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## **UNIT 6 COMPONENTS OF DECENTRALISED DEVELOPMENT – II: SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICO-ADMINISTRATIVE**

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### **6.0 LEARNING OUTCOME**

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After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- define the socio-economic as also the politico-administrative components of decentralised development;
- analyse the socio-economic and politico-administrative components of decentralised development; and
- suggest measures for strengthening the socio-economic and politico-administrative components of decentralised development.

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### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Decentralisation — the transfer of political, administrative and financial powers to local government bodies — has received attention all over the world, in recent years. It has been considered as one of the most important elements in development strategy and has become a major element in the administrative organisation of governmental services as a result of enormous increase in the variety, number and complexity of functions of the modern state. It is a way of mobilizing support for national development priorities by interacting with people at the local level and taking their feedback.

Decentralisation is advocated as an important component of policies to improve governance in developing countries and is often regarded as a necessary precondition for socio-economic and political development. There are two main dimensions of decentralization viz., socio-economic and politico-administrative. These dimensions reflect, in general terms,

increasing and often sequential stages of progress in achieving the objectives of decentralization (Jain, S.P; 2003:588). As such it becomes important to study in detail these dimensions of decentralization.

Accordingly, in this Unit, we will be focusing on the second component of decentralised development, i.e., socio-economic and politico-administrative. In the first part of the unit, we will be discussing the socio-economic component in brief, as it has already been discussed in detail in Unit-5 and the second part will deal with the politico-administrative component.

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## **6.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC COMPONENT OF DECENTRALISATION**

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Decentralization cannot be successful until and unless the weaker sections participate in the decision-making process. Keeping this in mind, the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Acts, provided for reservation to the weaker sections, which has been hailed as a radical and welcome step. This constitutional guarantee has given adequate opportunity to the women, SCs/STs and OBCs to fight elections and be represented on the rural and urban bodies.

The access of weaker sections to rural and urban power structure has been ensured legally thereby enlarging the social base of the system. Prior to the constitutional guarantee, the members of the weaker sections hardly made any dent into the power structure. However, the policy of reservation in Panchayat and urban bodies has empowered them and given an opportunity to air their grievances and get them cleared through participatory decision-making process. (Chandrashekar, B.K; 2000:10). It has provided institutional means for the explicit recognition and representation of the oppressed groups – of women and weaker sections (Buch, Nirmala; 2005:346).

The working of decentralisation reveals both negative and positive trends. The negative trends were visible initially, especially where panchayats were headed by SC/ST persons and women. This was because of the fact that most of the members belonging to these groups were found to be illiterate, less articulate and especially inexperienced. In case of SCs/STs, initially only those were elected from the reserved constituency who had the patronage of the dominant sections of the society and therefore functioned like the mouth piece of those affluent sections in the formal meetings of the PRIs/ULBs (Mishra, S. and Mishra, Sweta; 2002:30).

Similarly, after getting elected, women worked under the command and guidance of the males, as proxies, signing or stamping on the dotted lines. In some cases, it was observed that women representatives belonged to the family of the male Panchayat leaders. In some others, it was observed that the males fielded their wives, daughters-in-law, daughters, nieces, etc. to fulfill their own political ambitions.

Thus, at the initial stages the politically powerful made them (women, SC/ST and OBC) contest elections for their own political gains. (Mishra, Sweta; 2002:40), thwarting the socio-economic component of decentralised development.

On the other hand, there were some positive trends too. The electoral outcome, especially in case of women, has been quite encouraging in certain cases. Women contested with great confidence not only in the reserved constituency but also in general constituencies, defeating their male rivals. Of course, such cases were not many, but they were no less

significant. In many cases, the percentage of women who got elected to the PRIs exceeded the reserved quota. Immediately after the first elections to the PRIs, 43 per cent elected positions in Karnataka, 38 per cent in Madhya Pradesh and 35 per cent in West Bengal were held by women (Mishra, Sweta; 1995:116). As a result of this encouraging development, former Chief Minister of Orissa, Shri Biju Patnaik, asked for 50 per cent reservation for women in the PRIs. In the recently concluded elections in Bihar, 50 per cent of the seats were reserved for women, which is a welcome step in the direction of improving the socio-economic status of these sections.

In case of SCs/STs and OBCs, almost the same picture is reflected from the surveys conducted so far. In some states like Karnataka, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh etc., their participation was quite effective and they were able to assert their position and powers. This happened especially in those cases, where the elected representatives were educated and experienced. Even in case of Bihar, a large number of lower backwards were elected either as Mukhias (3.9 per cent) or as members of the Zila Parishad (3.5 per cent) in the 2001 elections, even without any reservation for them.

In Tamil Nadu a number of people from SC community have been selected to various Panchayat positions. Various basic facilities, like drinking water, road connectivity, etc., have been provided to the people of this community. As a result, 90 per cent of them are leading a life of sub-human conditions. The SC community leaders encourage Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to participate in Gram Sabha meetings. One SC women president herself formed a trust to serve independently to the SC community (Palanithurai, G; 2005:366-369).

Elected members from the SCs and STs are typically assigned responsibility for minor functions in panchayats such as the social justice committees, which are legally required to be headed by a SC representative. There are instances where SC leaders have been able to make effective use of these committees to block inappropriate decisions or challenge the authority of the dominant caste. In parts of Gujarat, SC representatives have successfully empowered the social justice committees, but such actions are comparatively rare and usually predicated on sustained mobilization on economic and social issues (Robinson, Mark; 2005:23).

The conscientious participation and assertiveness of members and Sarpanchas especially women, has already become a legend. For example, in the farflung villages of the Kutch region of Gujarat, most of the village panchayats were headed by young and middle aged women, making determined efforts to overcome caste and functional division in the villages and seeking unity and cleaner administration (Quoted in Sivaramakrishnan, K.C; 2000:116). Buch's study of women in panchayats in the three states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh indicated entry of a significant number of illiterate or just literate (70.5 per cent) women from the socio-economically weaker sections (41.4 per cent from BPL income households) in these institutions. Their participation in panchayats and related activities as elected representatives is quite encouraging. For example, attendance in panchayat meetings (65.5 per cent), efforts to carry their viewpoints in these meetings (42.6 per cent), weekly time devoted to panchayat work (68.6 per cent), petitions and problems received (46.1 per cent), efforts to attend these problems (34.5 per cent) and efforts made to overcome difficulties in their work (42.1 per cent) (Buch, Nirmala; 1999).

Similarly, in Puddukottai and Thiruvallu in Tamil Nadu, women's participation in panchayats was quite good. Seventy-two per cent of them attended all meetings fairly regularly, 95

per cent participated in discussions, 63 per cent spoke in community meetings, 63 per cent put forward suggestions, and 38 per cent cast votes in meetings (Athreya, V.B. and Rajeshwari, K.S; 1998).

In case of the urban local bodies too, man women councillors are educated and are actively associated with other women based organisations. They have created a forceful platform for uttering the voice of the deprived women. For example, in Kolkata, the politically aware councillors have taken up women issues at political level. (Maitra, Shipra; 2002:19). Many studies have observed that women councillors besides taking up women's issues, have taken up issues like construction, repair and maintenance of roads, provision for drinking water, sanitation, etc. Singh's Study (Singh, Seva and Singh, Ravindra; 2002: 31-32) reveal that majority of women (59 per cent) present their views freely in the council meetings. The general category women present their views more freely (68 per cent) in comparison to the backward classes (50 per cent) and SCs (29 per cent).

In a study of Kerala, it was found that the councillors have on their own, taken up initiatives for getting the work done. They discuss all the issues with the committee, take up matter individually and contact the appropriate departments in the corporation/ municipality regularly and pressurise them to speed up the process so that the work gets done (Sivaramakrishnan, K.C; 2006:174).

From the above analysis it becomes clear that the socio-economic component of decentralised development has been achieved to a large extent through the process of empowerment and reservation of seats for women, SCs/STs and OBCs. The above examples and the other examples discussed in detail in Unit 5, make it clear that the reservation given to the women, SCs/STs and OBCs in PRIs and ULBs have helped them in becoming a part of the governance in their villages and towns/cities in relation to their local needs. It has provided men and women from SCs and STs a guaranteed level of representation and share of leadership positions.

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### **6.3 POLITICO-ADMINISTRATIVE COMPONENT OF DECENTRALISATION**

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Like the socio-economic component, the politico-administrative component of decentralised development too is important. The two components, viz., socio-economic and politico-administrative, go hand in hand. To realise the dreams of Mahatma Gandhi and to make decentralised development successful, it becomes important and necessary on the part of the State Governments to sincerely implement the politico-administrative provisions of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Acts. Prior to these Acts, in most states, due to the excessive government control and direction, the PRIs and ULBs were not effective for long. But now the scenario has changed. The Acts have placed greater responsibility on the PRIs and the ULBs for overall development of the villages and cities.

The politico-administrative component includes a number of issues vital to the process of decentralisation. These issues are discussed in the succeeding pages.

#### **Accountability**

Accountability is a key element for instilling the confidence in people about the local institutions. It is a precondition for creating trust in the minds of people so that the abuse of power and misuse of public resources is prevented. The PRIs and the ULBs can be

successful provided proper system of accountability is provided for, as the citizens expect their representatives to be responsive to their needs, wishes, and preferences. Accordingly, the PRIs and the ULBs must remain accountable for being responsive to the needs of the citizens they serve. This accountability should be on a day-to-day basis and not just once in five years when they go to seek votes (Ghosh, Buddhadeb; 2005:261).

The Kerala Panchayat Act has clearly recognized this principle. The Act allows the citizens to demand answers from the Panchayats for their actions. However, the citizens have not utilized this opportunity extensively and effectively (Ibid.).

Keeping the accountability principle in view, all the states have made provisions for the financial audit. Most of the states except Haryana, Punjab, Tripura and Uttar Pradesh, have made necessary provisions also with regard to social audit. Regarding the *modus operandi*, it is basically ensured through Gram Sabha where the Panchayati Raj members are expected to answer to the queries of the people. In the state of Kerala, the monitoring Samitis have been formed for supervising various development works and to report to gram sabha about their findings (Gupta, D.N; 2004: 48-53). In Madhya Pradesh, the panchayats have to display the details of works undertaken by them. The villagers can take the certified copy of any document by paying nominal fees and the members of the gram sabha can raise issues and ask questions from elected members during the meeting of social audit (Ibid; 124). In Rajasthan, the Majdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) organised popular movements and demanded information from the panchayats about the quantum of public fund that was available and the manner in which it was spent. By organising *jan sunwai* or public hearings, they compelled the panchayat leaders and government officials to account for the development expenditure (Ghosh, Buddhadeb; 2005:261).

The above examples clearly prove that ample provision has been made in the Amendment Acts in order to ensure accountability of the representatives to the citizens. In order to implement these provisions, all that is needed is social activism like the one in Rajasthan (MKSS). People should be vigilant and should question the decisions of PR/Council members in case there is a genuine need and also participate actively during discussions in the panchayats/councils. They could give 'a tangible quality to the abstract notion of transparency and the right to information.

### **Representation to MLAs and MPs in Local Bodies**

So far as the representation to MLAs and MPs in local bodies, especially the PRIs, is concerned, the surveys indicate that in most of the states MLAs and MPs are the members of intermediate (block) panchayats and Zila Parishads and they also have voting rights in the meetings of the concerned panchayats. States like Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa fall in this category, with the only exception that in Madhya Pradesh, they do not have voting rights in the meetings of Zila Parishad and in Himachal Pradesh they do not have voting rights in the election or removal of the Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson, at both the levels i.e. intermediate panchayat and zila parishad. States like Kerala, Maharashtra and Rajasthan do not provide representation to MLAs and MPs in the intermediate and zila panchayats, while Tamil Nadu provides representation only in zila panchayat. In Uttar Pradesh they are the members but do not have voting rights in both the tiers. Similarly, in Gujarat, only MLAs are permanent invitees in block panchayat whereas in the zila panchayats, both MLAs and MPs are permanent invitees but they do not have voting rights in both the tiers (Gupta, D.N; 2004: 48).

The provision of representation and voting right to MLAs and MPs in PRIs in the capacity of ex-officio members has been questioned on the ground that it would lead to over domination of panchayats by them. The Zila Parishad presidents have highly resented on this issue in order to maintain its sanctity. The Panchayat members feel overwhelmed and marginalized by the presence of MLAs and MPs in the panchayat meetings and hesitate to speak in the meetings.

### **Role of Bureaucracy**

The effective functioning of PRIs and ULBs depend on facilitative functional relationship in terms of coordination and cooperation between the elected and official functionaries. In other words, the administrative wing should function under deliberative wing, that is, bureaucracy should be answerable and accountable to the elected political leadership.

The functioning of the PRIs and the ULBs indicate disturbing trends. This is due to the fact that the state Acts have given ample scope for the state governments, through bureaucracy, to exercise control, supervision, powers of dissolution and of annulling resolutions. The bureaucracy, in most states are in a prime position, over the elected leadership. However, in states like Karnataka such powers are vested with higher level panchayats, (Chandrashekar, B.K; 2000:10).

In case of Andhra Pradesh, the power to exercise control over Mandal Parishads and Zila Parishads is vested with the Commissioner of Panchayati Raj. While the District Collector has the authority to: (a) suspend or cancel any resolution passed by these bodies; (b) initiate action in the event of default; (c) suspend the Chairman (ZP), the President (MP) and the Sarpanch (GP); and (d) dissolve the Zila Parishad/Mandal Parishad/Gram Panchayat and any of the Standing Committees. Besides, the Collector, as the head of the district administration, continues to coordinate the development activities in the district as no transfer of development functions and the related staff from the line departments to the Zila Parishad has taken place so far (Ibid: 28).

The Andhra Pradesh Government has introduced a major change in village administration by establishing Village Secretariats. Since January 1, 2002, a permanent executive – Panchayat Secretary – came into existence in Andhra Pradesh at the Panchayat Secretariat. This system had already been introduced in states like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala and Gujarat. The Panchayat Secretary plays vital role in discharging the various duties and responsibilities assigned to him by the district as well as state administration while implementing the policy decisions taken by the Panchayat Secretariat Legislature (Kumar, A. Vijay and Sudhakar, E; 2003:202).

However, very soon it was realized that the system of Panchayat Secretary had certain flaws. It was criticised on the ground that Panchayat Secretaries are super-imposed by the state government on the village panchayats, affecting their independent status and often encroaching on the powers enjoyed by the elected representatives of the village panchayat. Further, it was realized that during the past one year of its implementation, the villages are no longer treated as units of local self-government, instead they are made the subjects of various government departments and their officials at the district and mandal levels. Since they are not responsible to the village panchayat, they enjoy and exercise authority without any responsibility. Besides, the multiple functions assigned to them, make them direct subordinates to the revenue and mandal parishad officials. These officials are more prone to interfere in the affairs of the village administration. As a result, the village administration gets more centralized, rather than being decentralised, in the hands of the revenue and

other departmental officials, making the village democracy a puppet in the hands of the village bureaucracy ((Ibid; 204-205).

In case of Haryana, there is a provision for an Additional Deputy Commissioner as the ex-officio Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Zila Parishad. But unlike the Panchayat Samiti Executive Officer, is not under the administrative control of the President of the Zila Parishad. Besides, the Government shall also post from time to time to work under every Zila Parishad such number of other officers and officials of the Government including any officer and official appointed to such services from amongst persons employed by existing DRDA (Mishra, S.N. and Mishra Sweta; 2003: 104).

In some states like Maharashtra, Gujarat etc., the District Collector has been given no direct responsibility for achieving coordination between district administration and state administration. The role of Collector is generally restricted to certain functions like election or reporting regarding resolutions like no confidence against office bearers etc. (Chandrashekar, B.K; 2000:146). In Gujarat, the District Collector did not exercise any power over PRIs in the state except that he could suspend Sarpanch/Up-Sarpanch against whom criminal proceeding involving moral turpitude was instituted (Sharma, P.R. and Joshi, R.P; 2004:133).

In Madhya Pradesh, initially, the Collectors were made the Chief Executive Officers of the zila parishads and they were assisted by full time additional chief executive officers. Later on, independent chief executive officers primarily drawn from the IAS and the state civil services were appointed. These officers were also to function as Executive Directors of the DRDAs.

In 1996, the Madhya Pradesh Government made changes in the administrative structure and the structure of Panchayat bodies by establishing District Governments. This was done in order to make Panchayats more effective and people oriented – as also to establish an organic inter-relation between the three-tier Panchayat bodies so that there will be clear division of functions between them. Thus the Zila Panchayats became the District Government. The CEO of the higher level Panchayat will have administrative control over administrative staff of the lower level panchayats (Ibid;:132).

The establishment of District Governments in Madhya Pradesh is in tune with the decentralisation process and to make the government more responsive and democratic. The District Government has been entrusted the responsibility of all district level developmental plans and evaluation of activities and programmes, their supervision, monitoring and follow-up. The fundamental principle is to delegate and transfer such powers to the District Government, which are not within the jurisdiction of Municipalities and PRIs, so that the citizens get appropriate and complete benefit of decentralised governance (Behar, Amitabh; 2000:677-79). With the introduction of District Government, a framework has been evolved for village level government so as to empower villagers to take decisions on matters concerning them and making bureaucracy answerable to the villagers.

In case of West Bengal, the collector was made the ex-officio executive officer of the zila parishad. An officer of the rank of the Additional District Magistrate and a senior state civil service officer were appointed as additional executive officer and secretary of the Zila Parishad respectively. However, the bureaucracy of various departments involved in rural development were not placed under the control of Panchayats either at the district level or at any of the lower levels. Rather their cooperation was sought through the Standing

Committees of the Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti in which they were made members. As such, the district bureaucracy is now reconciled to the fact that it has to work with the Panchayats (Ibid; 243).

In a state like Punjab, bureaucracy has been given real powers of control and supervision of these institutions thereby establishing an officers rather than a people raj. The Block Development and Panchayat Officers or any other officer of his rank presides over the meetings to discuss no confidence motions. The Director Panchayats could remove or reinstate a sarpanch. The Director shall also determine the period of suspension of elected representatives. In several other areas pertaining to disqualifications, suspension, fine and penalty, the order of the Deputy Director or the director will be final.

The experiences from various states makes it clear that the state Acts have given sufficient grounds to the state governments, through bureaucracy to exercise control, supervision, powers of dissolution and of annulling resolutions. Such provisions result in problems like recurring confrontation figuring between the District Panchayat leadership and administrative leadership. This is mainly due to the absence of a clear cut demarcation of powers, functions, responsibilities between Panchayat functionaries, particularly between the presidents and Chief Executive Officers of the Panchayats.

### **Role of District Rural Development Agency**

The District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) had an independent existence even when the new system of decentralisation became operational. DRDA was the principal organ at the district level to oversee the implementation of different rural development programmes, more particularly the anti-poverty programmes. As a result, a dyarchical situation at the district level existed. In order to avoid this, the Central Government, in 1996, recommended the merger of DRDA with PRIs or to put DRDA under the control of PRIs. The surveys and researchers reveal that except for some states, DRDA still has an independent status.

In Andhra Pradesh, DRDA has its own programme of rural development that is separate from Zila Parishad action plan. In Kerala, DRDA was merged with District Panchayat, though Project Director is responsible for distribution of funds of District Panchayats. Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka also merged DRDA into Zila Parishad. Karnataka was the first state to merge DRDA into Zila Parishad as early as 1987 and gave more financial and functional autonomy to it. Similarly, in Uttar Pradesh, the DRDA has been transferred to Zila Parishad, though there was resistance of state level bureaucracy. Whereas in state like Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Haryana etc., the DRDA still works as separate entity.

Thus, in most of the states, there are two separate bodies for rural development programmes at the district level, though in some states, Chairman of Zila Parishad acts as ex-officio Chairman of governing council of DRDA also. In other states like Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Maharashtra, Collector himself is the Chairperson. But in all the states, executive powers rest in the District Magistrate or District Development Officer who is a bureaucrat (Sharma, P.R. and Joshi, R.P; 2004:188).

From the above analysis, it becomes clear that various state governments have taken measures for merging the DRDA with Zila Parishad in order to provide effective control of Zila Parishad over DRDA. Even if the DRDA is not merged, the Zila Parishad would continue to provide direction to DRDA, as it would be accountable to Zila Parishad. In

other words, the DRDA should work under the overall direction of Zila Parishad and the Panchayat Department.

### **The District Planning Committee**

The District Planning Committees (DPCs) have got constitutional status under 243 Z(d) by way of 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act. The DPCs are empowered to prepare a draft development plan for the entire district by integrating the plans prepared by the panchayats and the municipalities. The new dispensation will undoubtedly have a far reaching impact on the decentralised planning and will give fillip to the institution building efforts for shouldering the responsibility for plan formulation which is an important prerequisite for micro-level planning (Singh, S.K; 2005:163).

So far as the formation of DPC is concerned, the surveys reveal that in a number of states, the DPC has not been constituted, while in some states like Haryana and Orissa it is in the process of formation. The DPCs have already been formed in states like Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. There are variations in the composition and functioning of the DPCs. For example, the MLAs and MPs are either the members or special invitees of DPC in all the states except in Kerala. Whereas in states like Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, they have been given voting rights. In still some other states like West Bengal, the Chairpersons of Panchayat Samitis, MLAs and MPs can become the members of the DPC and have voting rights by the special government order. Yet another variation is visible in Tamil Nadu where one-fifth of total block chairpersons in the district are the members of DPC by rotation. In no other state, the Chairpersons of Gram Panchayats and block panchayats are members of the DPC.

Even with regard to the Chairperson of the DPC, wide variations are seen. In Madhya Pradesh, the minister-in-charge is the chairperson of the DPC and the District Collector is the secretary. In Maharashtra too, the minister-in-charge of the district is the Chairperson of the DPC and the District Collector is the member secretary. In Haryana, the Chairperson is chosen by state government from amongst nominated members. Whereas in Karnataka and Kerala, the President of Zila Parishad is the Chairperson and in Tamil Nadu, the District Collector.

So far as the powers and functions of the DPC is concerned, here also one finds variations and overlapping. Article 243 Z(2)I empowers the state legislature to assign functions to the DPC. Majority of states have not spelt out any specific functions in the respective Panchayat Acts. They have simply borrowed the provisions as it is. A few states like Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Kerala have mentioned some specific role and functions to the DPC. In Madhya Pradesh, the DPC has been made Zila Sarkar, that is, district government, and has been empowered with administrative and financial powers but not accountable to the people. The DPC has been entrusted with certain powers related to transfer and postings, approval of tenders and sanctioning of projects. Earlier these powers were exercised by the government or directorate. There are certain areas of overlap between the Zila Parishad and the DPC and the DPC has been given much more power in comparison to the Zila Parishad.

On the other hand, in Maharashtra the DPCs are to prepare development plan of the district, to consider the five-year plan and perspective plans prepared by panchayats and municipalities, and to monitor the progress of the district annual plan.

In case of West Bengal, the Gram Panchayats and blocks prepare their plans and these are then forwarded to the DPC. Simultaneously, the line departments also prepare their plans and submit them to the DPC. Thereafter, the discussions are held in sub-committees/standing committees of the Zila Parishad. Once the discussions are held and necessary changes incorporated, the draft plan is submitted to the DPC for its approval.

Kerala has gone much ahead in carrying out decentralised planning process or 'planning from below'. Its much acclaimed "people's campaign for Ninth Plan" has provided many vistas of people's planning. The campaign assures that 35-40 per cent of the Ninth Plan would consist of plans prepared by the lower level bodies. The primary objective of people's campaign for Ninth Plan is "to ensure that the Panchayat/Municipal bodies prepare and prioritise of shelf of integrated schemes in a scientific manner". Maximum participation at every stage of the planning process from proposals to implementation has been ensured.

The DPCs have started functioning in Kerala. The DPCs have already scrutinized and integrated the plans of the panchayats and municipalities in the respective district from the point of view of backward and forward linkages.

The process of democratic decentralisation and decentralised planning in Kerala has been attracting attention from all over the world. "The decentralised planning process is largest of its kind in the world", says World Bank (Chandrashekar, B.K;2000:95).

The functioning of the DPCs in various states further reveals certain shortcomings. First, though the DPC has to look into the preparation of district plan based on the local needs, yet the Chairperson of DPC is not an elected member from panchayats or municipalities in most of the states. Second, the DPC does not have adequate experts as its members in order to provide technical inputs and make analysis for reaching rational decision-making despite the fact that the planning requires specialised knowledge and skills. Third, though the DPC is formed yet the supporting wing in the form of planning unit is not adequately placed. And, finally, no planning committee or unit exists at the block or Gram Panchayat level in order to carry out local level planning and also to provide vital inputs on local needs and resources to DPC (Gupta, D.N; 2004:227).

Apart from these, in the entire scheme of decentralisation, DPC is the only constitutional body in which one fifth of the total members is nominated. Even the selection of the Chairperson has been left to the state legislature to decide. As a result, DPC can emerge as strong body outside the panchayat and municipal system (Singh, S.K; 2005:164).

The operational aspects of decentralised planning in various states shows that it has several shortcomings, such as, lack of trained personnel, a confusing plethora of schemes, rigidity and lack of monitoring of the quality of the planning process and availability of resources (Ibid:172).

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## **6.4 STEPS/MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICO-ADMINISTRATIVE COMPONENTS**

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In the previous unit i.e. Unit-5, we have already discussed in detail the socio-economic component of decentralised development as also the steps taken to strengthen it. Hence here our main concern is to provide meaningful suggestions in order to strengthen the politico-administrative component.

In order to avoid any clash or overlapping of functions of the non-officials and bureaucrats, it is required that there should be clarity with regards to the powers and functions between the two. In the absence of such clarity, there are chances of more misunderstanding and differences. The two should not only be acquainted with their powers and responsibilities, but also each other's problems, difficulties and responsibilities. Mutual understanding and respect are useful for good relations between them. They should not consider each other as competitors rather they should complement each other.

On the pattern of Gujarat and Punjab, a separate 'Panchayati Raj Service' should be established. This may solve many of the organizational, functional and personnel problems which confront the Panchayati Raj and Municipal administration. Also there is a need to follow certain principles like the 'principle of subsidiarity' as done in Kerala, transferring all the line departments functions to panchayats, and the principle as followed in Karnataka that to allocate functions to what is appropriate at a given level and not necessarily at the higher level. As a result, the overlapping of functions between the panchayats while providing for demarcation of functions and responsibilities between the non-official and official functionaries of the panchayats will be checked (Chandrashekar, B.K; 2000:12).

As planning can be a vital tool in the optimal allocation of resources and can facilitate the process of resource-matching which are very crucial in the development process, it, therefore, becomes necessary to initiate certain measures in order to strengthen the local level planning. Some of these measures are discussed below.

The DPC must have experts from various fields such as economics, HRD, technologies, agriculture, health, engineering (infrastructure) and management and their task should be to provide necessary technical inputs, to carry out the data analysis and assist in the preparation of action plan, and to monitor and provide feedback to the DPC and lower tiers.

The chairperson of the DPC should be from among the elected members of Zila Parishad or municipality.

The DPC should be given the exclusive task of planning, as planning is an elaborate exercise that requires extensive as well as intensive efforts.

The DPC should primarily guide and facilitate panchayats and municipalities in formulating their plans. It should resolve policies, priorities, programmes and strategies for the total development of the district, so as to ensure maximum and prudent utilisation and exploitation of available natural, human and other resources in the area.

The DPC may organise training programmes to impart technical skills to personnel engaged in the plan formulation at the lower level local bodies. This will enhance the capability of personnel and hence quality of planning will improve.

The DPCs should be empowered to decide upon the plans prepared for the district and it may be submitted for information to the government.

So far as accountability of Chairpersons and members of panchayats is concerned, the Central Act has provided for financial auditing. In order to be effective, it requires procedural simplification like inspection of accounts for projects or items above certain value, so that the panchayats and municipalities are not questioned for every small detail, which may prove to be counter productive.

It is further suggested that all the financial details must be displayed outside the panchayat offices and be given to all the members, so that transparency is maintained. Besides, the auditing should also be transparent i.e. at the preparatory stage itself, the objection raised by the auditors should be given to all the ward members, before the panchayats and municipalities prepare the reply. After this, the final report should be placed before finance committee of the panchayat and the gram sabha as also the municipality and ward sabha (Gupta, D.N; 2004:295-296).

So far as social audit is concerned, there is a need to have: (i) proper procedure for raising questions; (ii) recording of proceedings; (iii) compliance by the members, if required; and (iv) reporting to people about the action taken. Apart from these, there should be a mechanism for arbitration in case the action is not taken for rectification. For example, there are cases like non-availability of essential commodities or non-payment of wages, which need to be attended to by the panchayats (for which the responsibilities are given to panchayats in some states like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh). It has been observed from the field studies, that in certain cases, actions are not taken by the panchayats, despite complaints by the people. Such cases may be referred to tribunals. (Ibid.).

It is further suggested that a people's watch committee should be constituted from among of the senior citizens (non-political) at the district and block levels. It should play the role of an ombudsman and its role should be advisory in nature. It should examine the procedural shortcomings and bottlenecks in the implementation of panchayat and municipal acts.

The Rights to Information Act is a welcome step in the direction of maintaining transparency in the functioning of the local bodies. The right to information includes the rights for taking extracts and obtaining certified copies of documents of any material or information contained in a document relating to the administrative, developmental or regulatory functions of a Panchayat and Municipality and includes any document or record relating to the affairs of the Panchayat and Municipality.

With regard to the functioning of DRDA, it is suggested that DRDA should be merged with the Zila Parishad. If the merger is not done, then the DRDA should be working under the overall direction of the Zila Parishad and the Panchayat Department. In other words, the DRDA should be made accountable to the Zila Parishad. It should be further seen that the DRDAs do not become agencies to implement the programme by themselves. Rather they should oversee the implementation and other agencies. They should maintain their separate identity but function under the Chairmanship of the Chairman of the Zila Parishad. Their role is supportive for providing technical inputs to Zila Parishads and facilitating, by way of coordination with banks/line departments, for implementation by panchayats. They should also match over and ensure transparency and effective utilisation of the funds intended for anti-poverty programmes.

The functioning of the rural and urban local bodies reveal that there are lots of problem due to the presence of MLAs and MPs in the Panchayats and Municipalities as their members. It is highly objected by the elected Panchayati Raj and Municipal members. Accordingly, it is suggested that amendment should be made in the existing 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Acts thereby scrapping the provision related to the membership of MLAs and MPs in the rural and urban local bodies.

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## 6.5 CONCLUSION

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The socio-economic and politico-administrative component of decentralised development can be achieved only when the above recommendations are implemented in letter and spirit. Sincere effort should be made by the Government to see that there is no clash between the elected representatives of Panchayats and Municipalities and the MLAs and MPs on the one hand and between the bureaucrats and people's representatives on the other. In order to provide a definite direction, there is a need of bringing amendments in the Central Acts in order to bring mandatory nature in the Act.

Among other, the crucial aspects that need to be further addressed are: empowerment of people, especially women, SCs/STs and OBCs, transparency, accountability, planning unit, coordination and delivery system. And only when these are addressed by the Act in concrete terms, the components of decentralised development can be set up in a right perspective.

Decentralisation is advocated as an important component of policies to improve governance in developing countries and is often regarded as a necessary precondition for socio-economic and political development. These dimensions reflect, in general terms, increasing and often sequential stage of progress in achieving the objectives of decentralisation.

The access of weaker sections to rural and urban power structure has been ensured legally thereby enlarging the social base of the system. They have got an opportunity to air their grievances and get them cleared through participatory decision-making process.

From the politico-administrative angle, a lot has yet to be achieved viz., merger of DRDA with the Zila Parishad; effective and efficient functioning of the DPCs; provision of accountability and transparency; less interference from MPs, MLAs and bureaucrats, in the functioning of local bodies. Until and unless these provisions are implemented in right earnestness, the politico-administrative component can not be achieved.

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## 6.6 KEY CONCEPT

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- Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)** : MKSS is a registered society set up in 1990 to fight corruption related to departmentally implemented public works programmes. They supported struggles of rural workers on issues of non-payment of full minimum wages. They also raised issues like fabricated muster rolls in works implemented by gram panchayats under Jawahar Rojgar Yojana, a centrally sponsored scheme. The mode of public hearings initiated by MKSS commences with the gathering of people in a village by beat of drums and then a demand for all documents related to works undertaken with public funds. By organising *jan sunwai* or public hearings, they compel the government officials and panchayat leaders to account for the development expenditure.
- OMBUDSMAN** : An ombudsman is an official, usually (but not always) appointed by the government or by parliament, who is charged with representing the interests of the public

by investigating and addressing complaints reported by individual citizens. In some jurisdictions, the Ombudsman is referred to, at least officially, as the 'Parliamentary Commissioner' (e.g., the West Australian state Ombudsman). The term originates from the Old Norse *umbodsmor*; and has been put to use in modern times with its use in Sweden, with the Swedish Parliamentary Ombudsman instituted in 1809, to safeguard the rights of citizens by establishing a supervisory agency independent of the executive branch. The word *ombudsman* and its specific meaning has since been adopted in to English as well as other languages, and *ombudsmen* have been instituted by other governments and organisations such as the European Union.

An ombudsman need not be appointed by government; they may work for a corporation, newspaper, an NGO, or even for the general public. Such an ombudsman obviously does not carry any governmental powers or sanction abilities.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ombudsman>)

#### **SELF-HELP GROUPS**

- : Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are usually informal clubs or associations of people who choose to come together to find ways to improve their life situation. The most useful roles for a self-help group is to provide its members opportunities to save and borrow and it can act as a conduit for the banking services to reach their members. Such groups can provide guarantee system for members who borrow or they may develop village banks in their own rights. In rural areas self-help groups may be the only way for people to get financial services.

[([http:// www. ruralfinance. org/ servlet/CDSServlet?](http://www.ruralfinance.org/servlet/CDSServlet?))]

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## **6.7 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING**

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## **6.8 ACTIVITIES**

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- 1) Discuss the socio-economic and politico administrative components of decentralised development.
- 2) In your opinion what measures you suggest for strengthening the socio-economic and politico administrative components of decentralised development.