UNIT 2 DECENTRALIZATION: AN OVERVIEW

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

One cannot find adequate literature on decentralised planning in India. Although, the discussions and deliberations were on even before the days of independence and subsequently after independence in all Five Year Plans, sporadically and sparingly it was put into practice at the ground and of course there were isolated experiments. Hence, inadequate literature on this area. After passing of the 73rd and the 74th Amendments to the constitution of India, decentralised planning gained much currency among the policy makers and administrators. Kerala emerged as model for decentralised planning and the experiences of Kerala were given in a separate unit. In the previous unit we have seen the need for decentralised planning contextually and the importance of peoples participation in the planning process at the grassroots and the approaches of decentralized planning. In this unit of principles and steps in decentralised planning you will understand the general principles to be followed and steps to be taken and followed in the preparation of a perspective participatory decentralised planning from below.

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

i) Explain the meaning and importance of decentralized planning and process involved

ii) Discuss various guidelines of decentralized planning

iii) Explain steps in decentralized district planning

iv) Describe steps to be followed in the preparation of village plan, urban local bodies plan and integrated district plan
2.2 DECENTRALIZED PLANNING PROCESS: MEANING AND IMPORTANCE

Decentralised participatory district planning involves people of all sections through an appropriate devise mechanism and strategy in gathering relevant data, analyzing it to set priorities, matching the set priorities with available budget and schemes and programmes of the state and central government. It involves in defining process of implementation and the setting and monitoring of targets. This plan comprises what different planning units within a district can achieve by envisioning collectively, operating their targets, exercising their skills and leveraging their initiative. In this planning process each planning unit namely panchayats at gram level, intermediate and district levels, municipalities of different categories, line departments and parastatals would prepare a plan for implementation of each of their functions and responsibilities after consultations with people. While collaborating and coordinating with each other, they would not trespass into each other’s area of responsibility, unless there are definite gains to be had and with mutual consent. The final plan would result from a buckling together of these unit plans through a consultative process of consolidation. It is the design of government of India.

Box I: Planning Unit

A planning unit is a body that is entrusted with responsibility of planning. In a logically organized system of local government the panchayats and municipalities are easily recognizable as distinct, self contained planning units. In India the position, status, responsibilities, powers, functions, finance, functionaries of Local Bodies vary from state to state. Planning exercises are being done not only by the local bodies but also government line departments and community organizations by making use of the schemes and programmes of the state and central governments. In the same way the donor agencies operate projects through NGOs and they also plan for activities. Keeping all variations the district planning committee has to accommodate all without trespassing the others domain.


India is at a critical and unique juncture where participatory decentralised planning is felt imperative and it receives much attention from all segments of the society. It gains currency at all levels. To operationalise this exercise more scientifically and in scale and mobilize people of all segments of the society, the innovations in information and communication technology help is inevitable and essential. In every sense the time is ripe for preparation of participatory decentralised plan from below. Local institutions, needed technology, man power and resources are available now along with the guidelines for preparation of plan from every local institution and to consolidate the same at the district level through the District Planning Committee. By making use of the opportunity, people’s felt needs could be fulfilled and better outcome and results could be achieved in terms of human development indicators. In the whole process, people will be mobilized for development tasks and level of awareness and capacity of the people could be enhanced. Participatory district planning is multi dimensional in nature and hence it calls for adoption of sequence of steps to achieve meaningful targets.
2.3 GUIDELINES IN DECENTRALIZED PLANNING PROCESS

The decentralized planning process follows certain guidelines which are delineated below:

There are certain key principles to be followed in the whole process of planning at the grass root level. They are non negotiable principles. A new mind set is needed for every one who is involved in the process of decentralized planning. Following are the principles:

i) Ensuring the participation of stakeholders

ii) Bridging regional disparities

iii) Keeping ecology and environment in the backdrop

iv) Strengthening the planning machinery at all levels

v) Building the capacity of the functionaries

vi) Transforming a vertical planning process into a horizontal process

vii) Using the ICT effectively for participatory planning

viii) Global vision and local action

ix) Proper assessment of resources

x) Law of subsidiary

xi) Downward accountability

i) **Ensuring the participation of stakeholders**

The prime objective of this plan is to make the unreached, neglected and marginalized to participate in the process of planning. The poor do not find time to take up responsibilities and they concentrate more on their livelihood. Hence, it is necessary to mobilize the marginalized for development action. By involving them in the process of decision making and planning confidence is instilled in the minds of the poor that they are also being considered as a factor to reckon with and by doing so the whole process is made inclusive. It requires new mind set and special skill for the leaders and the functionaries of the local bodies to bring them to the new exercise for inclusion.

ii) **Bridging Regional Disparities**

With in a district, wide variations are noticed among the regions. While seeing the blocks from the perspective of human development indicators, one will find the wide variations among the blocks within the district and variations among the districts within a state and among the states within a country. Removing such variations within the district should be one of the key principles and perspectives of decentralized participatory district planning. The district planning committee has to look into the disparities among the regions, while micro plan is developed. Allocation has to be ensured according to the needs of the region.
iii) **Keeping Ecology, Environment in the Backdrop**

You should know that we are living in a context where ecology and environment are in peril. Global warming and climate change will affect food production and disturb the eco system. Against this back ground, when decentralised rural planning is initiated, it should be done in the backdrop of ecology and environment. Natural resource conservation, protection and enrichment are key elements to be considered for decentralised participatory planning. While planning is initiated in the context of globalization liberalization and privatization, activities have to be chalked out on the available new opportunities with the aim of achieving economic development and prosperity. While doing so care has to be taken to protect ecology, biodiversity and environment. Optimum utilization of natural resources has to be kept in mind.

iv) **Strengthening the planning machinery at all levels**

Since planning at grassroots has been made mandatory, planning units at every level right from Gram Panchayat to District Panchayat, and Town Panchayat to municipal corporation have to be created and strengthened. Planning, monitoring and evaluation are to be done continuously and for which the units have to be equipped with staff, needed technology and resource support. Unless otherwise planning at grassroots will be adhoc and irregular and not people centric participatory planning.

v) **Building Capacity of the Functionaries**

Capacity building is an imperative need for effective functioning of the planning units. The key functionaries both elected representatives and officials have to be trained and oriented periodically in the new process and principles of evolving decentralised micro plan for poverty alleviation and development of the poor and marginalized sections. For collection and analysis of data and prioritization of activities at grassroots, they need perspective, understanding and vision. In order to make the functionaries capable, capacity building exercise is an imperative need.

vi) **Transforming a vertical planning into horizontal process**

Planning exercises have to done both horizontally and vertically. So far the line departments, mission units, donor projects and local bodies act in their own orbit without bringing any synergy. Now the weaknesses of the process is realized and synergy is the missing link and the need for such a link is felt and hence institutions working in a given geographical space have to work together keeping their autonomy intact. This is crucial for the success of the micro plan. By doing this synergization, every unit gets advantage. In a village, gram panchayat health committee is functioning, health mission unit is also working, a small NGO getting funds from a donor agency is also working in the same area and health department personnel is also functioning. All are working on the health issues. But they are all working not together but separately and they are accountable to their departments. But now in the planning exercise, all the units are bought together and work together by keeping their autonomy intact and towards acting the target and goals. So the vertical processes have to be transformed into a horizontal process.
vii) Using ICT effectively for participatory planning

At present information is power. People can be empowered through information. Information are essential need for planning. Data generation, validation, maintenance, updation should be done in a scientific way and for which the new technologies are needed. Every planning unit be it a Gram Panchayat or a small town panchayat, they are to be connected with newer technologies for transfer of information, generation of data and analysis of data. ICT can be used effectively not only to collect, collate, transfer and analysis of data but also for updation, maintenance and validation of the same. Moreover information dissemination has to be done in an effective way for wider mobilization of people for development activities and for which it helps immensely. Moreover it helps to maintain transparency.

viii) Global Vision and Local Action

We have millennium development goals. They are to be achieved. Countries have to work for it through their policies, programmes and resources allocation. But activities have to be carried out only in the society. So work has to be done only at the grassroots. Macro issues have to be tackled through micro actions. Be it literacy, poverty reduction, malnutrition or anemia or HIV, they are to be tackled massively by the involvement of people locally. If macro issues are broken and disaggregated it is easily manageable at the micro level. If each gram panchayat is empowered functionally and financially to tackle issues of health and education many of the MDG targets can be achieved at ease. Vibrant local actions are necessary. The beneficiary syndrome has to be changed and it is the look out of the people to participate in the process of development and act on the issues.

ix) Proper Assessment of Resources

Local units are traditionally spending units. Now it has to be changed. Available local resources have to be assessed and mobilized. Natural resources, human resources, and material resources available within the jurisdiction of the local governance units have to be assessed and accordingly decisions have to be taken for resource mobilization. The whole planning exercise will yield result only if resource planning is done properly. Fund flow mechanism has to be tracked and assess the resources available at the unit. Resources identification and tracking is the basic works in the process of planning at the grassroots.

x) Law of Subsidiarity

Every unit is autonomous and hence things that could be done at the lowest level could be allowed to be done at the lowest level. It should not be replicated or duplicated at the next level. From that perspective, planning exercise has to be carried out at the grassroots. We find overlapping of activities among the institutions and they are to be avoided. By doing so resources and time can be saved. Over a period of time capacity, skill and capability will be increased.

xi) Downward Accountability

In a traditional sense, in our governance and administration, accountability is built upwards. Every unit is accountable to the higher level unit and in the
same way every official is accountable to his / her superior official in terms of his / her roles and responsibilities. Now it has been reversed and accountability is built towards the stakeholders. They are empowered to evaluate the activities through the process of social audit. All units working at the ground are autonomous in their functional jurisdiction. Hence the units can work together without trespassing into the jurisdiction of the other. So far we have seen the basic principles that one has to follow while preparing the micro plan. Now we will move on to the next aspect the available software for preparation of micro plan.

After reading and understanding the concept of decentralized planning process, now attempt the question given in Check Your Progress-1.

**Check Your Progress 1**

**Note:**

a) Write your answer in about 50 words

b) Check your answer with possible answers given at the end of the unit

1) Bring out the basic principles in decentralised participatory planning.

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### 2.4 SOFTWARE AVAILABLE FOR DECENTRALISED PLANNING

For planning exercise data generation, data validation and data analysis tools are so important and imperative needs. For continuous exercises, data storage, retrieval, validation and updating modern tools are imperative as it will reduce the wastage of time, resources and manpower. Hence using modern technology is unavoidable and necessary also.

For the preparation of decentralised participatory planning, government and other agencies have developed software and many of them are in use and they are listed hereunder:

i) **“Plan plus”** is software developed by the NIC for the Ministry of Panchayati Raj Government of India to simplify and strengthen the decentralised planning process. It is well developed interactive local language software. It is suitable software for both the local bodies and line departments of the government.

ii) **“National Panchayat Portal”** http://panchayat.gov.in. This is also developed by the NIC for the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India. It is a dynamic website for all panchayats. It provides data pertaining to panchayats. The whole responsibility of managing the content can be undertaken by the panchayats themselves.
iii) “Gram ++” is a software developed by the IIT of Mumbai and it enables integration of numerical data onto a global information system for spatial display.

iv) “Riddhi Soft”. This software is developed by a private company and it provides a cost-effective and versatile GIS platform for local planning.

v) “DISNIC”. It is also a software initiative aimed at collecting extensive data on local resources in a detailed village wise database.

vi) “NIC'sGIS”. The NIC has an in-house GIS system that accesses data from remote sensing sources and provides detailed topography, soil, land use and water cover details which is ideal for watershed and agricultural planning.

vii) “PRIASOFT”: It is a yet another software developed by the NIC taking into account the accounting formats developed by the CAG for panchayats accounts. It can be customized for meeting the requirements of state specific systems of accounting for panchayats.

viii) “CDAC”: It is software specifically designed to provide Indian language interfaces that can be adopted and interlinked with other software for easy multi-language use.

ix) “Performance Tracking System”: It is developed by the centre for Good Governance, Hyderabad for easy monitoring of implementation targets on a user friendly MIS platform. It is useful for monitoring plan implementation and it permits feedback to flow back into the planning process.

x) “District Information and Planning System”. It is developed by a private vendor and it integrates GIS applications with data and permits resource allocation to preferences indicated by the people.

xi) “NRDMS”: The Natural Resources Data Management System is a three decade old initiative of the Ministry of Science and Technology to provide natural resource data gathered from remote sensing source for local planning. The data is available on GIS maps in districts covered by the system.

2.5 STEPS IN PREPARATION OF DECENTRALISED DISTRICT PLAN

i) **Stock Taking**: Preparation of a district stock taking report for presentation in the district planning committee is the first step. This becomes the basis for vision building exercise for the whole district. Where is the district in terms of poverty, employment, health, education, productivity and where it wants to reach have to be understood. Once the existing reality is perceived and understood and from where target can be fixed and strategy can be worked out. To build vision for the district, the existing conditions have to be projected through scientific data. So this is the first exercise in the preparation of the decentralized district plan.

ii) **SWOT Analysis**: In the vision building exercise a SWOT analysis has to be made. Based on the SWOT analysis vision for development has to be developed in the backdrop of the national and state goals. The distance
between the current status and the goals fixed can be assessed and accordingly strategy could be worked out to bridge the gap between the two.

iii) **Vision Building:** The District Planning Committee based on the existing conditions in human development indicators and the report of the SWOT analysis visioning exercise has to be done for the whole district. The vision should indicate the target to be reached and the approach to be followed based on the National and State Governments vision and approaches. MDG should be in the backdrop of the visioning exercise.

iv) **Vision Dissemination:** Communicating the district vision to different planning units functioning down below the district planning committee is the prime task of the District Planning Committee and making them to fix their vision and target to realize the vision of the district is the next task. Each and every unit of planning should have clarity on the vision of the district. To achieve the vision each and every unit has to fix their target in the form of vision.

v) **Finance Tracking:** Simultaneously communicating the resources available for development action to different units is crucial for planning. It is not a mere document. It is set of implementable targets and reachable goals. Hence available resources have to be communicated to different agencies. There are multiplicities of agencies involved in development action. The total amount spent by various agencies in a specific geographical location should be communicated to the difficult units of planning.

vi) **Enabling the Planning Units:** Enabling the planning units at different levels namely gram panchayat level to District panchayat, town panchayats to municipal corporations, village mission units to district mission, field office at the grassroots to district office of line departments to collect data pertinent to the needs of the people based on the participation of stakeholders.

vii) **Preparing the Plan:** At every unit the collected data have to be analysed, prioritization has to be done through a wider consultation by conducting development seminar and match the needs with the available resources come through various agencies.

viii) **Plan Integration:** Integrating the plan documents of the different units of planning and creating a district plan document. At a gram panchayat level plan of the field office of the line departments, mission units of the scheme mission and donor agencies have to be integrated. In the same way block panchayat plan has to be created through the process of integration. Likewise integration of plans has to be done both for rural and urban planning units at different levels.

ix) **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establishment of monitoring systems and social audit mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of the district plan is the final step in the process of decentralised district planning. So far we have seen the steps to be followed for the preparation of district plan.

After reading and understanding the various steps in preparation of decentralized planning, now attempt the question given in Check Your Progress-2.
Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Write your answer in about 50 words
    b) Check your answer with possible answers given at the end of the unit

1) Explain the steps to be followed in preparing the decentralised district plan

ii) Gram Sabha Discussion: Vision of the panchayat has to be discussed with the people in the Gram Sabha. People have to be mobilized and sensitized to think of the development issues. Through a process of discussion in the Gram Sabha the major issues to be tackled will be listed and they are the targets.

iii) Data Generation and Data Validation: Relevant data have to be generated from the community and borrowed from the line departments and other agencies from their data bank for the purpose of preparation of village plan. The collected data have to be scrutinized and validated.

iv) Need Assessment and Prioritization: Through participatory Rural Appraisal method needs have to be assessed and the prioritization has to be done. Major issues have to be tackled will be identified and fixed as targets. The whole exercise has to be done through organizing a development seminar in each Gram Panchayat.

v) Matching Exercise: The Gram Panchayat has to identify the available resources through various institutions and match them with the needs of the people.

vi) Gap Filling Exercises: After matching the available resources and the felt needs of the people, the gaps have to be filled up where the role of the panchayat is crucial. Schemes and programmes can be easily linked to achieve target. The gap has to be filled up with the own resources or to borrow the same.

2.6 STEPS IN PREPARATION OF A VILLAGE PANCHAYAT PLAN

The village panchayat planning process comprises the following steps:

i) Vision Building Exercise: Having got the district vision, the village panchayat has to take stock of the existing conditions of the people in terms of human development indicators. Where is the Gram Panchayat in terms of poverty reduction, education, health, agriculture productivity, employment and so on has to be captured. On each goal the panchayat has to fix the target based on the district vision. Thus the vision of the panchayat has to be stated.

ii) Gram Sabha Discussion: Vision of the panchayat has to be discussed with the people in the Gram Sabha. People have to be mobilized and sensitized to think of the development issues. Through a process of discussion in the Gram Sabha the major issues to be tackled will be listed and they are the targets.

iii) Data Generation and Data Validation: Relevant data have to be generated from the community and borrowed from the line departments and other agencies from their data bank for the purpose of preparation of village plan. The collected data have to be scrutinized and validated.

iv) Need Assessment and Prioritization: Through participatory Rural Appraisal method needs have to be assessed and the prioritization has to be done. Major issues have to be tackled will be identified and fixed as targets. The whole exercise has to be done through organizing a development seminar in each Gram Panchayat.

v) Matching Exercise: The Gram Panchayat has to identify the available resources through various institutions and match them with the needs of the people.

vi) Gap Filling Exercises: After matching the available resources and the felt needs of the people, the gaps have to be filled up where the role of the panchayat is crucial. Schemes and programmes can be easily linked to achieve target. The gap has to be filled up with the own resources or to borrow the same.
vii) Draft Plan Approval: After completing the above steps, the plan document has to be placed before the Gram Sabha for discussion and approval. Once it is approved it is a legal plan document of the Gram Panchayat.

**Preparation of a Gram Panchayat Plan**

- Vision Building Exercise at Gram Panchayat Level
- Vision Building and Mobilisation at Gram Sabha / Ward Sabha Level
- Data Generation and Data Validation
- Need Assessment and Prioritization through PRA Exercises at Ward Level
- Matching the Needs with Existing schemes and programmes of the Central and State Governments
- Gap filling and Final Approval at Gram Sabha

Once village plans are approved, the approved village plans are consolidated at the block level. The approved plans of the blocks are integrated and consolidated at the district panchayat level. They are shown in the form of an organogram below:

**Consolidation and Integration of Rural Plans**

- District Panchayat Plan Integration
  - Block Panchayat Plan Integration
    - Village Panchayat Plan
    - Village Panchayat Plan
    - Village Panchayat Plan
    - Village Panchayat Plan
  - Block Panchayat Plan Integration
    - Village Panchayat Plan
    - Village Panchayat Plan
    - Village Panchayat Plan
    - Village Panchayat Plan
  - Block Panchayat Plan Integration
    - Village Panchayat Plan
    - Village Panchayat Plan
    - Village Panchayat Plan
    - Village Panchayat Plan
2.7 STEPS TO BE FOLLOWED IN THE PREPARATION OF A URBAN LOCAL BODIES PLAN

Unlike the rural planning process, urban planning exercise has to be done separately for each unit whether it is a town panchayat, or a small municipality or a big municipal corporation. They are all separate entities and they are not linked with each other functionally. The plan prepared by these institutions will be integrated separately at the district level. They are consolidated only at the district level in the District Planning Committee. Whereas in the case of rural local bodies they are integrated and consolidated every next level as they are in a continuum. But urban local bodies are functioning separately. Following are the steps to be followed in plan preparation in urban local bodies:

i) **Vision Building**: Vision building exercise has to be done in every Town Panchayat, every municipality and in every corporation based on the district vision document. For the vision building exercise yet another document is necessary. The existing conditions of the people in terms of the development indicators. By doing this exercise every Town Panchayat, Municipality and City Corporation should have a vision document.

ii) **Mobilization of People**: Vision building exercise has to be done in every ward and every area with the active participation of the people of all sections. Poor people’s presence and voices are important. The vision of the institution and the district has to be shared with the people through an exercise. It is a process by which people have to be mobilized and sensitized on the issues of development.

iii) **Plan Preparation**: Data generation, data validation and data analysis have to be done for the whole unit. For prioritization, development seminar has to be conducted at the institutional level (Town panchayat, Municipality and corporation). Once development seminar is over, the needs have to be matched with the schemes and programme of the central and state governments and with available local resources.

iv) **Gap Filling Exercise**: It has to be done by the institution itself and finally the plan document has to be approved by the competent body in the respective institutions and all the plan documents will be consolidated and integrated at the district planning committee level.

The above process is explained through an organogram.
Urban local bodies whether it is town panchayat, or a municipality, or a city corporation, they are independent of each other. There is no linkage among these units. So the plans of these local bodies are consolidated only at the district planning committee. The rural plans consolidated through the district panchayat and the plans of the town panchayat, municipality and city corporation will be consolidated and integrated only at the District Planning Committee.

### 2.8 CONSOLIDATION OF DISTRICT PLAN

The District Planning Committee has to integrate the rural plan document from the District Panchayat and the urban plan documents from town panchayat, municipalities and corporations. Once they are integrated and they are to be formally approved by the District planning committee after the development seminar conducted at the district level. It is explained in the following organogram:
Decentralization: An Overview

Here it is to be noted that the mission units, line department units and civil society initiatives are to be integrated in the respective level of the planning units wherever the units are functioning.

After reading and understanding the steps to be followed in the preparation of a urban local bodies plan, now attempt the question given in Check Your Progress-3.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: a) Write your answer in about 50 words
    b) Check your answer with possible answers given at the end of the unit

1) How a urban local body for instance a municipality prepares a participatory decentralised perspective development plan?

2.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the meaning and importance of decentralised planning and the process involved in it. What are the guidelines of decentralised planning, have also been seen in this unit. So also the steps to be followed in decentralised district planning, village plan and urban local bodies plan have been discussed.

2.10 REFERENCES AND SELECTED READINGS

Hooja, Rakesh and Sunil Dutt (Eds.), 2008, Development Administration and Multi Level Planning, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi.

Mahipal, 2008, Decentralised Planning and Development in India, Mittal Publications, New Delhi.


2.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Bring out the basic principles in decentralised participatory planning.

The basic principles in decentralised participatory planning are:

i) Ensuring the participation of stakeholders
ii) Bridging regional disparities
iii) Keeping ecology and environment in the backdrop
iv) Strengthening the planning machinery at all levels
v) Building the capacity of the functionaries
vi) Transforming a vertical planning process into a horizontal process
vii) Using the ICT effectively for participatory planning
viii) Global vision and local action
ix) Proper assessment of resources
x) Law of subsidiary
xi) Downward accountability

Check Your Progress 2

1) Explain the steps to be followed in preparing the decentralised district plan.

The steps to be followed in preparing the decentralised district plan are:

i) Stock Taking
ii) SWOT Analysis
iii) Vision Building
iv) Vision Dissemination Finance Tracking
v) Enabling the Planning Units
vi) Preparing the Plan
vii) Plan Integration
viii) Monitoring and Evaluation:

Check Your Progress 3

1) How a urban local body for instance a municipality prepares a participatory decentralised perspective development plan?
Following are the steps to be followed in plan preparation in urban local bodies:

i) **Vision Building:** Vision building exercise has to be done in every Town Panchayat, every municipality and in every corporation based on the district vision document. For the vision building exercise yet another document is necessary. The existing conditions of the people in terms of the development indicators. By doing this exercise every Town Panchayat, Municipality and City Corporation should have a vision document.

ii) **Mobilization of People:** Vision building exercise has to be done in every ward and every area with the active participation of the people of all sections. Poor people’s presence and voices are important. The vision of the institution and the district has to be shared with the people through an exercise. It is a process by which people have to be mobilized and sensitized on the issues of development.

iii) **Plan Preparation:** Data generation, data validation and data analysis have to be done for the whole unit. For prioritization, development seminar has to be conducted at the institutional level (Town panchayat, Municipality and corporation). Once development seminar is over, the needs have to be matched with the schemes and programme of the central and state governments and with available local resources.

iv) **Gap Filling Exercise:** It has to be done by the institution itself and finally the plan document has to be approved by the competent body in the respective institutions and all the plan documents will be consolidated and integrated at the district planning committee level.