
UNIT 21 CAPACITY BUILDING OF GRASSROOTS FUNCTIONARIES

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21.0 LEARNING OUTCOME

After studying this unit, you should be able to,

- understand the significance of capacity building at the local level;
- discuss the requirements in capacity building of all ‘actors’ involved in local self-governance, that is, bureaucracy, civil society and the politicians; and
- highlight the significance of e-governance in this context.

21.1 INTRODUCTION

The 73rd and 74th amendments have introduced local self-governance with the purpose of introducing grass roots democracy in the country. It had been a long cherished dream that is now in the process of being realised. The amendments introduce new institutions at the local level. However the ‘capacity’ at which these institutions at the local level perform would depend on the resources, the infrastructure and the technical expertise available with the personnel in these institutions, that is the elected functionaries, the local bureaucracy, and especially the subject matter specialists, in newly introduced institutions such as the State Finance Commission and the District Planning Committee; besides the community, which is slated to be an important contributor to development in the future. But, even at the initial stage of the reform effort, there are disconcerting voices being heard about these bodies being burdened with generalists who would not make them efficacious bodies, rather turn into them into ornamentations that would not serve any real purpose in the countryside. Much lament has already been heard about lackadaisical plan effort at local levels and also problems with implementation of policies. While shortfalls in planning are largely explained by lack of required data and expertise to handle that data,

and broad failure of the plan approach based on the ‘trickle down effect’; incapacity of local administration to translate policy statements into practicable action plans and have a vision for the future; implementation bottlenecks are due to the disquieting space for ‘discretion’, with local public officials which means ordinary citizens have to pay corrupt officials even for their regular administrative duties; which is, ‘rent’ or unearned income in terms of the public choice theory, derived by virtue of ‘unaccounted’ positional authority. That clearly indicates the need to establish accountability mechanisms that are oriented also, towards ‘outcomes’ not strict construction of the procedure itself. Development Administration by its very nature is “end oriented”. Hence, provisions are needed to encourage initiative, which is direly needed for innovative policy to succeed. Hence, much needs to be done by way of reform effort concentrated at the development bureaucracy at the local level. Needless to assert, political will to affect the same at the state level is crucial for desired changes in local governance since the stimulus for desired change would emanate from the state legislature.

In this Unit, we shall explore the many facets of local administration and what adaptations are needed, where, for the intent/ purpose of the recent constitutional amendments to be realised.

21.2 INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

Recent amendments have introduced two new institutions, the District Planning Committee and the State Finance Commission in local governance. The composition of the State Finance Commission and the qualifications requisite for appointment, have been left to the discretion of respective state governments. Position in this regard, as a result, differs from state to state. As brought out by Bajpai and Verma (1995). In case of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Punjab, no details with regard to composition and qualifications have been provided in the respective acts. Certain larger states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have smaller Finance Commissions consisting of only 3 members each. As regards qualifications prescribed for the Chairman of the Commission the states of Assam, Bihar, Haryana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and U.P. have not provided any details in their acts in this regard. In case of Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat, the qualification prescribed, is a broad, ‘experience in public affairs.’

The question of qualifications of members should be carefully attended since the state finance commissions, as per the constitutional stipulation would be in charge of devolution of both plan and non-plan funds, unlike the central finance commission, which has lost, plan fund allocation to the planning commission. Since the state planning commissions are not that powerful, the finance commission would need all the expertise at its command to do justice to its role as the sole body in charge of plan and non-plan funds allocation to local government bodies. The terms of reference of the state finance commissions are also likely to be broader since there is no constitutional stipulation limiting their terms of reference to any specified taxes or duties. The specific terms of reference in a particular state would be dictated by its particular needs in the light of the functions laid down in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.

As regards the District Planning Committee, most states have not included enough information in their acts to give effect to the provision for a District Planning Committee, which has been made in the 74th constitutional amendment. Only 6 states, (Assam, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu) have provided some information

in their acts. The pattern is more or less the same. Directly elected members, viz. MLAs, MLCs, MPs, Chairperson of the Zilla Parishad, Mayor or Chairman of the Municipal Corporation /Board having jurisdiction over the Headquarter of the district have been included in the District Planning Committee. No State has mentioned the manner in which the elected members should be chosen. No State has a prepared a specific list of the functions assigned to the District Planning Committee.

These incongruities are glaring, in view of the significance of District Planning in the scheme of wider developmental planning for the district. The District Planning Committee was envisaged to bring about the much-needed integration between urban and rural planning with emphasis on small and medium towns as providers of higher order services to rural areas, like, marketing facilities, banking facilities, repair workshops etc. The Hanumantha Rao Working Group first articulated the idea which has since been pursued and finally given effect in the 74th constitutional amendment. It was emphasised that district plans should be envisaged, not just as rural plans but as spatial plans taking cognizance of linkages between rural development and urban development regarding areas closely aligned to the rural areas and to the development of these areas. It was recommended that urban areas with less than 10, 000 population should be treated as rural areas for purposes of district development planning (Ibid).

21.3 CAPACITY BUILDING OF ELECTED FUNCTIONARIES

Frequent dissolutions, suspensions and super sessions of local bodies have thwarted development of administrative capability among elected functionaries. Hence, political will at the state level to help develop local bodies as institutions of self governance is critical to develop experience of public affairs at the local level. The 73rd amendment has attended to the problem of dissolution, though only partly. Panchayats cannot be kept in a stage of suspension of dissolution for long periods, as it is mandatory now, on the part of the state government to conduct elections within six months of the dissolution. However, on what bases, a panchayat can be dissolved or suspended, and by whom, has not been clearly stipulated. Such matters have been left to the discretion of the state governments. As a result the position varies widely across states. For example, as regards village panchayats, in Bihar, the *zilla parishad or the government*, in Karnataka or Maharashtra, the *Commissioner*; in Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, *the prescribed authority or the government* and in the rest of the states, *the government* has the powers of dissolution of the village panchayats. In case of panchayats at the intermediate and district levels, in Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, *the prescribed authority or the government*, and in the rest of the states, *the government or any other person or officer authorised or empowered by the government* have got the powers of dissolution of the Panchayats at the intermediate and district levels. For the interregnum between the dissolution and fresh elections, work is entrusted to an ad-hoc board or a commission, or person or group of persons as per the practice in different states. The state government carries out periodic inspections during the period concerning it or on any matter in respect of which the sanction, approval, consent or order of the state government is required under the law and to determine personal liability of public officials in case of any loss or waste of public property caused due to misconduct or gross negligence of duties.

Most committees and working groups setup on local government agreed on the need for

adequate safeguards to prevent misuse of power on the part of the state governments. It was endorsed by each working group that proposal for dissolution of a panchayat should be discussed at length by the zilla parishad and the extreme step taken only if the resolution calling for the same is passed by the apex governing body. In the same vein, the legislative assembly should discuss and pass the resolution relating to dissolution of intermediate and district panchayats. Due inquiries should be conducted, by the District Magistrate in case of proposed dissolution of the gram panchayat, and, by the Commissioner of the Division in case of intermediate or district panchayats. However, the provisions of the new measure suggest that the issue has not been dealt with in desired seriousness (Ibid).

Besides dissolution, the question of membership of the newly formed local institutions for democratic self-governance is pertinent to understand the 'sociological dynamics' of these institutions. Political decentralisation may not be wholly effective, if the underlying social order remains, as is famously referred 'oligarchic' and 'oligopolistic.' Hence, provision of reservation of seats for women and the socially marginalised caste groups has been made in the 73rd amendment. Though the issue of caste- based reservations could be debated for veracity, one would agree to the fact that benefits anyhow are reaching the hitherto 'untouched' sections of society. Results are encouraging in that the participation of women and the ordinary poor farmer, though still outwitted by the powerful, are encouraging signs. In such a scenario, rule of law is the most important requirement. For the purpose, police administration needs attention. Good beginning has been made with the experiment of panchayat *thanas* to provide decentralised services at the local level. However it is the 'working' that needs urgent attention to break the order of privilege that is prevalent in the countryside. Decentralised interface between the people and the law and order machinery is also being attempted through community policing initiatives. Case in point is the Friends of Police Programme in Tamil Nadu, which enlists members of the community as partners in prevention and detection of crime. Such involvement of the local community in direct policing ensures accountability of local administration to the general people, and builds confidence among community members, which is the most important outcome of the exercise. A notable example in this respect, as per Doel Mukherjee is the Parivar Paramarsh Kendra under the aegis of the police in Madhya Pradesh, which resolves family conflicts amicably by paying attention to the root cause and nipping potential trouble in the bud (Mukherjee, 2005). Other community policing initiatives in Madhya Pradesh are, Gram Raksha Samitis, Nagar Raksha Samitis, Childline, medical Relief to injured, de-addiction camps etc.

Another reason why police administration needs attention is that *rule of law* is absolutely vital for a liberal economy, whose another tenet is, *freedom of contract*. Mafia activities and other sources of corruption need to be checked to allow fair competition between bidders for contracts, especially as the private sector would now be involved in public services provision, in partnership with the government (Tenth Plan).

21.4 CAPACITY BUILDING OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

Enhanced capacity of the administration has to match political decentralisation initiatives in order to get the desired results. As noted in the Tenth Plan (2002-07), the degree of democratisation achieved over the years in the political front has not been matched by progress on the economic front. " There are still too many controls and restrictions on individual initiatives, and many of our developmental institutions continue to exhibit

paternalistic behaviour which today has become anachronistic...". While the state would function as a catalyst and a promoter in many areas where the private corporate sector would participate, its role would actually increase in certain other areas, such as infrastructure provision, where private participation is negligible, such as construction, of roads, bridges, rural electrification, housing for the poor etc. Procedural delays affect performance in this regard and most funds have to be submitted at the end of the budget year. Procedural reform such as proposed single window clearance of tenders etc. in the tenth plan could go a long way in ameliorating this situation.

Also as rightly noted in the tenth plan (2002-07) the quality of agricultural research has fallen while the extension services have virtually collapsed. Agricultural research and development has to be strengthened while the extension services need to be revamped. Outlay for education is the lowest along with health. Most unspent funds at the end of the year come from these two sectors. More investment is needed in human resource development since human capital is the chief driver of the economy. India has lagged behind in this respect, as compared to other developing countries like China and South East Asian Nations (Sen, 1990).

There is too much unionism among municipal staff. They have succeeded, as in Mumbai, in extracting sizeable pay increases on the basis of their organisational strength. The question of labour law reform has lingered on for some time without much effect, since it faces tough opposition from the communist party members and others devoted to the socialist ideology. Labour law reform would boost investment and improve the employment situation considerably, since firms would be encouraged to do business and would not be bound by overly protective labour laws.

System has to be refurbished on both the input and the output sides. Input has been referred above; the output side implies the outcome of the efforts put in by the farmers in money terms. Post harvest technologies and market infrastructure demand re-look at archaic rules governing agricultural trade.

Organisational changes in local administration are also underway, though would take time to fructify. The issue areas are training of personnel in various specialized tasks in rural development, and rationalisation of the administrative structure. The District Collector is presently overburdened with the twin responsibilities of regulatory administration and development administration. There is a trend visible towards specialisation, though. His role in administration of law and order has been reduced, by transferring of administrative duties such as writing ACRs of the SP, over to the range DIG. As regards development, democratic institutions are set to share responsibilities increasingly in this regard along with the bureaucracy in the future. Situation up till now in this respect has been more conflicting than collaborative in that the bureaucracy has been reluctant to engage democratic self-governing institutions meaningfully in administration. To what extent the position will change in this respect, will only be known as things unfold. However it is rather desirable that the Collector relieves himself of some of the developmental responsibilities in the *local sector* since the *state sector* over the years has suffered due to insufficient attention on the part of the collector. Analysis of plan allocations over the years shows that much larger allocations are made therein, compared to the local sector. However as the Collector devotes much time attending to schemes in the local sector like construction of village roads, drinking water wells, school buildings etc., many important schemes in the state sector such as land reforms, rural industry, have suffered which has thwarted emergence of a self-generating agro industrial economy. Efficiency in Revenue

Offices has gradually deteriorated because of lack of adequate attention. In fact, frequent super session of local bodies by the district administration is also explained by this organisational shortcoming. Inspections were inadequate and superficial, which meant timely remedial could not be taken, which made super session unavoidable (Report of the Committee on Democratic Decentralization, 1961, Maharashtra). The experiment of Additional Collectors hasn't wholly succeeded. Hence, rationalisation of work at the district level is absolutely necessary to remove roadblocks in the implementation of plan schemes.

The joint Indo-American team on Agricultural Research and Education (1955) pointed out a major anomaly regarding *Staffing*, which persists till date in Indian Administration; which is (arguably), the problem of Generalists vs Specialists. It recommended that top positions in agricultural departments and in agricultural research institutions, should be manned by technical experts and not by generalist administrators. This is in accord with the indignation, oft expressed by technical experts that rural development is a scientists' job, not so much an administrator's. In 1957, the Food Grains Inquiry Committee noted with disquiet the mismatch in delays in the progress of major irrigation projects, utilisation of irrigation potential, apart from other delays and inadequacies in seed production and irrigation programmes. This could be correlated to insufficient understanding of issues involved in rural development (ICSSR, 1975). The need for rationalisation of work is endorsed.

There are new emerging concerns for which local administration would need to be prepared. Two such concerns are disaster management and sustainable development. With the current stress on development planning at the local level, disaster management would be a focal area since that is where the first impact and the first response efforts take place, post incidence. Hence, it is imperative that local stakeholders have a significant say in development planning in this respect, and the local communities are trained in disaster response along with suitable institutional provision for the same. The tenth plan indicates the strategy towards the end. Local initiatives would be encouraged by way of:

- Creating awareness through education and training and information dissemination to empower the community to cope with disasters.
- Incorporating Non-government Organisations (NGOs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in the Disaster Management System
- Identifying the more vulnerable groups, such as women and children for special assistance.

For sustainable development, all development schemes in vulnerable areas should include a disaster mitigation analysis, top assess the feasibility of a proposed project or policy.

21.4.1 Knowledge Networking

Since information is the most important resource, speedy and efficient transmission of information across institutions to vantage decision centers in organisations and between the government and citizens is vital for efficient policy making. The information communication revolution is making that possible today. The word in practice/parlance is "digital governance". "Simply stated, *digital governance* includes both *digital government* (delivery of public service) and *digital democracy* (citizen participation in governance). A survey conducted by the American Society of Public Administration in 2003 and updated in 2005 reveals a stark 'digital divide' between developed and underdeveloped countries.

Although the average score for digital governance throughout the world is 33.11, the average score in OECD countries is higher at 44.35, while the average score in non-OECD countries is lower at only 26.50. Websites were evaluated among five e-governance categories: *security and privacy* (privacy policies and issues relating to authentication), *usability* (traditional web pages, forms and search tools), *content, services* (access to contact information, access to public documents, disability access as well as access to multi-media and time sensitive information), and measures for *citizen participation* (how provisions are being made to facilitate and encourage participation in governance). While Seoul was ranked first, closely followed by New York, Shanghai and Hongkong, Mumbai was placed 48th, Karachi at 62 and Dhaka at 73. The third evaluation is planned in 2007. This survey endorses the need and significance of research in the area of e-governance to benchmark best practices globally for incorporation and direction in less advanced nations (Holzer, Kim, 2005).

E-governance has catapulted revenues to record highs in cities, where the benefits have been procured. The objectives of e-governance initiatives in local bodies are primarily, efficiency, through the Management Information System (MIS) and accountability, and informed interest articulation on the part of people through increased information access to citizens and representative citizen action groups. Recent example is the Rajasthan State Government Initiative in this regard with the following objectives:

- Effective Revenue Collection through development of common Data Base for urban land and property records.
- Better office administration through development of Management Information System, Personnel Management Systems and Computerization of all activities of Municipal Corporations.
- Efficient accounting by incorporating Double Entry Accounting System.
- Issue of Birth & Death Certificates and Trade Licenses.
- Establishing information flow systems between zones and central offices.
- Improved Citizen Services by imparting information through web site.
- Capacity Building of Municipal Corporation personnel by training them in operating and maintaining of the proposed System.

Training of personnel in e-governance is the emphasis area currently, to enhance capacity of local administration to absorb the changes in the external sphere to requisite extent.

21.5 COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Civil Society is the hope of the new world order, especially as it operates in the political space left vacant by the state and the market for different reasons; the market, for reasons of profitability since certain sectors, especially in rural development are not viable from the profitability angle; the state, for constraints; financial or managerial. There have been reported state and market failures in service provision, in that neither is a perfect instrument for distribution of all kinds of goods: public and private. While the private sector is efficient with regard to distribution of private goods, as beneficiaries can be identified and charged differentially for services as per benefits procured; benefits from public goods are not easily subtracted in that respect; as for example, we all benefit from

security equally, hence cannot be charged differentially, which makes it difficult for the market to provide these services. Hence, while the private sector does not venture into non-profitable sectors and the government is constrained by lack of funds, staff and/or managerial capacity, desired outcomes in infrastructure and human resource development remain elusive. The civil society, typified by the non-government organisations or the voluntary sector, steps in, in a constructive way, in this political space, working in tandem with the state and the private corporate sector to make up for deficiencies in this regard. As rightly articulated in the tenth plan document, decentralisation cannot stop at the level of PRIs and ULBs. The potential of civil society organisations such as water users' associations and health and education committees should be tapped since these could contribute to improving service delivery vastly. To that end, revitalisation of farmer cooperatives and encouragement to the voluntary sector by way of more active and articulate association with the people on the one hand and the state on the other, as envisaged in the tenth plan, would strengthen civil society in the desired way. The Food Grains Policy Committee, which gave the first official assessment of the Grow More Food Campaign (1943-44 to 50-51), emphasised the importance of *village panchayats* and *cooperative societies* in securing the desired increase in agricultural productivity. Significantly, this was also the guiding principle of the community development programme, which failed primarily for shortfall in this regard; people's participation could not be evoked in requisite measure (ICSSR, 1975).

Peoples' participation in administration is equally necessary. However, studies on participation exhibit bias in favour of the privileged sections since they have the 'means' to participate. Time is also a limiting factor since the poor are mostly engaged in livelihood activities and have hardly the time to participate. Social subjugation also inhibits effective articulation on their behalf. Participation therefore has to be elicited, for which the administration would have to create 'enabling environment' where the activity creates benefit and sustains interest on the part of the poor by offering tangible benefits in that participation would have to be secured in a way that it generates alternative employment avenues for the people and does not put on them the burden of cost in any form, such as transaction costs or transportation costs. Example in this respect is the Joint Forest Management Scheme (JFM), which is fairly successful in this respect. It generates extra income and an alternative employment source for poor farmers when the crops are not good, through activities such as plantations in forests in return for wages, which makes participation a fruitful exercise, both for the cause and the people involved (World Bank, 2003). In JFM, the state (state forest department) and local forest protection committees (FPCs) share rights and responsibilities pertaining to forest use and management. Its stated objectives are: (1) empowerment of poor and marginalised forest dependent tribal and other vulnerable and weaker sections of the rural society by providing them opportunities to participate in the decision making processes of forest use and management and gain benefits from it, and (2) regeneration and improvement of vast areas of degraded forests to serve the twin goals of environment protection and better forest produce for the poor. Under the JFM agreements, local users hold important decision-making powers that empower them to formulate and enforce important rules that most suits their interests. There have been little empirical studies however, regarding the nature of participation, that is, whether skewed towards the rich and the powerful, and to what extent local communities, are actually finding 'voice'. Besides encouraging and eliciting participation is an issue. When there is work, rich and poor farmers for reasons of their own, would not participate. However the attraction of added benefits, such as wages in return for services

and improved off farm activities such as animal husbandry due to forest protection, better forest produce etc. would make people attend meetings. Complementarily, community development projects are also taken up, such as construction of roads and dams for irrigation, provision of drinking water, health services and electricity, which also provide incentive for participation. Several other initiatives are also taken to improve the economic conditions of people such as distributing animals, sewing machines, etc.

However, the World Bank in its assessment study pointed out certain lacunae. Much money was spent without prioritising community needs. Lack of congruence between the attitude of the local forest department bureaucracy and the objectives of community empowerment, central to the programme have also been brought to light, which created implementation hurdles. Community needs could not be prioritised because of lack of sufficient articulation in this respect on the part of the people themselves, majority of who remain poor and socially marginalised. Kumar and Kant (2005) therefore recommend drastic changes in the organisational set-up at the field level in consonance with the objectives of the programme to attain desired results. There is therefore need for attitudinal change in the bureaucracy in keeping with the changing paradigm of Indian administration, which is exhibiting a marked shift towards a neo-liberal economy from a predominantly state controlled. Emphasis is on public-private partnership in governance and closer association of civil society with administration, which demands change in administrative culture (Beher, 2005).

21.6 CONCLUSION

Awareness of rights on the part of people is crucial to 'create' desired environment of change. Democracy presently, is working under presently among too many constraints. Besides financial and other organisational constraints, lack of understanding among people, especially the poor, constricts democracy since it makes them vulnerable to demagoguery, which distorts public opinion. Since public policy is essentially a 'vehicle' of/for public opinion, policies get distorted, in that real concerns are not put through and rhetoric reigns, which brings into question the credibility of democracy itself as an institution. Hence, the process of interest articulation, particularly, information transfer has to be paid attention to, to check/revert the current state of deliberate 'misinformation' on the part of vested interests, many in the political elite, to create conducive environment for public opinion formation. Besides misinformation, lack of information, is another problem to be tackled. That would call for measures like education with accent on information technology, e-governance particularly, and political space for the civil society to have effective say in governance related matters. Civil society is crucial to break the "monocentric" nature of governance, sine options for alternate ways of "doing things" are not open. The private sector and peoples' cooperatives, which need revitalization, presently have a vital role to play in rural development in the future- the Private, particularly in the field of marketing and insurance of agricultural produce. Introduction of new technology is also the combined responsibility of the civil society, including the private corporate sector, since in the coming years the political space for the civil society would widen, acquiring global dimensions; also in developing countries like India, where future forebodings in this regard are already in evidence. That would enable people to articulate their interests more effectively and also find ways of putting them through to the policy makers, which in turn would lead to 'fair' policies, in that 'rationality' would advance at the cost of rhetoric, which is a dire necessity if democracy is to free itself of the scourge of misinformation based on demagoguery. Also, as is now an agreed fact, good policies do get implemented.

21.7 KEY CONCEPTS

- Capacity** : Capacity is the power/scope to co-opt or internalise what is offered. To elucidate, changes are futile if the system cannot absorb them. Dr. Amartya Sen advocates enhancing the capacity of the system by human resource development measures like improved access to education, health services, more secure environment *et al* for humanity to thrive. Only then can systemic changes such as liberalisation or globalisation could have the desired effect(s).
- Community Policing** : Community policing is a proactive strategy of policing as opposed to the traditional reactive, which was not much successful in combating crime. People are organised in area watch committees or neighbourhood watch committees and made to work in close liaison with the administration.
- Monocentric** : When the government is the sole provider of goods and services without any competitors or sharers, governance is termed monocentric in nature. The opposite of “monocentric” is “polycentric” where there are alternate providers of goods and services.
- Oligarchic** : Oligarchy means concentration of political power in the hands of a few. Oligarchic explains social order where a few control power and suppress the minority will.
- Oligopolistic** : Oligopoly results when a few sellers, who interact among themselves and take crucial decisions, to control the market. They dominate the market situation to the disadvantage of the average customer. Here, oligopolistic implies, a social order where the few command economic power iniquitously, at the expense of others.

21.8 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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21.9 ACTIVITIES

- 1) Discuss the significance of capacity building at the local level.
- 2) Explain the significance of e-governance in the capacity building at local level.