

# GOVERNANCE THROUGH GRASSROOTS PLANNING

## A CASE STUDY OF THE MADHYA PRADESH MODEL

*Based on grassroots planning, recent developments in the state of Madhya Pradesh (MP), India may be characterised as systematic efforts to promote the decentralisation of governance. There has been a continuous struggle towards evolving democratic governance that provides for the participation of citizens in the developmental process. However, owing to vast inter- and intra-country differences, no single method has been set so far as a model for others to follow, although each effort contributes towards further deliberation and evolution. For the first time in the development history of MP, the government has shown the courage to interact with the community for making local development plans. This paper evaluates the adequacy of the decentralisation framework and mechanism of governance adopted by the state to achieve the desirable goal of participatory democracy.*

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*"The Planning Commission of India lauded the Madhya Pradesh State Planning Commission process in all districts. The move it said will help in enhancing agriculture production and productivity and that of its allied sectors as also traditional and small industries with a focus on the creation of employment opportunities and poverty alleviation".* —*The Hindu*, 6 April 2011

## INTRODUCTION

Since the launch of the First Five Year Plan in 1951, the Government of India has made a number of attempts to establish decentralised planning. In the last six decades, the planning process of the nation has undergone several changes. Although broad objectives have remained constant, strategies and techniques have varied from plan to plan to meet the needs of the time. The aim has been to achieve integrated and participatory development at the disaggregated level. However, in spite of changes, the basic system of centralised and departmental planning has remained old-fashioned, in a top-down manner, thereby losing significant local and at times expert information. Dhananjay

Rao Gadgil, the former deputy chairman of the Planning Commission of India once remarked, "The present mood is to talk about village democracy but to deny real power even to the states. Planning at the state level means official compilation of schemes, which may prove acceptable to the centre. Of course, non-official workers, experts or productive enterprises are nowhere in the picture in their own region". This is one of the reasons why planning has failed to meet the basic needs of the people. Properly designed

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decentralisation policies and programmes positively impact the performance of local governance institutions, service delivery agencies and ultimately local economic growth and poverty eradication efforts. There has been a continuous struggle towards evolving democratic governance that provides for citizens' participation in the process. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> *Constitutional Amendments* have made it compulsory to constitute district planning committees (DPC) and state finance commissions together with the three-tier *panchayat* system and urban local bodies. Similarly, under *Article 243 (z) (d)* of the constitution, DPCs have a mandatory and critical function of formulating district plans and monitoring and evaluation at the district level.

In recent years, the Madhya Pradesh (MP) state government has laid emphasis on planning at the grassroots level to restructure overall development and has recognised district planning as the critical instrument in achieving the overarching goal of inclusive

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growth. It has stressed that the optimum outcome in terms of balanced development would be attained with a convergence of resources and enforcement of inter-sectoral priorities. In this context, decentralised district planning has sought to improve the planning process. The state has been a pioneer in constituting DPCs and today all 50 districts have such duly constituted committees. The state government initiated the decentralised planning process in the financial year 2001–02 and

has even decentralised planning below the district level at the ward and *gram sabha* (village assembly) level. This article examines the process quality, effect, sustainability, equity and long-term effects on the service delivery and overall system in Twelfth Five Year Plan period.

#### OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK, STATUS, EFFORTS AND OUTPUTS

**G**rassroots institutions, both rural and urban, need to be empowered to improve development indices, accelerate the rate of socio-economic growth and ensure “inclusive growth”. A major milestone achieved has been the involvement of *panchayatiraj* (“rule of local councils”) institutions and urban local bodies in development planning, monitoring and evaluation. The preparation of “integrated district plans” in a decentralised manner has been a major step in this direction. The presence of mature institutions of local self-governance in MP provides a unique opportunity to translate budgetary outlays into better outcomes. A steering committee headed by the chief minister has been constituted to undertake decentralised district planning in the state. It provides overall policy guidelines and direction for implementation. Operational details and overseeing of implementation

are undertaken by a working group headed by the member-secretary of the State Planning Commission (SPC). The structures of decentralised district planning at the district level for rural and urban areas are detailed in Flow Charts 1 and 2.

The MPSPC has issued detailed guidelines for preparing decentralised plans covering all critical processes and activities. The main features are as follows:

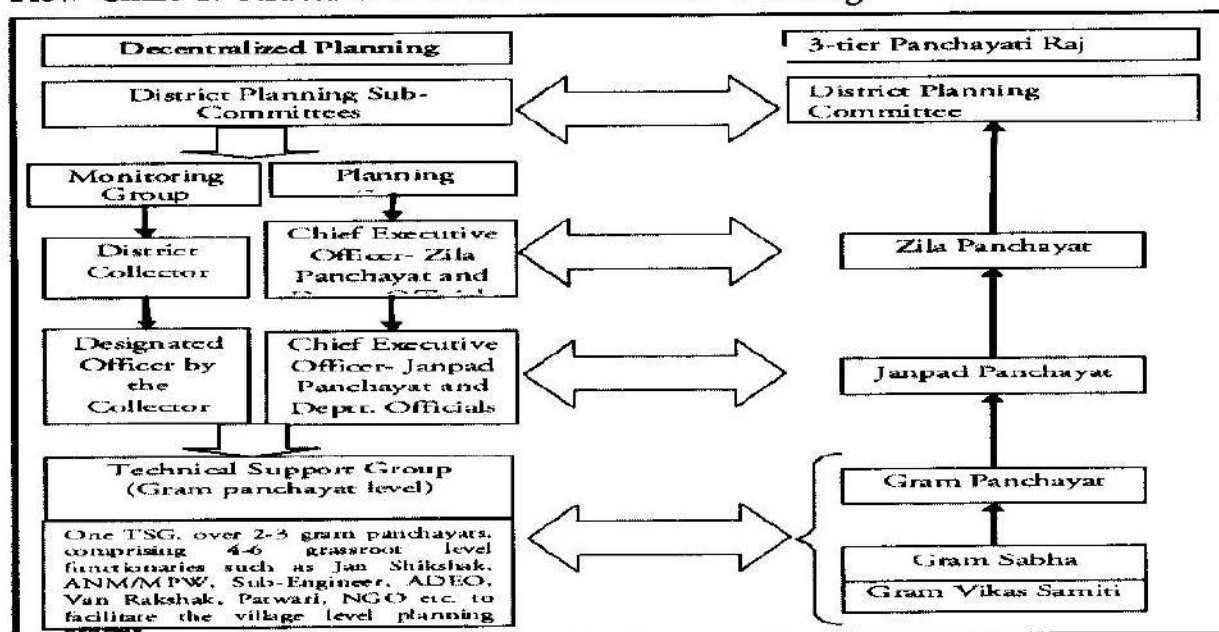
1. The SPC will provide support and direction for preparing district plans and allocate plan ceiling of districts.
2. DPCs in consultation with subject matter specialists, government officials, voluntary organisations and other stakeholders will determine plan ceilings between rural and urban segments and formulate strategies to prepare and integrate plan proposals of local bodies.
3. Rural plan proposals will be prepared by *panchayatiraj* institutions and urban plans by local bodies with support from technical support groups (TSG) constituted for each *gram panchayat* and ward.
4. Local bodies will formulate a "vision of development" based on local needs and specific strengths.
5. Plans prepared at the *gram panchayat* and urban ward level will be integrated and consolidated at each subsequent level and after final consolidation at the district level, will be submitted to the DPC for approval and consolidation.
6. All line departments will be grouped into key sectors. Further working groups will be constituted for each sector for preparing proposals keeping in view the needs and possible inter- and intra-sector convergences. Working groups will also prepare positioning papers for the achievement of Millennium Development Goals at their level.

TSGs formed over three to five *gram panchayats* comprise five to six

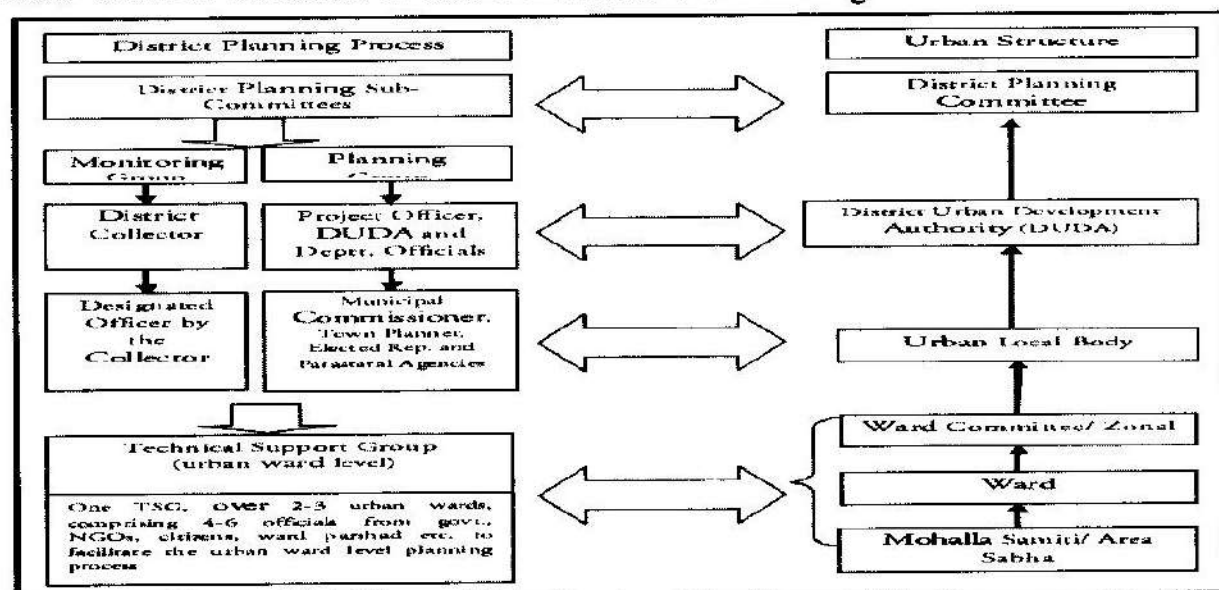
grassroots level government functionaries that support village development committees of *gram sabhas* in the planning process. TSGs have proven to be a good

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Flow Chart 1: Structure of Rural Decentralised Planning



Flow Chart 2: Structure of Urban Decentralised Planning



example of the “convergence of government functionaries at the village level” for planning purposes. With knowledge gained through fieldwork, the unique process in the preparation of district plans has been rolled out as follows.

### *The Rural Plan*

1. *Gram sabhas* follow a participatory process with the help of TSGs (grassroots functionaries, specialists and development workers) to formulate a “vision of development” based on local needs.



**Table 1: Sector Specific Convergence among Selected Departments**

Sectors	Concerned Departments /Agencies
Education	School education, higher education, technical education, non-formal education, vocational education
Health and Nutrition	Public health and family welfare, public health engineering, woman and child development, food and civil supplies
Livelihood	Agriculture, horticulture, forest, <i>panchayat</i> and rural development, veterinary and dairy, village industries, social justice, water resource, fisheries, handloom, cooperation, sericulture, welfare of scheduled castes and tribes and other backward classes
Infrastructure Management	Public works department, rural development, rural engineering service, water resource, energy, planning
Energy Management	Energy, rural development, forest, planning
Civil Rights Protection	Land reform, social justice, women and child development, revenue

2. *Gram sabhas* prepare proposals for different sectors in consultation with all stakeholders especially poor villagers, scheduled castes and tribes and women.
3. The proposals of each *gram sabha* are consolidated for preparing plan proposals of *gram panchayats*. Similarly, *janpad panchayats* consolidate the plan proposals of all concerning *gram panchayats* including the interventions of *janpads*.
4. In addition to the district level intervention, plans prepared by *janpads* form the basis for consolidating plans at the *zila* (district) *panchayat* level.

### ***The Urban Plan***

1. Urban local bodies form TSGs (working groups) comprising urban local bodies' functionaries, ward *parishads*, retired government staff and individuals from wards to provide technical support to *mohalla samitis* in the process of participatory urban planning.
2. Plans prepared at the *mohalla* and ward level are consolidated at the urban local body level with integration of interventions spreading over more than one ward or sector.

**The Role of DPCs:** After receiving rural and urban plans, DPCs consolidate them at the district level with the help of district level TSGs. Integrated plans finalised by DPCs ensure clarity on the roles of various departments and arrangements for monitoring and evaluation of projects. After due deliberation in DPCs, the plans are then submitted to the SPC.

**The Status of Decentralised District Planning: "From Conceptualisation to Institutionalisation":** Based on systematic learning experiences the MPSPC has scaled up the process and from 2010–11 onwards has rolled out decentralised district

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planning in all 50 state districts. The state government has institutionalised the planning process by allocating about 38 per cent of state resources to districts, under "district plans". The total allocation for district plans for the financial year 2012–13 is about 37 per cent of the total state plan. The plans are prepared in a bottom-up manner starting from the grassroots level, that is, villages in rural and wards in urban areas with the participation of the community and facilitation by

government functionaries. To support consolidation at the higher tiers of rural and urban local bodies, customised software has been developed.

**Actions Undertaken towards Decentralised District Planning:**

1. A state level steering committee has been formed under the chairmanship of the chief minister as well as a working group headed by the member-secretary of the SPC. The steering committee provides overall policy guidance and direction for effective implementation.
2. A state specific manual has been drafted and planning formats developed for each level (village, *gram panchayat*, *janpad*, urban ward, etc) keeping in view the requirements of the software application.
3. State level technical support institutes (TSI)—experts in the decentralised planning process in various developmental activities—have been selected. Eleven

such institutes have been identified for training and capacity building activities under the decentralised planning process.


4. Resource persons have been identified and training designs finalised for block level master trainers.
5. District level workshops and the training of trainers on decentralised planning have been conducted in all 50 districts of the state with the technical support of the Poverty Monitoring and Policy Support Unit (PMPSU), United Nations agencies and identified TSIs.
6. Financial assistance has been provided to all districts to undertake the decentralised district planning process.
7. Training has been imparted to district master trainers (separately for rural and urban areas).
8. Approximately 70,000 functionaries including TSGs have been given training as part of this year's roll out.
9. Planning software has been developed to facilitate data entry and analysis of data at each level of planning.
10. Under the decentralised planning process, offline and online modules have been developed for information technology applications to facilitate grassroots level planning, implementation and monitoring. The modular approach for the development of application software and deployment has proven helpful for effective implementation.
11. Data entry operators have been given training for feeding data from survey formats in the planning software.
12. An updated website has been launched (<http://mwh.mpforest.org/dcpnew>), which facilitates further analysis, planning and monitoring in the online mode. The web-based software helps generate plans for the district, *janpad*, *gram panchayat* and urban local body level. Segregated plans for particular sectors, departments and schemes are also available through the software.
13. Details of the planning process have been given in a manual. Sector-wise data analysis has been carried out and activity-scheme linkages have been made keeping convergence in the centrality.
14. Information generated through village/ward plans has been included in appropriate departmental plans.



15. Plans at the higher planning unit level have been consolidated along with the approval from DPCs.
16. A state level workshop for sharing the gained knowledge from the decentralised district planning process was inaugurated by the state finance minister.
17. The National Planning Commission has appreciated the unique process of planning adopted by the MPSPC and has suggested that other states replicate it as well.

#### EXPECTED RESULTS

On the basis of national and international experiences, one can see the potential benefit of decentralised planning with an optimum level of the participatory process that encourages demand for service in the community. Strategies however, should be designed to take into account best practices and evidence, should promote equity and rigorous monitoring, assessment should be inbuilt and initiatives should not be allowed merely through political generosity. Once the planning process rolls out in all districts then the following may be achieved:

1. Local self-governance institutions will be strengthened in the state as per the provisions of the Constitution of India.
2. This will build the capacity of institutions of local self-governance in implementing programmes and the delivery of essential public services.
3. Increased ownership of works will ensure better operation and maintenance.
4. This will streamline the process of planning being taken under centrally sponsored flagship programmes like the Backward Regions Grant Fund, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, the National Rural Health Mission, the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, the Total Sanitation Campaign, etc.
5. The convergence of programmes at the grassroots level will ensure a better allocation of resources and increased outcomes.
6. Advance planning will improve the fund utilisation capacity of the state. 

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