social mindsets are not fractured in the process.

2.4 It is further suggested that Guidelines on preparation of Twelfth Five Year Plan may be published six months before 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2012 to have enough time to organize required training for formulation of the Twelfth Plan by the related local body. Such guidelines have to be in simple language format with clarity on concepts and covering answers on possible questions like FAQs (frequently asked questions) .

3. Improving the Quality of Public services has been a challenge for years and how this could be achieved, especially through decentralized governance

3.1 Activity mapping is relevant here. Each of the local bodies is required to prepare scheme specific action points for those taken up on devolved functional areas. Presuming there would be distinct functional area and schemes respectively for each tier of Panchayats and Municipalities across the States, quality care aspects for such distinct schemes could be worked out centrally in consultation with State Governments and made known to such local bodies by the State Government. Additionally, this could be an item for capacity building at the training institute level.

3.2 Quality care audit may also be institutionalized in the country.

4. What are the approaches to be taken to democratizing information so as to reach the masses through information and using media for development

4.1 Dedicated website needs to be opened up on performances of the local bodies, State wise, periodically and updated quarterly in the related Ministry of the GoI and the departments of the State Government.

4.2 Annual reports on performances need also to be published by 30<sup>th</sup> June every year and shared with stakeholders including local level newspapers.

The questions are interesting and I'd like to address the third one - improving the quality of public services through decentralized governance.

We cannot think of delivering through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) until we create conditions for PRIs to function. However, Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) can be galvanised right away.

Responsibility of ULBs for development in areas such as public health, sanitation, education as well as maintaining street roads and lighting should be supported by Planning Commission, not with capital expenditure, but only revenue expenditure grants/loans. Capital requirements for things like roads and buildings should be met only by Finance Commission grants. Municipal schools are extremely poor performers and need huge investment by doubling the number of teachers and engaging NGOs to provide tuition to the children outside the schools. Non Formal Education (NFE) as arrangements for tuition to children in municipal/nagar palika schools can be organised.

To create conditions for PRIs to function, the BDO Offices have to be revamped. They must be asked to start maintaining all accounts on the accrual basis double-entry system ON COMPUTERS where all vouchers are entered with ALL details. This is essential, because it is from the BDO/Panchayat Samiti account that disbursements to village Panchayats are made by cheques to accounts in commercial banks (ie outside the government treasury). A web portal must allow for searching information by an educated citizen right up to voucher level disaggregation and all registers relating sanctions and contracts should be online so that any citizen of the Panchayat Samiti can know what is going on where.

PS Appu, the legendary IAS officer who headed the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), Mussoorie in 1980 had suggested to DoPT,GOI that all Group A Services direct recruits should be posted for 2 years as BDOs and thereafter, allotted specific services and cadres and trained at Mussoorie/other Academies. I think this suggestion ought to be revisited and read with the Ashok Mehta Committee Report of 1978 on Panchayati Raj, which underscored the fact that the block/tehsil level in the third tier should be viewed as an intersection of various markets and developed with that orientation. I am NOT suggesting any constitutional reforms, just a change in the way we look at the panchayat at block level for planning the activities at that level.

All success to the nation's 12th attempt !!!

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**[Jos Chathukulam](#), Centre for Rural Management, Kottayam**

I would like to suggest a few issues on Vibrant Grassroots Democracy:

How to define 'vibrant grassroots democracy' or what are the measurable indicators. In political science theory, it is not easy to differentiate what is meant by *grassroots democracy* from the more specific models of *direct democracy*, *semi direct democracy*, *mediated direct democracy*, *deliberative democracy*, *bioregional democracy*, each of which moderates 'power' in its own way. The term 'grassroots democracy' is more neutral on the left – right axis. The 'conservatives' often seek *semi direct democracy* or even *direct democracy*, which does not imply the more deliberative or mediated / moderated forms favored by the 'left', nor the *bioregional democracy* favored by green parties. ([www.fact-index.com/g/grassroots-democracy-1.html](http://www.fact-index.com/g/grassroots-democracy-1.html))

Role of people's organizations ( basic units of political parties, class and mass organizations, Gram Sabha / Ward sabha and other structures in the case of PESA ) in practicing democracy at the grassroots and exerting democratic control of natural commons

The relationship between grassroots democracy, decentralized planning, freedom of choice and freedom to choose.

Democracy is the expansion of political and civil rights. In other words, democracy is a continuous social process of expanding fundamental human rights (*Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002*). In this context, how to make convergence between grassroots democracy, flagship programmes and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)?

The democracy deficit is a serious political economy question. How to build democracy at the grassroots, in the background of class, caste and gender? Democracy must go beyond elections (*Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002*). Democracy ensures active involvement of public affairs through a variety of means, including decentralization, local governance, participatory budgeting, social auditing, and other ways of making the people's voice, (protest, demonstration, contestation and adversarial politics), an essential element of public policy making.

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[Prasanta Kumar Dash](#), CARE India, New Delhi

Please see my response to the questions raised:

**1. How to build Vibrant Grassroots Democracy which includes making decentralized governance work and capacity building for decentralized planning?**

For this, it is important to:

- Train Panchayat representatives on administrative, legal and governance issues, special training packages should be developed for women and dalit representatives
- Training should be provided to all the members of 'Panchayat', not just Pradhans. If other members of Panchayat also begin to share decision making, it will automatically have a rationalizing impact. Panchayat should be looked at as an institution rather than status symbol of a one or two individual or a family.
- Social Audits of Panchayat should be conducted annually: Social Audits done in district of Pratapgarh, Uttar Pradesh as a joint effort of Actionaid, Government of India and local NGO are an example to follow; these audits rather than leading to blame game, helped people understand how Panchayats can be strengthened and how 'Pradhans' can be assisted. In fact these audits helped Pradhans in enhancing their effectiveness after getting their conscience clear.
- Gram Sabha Meetings are not held at all and this is the biggest bottleneck in making grassroots democracy strong: hence, mechanisms should be developed to check that public is informed about meeting dates and actual meetings with the required quorum must be held. In each district mechanism should be developed to sample check some Gram Sabha meetings. A random survey can be done in 5-10% of Panchayats to ask people, if any such meeting was done during the month and if yes, what issues were discussed; Even if this process does get manipulated, it will make the practice of conducting fake meetings increasingly difficult.

**2. How can we ensure Social Justice for All especially addressing the issues faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, Women, Children, Old Aged and Disabled. How decentralized governance could be organized and capacitated to achieve this?**

- Interface of police, district court representatives, Lok Adalats, Block officials and other departments with public should be organized through Gram Sabha: this may help bring people closer to government departments. The mistrust among people will reduce through these interfaces. Mechanism of interface can be worked out.
- Awareness should be created among the most marginalized communities through mass media, IEC and some exposure visits. Wall writings, hoardings on legal rights of women, minorities, Scheduled Tribes-Scheduled Castes should be done: even if only a small proportion of these vulnerable groups are literate, it will have its impact; School buildings, Panchayat Bhawans, Anganwadi centres may be some sites where these wall writings should be done.
- Services of voluntary agencies should be availed in enabling these communities accessing their entitlements. Discourse on rights and entitlements should be encouraged at the community level. There is class of neo literates in each village who don't want the illiterate and most marginalized to get any entitlements. So we have to plan to take these groups into task.
- In the long run, writing applications for accessing entitlements and descriptions of procedures for getting entitlements should be made part of syllabus for children (class 5 onwards). There should be specific chapters on topics such as 'Accessing Widow Pension', 'Filing FIR against Dowry Harassment', and 'Applying for ST quota' and so on. Radio can also be used as a medium to provide information on these.
- The District Magistrate should review the system of social justice for all at the district and sub district level. Honest officials should be rewarded (presently they are punished, so nobody is interested to be honest).
- Some messages should be written at key offices e.g. BDO office, Police chaukis that tell people about the roles of the respective officers.
- Transparency should be promoted in the process of selection of beneficiary for any scheme and the result should be declared in public places.

### **3. Improving the Quality of Public services has been a challenge for years and how this could be achieved, especially through decentralized governance**

- Budget allocated for provision of each service for each district/ tahsil/ block should be displayed in news-paper, TV and other mass media biannually.
- Technical training should be provided for agencies/ department providing government services.
- Panchayat representatives should also be provided information kits on functioning of Public Distribution System, Integrated Child Development Services department, Education Department, major schemes and programs related to health, livelihood, education, women empowerment etc. Training of elected representatives may also include these details. Some short films on services available at health post, school, AWC can be made and shown to elected representatives and if possible to general public.

### **4. What are the approaches to be taken to democratizing information so as to reach the masses through information and using media for development**

- Use of mass media will be required to share information. The Government should make it compulsory for all TV channels to broadcast such programs not DD only. Radio programs on procedures related to accessing government scheme should be broadcasted. Radio is one of the most accessible medium of information.
- Folk media should be used in creating awareness amongst the most marginalized sections of the society.
- Budgetary allocations down to the lowest possible administrative unit should be shared through TV/radio. Each government department should provide its budget and expenditure description at the end of financial year on radio. Such programs should be advertised through various medium, including radio itself so that people are clear about the time. Important phone numbers should be shared with the people so that they may raise alarm if they find any doubt related to use of budget.

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**Pardeep Kamboj, National Institute of Health & Family Welfare, New Delhi**

I would like to give the following suggestions:

**Issue:** How to build Vibrant Grassroots Democracy which includes making decentralized governance work and capacity building for decentralized planning.

**Suggestion:** For decentralized planning, the capacity of local self governance bodies such PRIs, Urban local bodies etc. should be built. Besides, the representatives should be sensitized towards the new emerging issues with respect to governance.

**Issue:** How can we ensure Social Justice for All especially addressing the issues faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, Women, Children, Old Aged and Disabled. How decentralized governance could be organized and capacitated to achieve this?

**Suggestion:** In the new era the issues pertaining to social justice of various socio-religious communities such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, OBCs and other disadvantaged groups like Women, Children, Old Aged and Disabled have undergone change. Therefore, an assessment / issue search study needs to be undertaken by any social science research institute. The findings of such a research may highlight the issue need urgent attention.

Besides, awareness about the schemes/ programmes being implemented for welfare of these social groups should be generated adopting appropriate method. However, in order to enhance the decentralized governance, the State/ District level committees constituted for monitoring of various schemes such as committees under Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme for Welfare of Minorities, the members of these committees should be sensitized towards the new emerging issues pertaining to welfare of these social groups and bring them in the main stream of social development.

**Issue:** Improving the Quality of Public services has been a challenge for years and how this could be achieved, especially through decentralized governance

**Suggestion:** The best practices documented in the area of health & family welfare pertaining to improving the Quality of Public services through introducing the concept of Citizen Charter at CHC/PHC/SC levels can be replicated to other areas to enhance the Quality of Public services through decentralized governance.



**Issue:** What are the approaches to be taken to democratizing information so as to reach the masses through information and using media for development?

**Suggestion:** In this regards besides the use of print / electronic media, the scope/opportunities available within the system such as use the resources available at local levels in form of use of PRI/ urban local bodies, public discussion forms at grass root level should be explored.

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**Geethakutty P.S., National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad**

People's plan and vibrant decentralized governance require **true understanding and practice of governance** by all **stakeholders** - how to attain these? (Governance refers to **decision making** by a range of interested people or stakeholders including those in position of power and ordinary **citizens**. **Decisions of governance have huge impact** on the ways in which women and men lead their lives, on the rules they are expected to abide and on the structure that determine where and how they work and live. These decisions also shape how public resources are allocated and whether services take account of both women's and men's needs and interests.)

If so, the Approach paper should address the disparity existing between the theory and practice of democracy. Also the focus should be on what are the strategies to be built in the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan for the following:

1. How to make empowerment and information on governance serve as the route to reduce poverty, and more equal, democratic, corruption free societies?
2. Can governance promote social justice and gender equality and rights of citizens to be practiced?
3. If Citizens include all men and women, How far women both in power and ordinary positions are involved / included in decision making? How to make women exercise their right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives? If so what the decentralized governance has to do for women's equality and what women can do to democracy in the country
4. Are women accessing their rights?
5. How far accountability mechanisms designed specifically so that women can hold government accountable for their commitments to CEDAW is functioning or checking the status of women rights in the country (especially land rights, violence against women and girls?) If the country is a signatory to CEDAW, how the governance institutions can still remain/ allowed to be unresponsive to these inequalities?
6. How to persuade the state to take stocktaking of the of status of women's rights in practice and the related measures in place in the country- what is the status of shadow report?
7. How to build the capacity of the men and women in the families, governance institutions, development system, political parties, and CSO to understand the gender sensitivity, look at these issues and to develop the political will needed to bring about the change required for gender responsive governance?

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**Debraj Bhattacharya, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi**

I am sharing some of the ideas that I could think of:

**Vibrant Grassroots Democracy**



1. It is very important to provide support to the Civil Society Organizations so that they can stand beside the rural people who would dare to raise their voice in a democratic manner. Our field experience suggests that there are many organizations which are brave enough and capable enough to support the subaltern people who are willing to raise their voice during elections, during Gram Sabhas and during the tenure of a Panchayat. But these Civil Society Organizations are few in number and are starved of funds. XII plan needs to set aside a fund for supporting such organizations.
2. Encouragement needs to be provided to media persons at the state level who are willing to cover issues related to stifling of democracy at the grass-roots.

### **Social Justice for all**

3. All flagship programmes and rural development schemes have to be implemented on a priority basis. District administration needs to be made accountable for their failure to implement them. At the moment there is no mechanism by which a district administration can be reprimanded for not performing.
4. XII plan would have to make a serious effort to reduce cost of agriculture, provide irrigation, cold storage and marketing facilities to farmers so that they can improve their real income. Social justice cannot be achieved without improving the economic conditions of the poor farmers.

### **Improving quality of services**

5. This is linked to what has been said above in 1 and 2. Only if there is pressure from below that services will also improve.
6. Capacity building needs of the Panchayats who are genuinely willing to improve their services would have to be met. One training centre for each district may be envisaged as a target for the XII plan period.

### **Democratising Information**

7. ICDS workers, primary school teachers and CSOs may be utilised to provide information to each household on benefits available to the poor from the panchayats and block offices and how to access them. This would require convergence between some departments at the district level.
8. Radio and Television may be extensively used to provide information to the villagers.
9. Wall writings and "nukkar natak" may also be used for information dissemination.
10. Computerised kiosks may be set up in municipal and peri-urban areas and in the states where Panchayats are developed. I am not optimistic about such kiosks all over India as many Gram Panchayats are yet to have their own buildings.

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**E. Venkatesu, National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad (response 1)**

The 12th Five Year Plan Approach Paper should take into account following points to strengthen grassroots democracy:

1. 100% of the Gram Panchayats in the country should be provided with Gram Panchayat buildings with conference hall-cum-training centre and multiple activities.
2. All the Gram Panchayats should be well equipped with computerization, data, documentation, sufficient trained staff.
3. Like Anganwadi, Elementary school every Gram Panchayat should have a sub-centre across the country
4. There should be secretariat for the district planning committee for the convergence of resources, staff, planning and implementation with electronic documentation and required number of staff.
5. There should be a District Capabilities Development Centre under the management of Zilla Parishad to train Panchayat functionaries.
6. To strengthen the local democracy, in the light of separate state agitations, there is a need to promote the district level government. For this purpose it is essential to rethink about the restructuring of the political and administrative institutions towards downward percolation of the decision making and share in the fruits of development.
7. The micro-level planning exercise should not be mere paper based exercise of the line department officials, it should reflect the spirit and life of the poorest of the poor who must have opportunity to articulate their interest, because they are participating in making and unmaking of the government at local, state and national level through casting vote.
8. Universal accessibility for "PURA"
9. The most developed countries like Norway, for social justice, spend about 40% of GDP for social sector programmes like education, health, social security. India should also enhance the allocations for social sector schemes through construction of integrated social welfare hostels right from elementary school level under the management of Gram Panchayat.
10. Expansion of the satellite mode of training, information dissemination, interaction etc.
11. Providing sufficient infrastructure and other resources to introduce the PG courses in Decentralized Governance to prepare the fresh trainers from the central universities to meet the catering needs of the 40 lakhs of elected public representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

**K.K Pandey, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi**

I have examined these questions for Planning Commission Approach Paper from the angle of Urbanisation. Points given are highly relevant. However there is a cross cutting angle which needs to be suitably addressed. For instance climate change also deserves specific coverage under urban context covering sustainable urban energy use etc. Further all the four points are logical conclusion of decentralization of 74th CAA which has promoted empowerment up to town hall through political, functional and fiscal provisions.

However, this has not gone beyond the town hall. Therefore, further decentralization or empowerment is needed within the city itself. Each of the four points focuses on further empowerment. Please find my views as follows:

1. **How to build Vibrant Grassroots Democracy which includes making decentralized governance work and capacity building for decentralized planning?**  
 This has to be attempted in line with existing initiatives with a purpose to use them to the best possible level.  
 This question holds the key to carry forward reforms on decentralization which have introduced empowerment up to town hall. It is further needed to bring empowerment/decentralization up to grassroots level.

Area Sabha ,ward committee, community structures under Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY) etc. should be engaged , motivated and guided to join planning, financing (participatory) ,implementation and post implementation (upkeep of assets).They should be ,thus, encouraged to have sense of ownership, belongingness , cooperation for urban governance at grassroots.

Instrument of planning should include handholding by ULBs with the help of other stakeholders such as Development agency, State line agencies and civil society.

This will also facilitate effective use of RTI, Public disclosure Law and citizen charter etc. with a final objective to establish local democracy and downward accountability.

2. **How can we ensure Social Justice for All especially addressing the issues faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, Women, Children, Old Aged and Disabled. How decentralized governance could be organized and capacitated to achieve this?**

We have to decentralize governance below the town hall by using the institutions of Area Sabha, Ward committees, community structures in terms of assigning them powers such as part of local tax(property tax etc.)Collections combined with local elasticity (resources) including labour. Further, convergence of resources also has to be added such as MP / MLA funds and even Corporate Social Responsibility funds which are now available particularly from PSUs.

This will enable realistic planning at grass root level and provide specific inputs for P (poor) Budget, G (gender) Budget and E (environmental) Budget as already emphasized under JNNURM reforms

3. **Improving the Quality of Public services has been a challenge for years and how this could be achieved, especially through decentralized governance**

This also has to follow the existing initiatives to build further on them for quality delivery of services.

As suggested by XIII Finance Commission ULBs should identify rather disclose standards of four key services namely water, sewage, Storm water drainage and solid waste management by 31 March and simultaneously plan to deliver them accordingly.

Local/grassroots institutions as above should be involved in the assessment and feedback on services. System of independent ombudsman will go a long way to promote grassroots/local empowerment.

Assets / services should be listed for inventory followed by valuation and assessment of each of them to exploit their revenue potential and effective upkeep.

4. **What are the approaches to be taken to democratizing information so as to reach the masses through information and using media for development**

There exist interest groups at basic point of grassroots level. These get developed into pressure groups. There is a need to formalise/institutionalise these interest/pressure groups. It will bring them to the typology of grassroots institutions as indicated in question 1 above. Local media, cable TV, meetings, etc. will provide a contact point.

Once joining the formal structures these groups will become more sensitive to local democracy, awareness on public assets, accountability and belongingness.

The following are some of my suggestions on the theme **on creating vibrant grassroots democracy**:

Operationalisation of democratic decentralization in the tribal areas of Northeast region ( **6th schedule areas**) through the creation of **two tier local government** with **autonomous council**- that at present operates at sub state level in the Sixth Schedule areas- **at the upper tier** and **village councils at the grassroots/lower tier**.

For this to happen, we need to

- Strengthen the functioning of the autonomous council and reposition and capacitate them to take up the role of as agent of participatory development which will benefit the local people and at the same time safeguard their rights and interest.
- Development activities of the autonomous councils are at present very limited and need to be expanded in line with functions assigned to the Panchayats.
- Devolution of functions to autonomous councils (as mandated under the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule) is very limited or in some cases the formal transfer of functions has not been matched by concomitant transfer of funds, functionaries and mapping of activities. This needs to be addressed.
- Reduce the financial dependency of the councils on the state governments. Devolution of functions to the Councils must be accompanied along with immediate transfer of funds to the councils. Share of royalties collected by the state government must be transferred to the autonomous councils within a definitely time period.
- Widening of the local revenue base of the autonomous councils.
- Introduced direct funding of the autonomous councils by the Centre.
- Restructure the administration of the council to ensure financial and administrative accountability and capacity building of autonomous council members and staff.
- Work with the traditional local institutions to put in place a democratic and participatory form of local governance at the lower tier which will be responsible for planning, implementing and monitoring development Programme at the village/village cluster level- some examples are Natural resource management groups, Village employment/development council that exist side by side along with the traditional institutions.
- Devolution of powers and function from the autonomous council to the lower tier.
- Secure people's participation in planning and implementing of development activities in the state by involving the autonomous councils and also representative of village councils
- Entrust the implementation of central sponsored schemes to autonomous councils and to the lower tier of local government.

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**V.A. Vasudevaraju, Indian Institute of Community Development, Puducherry**

My suggestions are given below:

### **VIBRANT GRASS ROOTS DEMOCRACY**

Since the Second Five Year Plan, Planning from the Village Level has been advocated but not practiced. In the Fourth Five Year Plan the "Pilot Research Project in Growth Centres" was launched in 20 projects - 16 States, one Union Territory and three Research Institutes at Wardha, Varanasi and Talala in Gujarat - to develop a Methodology for Block Level Planning. But this could not succeed except in the one Union Territory.

Planning could become participatory and people's plan only by actively involving the Panchayats and Municipalities in rural, urban and tribal areas. Articles 243 G of the Panchayats and 243 W

under Municipalities Parts of the Constitution mandate that Plans for Economic Development and Social Justice have to be formulated and implemented by them.

Article 243 ZD and 243 ZE mandate that the District Planning Committee and Metropolitan Committee should consolidate the plans prepared by the Panchayats and Municipalities in their area and forward to the State Government. State governments have to incorporate them in the Draft Development Plans that are approved by the Planning Commission. This has not been done by the State Governments for the past fifteen years.

Planning Commission used to issue Guidelines to the States on Decentralized Planning while calling for the Draft Five Year and Annual Plans but did not make it a firm condition to approve the State Plans. It resulted in "Soft Pedaling" on this vital aspect of Planning. To ensure that Vibrant Grass Roots Democracy start taking shape Planning Commission has to adopt "Strict Enforcement" of the above mentioned Articles of the Constitution by the State Governments. State Five Year Plans 2012-2017 should not be approved by the Planning Commission if they are not based on District Plans. If this is not done history will repeat.

This will make the even some of the so called progressive States which have not even set up the District Planning Committee to start adhering to the Constitution.

## **DEMOCRATIZING INFORMATION**

Media in India is not giving importance to Panchayats and Municipalities and works and problems related to them. They failed to disseminate any information on major historic events like the Three-Day Conference of Presidents of Zilla and Block Panchayats held in Delhi in April 2008. Hence we cannot depend on the Media for Democratising Information.

We have to make use of the Extension Officers in the Blocks, Students in Schools and Colleges, Self-Help Groups, Youth Kendras, Farmers Forums, lakhs of Representatives in Panchayats in day-to-day manner to disseminate information disregarding the Media.

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**[Ashok Kumar Sircar](#), Rural Development Institute, Kolkata**

Please find below my inputs for the Approach paper to the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan.

### **Vibrant grass root democracy**

Several programmes of the govt. and civil society work on enhancing and strengthening grass root democracy. The suggestions therefore are about what goes on & what more can be done.

1. Enhancing capacity of the elected PRI representatives, particularly that of EWRs at all three levels is one core task not only for better institutional functioning of the PRIs but, also to strengthen grass root democracy. The state institutions like SIRDs are way to much behind in this respect, in terms of their overall capacity. The institutions of Civil Society are already doing this task with much better quality, orientation, and outreach.
  - a. Institutions of Civil Society must be supported to take up this task across the country.
2. Electoral awareness of citizen vis-a-vis the PRI institutions is another major work mainly done now by various civil society groups. At present it concerns more with elections, and candidature. An enhanced version of this called democracy awareness campaign can be

planned across the nation including elections, candidature, democratic institutional processes, citizen rights, etc.

- a. Democracy awareness campaign across the country vis-à-vis PRIs should be planned.
3. Orientation of Political parties contesting local elections about the nature of local democracy, roles and responsibilities of elected candidates including those who would become office bearers and selection of better candidature is something only tried in Kerala. There must be a national consensus that it is important and therefore developing national consensus is one important task
    - a. Building national consensus on orientation of political parties contesting local elections
  4. The standing committees and sub committees of PRIs are a mechanism to expand the institutional democratic functioning. These committees need to be expanded to include subject experts from civil society, and also representations from Civil Society Groups.
    - a. Standing Committees must include subject experts from Civil Society and representation from Civil Society groups. The Planning Commission or MoPR can recognize various civil society groups in this regard.
  5. There are various Civil Society movements engaged in strengthening Gram Sabha processes, forest rights, PESA, women's rights Village Education Committees, etc. All these social movements are in some way or other working towards strengthening grass root democracy, taking it beyond the realm of local bureaucracy, Higher caste control, partisan forces, and male dominance. It is important to recognize these as friends of decentralization and grass root democracy.
    - a. Recognition of grass root social movements like forest rights movements, Mahila Samakhya (a MHRD programme), Education movements, and support them. A case in Point is Mahila Samkhya that works in 463 Blocks, of 150 districts in 9 states.

### **Ensuring social justice for all**

1. The idea of social justice has to combine social security and social justice for all the marginal people, including rural women, *dalits*, minorities, ethnic tribes, traditional communities, child labour, adolescent girls, the old age men and women, etc. Each of these segments have specific vulnerabilities that are linked with societal practices, and also are built in some of traditional social justice delivery systems.
2. In this framework, the social justice delivery has to take three courses, 1) enforcement of relevant Acts, 2) strengthening non formal justice delivery systems and reorienting traditional justice delivery systems, and 3) ensuring inclusion of marginalized in the mainstream. All of these would require strong and vigilant grass root civil society, and its partnership with administration, and PRIs. The suggestions
  - a. Accept non formal grass root arbitrational systems, like *Nari Adalat* of Mahila Samkhya that run in 9 states, *salishi* process that run in West Bengal by Gram Panchayats, or similar systems that run in other states, as valid processes of

delivering social justice, and provide funds for training and administering these at appropriate levels.

- b. Engage with the Tribal leadership, to re-orient their traditional systems on issues of gender justice.
- c. Have the WCD administration in Districts and Blocks, structurally linked with all grass root social movements for abolition of child labour, gender justice, anti trafficking, anti dowry, land rights for women, etc.
- d. There is a need for massive re-vamp of the shelter and homes run by states and civil society, in terms of infrastructure, number of institutions, support grants, training, HR, etc. At present, the state social welfare and central social welfare boards are extremely ill equipped and highly bureaucratized to handle this process.
- e. All social welfare support like old age Pension, disability pension, pensions for people various occupations (8 such different schemes of several departments like handicrafts, fisheries, etc.) SC-ST stipends and pensions, disability supports, must come under the purview of Gram Panchayats. And Gram Panchayats be provided with administering cost to run these programmes.
- f. Social justice and security for marginalized people first and foremost require their inclusion in Panchayats' institutional processes. This can be done through a joint collaborative effort of Gram and Block Panchayats with local CSOs, as they often have complimentary skill-sets. This kind of partnerships for inclusion goal needs to be promoted as a central policy.

### **Improving Quality of services**

1. Improving quality of services has to include, equity, efficiency, outreach, and responsiveness. The challenges are local bias, corruption, inefficiency due to cumbersome procedures, lack of sense of equity in delivery. There are various good experiences available in this regard. And some more are developing. Various suggestions are being offered here.
2. Its time to do away with private ration shop owners, and be replaced by other institutions that are intrinsically much more accountable like cooperatives or SHG federations. All the examples show that these institutions are much better poised to deliver services. Time has come now to recognize it and do the needful to institutionalize it.
3. Use of technology needs to be massively explored, in terms of village kiosks, mobile based information sharing, reporting and tracking, Web Swan connectivity, etc. can improve services, like land records, PDS, MNNREGA, IAY, ICDS, SHCs, and Schools.
4. Coupled with above is the institutional issue that a few basic services like PDS, ICDS, SHCs, and Primary Schools, village roads, must universally come under Gram and/or Block Panchayats functions. This do not need any constitutional amendment and can be done by building consensus among states.
5. One fundamental aspect of quality services is about data management. The issues are desegregation of data up to household level, outcome data in contrast to input level

data, and standardization of data vis-à-vis PRIs administrative boundaries. This needs a massive process re-engineering that has to start as a national programme.

6. Quality of services can further improve with inclusion of three important social accountability mechanism 1) Citizen Charter of PRIs, 2) Social audit of services, and 3) Citizen Report Card. While this is being done in many places in the country, time has come now to universalize it. This may be built into a national programme.
7. Statutory audit is a long accepted mechanism to account for value for money. The methodology of statutory audit remains archaic and needs to have a re-orientation from Public Services outcome framework. It is also possible to develop mechanism so that statutory audit is more inclusive of citizen, through a combination with social audit mechanism. This needs to be piloted, but can go a long way to bring in required push for quality services.
8. Civil Society working as watchdog for public services is a long cherished concept in social development, but never clearly built into official policy and strategy of governance. Time has come now to do it.

### **Democratizing Information**

Democratizing information has multiple dimensions; democratizing information within institutions of governance, and democratizing information to citizen, plus democratizing information of the market and civil society. At this point, there are two major instruments available towards democratization, 1) Right to Information, and 2) Web Portal of various authorities. These are beginning to usher in a new information regime. The various suggestions are:

1. Process re-engineering of all PRIs and related departments is a fundamental pre-requisite towards democratizing information. Process re-engineering would lead to identifying areas where information can and needs to be widely shared within and outside of an institution. Process re-engineering is also the basis of making processes online and leave behind the days of *babus*, and *chaprasis* controlling information and power. This can start at the Municipalities, Zilla Parishad, and Block Panchayats level immediately.
2. Upgrading the web portals of all local government institutions is another very important pathway to democratize information. Here the critical point is to developing an information sharing framework that must provide the building block of the web portal. It must be at least bi-lingual, the state language and English. Each institution must have a information backbone accessible to the public.
3. A special task force is necessary to institutionalize information sharing under section 4 of RTI Act that calls for suo-moto information sharing. Although the Act provides the backbone of what is to be shared, a lot of work is necessary to unpack and institutionalize those within a given institution. That would need piloting and then scaling up.
4. Village Kiosks under National E-Governance Programme is a welcome step. However, it is unable to take off as there are very information available at those kiosks. Here Policy making can help, operationally structural linkage with information backbone of each institution with the Kiosks can also help improve its performance
5. Market information is extremely empowering for rural producers as ITC's e-choupal or MSSRF's experiment have shown. The proof of concept is over, now this needs to be



institutionalized. It is possible to do it if it is made part and parcel of Rural Business Hub that is promoted by MoPR.

6. National Panchayat Portal developed by NIC is a tool that can help build web portal of every PRI. A national programme can be taken up by which competent civil society institutions, social entrepreneurs and even for-profit institutions can be asked to partner with Panchayats to create and help run the portal of each Panchayats. Since this portal is compatible with many Indian languages, it will enhance the usage of these

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**Dhirendra Krishna, New Delhi**

My suggestions are given as below:

#### **VIBRANT GRASS ROOT DEMOCRACY**

1. Education for all : implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Right to Education in letter and spirit with community participation.
2. Adult education
3. Education program under section 26 of RTI Act
4. Education/training/ simple guidance note for elected representatives- leading to empowerment of grass root "committees" and PRI bodies.

#### **IMPROVING QUALITY OF SERVICE**

1. Public accountability of grass-root public authority to the beneficiaries: mandatory disclosure of critical financial and operational information to enable beneficiaries to ascertain whether the benefits shown on paper actually reach him/her.
2. Empowerment of beneficiaries in decentralized planning, execution and monitoring.
3. Mandatory Social Audit by the beneficiary of all socio-economic development scheme
4. Monitored action on result of social audit.

#### **DEMOCRATISING INFORMATION**

1. IMPLEMENT SECTION 4 OF RTI ACT IN LETTER AND SPIRIT
2. Improve quality of disclosures, for the sake of empowerment of beneficiaries
3. Implement section 26 of RTI Act and educate citizens about schemes and programs of the Government for their benefit.

#### **WAY FORWARD, (FOR SOLUTION EXCHANGE)**

1. Take help of Members, with varied specialization, for drafting social audit guideline in their area of expertise.
2. Evolve Social audit guideline for all centrally sponsored schemes.
3. Institution for monitoring result of social audit; consultation and brain-storming to evolve recommendations.

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**Rajan M Karakkattil, Thiruvananthapuram**

I would like to suggest the following points:

#### **1. Vibrant Grassroots Democracy**

- To make the grass root level democratic organizations more vibrant, the strengthening and capacity building of Gram Sabhas and voluntary organizations with the participation of the local citizens becomes very necessary and significant.
- Improved civic consciousness and rights for the development process have to be enhanced.
- A development platform comprising of local experts, teachers, voluntary workers, students and other development actors has to be constituted.
- The planning process should be accrued in such a manner with the support of the peoples, experts and the representatives of the Panchayat, development organizations and government institutions functioning in the Gram Sabha level.
- Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning Appraisal (PLA) methods have to be incorporated in the development of micro level planning process.
- Micro level plans have to be developed in the meso level and possible mega projects identified for the implementations.

## **2. Social Justice for All**

- Social equity standards have to be developed and possible mechanisms for the inclusion of the above marginalized sector in to the mainstream of the society. A social equity perspective will diffuse the view points of the local community towards the development vision and for the faster development of the vulnerable sectors. If there is an injustice for one, it is the injustice for all.
- The government initiative of ADHAR should help to stream line an electronically linked economic development of the excluded communities and the equal distribution of the resources for the deprived sections also.

## **3. Improving the Quality of Public Services**

- Participatory assessment of the public and private services should be conducted with tested indicators or criteria. This will help us to identify the gaps of the services and to improve the quality in a meaningful manner.
- The citizen charter of the each service organizations should be published and monitored monthly by the Gram Sabhas committee with the support of the experts and development actors and submit in the Gram Sabhas meetings.
- I think that if we take positive steps towards the inclusion of all development actors including individuals and organizations at the Gram Sabhas will make our grass root level organizations more vibrant and dynamic in the coming days.

## **4. Democratizing Information**

- The constitution of development platforms in the Gram Sabhas will support the local level documentation process more easily. These documents have to be circulated and communicated with the local citizens .Wide publicity, campaigns and demonstrations have to be given regarding the development outcomes of the documents.
- Folk Medias, community radios and educational institutions have to be linked with the outcomes of the developments.
- The convergence of Joint Liability Groups, Self Help Groups, Voluntary Agencies, Religious institutions in the Gram Sabha areas will help to disseminate the information more easily and steps should be taken to convene the regular meetings with the representatives of these organizations before conduct of Gram Sabhas thrice in a year.

With reference to the query by Shri. Arun Maira and Dr. Pronab Sen regarding the Approach Paper to the XII Five Year Plan, I wish to invite your kind attention to the study report entitled "Fading Images of Decentralization in Kerala - Study with reference to Marine Fisheries in 10<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan" (Rajan J.B and Haribabu T.P, 2005). The following extract from p.76-77 of the cited report is relevant to your query.

### **Section 1.01 "Fish, the Untouchable!**

The Draft Approach Paper to the 10th Five-Year Plan by the Planning Commission, Government of India, would shock any researcher interested in the country's plan approach to the fisheries sector. The entire document does not even once mention the word fisheries. While forest occupies an entire section; marine wealth, sea and the coast is not that fortunate. Fish is not considered as an effective supplement in the dietary system even while nutrition-related public health issues, vitamin and iodine deficiencies are discussed. The document correctly promotes increased consumption of coarse grain and increased availability of pulses. Also "*increased availability of vegetables at affordable cost throughout the year in urban and rural areas is desirable to address nutritional deficiencies*". (Govt. of India, 2001). Surprisingly, not fish! India literally has a 'sea of wealth' left for domestic consumption after current export requirements. This apathy towards fish and fisheries sector is in spite of the fact that India is the fourth largest fish producer in the world, second in Asia and next only to China. (The Hindu Businessline, 2003). India has a vast sea-claim; supporting the fishery that offers export earnings and decentralised employment. Fish provides a relatively less expensive protein supplement, especially to the economically underprivileged. To put it mildly, non-recognition of this sector is a grave omission. There are several issues of concern in the fisheries sector that seeks the national government's intervention. The growth of the sector demands directives in sequencing and pacing of several problems, particularly those arising out of national trade liberalisation and new EXIM policies. Non-recognition of the sector in the national Planning Approach Paper also means that the fishing dependent communities in this country have no role to play in the 10<sup>th</sup> Plan. Does this omission point to the long-standing demand by various peoples' organisations for an independent fisheries ministry at the centre? Fisheries call for an identity of its own and not left to languish within the Ministry of Agriculture, and clubbed along with animal husbandry and dairying. It is surprising that the Kerala Government and State agencies did not challenge this omission. The Draft Approach Paper to the 10th Five-Year Plan, therefore, has nothing constructive to offer in fishery sector planning either strategically or exclusively." [p.76-77, Rajan & Haribabu, 2005].

The historical omission of fisher people and the fisheries sector from the planning and development discourse is also repeated in the group of challenges identified to be included in the Approach Paper for the XII Five Year Plan.

The long list of key challenges covers almost all sectors including "land, mining and forest rights" in section 3 of Managing the Environment, but not coast and sea tenure the issues on these are in a perplexed state now a days. Even the section on "Social Justice for All" under section 5 of the list covers SCs, STs, minorities, women, children, old aged, disabled; but the fisher people do not find a place in the list!

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### **E. Venkatesu, National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad (response 2)**

It is in continuation to my first part of response which was posted on the Decentralization Community on 3 December 2010. Points 1 to 11 were covered in that response.

12. The Planning exercise should become a participatory grassroots aspiration, for that community lead a political and social movement to strengthen their voice, political parties make

the planning as an agenda in their election manifesto and practice and State initiate for the policy measures to strengthen the planning process. If the planning exercise is not taken in a multi-dimensional way, it may become outdated one like Soviet Union.

13. As on now, there are four practices in functioning of Gram Sabha,

- a. It is effectively functioning and decisions are being implemented,
- b. Gram Sabhas are taking place, but decisions are not being implemented
- c. Gram Sabhas have been taking place, but is in the house of Sarpanch and
- d. Gram Sabhas are not at all taking place. This sort of terrible situation has emerged in a mass based democratic country due to lack of resources for planning at decision making level of the community due to lack of confidence on the capabilities of the local institution. If the resources are available with the local government, certainly, the community will also be having faith on the system that the interests of every citizen get reflected in the planning.

14. Due to lack of basic required services and awareness building activities at the local areas, community is being subjected several types of the risk, for instance farmers committing suicides, deaths in electricity shacks, health disaster for having used the furious and dangerous fertilisers and chemicals of the MNCs causing for the knees and body pains and stunted growth of children and early old age.

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**M. Neelakantan, (Formerly of National Sample Survey Organisation), Thrissur**

I would like to congratulate Planning Commission for adopt this bold initiative before finalising the Approach Paper to 12th five Year Plan. I fervently believe that the Decentralization Community Forum would give very valuable inputs to Planning Commission in response to their appeal keeping in view the best interest of the country.

I give below my comments and suggestions based on my vast experience in working in Central Government Departments/ Agencies major part of which has been in Field Organisations, during 1968-2004 as a Member of Indian Statistical Service.

1. Effective Decentralised Governance:

- a. Ensure implementation of all delegated functions to Panchayats, in many states the suggested functions are not even allocated, where allocated, not allowed to be exercised.
- b. Do not allow any interference from Top- whether Central or State Govt. level. Allow the PRIs to effectively exercise their Powers and Authority.
- c. Put in place effective system of checks and balances to ensure accountability and proper exercise of powers. Have built in system of preventive vigilance measures.
- d. Mount system of continuous training and capacity building programmes both for elected representatives and official in PRIs.
- e. Strengthen Social Auditing of PRIs.
- f. Build up continuous system of Monitoring and Evaluation of development and other programmes.
- g. Review Staff requirements and provide them so that PRIs are self-sufficient in all respects
- h. Aim at having Elections to Local Bodies not based on party Lines or Party less Elections.

- i. These measures are expected to ensure Good Governance at the lowest level of administration.

## 2. Improving the Quality of Public Service:

- a. Improve Delivery System through effective implementation of UID Project, make more user friendly application of RTI Act provisions, Strengthen Common Service Centres by increasing both in coverage and quality of prompt service, Introduction of Single Window System in all departments of Public dealings like Taxes, PWD, RTO, Telephones, Railway Reservations, etc.; this would check red tap-ism, delays and consequently corruption.
- b. War on corruption- to start with, all Public Servants and Elected Representatives should be asked to declare their assets at the time of joining service or elected bodies and mount a constant vigil on their Annual Returns and take prompt action wherever required. Prevention is better than cure.
- c. Most importantly, Public Servants should show courtesy and be responsive and helpful in their attitude to people approaching their offices for redressal of grievances.

## 3. Social Justice for all and particularly the downtrodden

- a. Improve literacy level particularly of disadvantaged sections of Society and in that group again, women with focus. The 12th Plan should target at least 70% literacy level for this group and general population 85-90% level. This would need massive strengthening of Primary Education after making education as a fundamental right. Infrastructural and manpower related measures are to be taken on war footing for this purpose. The lot of the Teachers should be improved to make the profession secondary to none.
- b. Empowerment of people through appropriate criteria for eligibility and entitlements based on suitable legal framework wherever necessary. Besides, focus also to be on awareness generation programmes at grass roots level so that they will know what are their entitlements and how to avail of them.
- c. Review reservation policies for disadvantaged sections of people and take policy changes where required, e.g. not all Scheduled tribe (ST) people may need reservation as many may be economically and socially at par with general population. Also, introduce Reservation based on Economic Criteria for General Population as well to take care of the poor among them.
- d. Adopt Housing For All during 12<sup>th</sup> Plan.
- e. Special attention for the Aged and Physically Challenged as also Unorganized Workers through appropriate scheme of Insurance, old age pension etc.

I am also giving my observations on one more related area needing special focus in the 12<sup>th</sup> plan - Poverty Eradication and Food Security.

- a. Even after implementation of various Poverty Eradication and Employment Programmes, considerable headway is still to be made on this front. So, as part of the Inclusive Growth and Development, due emphasis has to be provided in the 12th plan on the subject.
- b. Special emphasis has also to be given for tackling Educated Unemployment. Already Skill Development has been given special attention recently and new initiatives are on.
- c. To ensure food Security of people, suitable measures from adoption of Legislation to implementation of action plans are needed to be taken up on most

priority basis. Universalisation of Public distribution System (PDS) could also be considered, among other things.

- d. Strengthening of PDS even otherwise is called for by increasing the coverage to all essential items of consumption, eg items like Cooking Oil, Pulses, Sugar etc. should also be supplied; also quality of the items supplied through PDS. has to be improved. As already noted, ideally, option can be given to people on coverage of population; those who want to use the PDS System should have access to it; strictly, supplying only Rice and wheat to APL families does not follow any logic when the Middle classes also are suffering due to very high price level of pulses, cooking oil and sugar these days.
- e. Strict measures for control of prices of essential items of consumption are the needs of the hour for which suitable mechanism has to be put in place.
- f. To ensure Inclusive Growth, Inflation control and price control are also a Must.

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[Srinibas Pathi](#), Mizoram (Central) University, Aizawl (*response 2*)

This is in continuation of my response posted on 1 December 2010.

### **Ensuring Social Justice for All**

Renewed efforts to promote literacy and education among the disadvantaged sections including the differently able (we may need to replace the term ' disabled ' from our discussion / communication as per the current global practices). Incidentally, December 03 is international Day for the Differently Abled!

### **Improving Quality of Services**

- More effective social audit mechanism at the grassroots level
- Ensuring proper functioning of Gram Sabha / Palli Sabha / Gram Sansad / Ward Committee
- Citizen's Charter Initiatives at all rural and urban local government institutions

### **Democratizing Information**

- Creation of a National Data Bank by way of collecting ,preserving , disseminating and sharing vital information (particularly relating to the prevailing best practices in the field of planning and developmental initiatives) from the local communities and self- governing institutions
- Simplification of laws, rules, regulations and procedures regarding the working of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and Rural Local Bodies (RLBs) and dissemination of such information
- Balanced use of print, audio- visual and folk media
- Cautious approach in the field of e- Governance at the local level as there is an inherent danger of misuse of the huge data base ( infrastructure, resources, landmarks etc) as most of the information will be available in the 'Open Access Platform' as in the case of the National Panchayat Portal of National Informatics Centre (NIC).

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[D.C. Misra](#), National Informatics Centre, New Delhi

It is in the context of point number 1, 2 and 6 under "Democratizing Information" section of observations made by Mr. Ashok Kumar Sircar posted on 7 December 2010, I would like to share that recently a study has been conducted, under ePanchayat Project, by Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) in identified 40 districts of the country. The study involved interactions(formal and informal) with Gram Sabha, Gram Panchayat, Block Panchayat, Zilla Panchayat, District Level key

line departments, some of state line departments and central line ministries dealing with schemes having foot print in rural areas and varying degree of interface with GP.

The study aimed to find out key information and Service Need Requirements of various stakeholders if eGovernance is introduced in Panchayats, Current & proposed processes (**BProcess Re-Engineering**) for various services and preparation of DPR. These reports are available on <http://panchayat.gov.in> under ePanchayat Tab.

One of the key findings (i.e. demand) of the study is identification of 12 common core areas for application software like Planning, Accounting, Website for PRIs, Scheme monitoring system, Asset management, Service-Delivery, Training System to manage training demand & Supply etc. An attempt is being made, by NIC, to prepare generic software packages under Panchayat EnterPrise Suite (PES).

The early versions of PlanPlus(<http://PlanningOnline.gov.in>) , National Panchayat Portal (<http://Panchayat.gov.in>) is already in place and being used by some of the states. Accounting system for Panchayat (PRIASoft, <http://AccountingOnline.gov.in>) has been launched, based on CAG prescribed model accounting formats, recently and Odhisa, Maharastra, AP are lead states in using the system.

Some of the inputs based on my limited understanding are given below.

1. District Planning infrastructure should be strengthened with resources. It has been a learning experience while supporting utilization of PlanPlus at district level. In consultations with states, formats of Plan Document data (Perspective, Draft annual and Action Plan) have been standardized in configurable manner to facilitate navigation, usability by any reader and comparative analysis of Plan Documents between Planning units and across states.
2. Currently, the entire training agenda, for Panchayat functionaries largely appears to be supply driven. Its is people/agencies at national or state capital decide the topic and schedule and majority of training funds are being spent in this mode or adequately used/spent. Demand sizing is based on either guess-work or felt needs by people away from grass-root level. This could be reversed at least in case of Panchayats. The Panchayat members, staff and if possible people may be encouraged to register their demand of training(topics) as per their needs and training organisations should design syllabus and calendar accordingly. One of the module under Panchayat EnterPrise Suite aims to provide platform for such activity.
3. But, capturing demand is step-one. The associated challenge is to organise large number of Panchayat functionaries within district or at best at district HQ. Most of the time, the difficulties are faced in finding organisations having a suitable faculty on a given a) eGovernance package/topic b) reach up to district level to train functionaries and c) subsequent handholding.
4. The proposed approach paper could consider reflecting on some of the eGovernance best practices being used at Gram Panchayat (and other tiers) level and should stress upon internal automation in local bodies. Increasing degree of internal automation would gradually lay foundation for better transparency and effective service delivery in times to come.

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**Tarun Sharma, Rishikesh**

I am writing in response to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> questions keeping decentralized governance and urban areas in the perspective. The suggestions thus are specific to challenges for improving public services through decentralized governance in urban areas as well greater democratization of information. The focus on urban areas through the Five Year Plan (FYP) needs to be given

enough importance that is due at the pace of urbanization we are moving at and these gaps should be plugged in the upcoming FYP. I am hopeful and wishful and my best wishes for the efforts.

When talking of decentralization and governance, there is widespread sense that participative community planning and governance is associated largely to PRIs and villages but its most urgent and emergent for the decentralized functionaries in urban areas to be democratic in the real sense and deliver on the tasks they have been entrusted to or should be entrusted with.

### **Improving the Quality of Public services has been a challenge for years and how this could be achieved, especially through decentralized governance**

Common minimum elements required for effective public service delivery in a decentralized model are: a) empowered Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), citizens and the civil society; b) institutional and policy sanction to the functionaries; c) public services and infrastructure. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments have created the sanctions but the adherence to them is still an unfinished task.

The lowest unit in urban areas for governance purposes for which institutional structure has already been created is that of an **Area** within the wards.

Through decentralized governance in urban areas, the model of Community Driven Development (CDD) for improving service delivery in urban areas should be actively pursued along with enabling policies and institutional sanction, scope for enhancing capacity and access to required resources. Such a system needs to ensure that the improvements and provisions are demand driven and lowest tier is involved in decision making. Successful projects for participatory planning to assess demands of communities have taken place across India (such as Kerala Sustainable Urban Development Project (KSUDP)).

- a. **The CDD model with Area Sabhas as the key functionaries** should be adopted and projects to improve or provide public services should be identified, planned, and implemented by community groups.
- b. The CDD model directly ties in with the focus JnNURM has given to the 74<sup>th</sup> amendment and thus at the least, **Community Participation Law** should be invoked with full force in all states
- c. The key findings from the states such as Andhra Pradesh, Assam etc that have moved forward with CPL should be incorporated while designing urban decentralized governance and CDD model. Forums for effective dissemination of the knowledge being gained through policy practice as well as research should be created, such as national seminars or training programs
- d. Government may adopt urban district/s in different states as pilot projects that follow a CDD-CPL mixed approach as an exhibition model for the rest to follow
- e. Constitution of Ward Committees should be enforced
- f. Accountability mechanisms and transparency norms shouldn't just be bottoms up but top down as well and hence Area Sabhas need to be made aware of the functions and activities being done by municipalities and ward committees
- g. Wherever Area Sabhas are not constituted, sector specific community groups constituted from civil society and academia should be involved for community decision making

### **What are the approaches to be taken to democratizing information so as to reach the masses through information and using media for development**



Sound public policies and governance is based on robust data that is reliable, consistent, timely and available on disaggregated basis and it is this data which builds any information that can be used for masses to understand. Empirical evidence based analytical techniques for formulating options, monitor and assess a particular set of policies or projects can come only from sound data and databases which then need to be made available in intelligible and accessible formats.

Public agencies working in urban domain generate data for specific purposes of record keeping, future references or public consumption. Firstly, all the agencies and bodies working on urban issues and those that create this kind of data on daily basis as part of their work should make effective steps to collect, collate record and manage this data. A lot of this administrative data that could be converted into useful information for governance purposes is lost in government files. Thus the agencies need to make up for this lack of collection effort and recognize data's importance in impacting the decisions and planning process.

Manuals and audio-video documents that simplify and explain the decentralized models should be created and distributed widely in the urban population. Short films, interviews and booklets on: constitutional process of how local urban government elections take place; what are the roles, responsibilities and duties of the elected representatives; interviews of what the representatives been doing or plan to do for areas under their jurisdiction; short features about the newly created infrastructure in the city providing information such as under what scheme it is being created, the status of its completion should be widely distributed. One such example which needs to be replicated is <http://www.transparentchennai.com/buildamap/>

Also, with help of media students from various media schools across India, features on urban problems should be made that highlight the challenges faced by citizens as well as hear what policymakers have to say about them. This will help the public to see and understand the problems that policymakers face and that how citizens are a cause and hence also the solution to them. One such example is a short documentary **Footpaths** made by students of Indian Institute of Journalism and New Media, Bangalore highlighting the problems of Bangalore's pedestrians. (<http://www.pagalguy.com/2010/11/of-diamonds-footpaths-war-widows-the-3-best-entries-at-confluence-2010-short-film-competition/>)

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**[Bidyut Mohanty](#), Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi**

It is a welcome step on behalf of the Planning Commission to get feed back from the people working in the field.

I would like to concentrate in the areas of improving the quality delivery of services. I will draw the attention to the KBK region (Western Orissa). Recent State HDI report has clubbed six states in which the HDI and GDIs are the lowest. In that, KBK region figure quite lot. In every respect KBK region lags behind. This is in spite of the fact that the central government and the state government have special programmes to mainstream the neglected area since 1995-96. This year again, a similar kind of Integrated Action Plan (IAP) is going to be implemented through Planning Commission and Ministry of Panchayati Raj. The sectors to be looked after are education, sanitation, portable water, health along with agriculture. Each District will be given 25 crores of rupees to spend in the financial year of 2010-11 which is going to end in another three months. Will it be possible for any government organization or Panchayats to identify suitable programmes to spend the entire money within a span of three months? Almost all the government programmes operate in this manner.

Secondly the sectors which are unidentified as the core areas have already been identified earlier. But recently cholera epidemic had broken out in Rayagada and many people died due to lack of health care and safe drinking water. It led Prof. Abhijit Sen to take tour to that district. It

was noticed that neither road, nor access to safe drinking water has improved at all in spite of the special programmes and MNREGS. Further as mentioned above, the new programme has included portable water and sanitation. We have been monitoring the construction toilets in seven states. It is noticed that the people in the forest area would prefer to go to open field rather than using the toilets. Similarly they also would like to use the running stream water rather than using the tube well. In other words there is a lack of social engineering in all these schemes. Nobody has taken care to create awareness about the usefulness of sanitation and safe drinking water convincingly. The new scheme which has been introduced this year is likely to be a non- starter. Further, under the KBK plan some infrastructure might have been built. Under the new scheme might not use those structures again. Those structures would remain defunct. This kind of anomaly came to our notice when we were evaluating one of the sponsored programme. Before the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) was introduced, Haryana government had built delivery room in each Panchayat. But when NRHM was introduced those rooms were not used at all. It would have led to colossal wastage of national resources.

Besides, there is hardly any kind of convergence among different departments and ministries though the schemes have inter-departmental linkages.

In many occasions, the suitability of the schemes is also in doubt. For example the tribals are more acquainted with the minor forest produce. Hence a number of micro enterprises could have been taken up to process the minor forest produce, cultivation of turmeric and ginger, lemon grass which in turn would strengthen the PESA (Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas). Efforts should be taken to map out the different kind of forest produce such as Mahua, sal leaves, niger, honey and many other valuable products. This would have helped Niyamgiri people to earn livelihood with dignity instead of getting displaced. Encouragingly there are women micro credit groups who are taking loans from the government and the incidence of money lending has declined according to one study done by Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) Bhubaneswar branch. Of course, nobody is suggesting that tribals should not get any modern enterprises and the mining should be completely stopped. But a lot of persuasions, with least damage to the environment should be aimed at while introducing the modern industries.

This in turn leads to the access to information. First of all no or very little step is taken to discuss the components of the different before those are introduced. The tribals also face another problem such as the language barrier. Since the contours of the schemes are written in English or Oriya and many Panchayat leaders are not aware of those languages, they are unable to comprehend the significance of the scheme unless they are told in their own dialect. The dissemination of the information should be done both in their own languages as well as in official languages. That too it should be done in a simple language. Visuals and audios should be used to create awareness among them.

Finally the prevention of incidence of liquor drinking particularly among the younger generation should be introduced to check the habit formation if we really want them to take note of the presence of the governance.

I also think that I must express my views on the vibrant grassroots democracy from a perspective of the great leader Dr. Ambedkar. I hope that he would excuse me for putting on his sacred shoes. After all he had some justification for not accepting the PRIs keeping the stratified social structure in mind. Let us see if the social structure has changed since then or not. Let us suppose he is still alive would he have accepted the PRIs in the present form? Or would he have rejected it. Recently P.K Bardhan wrote that the Panchayats which are headed by Scheduled Caste (SC) men, the targeted benefits are shared by the SC communities. But if the PRIs are headed by women from the same community they get hijacked by the dominant community of the village. He was writing on the West Bengal experiment.

Similarly Staffan Lindburg points out in case of Tamil Nadu, in certain areas, the SC women being armed with the earned income from non-farm sector are able to challenge the dominant caste members. The elected women representatives (EWRs) from Kerala also being empowered with Kudumbashree groups, are likely to assert their view points in certain areas. So if Dr. Ambedkar is taken on a guided tour to those places, perhaps he would give a conditional support. But his heart would sink once he finds out that PRIs don't have any autonomous power to plan and execute in their respective villages. Those institutions have been reduced to implementing agencies. Coupled with that he would again get saddened (elated!) when he realizes that the institutions along with other national institutions are steeped with corruption, nepotism etc. On the top of the kind of leadership emerging from the grassroots are vying with each other to recover the election costs and share the booty with other leaders with muscle power. In the process the women are being used as pawns.

Given the kind of scene in the village India, what would Dr. Ambedkar recommend for the selfless and clean leadership to emerge. Again he would sulk because if one cleanses the grassroots alone, leaving the other lower tiers of governance at the state level, and central level as it is, it would not help. So a thorough cleansing should be done. That is really an uphill task.

With regard to women leadership, unless a holistic approach is adopted in terms of restructuring all the structures that is social (of course family) including education reforms, economic and political the real leadership is not likely to emerge. But there is always a hope.

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**Tushar Dash, Vasundhara, Orissa**

Implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 and PESA, two powerful laws of our time, in the right spirit would greatly help us to ensure i) vibrant grassroots democracy, ii) building pro-poor institutions and hence social justice and equity, iii) deepening of the democratic process. Trends in implementation of the Forest Rights Act have already shown that the provisions for forest rights, an empowered process for recognition of rights, empowered authorities to Gram Sabha and community institutions have led to political, social and economic empowerment of the marginalized forest communities. While we prepare for the new plan it is important to draw lessons from the elements of empowerment in Forest Rights Act and PESA that support grassroots democracy and build powers for the poor and marginalized. For more on the practical experience on implementation of Forest Rights Act and the role played by it in strengthening grassroots governance and conservation please refer my articles on the subject which may be seen at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111003.pdf> (Size: 75 KB) ; <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111004.pdf> (Size: 26 KB); <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111005.pdf> (Size: 1.5 MB)

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**P.V Indiresan, New Delhi**

I thank Shri Arun Maira and Dr. Sen for posing a series of issues. If you please permit me to divert a little, I feel that a lot of resources are being wasted by expanding cities without limit and that better results will be obtained if we divert investment to towns and villages, and in particular, halt the damnable growth of "gated communities" which specifically exclude the poor.

I make the following specific suggestions:

1. All habitat developments should follow the 80-20 principle and allocate twenty per cent space for the bottom half of the population
2. The richer half should pay to a charity the cost of developing the twenty per cent space for the poorer half and thereby get tax benefits

3. The developer charges the poorer half only the direct cost of buildings and free them from infrastructure costs
4. The poorer half will get access to schools and hospitals at marginal prices only
5. For all dwellings, the FAR should be restricted to 0.5 which was the norm in Delhi in the 1960s. That single rule will compel developers to go away from large cities.

I enclose a copy of the talk on developing cities of the future which may be seen at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111006.pdf> (Size: 502 KB)

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### **Nandini Sen, KIIT School of Rural Management, Bhubaneswar**

In addition to the points being made to the query regarding 12th Five Year Plan, I wish to make the following suggestions.

#### **Vibrant Grassroots Democracy**

1. At present the management capacity of PRI members especially at the level of the village Panchayat and intermediate level is extremely limited despite the efforts being made by respective SIRDs and civil society organizations. Hence, it is extremely important to **impart basic management education** in functional areas like finance and accounting, HR, strategy, along with tools for planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. A number of academic institutes can be roped in to help in this task.
2. Establishing **Block Level Technical Resource Teams and Centres** (20-25 km operating distance) with thematic expertise in NRM, construction technologies, livelihood, social development planning. These centres need to have the expertise themselves or the necessary linkages to bring in the expertise on an ongoing basis to support the PRIs. Civil society organizations, private organizations as well as individual expertise may be drawn for this purpose who can operate on a use and pay basis.
3. Regularizing and **systematising Campaigns for Gram Sabha mobilisation** as a precursor to the annual plan preparations of the Panchayat. This should be done with a view to include the views, concerns and proposed solutions of marginalised groups like SC/ ST, women, disabled, landless and others.
4. Incorporating one **dedicated Infrastructure specialist** (may be drawn from government or outside) at DPC level **who would scrutinise, co-ordinate and converge expenses on infrastructure** such as roads/ rail/ bridge/ warehouses within a district.

#### **Ensure Social Justice**

1. Immediately update and **computerise all land records and ownership** records at block level as land disputes and changes in land use will continue to be the major source of disputes in this period of transition.
2. **Activate Panchayat Level Arbitration cell** for settlement of social disputes, land disputes within Panchayat, issues of subjugation etc. Judgments passed by this mechanism must be considered valid by all existing levels of judiciary. As and where feasible they can incorporate existing informal social justice systems, civil society organizations, women or human rights activists or members of the judiciary. This cell should also be in a **position to forward names and cases for accessing social welfare benefits** offered by the state.
3. **Ensure that the government provided social welfare entitlements for** disabled, widows, deserted women etc **at least meet the basic food requirements of the person.** For example in Orissa widow pension is only Rs 200 which hardly meets the food requirements of an individual.

#### **Improve Delivery of Services**

1. **Creating a set of parameters** for judging overall efficiency and effectiveness of PRIs.

2. Systematising a system of **annual social audit of services offered through a report card** system which is then uploaded on Plan Plus. This should be made a necessary part of annual report of PRIs. Suggestions and changes made in the social audit must be incorporated into any proposed plan of that level of PRI.
3. **Engaging youth volunteers /senior citizens** (two male, two female, 10-12 std) per village to ensure proper delivery of services, provide feedback to departments, inform about new demands as well as to register complaints regarding services. They could coordinate with the Panchayat and the line departments at the Block/District. In time a suitable quality assurance cell can be created.

### **Democratizing Information**

1. **Create uniform patterns of essential information** to be collected about each level of PRI in the country to permit decentralised planning. This can be uploaded on to Plan Plus.
2. **Ensuring connectivity and power supply** to these information units through renewable energy systems if necessary.
3. **Linking Plan Plus to NREGA and other platforms as well as line departments** such that PRIs can access information regarding allocations, projects, changes in rules and regulations, new schemes, notifications etc quickly.
4. **Providing market based information** about agricultural commodities through the existing information kiosks as well.
5. **Creating an escalation scale for RTI requests** such that those that those which can be dealt at the RLB/ ULB level should only reach the next level if they remain unaddressed within a given time frame, say a month.

### **Anju Talukdar, MARG, New Delhi**

Only those who know their rights can access them. For the marginalized (the poor, persons with disabilities, women, dalits, etc) even knowing rights is not enough. They frequently need assistance to access these rights. The challenge is to make 2-fold interventions: (i) Legal awareness (ii) Legal assistance.

#### **Legal awareness:**

The challenge here is to achieve spread-to reach the maximum number, but more importantly, to reach the remote, the neglected, the invisible. 2 ways to do this are:

1. Vigorous and large scale legal awareness by mass media-on fundamental rights, statutory rights and remedies.
  - Radio programmes on AIR and local FM channels, films ranging from 2-minute clippings to 25 minute serials to be shown on Doordarshan and mainstream channels
  - Budgets to be available for relevant departments (women and child, labour, urban development, health and family welfare, social justice and empowerment, etc) and bodies (state and central human rights commissions, commissions for women, children, disabled, etc) for the purpose of spreading awareness through mass media
2. Legal awareness in remote areas (where access to radio and TV are minimal/non-existent).
  - Teams comprising Legal Services Authorities lawyers, law students and NGO activists to hold awareness camps in these areas

#### **Legal Assistance:**

1. Creating a pool of trained paralegals who can work amidst the marginalized to assist in access to justice. This could take the shape of providing advice on ordinary issues, and referring more complicated matters to trained lawyers either attached to the Legal Services Authority or registered as pro bono lawyers in a 'Paralegal Register' under a state/central authority. Trained paralegals to also be registered to lessen possibility of 'legal' charlatanism.

Issues to be kept in mind:

- Training only by competent institutions (e.g. law colleges, organisations running approved training courses)
  - Training to be of sufficient duration, with adequate screening and testing, provision for refresher course, instilling code of conduct for paralegals
  - Licensing of paralegals
  - Sustainability through payment of adequate salaries to these paralegals/ justice workers (on the lines of health workers). Voluntarism can only be on a small scale and will not reach the whole country
2. Legal aid centres to be established in existing law colleges with adequate infrastructure (faculty, number of students, premises, etc). Persons from marginalized sections can approach them for advice, interventions. Proactive effort to be made by these legal aid centres to reach marginalized communities (through workshops, community programmes, etc). These centres can be strengthened by:
- Convergence between recognized law colleges, CSOs, Bar Councils/Associations, Legal Service Authorities... so that more serious matters can be referred to professionals
  - Making 'legal empowerment of the poor and marginalised', 'Alternative Disputes Resolution' as compulsory papers, not merely optional
  - Compulsory service of 3 months in NGO/ marginalized communities for obtaining final law degree. Present arrangement of 4 week internship during course of study is insufficient with insignificant impact.

Many of these suggestions are being implemented in a sluggish manner. Government must make access to justice a priority issue and be willing to bear the financial burden in fulfilling this constitutional obligation. The *quality* of legal awareness, and particularly legal assistance, cannot be compromised. The Government must ensure that adequate and affordable means are available to all sections, particularly the marginalized, to access their rights.

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**Piyush Ranjan Rout, Local Governance Network, Bhubaneswar**

This is a very interesting topic for discussion even after decades of decentralization in India. My views are purely for the Urban Areas and not for Rural Areas.

1. *How to build Vibrant Grassroots Democracy which includes making decentralized governance work and capacity building for decentralized planning*

First of all government needs to seriously think on removing the process of reservation and Delimitation process. These two factors are responsible for bringing non effective leaders to govern cities. This is in another way denying good citizens the chance to be part of the municipal council. We also need to see the options of people contesting elections even if they are in profit making or government service. The present practice of capacity building by institutions may be restructured and new set ups be brought up. Examples like City Managers' Association / Local Government Association could be encouraged to take up capacity building activities.

2. *How can we ensure Social Justice for All especially addressing the issues faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, Women, Children, Old Aged and Disabled. How decentralized governance could be organized and capacitated to achieve this?*

The best way is to improve their educational capacity to stand up with the society. Sixty years of reservation practice is enough for upliftment of society. Singapore changed within forty years and Japan in similar pace. No one used reservation process but through education and efficiency.

3. *Improving the Quality of Public services has been a challenge for years and how this could be achieved, especially through decentralized governance*



We need professionals to manage cities based on academics and efficiency and not just on the basis of how senior in Civil Service. Sixty years ago this country did not have enough Graduate / Masters with specialisation to run the cities. So Civil Service with minimum Graduation as eligibility was enough but today there are enough professionals available in areas of Urban Management, Planning, Finance, Waste Management, Transport etc. So either civil service needs to change its selection process or build an opportunity for professionals to manage cities.

Similarly allow the Mayor to choose his/her Officials to run the city particularly post Municipal Commissioner. Ensure Municipal Commissioners do not behave like they are the peoples' representatives in Municipal Governance rather they are under the Mayor. Mayors must be given powers like others Chief Minister, Prime Minister, Governor, President to choose their office to work with them and not some one is posted who work beyond Mayors and creates another leadership within the city.

4. *What are the approaches to be taken to democratizing information so as to reach the masses through information and using media for development?*

Municipal Bodies need to be strengthened with proper Public Relation background professionals to manage information. Ward committees need to be strengthened for dissemination of information. Volunteerism in Cities needs to be strengthened for dissemination of information. Internet should be widely used for the information dissemination.

It is important that both National and State government must find ways of looking towards Local Government handling the subjects of Police, Tourism, Transport, Railway, Water Supply etc. Even if local governments do not manage them but must have definition of the system to follow. For example a Mayors intervention of making city friendlier to walking / cycling cannot be possible without Railway understanding the importance of building Under Passes. Similarly, there are many areas where the role of Local Government voice is desired.

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**Abha Singhal Joshi, New Delhi**

1. How to build Vibrant Grassroots Democracy which includes making decentralized governance work and capacity building for decentralized planning?

- Targeted work for improving participation in Gram Sabhas, especially that of women.
- Identifying 'weak' Panchayats/Sarpanches and developing support systems for strengthening them.
- Training for Sarpanches, Panches and Panchayat committees is a must for effective Panchayats. Training must be a combination of the philosophy of democratic values and the Constitution of India, basic laws pertaining to the people, powers and duties under the Panchayat Acts and handling of accounts.
- Voter education for weaning them away from caste-based politics. This should be on a continuous basis and not tied up with election time. Citizens' education for ensuring accountability of elected representatives must be a continuous exercise.
- Suo-motu provisions of the RTI Act need to be stepped up manifold for accountability and citizens' participation.

2. How can we ensure Social Justice for All especially addressing the issues faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, Women, Children, Old Aged and Disabled. How decentralized governance could be organized and capacitated to achieve this?

Many Panchayat Acts contain provisions for the formation of "Social Empowerment Committees". The mandate of these committees is to look after the interests of all these classes. These have been formed only on paper. These committees should be formed and activated.

While the efforts towards empowering the SC/ST, etc. have been quite aggressive and have been sporadically effective, there has been little effort to 'buy over' the other classes of citizens to participate in this idea. This has resulted in alienation and social divisions becoming worse in some instances. Some processes should be developed for developing healthy dialogue between communities who are competing for the same limited resources.

Informal mediation forums should be harnessed and tied up with the formal processes. However, these need very focused and quality training inputs. The legal profession as well as the judiciary at the lower levels needs to be brought on board to help people access rights in different forums.

3. Improving the Quality of Public services has been a challenge for years and how this could be achieved, especially through decentralized governance

Better use of RTI Act, social audit and private-public partnership in some areas such as sanitation, education, etc.

4. What are the approaches to be taken to democratizing information so as to reach the masses through information and using media for development

Information must be simplified so as to reach the masses. Information must reach people in the vernacular and must retain its veracity.

Community Radio and Public Interest Broadcasting needs to be stepped up and done in a far more organized and consistent way. Internet usage has to be stepped up. Successful models for use of cell-phones for monitoring of schemes and reporting irregularities should be replicated.

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### **Mahi Pal, Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi**

73rd Amendment to the Constitution and its extension to Scheduled Areas and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment have been very progressive legislations for strengthening decentralized democracy in the country. Since coming these legislations in force, a number of positive changes have taken place for strengthening grassroots democracy. However, many more things have to be done for further deepening local democracy in the country. Following are my some suggestions in this regard:

#### **Decentralization**

1. As per the Constitution, Panchayats are expected to prepare plan for economic development and social justice and their counterparts in urban areas are also expected to do the same. The plans so prepared are also expected to be consolidated at district level. But this has not been happened across the country barring a few exceptions. One of the reasons for this is that the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) could provide only people's participation in the activities of the local bodies. However, professional and technical support has been lacking in preparation of plan at these bodies. This more in case of Panchayats. It is not possible to provide such support when the size of the Gram Panchayat is very small. The reasonable sizes of Panchayats have been delimited on account of political reasons. So, for a proper planning at local level is required a proper size of the GP. Generally, size is suggested about 5000 or so of course local variations are there. If see the Panchayats on this , only Panchayats in 8 states are having this much of population. Hence, it is suggested that Panchayats may be remodeled demographically. There may be an office of the GP located in the central village of the GP. This may be designated as GP secretariat. Various Committees have suggested for such reorganization of Gram Panchayats. The LM Singhvi Committee on PRIs suggested of giving the task of delimitation of reorganized Panchayats to a Commission in each



State. If this is done, providing professional and technical support for plan preparation and implementation which is main work of the Panchayats will be possible.

2. Creation of Parallel institutions such as Committees for the implementation of various centrally sponsored schemes should be avoided. These committees create such an environment in which elected representatives becomes indifferent because they do not have much to think, create and deliver at local level and hence conflict with the Panchayati Raj System. Activating the committees given in the Panchayat Acts also enable the Members of marginalized Groups to participate in the developmental activities of the village. In fact, Committee which is to be constituted in accordance with Panchayat Act remained on paper and other committees created with an administrative order overtake governance system at local level. This phenomenon may be an example of governance without accountability.
3. As per the Constitution, the Panchayats are autonomous institutions but their economy is primarily grant-diet as they have not mobilized their own resources. The fiscal reforms process has been bypassed the third stratum of Government. In case of Panchayats, the data revealed by 13<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission show that public expenditure is increasing, however, local Government share in public sector own source revenue decreasing. This is not only discourage people's accountability to the Panchayat but also injurious to the health of local democracy. Prof. M.A. Oommen's article entitled "The 13<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission and the Third Tier" published in Economic & Political Weekly (November 27 – December 3, 2010) is a useful reading in this regard as it deals both malady and remedy.
4. Capacity Building of Panchayat Personnel is very important. In this regard, the Report of the NACRC on BRGF by NIRD (Capacity Building Chapter) is a useful reading to devise a capacity building strategy for Panchayat personnel.
5. It may be worthwhile idea that a separate report on the implementation of PESA by the Governors of the concerned States to the President may be a regular part in the Plan period. This report may be both critical and directional for the States and the Centre.

### **Marginalized Groups**

6. For marginalized Groups, Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (SCSP), Tribal Sub Plan (TSP), Special Component Plan (SCP) are in vague. Model of MSDP (Multi Sectoral Development Programme) of the Ministry of Minority Affairs may be worth considering in this regard.

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### **Jacob John, KDS, Delhi**

India has been experiencing a mini revolution in the area of Self Help Groups (SHGs). They have become a powerful social capital in several States. SHGs, mostly belonging to marginalized communities, are formed under government programmes or with the support of NGOs/International Organizations, political parties and religious organizations. In terms of the membership pattern of SHGs, these can be categorized as male- based, female -based SHGs, male-female combined, Scheduled Caste (SC) dominated, Scheduled Tribe (ST) dominated, Below Poverty Line (BPL) dominated, etc.

It is important to note that SHGs in some Indian States have evolved as an institution for rural development enabling the country to achieve a reasonable level of social and financial inclusion. SHG programmes are not restricted merely to micro credit activities as it has started to evolve as a comprehensive poverty eradication programme with a wide range of activities. Some States

have proved that SHG network can be used for execution of various rural development programmes .

The potential of SHGs in local level planning has increasing being utilized by States like Kerala. SHGs, especially of women, have become active participants in the planning of various development projects in Kerala. With the active involvement of SHGs, participation of Gram Sabha is improved. SHG based poor women of each State can become active participants in the planning of various development projects. By creating platforms for women SHG to discuss and deliberate development projects and problems in their locality and with subsequent evolvement of a development plan for each locality or village, a process of grassroots level planning can be initiated.

SHG programmes have developed leadership qualities and achieved political empowerment in several States. Many SHG women leaders have contested and got elected to Panchayati Raj Institutions which is a clear evidence of political empowerment of poor women and other marginalized groups.

The relationship between SHG institutions and Panchayat bodies needs greater attention. In most of the States SHGs work as extension units of the concerned government agency or NGOs who promoted them. However, a few States have gone a little ahead in establishing a limited linkage with PRIs. SHG programmes in all Indian States should envisage a significant role for local governments and it is important to strengthen local governments and link them to SHG based anti- poverty programme. In nutshell, the social capital of SHGs can build up a vibrant grassroots democracy and ensure Social Justice for marginalized people in India.

**[Naimur Rahman](#), One World South Asia India, New Delhi**

At the moment, I am forwarding here my quick thoughts on the inputs 12<sup>th</sup> Plan Approach Paper:

<b>Decentralisation, Empowerment and Information</b>	
<p><b>Vibrant Grassroots Democracy</b></p> <p>Making Decentralised Governance Work Capacity Building for Decentralised Planning</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensure real delegation of authority to Panchayati Raj Institutions and enable accountability framework to measure their outcome.</li> <li>2. Create institutional mechanisms to empower elected PRI functionaries; deploy adequate human resources for the PRI to deliver on their outcome</li> <li>3. Provide ICT especially Mobile based learning tool to routinely support on-demand, administrative and managerial knowledge requirements of PRI functionaries.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Democratising Information</b></p> <p>Reach the Masses through Information Using Media for Development</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Roll-out low-cost, easy-to-use (even by an illiterate) and voice enabled computing infrastructure at Panchayats as vehicle for diffusing public information.</li> <li>5. Routine publish all governance knowledge, including legal and constitutional rights, statutory entitlements, and details of public service / citizen centric schemes &amp; programmes on public broadcast media; and also on government websites. Ensure linguistic localisation and voice-enablement of all public service information on the web.</li> </ol>

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|  | 6. Use Community Radio, citizen's video and other Mobile based tools for mainstreaming Citizens' Media for Development |
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**[Indrajit Roy](#), University of Oxford, United Kingdom**

Kudos to the Planning Commission for seeking to engage different stakeholders and soliciting inputs into the policy-framing process!

Colleagues have already referred to several innovative technical and managerial ideas, which could be considered. I would like to draw attention to the need to complement these with more 'political' approaches. These do not lend themselves to quick-fix solutions, but will take time, patience and sustained commitment from State- and national-level actors to build on. Given my own expertise and knowledge, I will respond to Q. 1 & 2.

**Building Vibrant Grassroots Democracy**

Building a vibrant grassroots democracy is closely linked with the construction of citizenship, which in turn is a deeply political process. As such, making decentralized governance work is an important outcome of this 'politicization' process, which need to complement the more technical interventions. It is imperative to work with local politicians - not only formal representatives, but also the wide variety of informal leaders, opinion-makers, political party functionaries, and other "brokers" (known variously as chhoto bhai neta, dalals, bichaulias, pyraveekars, etc.), including those deemed to be 'corrupt', 'inefficient' and 'populist'. They cannot and should not be ignored since they are after all the lynchpin of any democratic system. Working with politicians includes building their technical capacities on the roles and responsibilities of the Panchayat, etc. (which several colleagues have referred to) but also to inculcate the values of accountability, responsibility and the feeling that they are part of a larger DEMOCRATIC system, not just dispersed politicians engaged in what is often perceived to be a thankless but lucrative job.

There are several ways in which these values could be inculcated. Contracting NGOs/ CBOs,/ social activists, etc. is one. A regular system of appreciation by State-level authorities is another- I know several States have instituted Nirmal Gram Puraskars, etc. but these are neither well-publicized, nor, frankly, do existing politicians care. Moreover, such appreciation must be shown not only to the elected leaders, but also to other politicians, both those who have supported the elected leaders and those in opposition.

The most important pillar of a vibrant grassroots democracy, of course, continues to be Gram Sabhas, which are convened at Panchayat level. One colleague has pointed out to the four different ways in which these function: mostly they do not. It will be more useful to institutionalize these participatory assemblies at the ward/ hamlet level- i.e. one or two levels below the Panchayat. Perhaps more responsibilities could be devolved on ward members than is presently (as, indeed, happens in States like West Bengal).

And finally, central to establishing democratic institutions is to formalize a system of checks and balances. There should be some institutional arrangement to facilitate this, perhaps on the lines of the elected Nyay Panchayats in Bihar. One criticism of this may be that parallel institutions will be created, and there might be a lack of coordination due to clash of egos, personalities or other factors. But there could be ways to manage that (perhaps the threat that unspent balances would not only be returned but a penalty incurred).

## Ensuring Social Justice for All

I will refer to SC/ST/ minorities since I am more familiar with these issues. Again, there are no quick-fix solutions to what has been a long-standing problem. Hamlet-level committees (since, let's face it, most hamlets tend to be organized along caste/ tribe/ religious lines) is one way of ensuring that problems of justice are raised at least somewhere along the line. These committees in turn should inform the social justice Standing Committees constituted by Panchayats. Hamlet-level organization would be a good way to focus because most of the discrimination in public goods (e.g. lack of drinking water, electricity) is faced at that level. Consequently, once members acquire some wealth and/ or prestige, they tend to migrate to 'cleaner' localities: my own experience of research in Dom and Musahar hamlets in Bihar bears this out. The social justice committees in general and the hamlet-level committees in particular should have more teeth.

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### [Vibha](#), New Delhi

#### Building Vibrant Grassroots Democracy

Any governance can work when they are held accountable. That is possible when people are **aware** what the government is supposed to deliver (quantity & quality both), they have **awareness of legal provisions** vis a vis the Rights.

Capacity building for decentralized planning - it should be **participatory in true spirit**. And for doing this, such approaches should be used which are holistic in nature, meaning thereby approaches that not only engaging participants at mental levels but at all levels of human intelligences, i.e, mental, physical, emotional and spiritual, for wholesome engagement in doing decentralised planning. Because mere mental level engagement produces limited results in terms of level of participation, commitment, acceptance, creativity and adherence of any plan.

## Ensuring Social Justice for All

A holistic approach called Genuine Contact Program takes care of social inclusion issues. Capacity can be build around this across cadres, including PRIs.

### Improving the Quality of Public services

This can be achieved by making people aware in simple terms about the qualitative aspects of all public services. Any public service - a PHC, school, anganwadi, mid day meal, shelter homes etc etc., should clearly spell out the qualitative aspects one should look for. Once people know that they have a right to x standard of quality or xyz components in any service, they know what to look for or ask for while getting that service. A small example: Now in health sector, many people know that they should ask for a disposable syringe and so they do it which is helping in infection prevention in a significant manner.

### Democratizing information

Three routes –

- a. Multi prong approach using common means of communications like community radio, electronic media, print media, inter personal, mid media etc.
- b. Creating para legal within the community, training PRIs, NGO representatives and most importantly journalists/stringers so that they main stream such information in their routine reporting.
- c. It could be mandated for all NGOs/intl agencies to undertake capacity building work of legal provisions and for **quality aspects of all public sector**

**schemes.** This could be made pre-requisite for all programs, be it health, micro finance, education, nutrition, NREGA etc. as foundational work for any project/program.

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### **Democratic Governance Team, UNDP India, New Delhi**

Based on experiences and lessons of UNDP's programming in the area of 'Democratic Governance' over the last few years, some recommendations are highlighted below:

#### **Vibrant Grassroots democracy**

In order to strengthen grassroots democracy, the bottlenecks preventing local governments and communities from participating effectively in addressing their development challenges need to be analysed closely.

- If one looks at public expenditure over the last 15-20 years, it becomes clear that the pattern has reversed - From 80% of un-tied grants from Centre to States (and 20% tied), the ratio has gone to 20% untied and 80% tied in the form of Centrally sponsored schemes with rigid guidelines on the use of funds. Most plan funds to the districts originate from the central Ministries. Thus, the leeway of state governments to plan with flexibility of resources is extremely less and poorer states have little discretionary funds to allocate to the districts. Thus integrated district planning from below has been undermined by different streams of funding with their origins in the central Ministries. As States have to prepare their annual plans within the framework prescribed by the Government of India, they have no option but to prepare sectoral budgets and submit it to GOI Ministries for funding. They, in turn, often prescribe rigid guidelines, which leave little scope for flexibility to the districts in preparation of their annual plans. With continued parallel sectoral planning and top-down implementation by individual ministries, Integrated District Planning is rendered impossible. Sectoral planning also leads to neglect of issues of institutional strengthening. This is a critical bottleneck in achievement of MDGs. ***It is therefore critical that the centre and state provide far greater untied funds to the district and sub-district levels to help address local needs and incentivize decentralized planning and monitoring. As a first step in this direction, the Centrally sponsored schemes need to be streamlined and reduced in number.***
- Convergence between centrally sponsored schemes and implementation of district planning will need attention and ***strong coordination and effort at the highest level of Planning Commission and other Ministries including MoPR and MoUD.*** A High level Coordination Committee at the National Level and also at the state level comprising heads of all sectoral ministries and departments is essential to look into the obstacles in convergent decentralised planning especially rigid sectoral guidelines which hamper annual integrated bottom-up planning at the PRI levels.
- To further strengthen the enabling environment, ***dedicated human and technical resources are required at all levels, particularly district and sub-district, to facilitate planning, implementation and monitoring.*** The Planning Commission scheme to support integrated decentralized planning has not been approved yet and requires priority attention.
- ***Implement the NREGA principle of devolving implementing powers and funds to Panchayat committees in all centrally sponsored schemes.***
- The ***resource envelope should be made available to local level planners ahead of the planning process and activity mapping needs to be completed.***

- **Human development approach should be central to planning at the national, State and district level.** This approach puts people at the centre of development and promotes convergence. In terms of processes, this would mean a paradigm shift in the current sectoral planning process. Beginning with the XII Five Year Plan, the following may be attempted Financing/budgeting for achieving human development goals – A thorough study identifying financing gaps for meeting the targets should be undertaken which should inform formulation of new schemes or programmes. The National Institute for Public Finance and Policy has conducted such studies. These could be institutionalized as an input to national plans. Similar studies could be done at the State level as well. Other tools such as social accounting matrix and computable general equilibrium (CGE) model could also be used for this exercise.
- The XII Plan could **recommend preparation of State/district HDRs as an input or the approach paper** to five year planning/visioning at the State/district level.
- Many State governments also have a chapter on human development in state plans. It presents status on key human development indicators. The XII Plan could **advise all States to include a chapter on human development indicators in state plans**, broadening its scope to reporting on key State level development targets as set out in the Plan. This would ensure that monitoring of development goals is institutionalized. A sound statistical system would of course be essential for this initiative. As part of UNDP project on human development, State governments have prepared thematic reports on key factors that have a bearing on human development. Such studies are inputs for planning at the State level, but they could also be useful for national planning.
- The next step then would be to **develop capacities for decentralised, yet integrated and outcome based planning, particularly focused on issues of human development, at all levels.** To enable this, analytical capacities can be developed through preparation of National, State and District Human Development Reports to highlight key issues and present a situation analysis. Disaggregated data and situation analysis of specific marginalized groups and calculation of inequality index in state HDRs could highlight specific challenges of specific groups and help inform targeted policy making. This, accompanied with behavioural changes in the attitudes and mind sets of the key stakeholders involved in the planning process at all levels: national, state, district and sub-district levels to bring a strong outcome orientation and inter-sectoral approach, would be key.
- **State level training institutes capacities on human development analysis should be enhanced** for further building capacities of elected reps and state and district officials for informed planning. State governments to adopt innovative models of partnerships for imparting trainings.
- **Resources for capacity development also need to be untied and made available to key national, state, district and sub-district training institutions so that a holistic and integrated plan for CD can be implemented** rather than scheme specific training budgets and training content.
- **Identify mechanisms that will support and strengthen the regular training process for elected representatives, especially women elected reps and other marginalized groups.** A detailed note with recommendations on capacity development of elected representatives may be seen at <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111007.pdf>. Experience on Capacity Building of Elected representatives esp from marginalized sections of society through projects under UNDP Governance programme have found that a mix of strategies adopted by the state and civil society helps develop capacities of elected reps. Training must be seen as an ongoing

process and should not be a onetime intervention. Some of the important and effective strategies for Capacity Building are:

- Environment building through the campaign approach with the help of mock polling exercises, street plays, posters, pamphlets, inspirational songs, yatras, etc;
- Building capacities especially of elected women representatives by sensitizing the men members and men relatives of these women leaders; also arranging special programmes for women representatives such as mahila sammelans (women's gatherings), citizen dialogues, special training of master trainers for women representatives- village level professional women workers.
- Strengthening women's collectives and building networks and arranging exposure visits and peer learning opportunities for women leaders.
- Activating gram sabhas through awareness generation programmes, community mobilization activities and perspective building programmes;
- Strengthening information dissemination through information kiosks, community radio programmes, establishment of Panchayat Resource Centre, information melas.

### **Social Justice**

***Train PRIs on various schemes and laws relating to disadvantaged groups.*** It should be a part of their roles and responsibilities to inform people about the availability of laws and schemes. This information should be displayed at Panchayat and block offices.

- All organs/institutes/officials of the State including ***government officials, police, prison officials, public prosecutors, legal service authorities, legal aid lawyers must be sensitized on laws and issues relating to vulnerable groups.***

***Performance indicators should be developed at local level and those should include issues of disadvantaged groups,*** social justice and equitable sharing of resources. Grading and incentivizing of panchayats would help creating enabling environment.

- ***Strengthen Gram Sabhas for better representation in decision making*** and sensitize them on issues related to marginalized people.
- ***Building capacities of elected women representatives on issues of social justice*** is also the key
- ***Create platform, networks and issue-based alliances for dialogue between duty bearers and rights holders.***
- ***Increase budgetary allocation in plans at district, block and village level for SC, ST, women, old people, children and minorities.*** Improve utilization of resources and demand accountability by way of creating Social Justice Committees in each village with members taken from the excluded groups.
- ***Identify the processes through which exclusion takes place*** and expand the scope of analysis by looking at the strategic interests of groups like property rights for women.

### **Improving the Quality of Public services**

***Training key personnel along with building in performance indicators*** for Panchayats and local institutions and ensuring transparency and accountability is the key.

- To improve accountability of PRIs and quality of supervision over issues of education and health, taxation powers of PRIs need to be enhanced.



- **Localizing MDGs** is important at the lowest level of planning and community monitoring tools such as **annual public perception surveys and preparation of report cards for public services will enhance demand for accountability.**
- **Strong monitoring of outcomes and analysis of bottlenecks in implementation and delivery of services is critical.** Studies should be undertaken analysing the bottlenecks and cross sectoral governance issues in implementation of government programmes for addressing practical issues of service delivery.
- Since the X Five Year Plan, monitorable targets are being set at the national level. In the Eleventh Five Year Plan, targets have also been set for States. While setting a goal is imperative and laudable, this is only the first step towards progress on targets. Two critical lacunae need to be addressed: i) The correlation between schemes and budgets proposed in the plan to the achievement of targets is not very evident; ii) The national statistical system (frequency, disaggregation of data) is not in sync with planning cycles. Aligning the statistical system to planning – One of the main reasons why monitorable targets cannot be tracked effectively is that the timing of large scale survey operations /Census does not necessarily coincide with planning cycle. It may be useful to initiate an alignment of statistical systems with the planning cycle in terms of frequency of data collection and levels of disaggregation (by geographical areas and social groups).
- **A constructive engagement of professional institutions** can help in concurrent monitoring, feedback to state government and engaging with government to find solutions as is the case with the 'Professional Institution Network' set up by MoRD under MGNREGA with UNDP support to engage IITs, IIMs, Agriculture Universities. The network undertakes assessment, studies, research/action research to identify within districts and across states, efficient management practices, procedures, processes, factors that have contributed to good performance and the positive outcomes. Based on their field experiences and primary and secondary data, the institutes make recommendations and strategies for dissemination of these practices and factors that have or will limit the optimal performance of the Scheme. The findings of these institutes have been shared with state governments through reports, review meetings and discussions to highlight constraints and follow-up action is being monitored in order to strengthen implementation.
- **To incentivize innovation and demonstration of effective service delivery best practices, an 'innovation fund' must be built into programme design and budgets and clear cut strategies for replication/ up-scaling and dissemination of successful pilots should be outlined.**

#### **Democratizing information**

- It is imperative that **all schemes and laws for the vulnerable populations** have a built-in accountability system. They **should clearly mention the implementing authority, grievance redressal systems and consequences for non-implementation.** For example, if the law states that no one can be detained in prison beyond the maximum period of punishment for the offence with which s/he is charged, then it or the rules/SOP thereunder should mention whether the it is police, prison, prosecutor or the judge who ensures that this will be implemented. There should be consequences for not ensuring the implementation of the law. Similarly, if a person is entitled to a BPL card or Job card under NREGA and is unable to secure that, s/he should know what and where is the grievance redressal mechanism, and it is the duty of the State to ensure that this knowledge is available to the beneficiaries.
- **Use IT extensively to ensure transparency and accountability** e.g. NREGA has used technology effectively for inclusion. Web enabled Management Information System (MIS)



(www.nrega.nic.in), one of the largest data base of rural households, makes transparency intrinsic to NREGA by placing all critical parameters such as wage payments, number of days of employment provided and works under execution online for easy public access. Efforts should be on to deepen the ICT infrastructure upto the Gram Panchayat level. A good practice to facilitate transparency is to integrate worker's job demand process and their access to information. This penetration will trigger innovations at the grass root, helping workers to assert their Rights and hold implementation agencies accountable. A local language enabled audio visual ICT kiosk model (guided by icons and audio) has been demonstrated by UNDP in Bhilwara for workers to use the system and exercise their rights. Workers authenticate their registration through a biometric process by recording their fingerprints on the biometric reader in the kiosk. The worker also records his attendance at the site in the same manner. The kiosk then provides the worker details such as work allotment, attendance, muster report, wages calculation as on date, in the local language. Workers acquire agency through simple ICT methods. This pilot must be upscaled and could be a valuable for awareness on rights and entitlements across the board.

- It is imperative that the ***proactive disclosure clause in the RTI Act should be implemented.***
- ***Licensing policies for media may be reviewed to include conditions such as free space/space at reduced rates for development related information.***

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#### **Subhash Mendhapurkar, SUTRA, Jagjit Nagar, Himachal Pradesh**

First I would like to lay out some of principles before I put my thoughts.

1. In a Representative based democracy certain power to patronage is inherent, and thus decentralization of Governance means decentralization of power to patronage.
2. More the resources at the hands of a Body, more the competitive politics to control it and consequently squeezing out spaces for independent candidates to contest elections.
3. To form the Government, in democracy we need number based legitimacy; but to govern we need moral legitimacy.
4. A vibrant democracy is possible only when a strong watchdog body is available

Based on these principles, if we look back on the work done on Decentralization of Governance for last 15 odd years, I feel we have achieved the following:

- a) We have successfully converted a democratically elected body into a cheap 'delivery machine' and to make this machine efficient, created a singular center of power at Panchayat level, namely Sarpanch / Pradhan
- b) As a result of this we have successfully brought it under the control of bureaucracy
- c) And because of these, a proper nexus has emerged at Panchayat level to undertake only those work / activities that have 'money' / 'funds' opening the gate for corrupt practices, loosing the moral to govern.

Given the political scenario, there is no way we shall revert these processes, thus 12<sup>th</sup> Plan should approach to find remedies for the problem that we have created. So what can be done? How can we break or control the nexus between local bureaucracy and political leadership? How can we decontrol the Panchayats from bureaucracy? Unless we find answers to these questions, there is no future for PRIs.

One possible solution is to establish Nyaya Panchayats that have constitutional powers to:

1. Oversee the work of Panchayats and undertake concurrent social audit of all its work
2. Oversee the services that are to be provided by various departments and make service providers accountable

3. Address the grievances of people who feel Panchayat has unjustifiably denied them benefits under various schemes

Along with this, Nyaya Panchayats can also be entrusted to address the issues of Social Justice. To this, they be empowered to undertake implementation of:

1. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
2. International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)
3. Human Rights
4. National Population Policy
5. Women's Empowerment Policy
6. Right to Education
7. Child Rights

It should also be empowered to undertake implementation of:

1. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005
2. Various sections of Indian Penal Code (IPC) / Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) that have only fine as punishment (refer to Judiciary Functions of Panchayats – HP Panchayati Raj Act 1994)

Directives from Nyaya Panchayats must be made legally binding. In short, Nyaya Panchayats to Gram Panchayats should be what High courts are for State Governments and Supreme Courts for Central Government.

I feel strongly that the Central Government must initiate such a remedy. It is so because, 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution was brought in without a demand from states or people's movement, it was a top-down model. Thus, finding remedies to the situation to realize the dream of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment now lies with the Central Government, it can not now say, let the States should it.

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**[Pratishtha Sengupta](#), MANTRA, Kolkata**

The very thought of soliciting thoughts from across various tiers on effective impact of decentralised governance is significant in its commitment. I have been reading responses all this while and thanks for other contributors for enriching us on some of the revisits that are real need for decentralised functions.

Some of our exposures may be added to this list of reviews and revisits.

**Vibrant Grassroots Democracy:** There are quite a few grass root level endeavors working pretty well for people. For ex., SHGs, REFLECTs, Groups on Water & Sanitation to name a few. Potentials of people's participation, awareness and an attitude towards development themes have been evident in a large number of such ventures. Would not then be relevant that we identify them with support from concerned VOs/NGOs/GPs and capacitate them further to reach a more decentralised image of development. Because these are formulated and being made functional by people despite many a challenge, Government guidance is not irrelevant in such people's empowerment efforts.

**Ensuring Social Justice for All:** Disparity in development in some form or other is an integral feature. Thus whatever name one may coin (in lieu of reservation/quota) some sort of special spaces are to be ensured for not so competent classes. Even after sixty years if this quota system has not helped the target groups then there are procedural problems which lead another debate. That is the challenge before any governance which requires to be inclusive. As highlighted by one member that inputs for disadvantaged classes are more important than output reservations. I think it is high time that government takes a proactive stance on this as newer definitions of

disparity are on the horizon given so much consumerism and squalor at the same time. Many a times the very purpose gets defeated and misinterpreted due to its presentation.

**Improving Quality of Services:** Present development dynamics requires lot of challenges knowledge wise and more importantly attitude wise. Some member has already expressed concern that traditional grammar based administrative mode may not and in fact has not done wonders under many occasions. Officers from general stream need to be oriented on a particular department's theme. He/she would be in charge of Professionals like Sociologists, Economists along with other health cum infrastructure experts need to be there as part of system to understand human factors in a more sensible manner.

**Democratizing Information:** Despite RTI Act and other such legal provisions, sharing information is something that does not come forth with advancement in education or income or technology. If technology creates one additional space can close another as well. Approaches /attitudes towards others are something that we need to work on. May be special sensitization (as happens for doctors in European countries) sessions for a group of powers can be explored.

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### **K.J. Kurian, Idukki, Kerala**

I have the following suggestions with regard to How to build vibrant grass root democracy:

1. There is no uniformity in the devolution of functions, functionaries and funds among States. In some States, Local Self Government Institutions (LSGIs) enjoy substantial powers and also have the needed functionaries and funds at their disposal. Even Ministers, M.Ps. and M.L.As are envious of the enormous administrative powers and funds available to these institutions in certain states. The devolved funds from the Centre, State Governments along with own funds for certain Gram Panchayats (GPs) go up to the extent of Rs. 2 or three Crores during one financial year. There are sufficient number of office staff and also qualified engineer on rolls. On the other hand, there are GPs with little or no functions and funds. To mention about the functionaries; there is only the Gram Sachiv entrusted with all developmental as well as administrative functions. At the same time he/she is also in charge of four or five GPs in the same Block Office. Many GPs even today have to look towards the State Government for funds to pay wages to their safai karmacharies. This disparity in the devolution of functions, functionaries and funds among states stands in the way of effective decentralized governance and needs to be addressed with utmost priority in the coming Five year Plan.
2. The District/Block officials' attitude (in certain states) towards the elected representatives needs a thorough change. The bureaucratic set up even now consider the Sarpanch/Panch as persons incapable of shouldering any kind of administrative as well as financial responsibility. The States show reluctance in devolution and at the same time officials do not want to loosen their grip over the LSGIs.
3. Empowerment of the Sarpanch and Panch again needs topmost priority. The elected representatives do not know what status they have. Imagine a situation in a Gram Sabha where the officers occupy the few available chairs and the Sarpanch and Panch sitting on the stinky floor( in some cases even a mat is not there) and asking for favours. If the elected representatives are illiterate, the situation is still worse.
4. The impact of reservation for women especially for backward classes has yet to be felt in many GPs. Some of the elected women Sarpanchs and Panchs have not even seen the Panchayat Ghar/ Chaupal not to talk about chairing the Panchayat Samiti proceedings. There are the 'Sarpanch Pathi and Panch Pathis' (husbands) to take charge of the official responsibilities. Elected representatives get only one or two days departmental training in some states. Even for such training programmes the women members, for one reason or the other, fail to be present at the far off place meant for training. Instead their

- husbands take their place. Training in the GP itself and exposure visits to progressive Panchayats in some other states may give them lot of practical experience.
5. There are States offering reasonable amount to elected representatives as honorarium while many states still hesitate to do this. With increased responsibilities, steps have to be taken to give decent honorarium to the elected representatives.
  6. Where ever the State Governments are reluctant in devolving funds the Central Sector funds including the M.P. Funds may directly be transferred to the LSGIs.
  7. The LSGIs should try for employment expansion for the women and the rural poor through MGNREG programme. The Self Help Group movement is a great solace for the disadvantaged. But the movement has yet to get initiated in many villages. The Civil Society Organisations have to be encouraged to guide the interested groups for activities which would provide employment as well as value addition to the village produces. Small and micro enterprises had made an impact in remote villages and this could further change the face of rural sector. The Plan initiatives should be directed towards skill development of our huge manpower and making our village production centre, the factory of the world. The dream of double digit growth of our economy can be ushered in by harnessing the latent potential of our villages to generate aggregate demand.
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## **Ratan Ghosh and Jayanta Choudhury, Tripura**

### **1. Building Vibrant Grassroots Democracy**

Till recently, all the attempts made by the Government of India for decentralized governance have ignored the reality of the legal frame of the Local Government Institutions of the North-Eastern Region. There exist three types of the legal frame in the North-East, namely, *Sixth Schedule Frame*, *State Legislation Frame* and *National Frame*. Since 2006, Various reports like Second Administrative Commission (6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Report), Expert Committee of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Mungekar's Report, NEHU Report etc. dealt with the problems of decentralized planning in the North-Eastern States. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj summarized all these Reports and offered some suggestions on the Decentralized Governance in the NE States (vide. <http://panchayat.gov.in/data>). Planning Commission should take into account all these Reports, while preparing 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan Approach on Decentralized Planning in the North-East. For the Capacity building for decentralized planning, teams of resource persons at the State, District and Block levels may be constituted. Their job would be not only impart training to the members of the concerned local bodies, but also to formulate the appropriate "training needs" for decentralized planning The methodology of the decentralised governance for the PRI areas and 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule areas, as adopted in Tripura is given below.

#### **Tripura's Approach to decentralized Planning:**

**Background:** In Tripura, there exist two types of legal frame in the rural areas, namely **Sixth Schedule Frame** and **National Frame**. In the State, two-third of the total geographical area and one-third of the population falls within the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule areas. The unique feature of the state is that that every revenue district comprises of both the areas under Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (ADC) and the PRI areas.

**Administrative System:** Out of the 40 RD blocks, 17 blocks are completely within the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule areas (ADC block). In the remaining 23 blocks (mixed block), both the elected Panchayats and elected Village Committees (within 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule area) exist. Through administrative order, State Govt. had set up Block Advisory Committee (BAC) in 35 blocks (17 ADC blocks and 18 mixed blocks ; in the blocks where the number of Village committee is less than 5, BAC was not set-up) to formulate and implement development plans in the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule areas. The Chairman of the BAC is the elected member of the TTAADC, and all the elected

chairpersons of the Village Committee are the members of the BAC. BDO is the member-secretary of both the Panchayat Samiti and the BAC. In the state, there exist 513 elected Gram Panchayats and 527 elected Village Committees.

**Decentralized Planning:** The State Govt. initiated *Gramoday* Programme (in the rural areas) and *Nagaroday* Programme (in the urban areas) for the preparation of the Annual Plan 2002-03 and 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2002-07). Under the *Gramoday* Programme, the Village Development Plans were prepared for all the 527 villages in the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule (ADC) areas and 513 Gram Panchayats in the PRI areas, on the basis of the total needs of the locality as revealed in the people's perceptions and opinions, expressed in the village level meetings. On the basis of the likely availability of resources, the priority list of plan/project proposals arising out of the total need of the ADC Villages /Gram Panchayats were prepared. The residual needs of the Villages/GPs then passed on to the Blocks for implementation. The 40 Blocks of the State then prepared their consolidated block plans taking those residual needs of the Villages/GPs as their targets for development and after taking into consideration the likely flow of resources to the blocks. In the block level, the plans from the Villages / GPs are aggregated separately for the ADC and PRI areas, and then integrated to prepare the consolidated block plan. The block level plan for the PRI areas is approved by the Panchayat Samiti, while block level plan for the ADC areas is approved by the BAC. The remaining needs of the Blocks then passed on to the District and State level for possible implementation. In the Nagaroday programme for the urban areas (one Municipal Council and 15 Nagar Panchayats), the 'Word' is the primary unit of the development plan. In similar way, Nagar Panchayat Plans are prepared and submitted to the District Magistrate. At the district level, development plans for the ADC areas, as received from the blocks is aggregated and submitted to the Autonomous District Council (ADC) for their approval. Similarly, the plans for the PRI areas are aggregated and approved by the Zila Parishad. Then the consolidate plan for the district, by integrating plans of the ADC, PRI and Nagar Panchayats, are prepared. The similar exercise continued for the preparation of the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan and Annual Plans.

**District Planning Committee:** Matter relating constitution of District Planning Committee (DPC) in each of the four Districts of the State has been under consideration for quite sometime following the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution of India. During September, 2000, State Govt. introduced "The Tripura District Planning Committee Bill, 2000" in the Tripura Legislative Assembly (TLA). And, the TLA, unanimously, passed a resolution to urge the Union Govt. to consider suitable amendment of the Constitution for extending the provisions relating to Panchayats and Municipalities to the areas under TTAADC also.

The major hindrance in this regard is due to (i) non-applicability of the provisions of 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment to the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule area and (ii) major chunk of each of the 4 Districts of the State falling under Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) (constituted under the provisions of 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Constitution). So, if a District Planning Committee is constituted only for areas excluding ADC areas, the development plan would only be for a part of the district and not for whole.

In the meantime, State Govt. has constituted District Planning Committee in the Dhalai district, in September, 2007, for implementation of the Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF) with the approval of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the Planning Commission. In a similar manner, the District Planning Committees in other 3 districts were constituted in September, 2008. The DPCs, thus constituted in Tripura has proportionate elected representative of the Nagar Panchayats, Autonomous District Council and Panchayati Raj Institutions in the ratio of urban, 6<sup>th</sup> schedule and PRI area population. About one-fifth of the members of the DPC are nominated by the State Government. The Chairperson of the DPC is a Cabinet Minister of the State Govt. The DM acts as the Member-Secretary of the DPC.

## **2. Ensuring Social Justice for All**

There are number of Centrally Sponsored and State level programmes / schemes / projects for the benefit of these groups. The only democratic way to ensure social justice to them is to transfer all these schemes to the respective rural and urban local bodies. In Tripura, most of these programmes / schemes are being implemented by the elected local bodies. As to the case of seat reservation, there is 50% reservation for women in the Rural (both in the PRI areas and 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule areas) and Urban Local bodies. Besides, attempts may be made by the Local Bodies for regular consultations / meetings with the various groups (SC, ST, Minority, Women etc.) separately, in order to understand their problems.

## **3. Improving the Quality of Public Services**

The only way to achieve improving the quality of public services is to involve not only the local bodies, but the common people at all level starting from formulation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and most importantly in planning process. Again involvement of third party like NGOs, Civil Society Organisation, academic institutions (e.g. during preparation of Village Development Plan, monitoring and evaluation, Capacity Building etc.) is also necessary.

## **4. Democratizing Information**

The basic requirement for the democratizing information is the dedicated connectivity with the PRIs. For this the availability of Hardware, Software and Manpower are very essential. In Tripura, Computer hardwares are provided to all the blocks and some of the Gram Panchayats. The software (Plan Plus) is also available. In some of the blocks, the manpower is also available to handle some basic data (although, the expertise to handle software like "Plan Plus" is quite inadequate). But the major problem is the absence of dedicated internet connectivity with some of the blocks and with all the Panchayats. So, in order to implement the democratizing information, particularly in the State of the North-East, the following steps should be taken first.

- a) Not only to provide computer hardware to all tiers of the Panchayats, but also to arrange dedicated internet connectivity to all.
- b) The problem of availability of competent manpower, particularly at the Gram Panchayat level needs to be solved.

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[Niranjan Upadhyay](#), Department of Management Studies, Sikkim Manipal University, Sikkim

These are my inputs to the query:

### **Building Vibrant Grassroots Democracy**

#### Response 1.1

*Sustained Social Mobilization is the only answer.* For which dedicated group (consisting of unemployed graduates and under graduates) could be associated. An example can be cited : In South Tripura such type of scheme was operating to form SHG groups ( DALA BANDHU). Every youth was given an honorarium of Rs. 2000/- per month. The similar type of group can be formed in the panchayat and the honorarium be enhanced suitably (Say Rs. 5000.00 PM). Effective monitoring by group of village elders, teacher and priest may be thought of. The same would be chaired by Panchayat President.

#### Response 1.2

Activity profile of The Group: (a) Activity Mapping (b) Linkage with NABARD (GRAMIN BANKS) and other Nationalized Banks, (c) To be assisted by the important members like teachers/doctors/social workers, while taking any decision.

## **Ensuring Social Justice for All**

### Response 2.1

- Social Exclusion has to be eradicated. It is therefore most urgent task is to bring them under both Social and Economic fold. Therefore effective credit delivery is a must.
- Monitoring for the schemes is also essential to meet the philosophy of Inclusive Policy.
- Public Distribution System has to be strengthened. Capacity building of the officials must be religiously undertaken in each stratum.
- Village planning be made through an exercise -“ Community Problem Identification” (CPI)

### Response 2.2

- Who will take care: Gram Panchayat, through Sustained Social Mobilization movement. Financial inclusion can be thought as per NAGALAND MODEL of Village Development Board, Under VILLAGE COUNCIL.
- Kerala Model of Kudumbashree is also proved to yet another institution, which can be replicated.

(REF: The report on the *Credit Related Issues Under SGSY (2009) MoRD, GoI*)

## **Improving the Quality of Public services**

### Response 3.1

- To improve the public services, most essential requirement is Transparency.
- SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Rational, Timely: This is essential for project monitoring.
- Training on Right to Information act has to be imparted to everyone.
- Those who are not educated, for them game playing, can be undertaken
- Student/unemployed youth can be easily given training for monitoring purpose of the quality, quantity, rate, measurement. The youth clubs in the locality could be engaged.
- Citizen charter should be framed and discussed by one and all. Retired teachers retired defense personnel may be roped for rendering voluntary services.
- Training can be imparted at Three Levels (Senior/ Middle/Lower) participants

## **Democratizing information**

### Response 4.1 : Dalabandhu as Social Mobiliser

- Active grass root level social mobilization. This can be achieved by appointing unemployed graduates from the same locality for effective communication. In one of our study sponsored by MoRD, during 2004-05 we came across the concept of DALA BANDHU. Members were unemployed graduates from the same locality. They were paid honorarium of Rs. 2000.00 then.

### Response 4.2: To create innovative calendar for each district:

- In the year 2003-04, an innovative Calendar was made by the district authority, of South District of Tripura State. The calendar had all fixtures for all kinds of meetings, training programs, date, venue, and other types of activities.
- The calendar was unique as it was from “April-March”.
  - This gave advance notice of the meetings/any other activities
  - No prior notice was required
  - Each functionary under Panchayat shall be given this calendar, to avoid any confusion.

### Response 4.3: USE of Community Radio



- In the far flung places information can be reached easily. Expenditure is also negligible. Local language and dialect could make effective dissemination of the information.

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**Shiv Kumar Acharya, Bikaner**

I am writing here my suggestions as these may create some steps toward a vibrant democratic nation:

**How to build Vibrant Grassroots Democracy which includes making decentralized governance work and capacity building for decentralized planning:** This can be by ownership by community members on each public service. For that we have to establish some systems/platforms through which people can express their views and can create changes in the situations. We have to strengthen the systems or public forums already existing as for example under NRHM there is a provision for Village Health & Sanitation Committees (VHSCs) for each revenue village. These can be the best example for vibrant democracy at grassroots, if it can be fully accepted by the government to community ownership and people's interventions in health services or other public services. VHSC, SDMC and other village level committees can plan at grassroots level according to their local needs of health, education, employment and on other issues. We have to train PRI members on fully missionary zeal also. There is another need to sensitize departmental people as well toward going in people opinion, forum and to value their opinions as community processes are the weakest point of each department in our nation. And this is the only reason for to be failure of any scheme, program or plans. We have to understand that only community ownership and active participation can create changes the situation our nation is facing.

**How can we ensure Social Justice for All especially addressing the issues faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, Women, Children, Old Aged and Disabled. How decentralized governance could be organized and capacitated to achieve this?**

Social justice for all can be ensured by sensitizing government people. And the social justice and security schemes' information should be reached till the last person of a village or area. Some support systems for people to reach till the service have to be established as there are so many hurdles to get any service by any SC/ST or other marginalized person. Like Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) under NRHM we have to establish some more pillars (people) for each village who can do work as social activists to link the marginalized with schemes and even more than schemes.

**Improving the Quality of Public services has been a challenge for years and how this could be achieved, especially through decentralized governance**

There should be appointed some people assistants (Lok Sahayak) kind of personnel who can respect, help people who come at the offices. There should some regular researches and rectifying processes in the qualities of public services in each public department. Research officers and their recommendations should be placed there in government offices. Peoples' Satisfaction should be the Core Value in public services. For that Sensitization of the public personnel on this core value is essential with some refresher trainings also.

Hope these suggestions can create some democratic environment which has been just for showing now days.

"Each brave step deserves another" - We can create a health, educated, transparent, responsible, prosperous, and democratic nation.

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**Chandan Datta, Kolkata**



**Vibrant Grassroot Democracy** is possible through common citizens' active participation in the entire process. Large number of citizens cast their votes in the election of rural bodies. For example, in West Bengal, over 95% citizen cast their votes to elect their representatives. However, participation in Gram Sabha's, Ward Sabha's is very low. Often Elected Members do not sit together due to various differences. Therefore, "**Campaign for citizens' involvement**". (Involvement means participation, commitment and pride) is an important approach to address this challenge. Children and students will teach illiterate elders, youth will involve in preparation of Gram Sabhas, Ward Sabhas, and assist Panchayat bodies in their work. Elderly and Educated citizens will guide and assist the ER's and local government officials to take appropriate decisions and implement the decisions. It was not a balanced approach to involve citizens just in 'Social Audit' without their involvement in assisting, supporting, guiding the ER's and grassroot level officials.

For effective decentralized planning at the local level the approach will be all the related line departments need to work together to plan and implement the plan. Consolidation of information, developing a document and follow-up the plan are the focus area. All the departments follow the 'Common framework' in a coordinated way. Here also large scale campaign is necessary like Kerala Planning Board did in the late 1990's and later.

**The Challenge of improving the quality of public services** must be addressed through direct private involvement with strong accountability by the providers. The administration should be responsive to the needs of poor and marginalized group and ensure quality (need specific, time bound and follow-up) services to the poor.

**The challenge of democratizing information** will be addressed through a coordinated approach of concerned departments. Government will share relevant information like plans of elected bodies, allocation of resources, expenditure, schemes, work in progress, work completed etc. through internet and make its easy availability among the common citizens. Necessary infrastructure and access facilities need to develop with in a time frame.

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**Kris Dev, Life Line to Citizen, Chennai**

I agree with [Subhash](#). We need a transparent, decentralized democracy where the citizens are the stakeholders and administrators of every welfare scheme of the community at the village level.

Why not a transparency law similar to "The False Claims Act (31 U.S.C. § 3729–3733, also called the "Lincoln Law") - an American federal law that allows people who are not affiliated with the government to file actions against federal contractors they accuse of committing claims fraud against the government. The act of filing such actions is informally called "whistleblowing." Persons filing under the Act stand to receive a portion (usually about 15–25 percent) of any recovered damages. The Act provides a legal tool to counteract fraudulent billings turned in to the federal government. Claims under the law have been filed by persons with insider knowledge of false claims that have typically involved health care, military, or other government spending programs. The government has recovered nearly \$22 billion under the False Claims Act between 1987 (after the significant 1986 amendments) and 2008". Why not follow a similar Law in India?

See a Public TV Debate on "Fight Against Corruption" at <http://tinyurl.com/27zt2o9>

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**Harsh Singh, NOIDA**

Shri Maira and Dr. Sen's query focuses on governance and social justice aspects. But in real life, these are inextricably linked to livelihood priorities-infact, livelihood as a concept includes the former two. Arising out of this intersection let me make two points on decentralization.

*First*, is a set of conclusions from a recent small study 'Creating Vibrant Public-Private-Panchayat Partnership (PPPP) for Inclusive Growth through Inclusive Governance' prepared for the National Platform for Promoting Decentralisation. The main conclusions are:

- In most states, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) remain weak partly on account of the narrow role that they perceive for themselves-that of resolving local disputes and implementing small works sanctioned by the higher tiers of the government. This perception persists despite the growing base of PRIs in the rural landscape captured by a 2008 UNDP-supported NCAER study in sixteen poorest districts. About 77% of the respondents reported the need for services from Panchayats. Further, 46% of the respondents reported reliance on Panchayats to secure services under government programmes. The corresponding score in favour of government officials was only 27%.
- Particularly, lack of a leadership role by PRIs in agriculture has affected their own role in the rural economy as well as the pace of agricultural growth. This imbalance needs to be corrected.
- Deficiencies in the public extension services in agriculture are well known and have been reported by independent studies as well as public documents (including the working group reports of the Planning Commission). Yet most of the solutions advanced stop short at approaches 'involving' PRIs, while the attitude towards the business sector continues to be negative despite the fact that some of these agencies have built-up impressive capacity in input supply and extension services.
- The solution lies in a 'rural service enterprise model' based on public-private-panchayat partnership (PPPP). This model envisages a mainframe planning and monitoring role for PRIs.
- To make this model work, public policy support needs to move away from subsidizing individual PPP/PPPP-type projects to addressing institutional bottlenecks responsible for the enormously high transaction costs, particularly in backward regions. Similarly, with regard to the business sector, the report recommends the need for a transparent and accountable framework to replace the voluntary corporate social responsibility type approach.

(For more details, see <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/article412609.ece> and [http://www.academicfoundation.com/n\\_detail/615.asp](http://www.academicfoundation.com/n_detail/615.asp) )

*Second*, is the need for a decentralised governance model that fosters a bridge between 'rural' and 'urban' (within a district), and promotes a network of vibrant 'rurban' habitats (*Novodaya Grams*) with quality human development services. These habitats will create a new class of assets which the *aam aadmi* could own as a first step towards equitable participation in India's growth story. I have attempted a small article that defines this 'asset-based' approach to development (as against the public services approach which continues to remain elusive). I am enclosing this article, 'From Trickle Down to Triple Bottom Line of the Aam Aadmi' as this appears to be a good opportunity for its' e-publication! (Please see <ftp://ftp.solutionexchange.net.in/public/decn/cr/res26111009.pdf> ; Size: 21 KB)

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### **Trinadha Rao, Laya, Rajahmundry**

My comments are on Building Vibrant Grassroots Democracy:

The case in hand is tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh. Undermining the Panchayati Raj structures under PESA, several parallel structures have been created for execution of Department plans. These functional committees such as Village Tribal development authority, Vanasamrakhana samithis etc. are accountable only to the departments instead of the members of Gram Sabha.

There is no democratic and legal space to share the concerns of the people in decision making process. It would be wonderful if these functional committees be made accountable to the Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat and if these committees take the consent prior to implementation of the socio economic programmes. Besides these convergence efforts, it is also essential to float vigilance committees with potential tribal youth to assist the members of Gram Sabha in articulation of their issues during the meetings. These committees can act as a platform for the public concerns. These efforts will help for effective, vibrant and democratic participation of the people in local governance.

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**Avanish Kumar, Management Development Institute, Gurgaon**

Thank you for inviting suggestions on some of the fundamental challenges leading to social and spatial inequity. My suggestions in this regard are as follows:

1. How to build Vibrant Grassroots Democracy which includes making decentralized governance work and capacity building for decentralized planning

There are two parts, to build vibrant grassroots democracy I think one needs to create platform for vibration of ideas, heart and hands. In current context, Gram Sabha hypothesis is that community members will come to plan. It is important to understand why members' do not wish to attend Gram Sabha. There are primarily three inter-related factors- (a) Individual loss of one day wage/work is considered more critical than participating in a meeting, (b) Decision makers in the meetings are few, while others voices are either unheard or ignored, and (c) Irrespective of micro-plan, individual benefits are driven by centrally planned vertical programmes, such as MGNREGA, NRHM, and etc.

My suggestions would be that Gram Sabha should be ideally divided and organized into thematic issues, livelihood issues, social issues and political issues and government programmes and entitlement issues. This would enable participation of different interest groups as per their needs.

On capacity building, unfortunately Panchayats have no right to select resource persons or even issues. I would suggest develop a cadre of politically ignited village leaders and build their capacity as resource persons in their area. These should preferably be women. The role of these resource people should be to create convergence of public-public partnership between all the line departments, which currently run into tangents in planning, implantation, monitoring and reporting.

2. How can we ensure Social Justice for All especially addressing the issues faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, Women, Children, Old Aged and Disabled. How decentralized governance could be organized and capacitated to achieve this?

Make all entitlement processes transparent through internet. To start with one should use radio to generate demand as viable medium. A village radio will be much cheaper and viable model than all IEC strategy.

3. Improving the Quality of Public services has been a challenge for years and how this could be achieved, especially through decentralized governance

Involve community based organizations, such as SHGs for monitoring and reporting. Secondly make the Panchayat committees more accountable. Link the committees to the respective government departments-like health committee to ASHA/ANM. Though it is envisaged in some programmes, they do not provide any incentives for the performers or sanctions for non-performers for their inputs.

4. What are the approaches to be taken to democratizing information so as to reach the masses through information and using media for development.

I think radio and internet are viable media, but government should try to link village traditional platforms and systems for communicating the need and benefits of the programme. One such example is festivals, local market, and etc.

Lastly, Panchayat incentives for performance are more on public good. I think government needs to evolve parameters/benchmarks for Panchayat head and all elected members and start giving rewards. Like an award for most transparent Panchayat. Though there are some initiatives in this direction, but the field of competition (national/state) is too large to associate all Panchayats. The whole idea should be to think, how a Panchayat in a remote village can think of investment of precious time and skills in long term strategy?

I thank the Government initiative to invite ideas, I am sure if the essence of all the like minded people responding on the raised concern can be taken care of, most of the issues can be addressed.

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#### **S.K Biswas, Port Blair**

To create vibrant grassroot level democracy, the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment aims to decentralize the powers from states to village units and to empower local representative at Gram Panchayat level. But the present situation has revealed that it is not people centric power but Pradhan centric powers. Decentralization ultimately empowers the hands of Pradhan, Pramukh and President of Zilla Parishad. As the Pradhan is directly elected by local people and in the absence of regular Social Audits in Gram Sabha, the Pradhan is no more accountable to either of the forum. As a result corruption is found at grassroots level. A nexus has developed between Pradhan, Pramukh and Adhayaksha and their officials and private contractors in the field of fund utilizations. The line departments are non- cooperative to local bodies for formulating and finalizing the consolidated plan through DPC.

To overcome these challenges and to make the grassroot democracy more vibrant, the following points are needed to be addressed at highest Planning level:

- To eliminate corruption and misuse of public funds, Gram Sabha should be more active and vibrant
- To ensure transparency at every level for policy implementation and fund utilization
- Heads of all three tiers (Pradhans, Pramukh and Adhayaksha ) should be more accountable towards public forums
- Active participation of Civil Society is essential as a Watchdog at every level
- Responsibilities of officials should be fixed and they should be answerable to Gram Sabha for their work
- In the present system, members are inactive and de- moralized due to undue power to Pradhan and other officials
- Young generation should be mobilized towards Panchayat institutions and community participation

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#### **Vishwanath Azad, Binni, Amarnath Abz, Samuel Hahnemann Associates & Research Centre, Hazaribag**

As we go through thinking of our friend [Subhash Mendhapurkar](#), we 100% agree with the suggestions given by him to the Planning Commission for decentralization of the power to the community as a whole without any interference of the bureaucracy and with the control and social interference in any development work in the society. All development works are done according to the needs of the public of the area and it is possible when interference of the

bureaucracy is strictly banned and feel free from them but not from the community. They all are dedicated to the community not to the government and bureaucracy. So, the Commission must make community powerful not the bureaucracy.

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**V.R Ghorpade, SHIRDI Foundation, Bangalore**

The following points outline comprehensively the basic factors that need to be considered while preparing the 12th Five year Plan related to PRIs :

12<sup>th</sup> Plan – main issues to strengthen PRIs

- Every Gram Panchayat constituency must be made single member constituency. Today, constituencies are combined to form multiple member constituencies, thereby diluting the reservation policy at the grassroots level.

To strengthen the PRI following basic steps need to be taken:

**Proposed Recommendations:**

**1. Standardize format for Data collection and Monitoring:**

Based on the ' Samanya Mahithi ' and ' Sarva Kutumba Samikshe ' – grassroots level beneficiary oriented surveys - presently available with RDPR dept., DES (Directorate of Economics & Statistics) to come up with unified formats starting from the Gram Panchayat level.

**2. Create Data collection centers (Kiosks) in each Gram Panchayat:**

These Kiosks could be linked upward to the Taluk Panchayat, Zilla Parishad and State with NIC acting as nodal agency for providing technical support. Also create a cell (consisting of a three man team) that is made responsible and accountable for collecting, monitoring and validating the database at regular intervals at the GP level.

**3. Strengthen GP administration / capacity- building:**

- GP secretary: existing capability grossly inadequate.
- Improve delivery system.
- Efficient utilization of funds and resources.
- Understanding of PRI Act and State Human Development Report.

A separate workshop is necessary to address these crucial issues.

**4. Strengthen the DPC (District Planning Committees):**

- For imparting training to TPs and GPs.
- For preparing district level HD plan/reports.
- For preparing annual budgets for the district

The State plan and allocation of funds to PRI in the link document of the State Budget should be based on the plan prepared and approved by the DPC of ZPs; today this is not happening.

**5. Human resource at village level:**

Absenteeism of government staff at the village level is alarming – ANM staff, school- teacher, GP secretary, PHC staff. This is a major area where leakage of human resource is taking place today; and is a serious negative factor for dragging down the HDI. Any amount of basic infrastructure support along with financial resources cannot offset this drag.

**6. To set up workshops for O&M in every GP:**

Government to set up these workshops and also impart training to local persons in the following areas:

- Hand-pump repair/ water supply schemes
- Transformer winding / Electricians
- Masonry
- Carpentry
- Adult literacy

This will ensure proper maintenance of government infrastructure and will also help generate employment to support the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005.

## 7. Establish Certificate courses for GP Secretary:

Staff could undergo training courses before taking up qualifying exams to work as GP secretary. This concept could be later on extended to EO and even CEO of TP and ZP, respectively. Training period could range from six months to two years for different examination levels; and the salary grades could be based accordingly.

### Other Suggestions:

- MPs and MLAs need not be made part of the Zilla Panchayat bodies, which should constitute only of elected Zilla Panchayat members. This principle should apply to all the three tiers of PRIs.
- When it comes to fund allocation, there should be a clear demarcation of funds that could be classified as Central sector (MP grants); State sector (MLA grants); and Panchayat sector (PRI grants).
- The action plan for the above three sectors should be prepared by the respective elected representatives, keeping the total District Plan in mind.

Finally, certain steps need to be taken by the Centre and State to provide institutional support to strengthen the PRIs :

- Though the PRI is a State subject, the degree of decentralization should not be subjective and left to the discretion of successive State government to either withdraw partially or even fully (through Ordinances and Bills) steps taken by the earlier State governments towards strengthening the decentralized governance. This sends wrong and conflicting signals to the PRIs, and gives the impression that the Govt. is not so serious about decentralization.
- There should be statutory Cell at the Taluk level that constantly monitors and assesses the potential of every Gram Panchayat to raise its own resources by looking at some of the important areas, such as:
  - Agriculture and its productivity
  - Animal Husbandry
  - Horticulture
  - Commercial and Property taxes
  - Scientific exploration of available natural resources
  - Areas where 'Panchayat cess' could be levied
- The middle tier - Taluk Panchayat – should be made to function mainly as a technical body dealing exclusively with the task of capacity building in every Gram Panchayat (GP), and provide legal, financial and administrative support and consultancy to the GPs.
- **Ombudsman:** It has become necessary to constitute a Three-member ombudsman Committee consisting of the DC / ZP-CEO/ SP to look into all routine legal issues related to development, implementation of Govt. schemes, devolution and application of PRI funds etc. so that the judiciary at the taluk level (and District level), which is already over burdened, need not come in the way of speedy implementation of various schemes. The three-man Ombudsman Committee should be empowered to resolve such development related issue at the district level.
- DPCs to be made effective:
  - State's fund allocation to the Panchayats to be based on the recommendations of the DPC – Panchayat sector.
  - This allocation should be untied, and the various heads' of account to be finalized and created by the DPC.
  - State government should know what the Demand Budget of the DPC is. Accordingly, the State government should make allocations, either fully or partly, and encourage the DPC/ZPs to raise their own resources to bridge the shortfalls.
- Parallel bodies to be completely avoided. All centrally sponsored schemes should go through the DPC/ZPs. This will immediately enhance the quantum of

development funds to the PRIs and provide scope for better control over quality of work executed with greater peoples' participation. Today, the works of centrally sponsored schemes are executed by the engineering staff of the ZP without the ZP (or the DPC) having any clue of such works.

- To address this crucial subject of decentralized planning, the first and foremost basic reform that needs to be brought in immediately is the stoppage of equal distribution of any funds or grants that come to the GP amongst its elected members. This is the root cause for the lack of any effective planning process that should begin from the grassroots level.
- It is absolutely necessary to have a separate Rural Development Panchayati Raj (RDPR) cadre – similar to the IAS and State Administrative services – where the selected government employee (or a new recruit) under goes a intensive training programme spread over two years before he/she gets a confirmed posting as a GP secretary.
- Today, every State has close to 5000 to 7000 GP secretaries and every year if 5000 GP secretaries are trained in RDPR, it will make a world of a difference in terms of accountability, decentralized planning & monitoring of funds, generation of authentic data, and provide proper guidance to the elected representatives.
- Lastly, there is a need to evolve a standardized data base throughout the State for uniform data collection and generation starting from the village going up to the GP level and linking it further to TP, ZP, and finally to the State. Wikipedia software platform may be considered for such a wide spread common data base, which could even be linked to the national level where every State knows what is happening in different States of the country. This will avoid a lot of repeatability and overlapping of information being generated by different government departments, which are invariably inconsistent with each other in terms accuracy and reach.

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[Dhirendra Krishna](#), New Delhi (*response 2*)

#### **IMPROVING QUALITY OF SERVICE**

1. Public accountability og grass-root public authority to the beneficiaries: mandatory disclosure of critical finanacial and operational information to enablebeneficiariesto ascertain whether the benefits shon on paper actuallyreach him/her.
2. Empowerment of beneficiaries in decentralised planning , execution and monitoring.
3. Manadatory Social Auditby the beneficiary of all socio-economic development scheme
4. Monitored action on result of social audit.

#### **VIBRANT GRASS ROOT DEMOCRACY**

1. Education for all : implementation of SarvaShiksha Abhiyan and Right to Education in letter and spirit with community participation.
2. Adult education
3. Education program under section 26 of RTI Act
4. Education/training/ simple guidance note for elected representatives- leading to empowerment of grass root "committees" and PRI bodies.

#### **DEMOCRATISING INFORMATION**

1. IMPLEMENT SECTION 4 OF RTI ACT IN LETTER AND SPIRIT
2. Improve quality of disclosures, for the sake of mpowerment of beneficiaries
3. Implement section 26 of RTI Act and educate citizens about schames and programs of the Government for their benefit.

#### **WAY FORWARD, (FOR SOLUTION EXCHANGE)**



1. Take help of Members, with varied specialization, for drafting social audit guideline in their area of expertise.
  2. Evolve Social audit guideline for all centrally sponsored schemes.
  3. Institution for monitoring result of social audit; consultation and brain-storming to evolve recommendations.
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**J.B Rajan, Kerala Institute of Local Administration, Thrissur (response 2)**

With reference to the query by Shri.Arun and Dr.Pronab on the Approach Paper to the XIIth Five Year Plan, some of the initiatives of Kerala worthy to note. They are presented below.

Q1. How to build vibrant grassroots democracy and capacity building for decentralized planning? Kerala State has launched the decentralization with democratic mode by creating democratic platforms. The Standing Committees designed in such a way that the devolution of do not end upto the level of the Presidents, but further down to the elected representatives through the Standing Committee system. The other platforms viz. Working Groups for planning, Technical Advisory Groups for project vetting, and Institutional Management Committees (eg. Hospital Management Committee) are examples of democratic decentralization.

The capacity building strategy has made an influential role in ensuring peoples' plan campaign in Kerala. The decentralized training system, implementation of trainings through District Implementing Institutions, Help Desk to provide handholding support, and enhancing the instructional skills of the trainers through ToT have made the capacity building more effective.

Q2. How can we ensure Social Justice for all?

The provisions made under Anti-poverty Sub Plan and its methodology, implementation of SCP and TSP through LSGIs [2/3<sup>rd</sup> of SCP and 1/2 of TSP through LSGIs], mandatory minimum of 10% on Women Component Plan (WCP), and mandatory minimum of 5% for aged and children are examples for ensuring social justice for all. This may be considered by the Planning Commission to suggest as a model to follow by other states. But what is missing is concern for fisher people and social justice towards them. The Planning Commission may seriously think of providing due focus on fisheries and fisher people too. Considering the socio-economic backwardness of fisher people, special provision for Fisherpeoples' Component Plan (FCP) has to be seriously thought of by the Planning Commission.

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**Tomojeet Chakraborty, Kolkata**

Kindly find my suggestions as follows.

1. How to build Vibrant Grassroots Democracy which includes making decentralized governance work and capacity building for decentralized planning.ans:-Building a vibrant democracy is essentially kickstarting and feeding a thought revolution in the masses.It can begin by two things one is Enlightenment & consequent Empowerment through sensitisation and campaigns and two is conserving liberty of choice offered.To elaborate the second point we offer several social development schemes of which we do not offer sufficient information,thereby constraining the individuals capacity to exercise the choice.Even if suppose the individual will get the benefit we do not have the support chain to take the benefit to its perceived fruition.
2. How can we ensure Social Justice for All especially addressing the issues faced by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, Women, Children, Old Aged and Disabled. How decentralized governance could be organized and capacitated to achieve



- this?Ans.Reservation is a temporary tool and starting point may be.Decentralization needs to be inclusive in the sense the service delivery channels should be able to process request variants emanating from different type of demand groups with multifarious dimensions of the demand domain.Like the person who cannot see will have less regard for a decentralised planning process which entails writing and reading conventionally,slowly different categories will also feel alienated if we do not recognise the specialty of their demands.
3. Improving the Quality of Public services has been a challenge for years and how this could be achieved, especially through decentralized governance.Ans:-Civil Servants should be subjected to objective review and though the comments/remarks of the superiors needs to be there.But overall mechanism should be a target and score based one so that they can act without fear and favour.This will trickle down the layers.Elected representatives will also need a form of appraisal and most importantly a kind of recall democratic instrument needs to be incorporated for the Gram Panchayat members.
  4. What are the approaches to be taken to democratizing information so as to reach the masses through information and using media for development.Ans:- Using two steps this can be done:- 1.Creating vernacular videos for the masses not propagandist clippings 2. Mandating the Electronic media to broadcast such videos in appropriate time slots for mass outreach
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**Anima Sharma, New Delhi**

Few of my suggestions are as follows:

1. For building the Vibrant Grassroots Democracy the role of PRIs becomes crucial. The PRIs should be involved in the process of the planning and implementation and they should be given the independence to take decision in few regional matters. Because of their approachability they help a great deal in the identification of the local needs and can be the resource agency in several aspects.
  2. We should make committees for each group separately at the regional level and then they should be merged in the National level development cycle gradually. By giving proper training, the regional committees will be of great help in micro-level planning.
  3. By ensuring the foolproof delivery system and redressal system many existing problems in the Public Services can be addressed. Also, instead of top-down approach we should adopt need based bottom-up approach of Social Development.
  4. Opening of multiple forums acting as the platform of thought exchange would be beneficial. Ultimately these Forums should interact with each other to prevent repetition and gaps. While creating these platforms we should take into account the heterogeneous nature of Indian population in terms of economy, geography, linguistics, culture and customs etc.
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**Alka Singh, AMRITA (Agency for Multidimensional Research, Implementation, Training & Advocacy), Allahabad**

I am happy to see this query on Solution Exchange, as we know that Approach Paper to the 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan is currently under way. Seriously, it is a positive and sincere approach of the Planning Commission of India that has in an internal exercise identified 12 key challenges.

Actually, gender imbalance is a serious discourse for impartial development. This a prime need of our country as well as women also. Theoretically, women are also equal citizens but after 62 years of our democracy women, especially rural women are not enjoying equal citizenship (at social, economic and political level) because of numerous reasons.

We are working with women on Panchayati Raj issues from last several years. It is our experience that after 15 years of Panchayati Raj system our women leaders are still facing problems at various levels. Theoretically, after 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment of the Constitution, women of India got clear political power with 30% (In Bihar it is 50%) reservation. It was a great victory but since 1993 to till now, they are not only weak but also helpless. It is known that majority of our women leaders are

- less informed
- less trained
- illiterate
- have no exposure
- most of them do not know how to deal the social issues

It is noticeable, after 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment, families are changing their traditions, supporting women to be a Panchayat body member. It is however not natural. It is not because of the development of women or to strengthen our democracy, they only are seeking power, money and political lure and fabulous life. However, they are not in the support of their development. The major hurdle they face is mostly they are illiterate, facing family problems, and many social barriers. Eventually, they are still dependent, powerless and ineffective. In few pockets, NGOs and CBOs are breaking the bridge but over situation is still the same. To address this problem at large level it is necessary to a lot a separate budget for:

- At least 4 month training
- For resource center to get information
- Re-orientation programme after a year
- For exposure visit

Through this may be we can develop our decentralized democratic process in a vibrant mode because our women leaders are now the essential part of our PRI system.

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**[Tina Mathur](#), UNDP, New Delhi**

I would like to give some suggestions on the challenge of *improving the quality of public services*.

The first step towards improving the quality of public services would be to set 'standards' and develop 'norms' for identified services. It would be these norms against which the quality of services would be measured. A performance measurement system would also need to be institutionalized as would the monitoring and evaluation systems. It is important that the services are delivered according to the needs of the citizens and for them to evaluate the quality of services delivered. Accountability of the service provider is thus an important component where quality is concerned, Social Audit is one way of ensuring this.

When it comes to specific measures of improving the quality of service delivery, the following may be considered:

***Process simplification:***

- Simplification of rules and procedures in departments and institutions having direct public interface. Ensuring rules and procedures are easily comprehended by the citizens and make delivery of services quicker.
- Convergence between various services which are similar in nature or where interlinkages are obvious.
- Using IT in governance. This is particularly useful in District administration at the Collectorate and at the level of Local Self Government Institutions. Single-window service delivery systems and online record-keeping in addition to handling grievances

through the use of IT are some examples of e-governance which have been tried and tested with varying degrees of success in various Indian States.

***Capacity Building:***

This is important in the context of the changing roles and responsibilities of government functionaries and especially in the context of decentralization. This is a critical area for focus if services are to be citizen-centric and according to norms. It is particularly applicable to the Panchayati Raj Institutions which require strengthening in order to efficiently deliver all the services that they have been vested with. Issues of effective financial delegation, clear roles and responsibilities and training in governance systems remain crucial in this area.

***Infrastructure:***

Many of the frontline service delivery institutions lack adequate infrastructure for effective citizen-centric service delivery. Basic infrastructure, adequate space, provision of computers and other items crucial to service delivery must be in place to improve the quality of delivery.

***Human Resources:***

While it is a widespread belief that government institutions are overstaffed and downsizing is the order of the day, a study of the frontline service delivery institutions is necessary in order to assess the situation at the ground level. In many instances government departments are overstaffed at the level of the line departments while being woefully understaffed at the frontline level. Redeployment and 'rightsizing' would assist in improving service delivery.

I hope these reflections are useful.

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**P.P. Balan, Centre for Research in Rural & Industrial Development (CRRID), Chandigarh**

The relevance of democratization of information in the context of decentralization where linking the governance system and development process with the people is an essential component, has gained much significance. It is necessary to have a new media agenda that strengthens its developmental role for a decentralized and participatory mode of communication flow. This underlines the need for a decentralized system of information collection, consolidation and dissemination. There must be proper local self government institutions (LSGI) strategies to engage the media on its potentialities and the ways to engage them. Some of the activities that can be undertaken are as follows:

- Training programmes for media persons at various levels and streams with specific modules.
- At the state level, it is necessary to set up a LSGIs News Network with trained rural reporters, so that the stories can be fed to other news agencies and channels.
- A development archive at state level can compile the data and information from the local bodies. This will be a treasure house of information for the media as well the academicians.
- A local body portal can be an exclusive communication medium, which will archive the entire spectrum of activities of all the LSGIs in the states.
- Like the EDUSAT, in collaboration with ISRO and with their technical expertise and financial assistance, a LSGI SAT can be set up.
- There can be platforms at Panchayat, district and state levels for developmental dialogues through which people interact with the planners, bureaucrats, political leaders etc on a common platform.

- At the district level, the stress can be on community radio so that very specific information will be passed on to the general public.
- A large network of rural reporters and citizen journalists are to be developed at the local level. Trained rural reporters will be responsible for collecting information, development stories etc and disseminating them through various channels like community radio, local cable network, Panchayat newspapers, VKCs, etc.
- At the local body level, there can be posters, banners, notice boards etc to keep on reminding the public about activities.
- SMS-based communication can be made use of for information on Gram Sabhas or such important events. At the panchayat level, Village Knowledge Centres can be operated, preferably in the local reading rooms where there will be convergence of television, telephone, internet, community radio, local news gathering unit, etc.
- Constituting a centre for development communication and media for LSGIs at the state training institute level can be a knowledge dissemination centre at the apex. The centre will also train local level functionaries on various aspects of media and the approaches for engaging media in their day-to-day activities.

A network of PRIs, development departments, media organizations, research and educational institutions, NGOs can also be constituted.

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### **Bishal Rai, SIRD, Sikkim**

Sikkim had a well defined system of local governance even before it became a part of India in 1975. However, Panchayati Raj in its present form came into force in letter and spirit of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act only since July, 2003 with the formal devolution of funds, functions and functionaries to the PRIs.

We have come a long way since then and the PRIs are relatively empowered in our state. However, there are still areas of concern which needs urgent attention. One of the key areas which require intervention is the lack of coordination between Gram and Zilla Panchayats (The 2 tiers of Panchayati Raj in the state). This, in spite of the fact that the Sikkim Panchayat Act has a provision to address this important issue (20% of all Gram Panchayat Presidents of a district are members of Zilla Panchayat of the concerned district).

A number of workshops have been conducted earlier to sensitize the concerned stakeholders and try to bridge the gaps, perceived and real. Some of the resolutions and suggestions compiled on the basis of these workshops are listed below:

1. The concerned Zilla Panchayat Member should be invited to all meetings of the Gram Panchayat of all the Gram Panchayat Units under his territorial constituency.
2. The Zilla Panchayat Member should compulsorily attend each of the Gram Sabhas under his jurisdiction and the minutes of these Gram Sabhas should also be forwarded to the concerned Zilla Panchayat.
3. A proper seating place/room/cubicle should be allotted to the Zilla Panchayat Member in each of the Gram Prasashan Kendras (Office of the Gram Panchayat) in her/his constituency.
4. The minutes of each of the meetings of the Zilla Panchayat should be provided to all the Gram Panchayat Units of the District.

5. The President of the concerned Gram Panchayat should be asked to issue "Completion Certificate" of all the works executed by the Zilla Panchayat in her/his Panchayat before payment is made.

6. The Zilla Panchayat Member/President of Gram Panchayat to countersign/ approve beneficiary list of all schemes implemented through the Gram Panchayat/Zilla Panchayat respectively.

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*Many thanks to all who contributed to this query!*

*If you have further information to share on this topic, please send it to Solution Exchange for the Decentralization Community in India at [se-decn@solutionexchange-un.net.in](mailto:se-decn@solutionexchange-un.net.in) with the subject heading "Re: [se-decn] Query: Inputs for the Approach Paper to the 12th Five Year Plan - Examples; Advice. Additional Reply."*

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