Working of PR in Odisha: Training and Capacity Building

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Rural local Government in the process of democratic decentralization is known by the popular name Panchayati Raj. It has been in operation since the early years of independence with greater responsibility to satisfy the local needs and aspiration of the rural people. It is a system of direct and active involvement of the people of a local area into the administration of local affairs, for the satisfaction of local needs with the help of the local resources and through organized local efforts. The success of a democratic system largely depends upon the existence and efficient operation of such a system of local government at the grassroots level.

PR SYSTEM IN ODISHA:

The PR system in Odisha is as old as the province itself, but in its present form, it came into existence in 1994. Prior to that it was governed by the PS and ZP Act of 1959. In the year 1961 a 3-tier Panchayati Raj Institution (PRIs) was established in the state covering all villages with the objective of removing illiteracy, poverty and diseases. It was however amended in 1962, 1965 and 1968. The 1965 amendment provided direct election of the Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat by the people. The 1968 amendment substituted the District Advisory Council in the place of Zilla Parishad.

The Panchayati Raj system during 1950s and early 1960s was under the control of different departments like Board of Revenue, Department of Agriculture and Community Development and Political Services Department before it was placed under the Department of Planning and Coordination with a Secretary to head the Department. In July 1962, a new department of Community Development and Panchayati Raj was created. The Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads and former District Boards came under its purview.

DEVELOPMENT AND DEVOLUTION OF POWER:

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 transfers the representative democracy into participatory democracy with devolution of power to PRIs in the Country. The Act came into force on 24th April, 1993 and ensures the right of the states to take local factors of geographical, politico-administrative and others into consideration while adopting the new system. Odisha Panchayat laws were amended in consistent with the provision of the Act and provision of Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Area Act, 1996 (PESA). Odisha is the first State to conduct PRI election in 2002 according to PESA Act, thereby ensuring social justice to scheduled tribe communities.

Government of Odisha is committed to strengthen PRIs as institutions of self Government. In the year 2003, 21 subjects of 11 departments were transferred to Panchayati Raj Institutions. District level Officers, Block level Officers and village level functionaries of 11 departments have been made accountable to Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayat respectively for implementation of subjects/
schemes transferred to PRIs. They will place plans and schemes for discussion and approval in the meeting of the respective level of PRIs for economic development and social justice of the people. Government has signed an MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India for effective devolution of functions, funds and functionaries as per the mandate of 73rd Amendment of the Constitution.

WORKING OF PR IN ODISHA

The structure of PRIs in India varied from state to state from a 3-tier structure in Village, Block and District level to a 2-tier structure at the Village and Block level. A few states had only a single tier Panchayat at the Village level. The experiment was started in Rajasthan with 3 statutory institutions of Village Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads. This 3-tier model structure was adopted by the state of Orissa and has continued to operate over a period of three decades up to the historic amendment of 1992. Out of the 3-tiers of Panchayati Raj, the intermediate tier, the Panchayat Samiti is made the implementing agency for all programmes. Funds for community development given as grant-in-aid to Panchayat Samitis, Zilla Parishads were abolished in the year 1968. The Panchayat Samiti emerged as an important institution for implementing developmental programmes, poverty alleviation programmes and social security schemes. However even before the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution, Odisha had taken the lead in providing reservation in favour of SCs, STs and women in 3-tier PRIs. A distinguishing feature of the Panchayati Raj System in Odisha is that either the Chairperson or the Vice-Chairperson of all the 3-tiers of PRIs is a women. Despite these important roles, PSs and GPs could not emerge as institution of self Government. Those wishing to take a deeper look into the malady would find factionalism, casteism, communalism and groupism and the nasty game of Politics that has been carried to the doorsteps of innocent villagers. In fact, the PR began to totter and in some states even crumble, under the heavy weight of political factionalism, scramble for control over patronage among politician and bureaucrats, scarcity of economic resources and not the least of all, the general apathy of the people.

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

The entire contour of the democratic decentralization has completely changed by the 73rd Amendment Act. It is considered now as a very important department not only for the quantum of funds it handles, but also for the fact that its activities have a direct bearing on rural development and poverty alleviation. Political education and training to the representatives of the PRIs, thus required, without which they cannot become well functioning and active participants in the democratic system. As such, traditionally, various training institutions, i.e., State Institute for Rural Development, Panchayati Raj Training Institutions (PRTIs), Extension Training Centres (ETCs) etc. are involved in delivering scheme-specific training programmes, including those aimed at improving capacities of elected representatives and officials of PRIs. A number of NGOs too have been working in this area either directly or in partnership with the training institutions. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) has also provided funds and other support under Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikarana Abhiyan (RGPSA) to strengthen the state and district level training institutions to enhance their CB & T delivery capabilities in partnership with the state Panchayati Raj Departments.

STATE INSTITUTE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The PR Department has got a state level institute at Bhubaneswar namely the State Institute for Rural Development for training and capacity building of PRI elected representatives and field functionaries. Originally it was established in 1964.
by the Government of India as one of the core distinguished institutions of the country for conducting training and research programmes in Tribal and Community Development. In 1967 it was named as Tribal Orientation and Study Centre (TO & SC) under Government of Odisha. In 1975 its name was changed to State Training Institute of Community Development (STICD). From 1984 onwards as the State Institute for Rural Development (SIRD) it acts as a nodal institute of the state for training, research, evaluation and consultancy in the field of PRD, Government of Odisha.

The training strategy of SIRD is envisaged and designed to educate the elected representatives and officials of the 3-tier PRIs on functioning of the local self governance but also enables them in acquiring the knowledge in the implementation of programmes of rural and social development. The capacity building is aimed at fighting ignorance and deprivation. The programme is also aimed at to bring a behavioral change in relationship among the elected representatives and government officials at the grassroot level to work for a holistic community development through a culture of good and responsive governance.

**ACTIVITIES OF SIRD**

Broadly SIRD activities can be categorized as follows:

1. Training and Capacity Building.
2. Research and Evaluation.
3. Publication and Consultancy.

SIRD has conducted 167 training programmes during 2007-08. The main thrust was to sensitize the newly elected PRI members who assumed office in 2007. They were oriented about the important acts and rules of Panchayati Raj, Financial Management and the schemes directly implemented through PRIs, especially NREGS. SIRD concentrated mainly on off-campus mode of training to ensure more coverage of participants. SIRD entered into partnership with 76 NGOs across the state during Dakshata Programme in 2007-08 in order to expand the areas of the institute.

**INTERACTIVE TRAINING PROGRAMMES (ITPs)**

SIRD organizes various training programmes for elected members of 3-tier PRIs, NGOs and different level of officials of PR and other line departments both through in-house and off-campus mode. It also develops necessary training curriculum for the participants and develop training modules for various training programmes undertaken in SIRD and 3-ETCs (Bhubaneswar, Bhawanipatna and Keonjhar) of the State. It has also undertaken various Case Studies, Research programmes and Action Research Projects. The institute has the mandate to improve the training capacities of it’s linked institutions, as such, the Extension Training Centers and District partner NGOs with wide coverage through networking.

**PROJECT DAKSHATA**

Project Dakshata, an endeavour by the PR Department, Odisha, UNDP, funded by DFID, is a unique initiative for capacity building of the PRIs in Odisha by SIRD. Since the election of 2007, the office bearers of all the 3-tiers could not be provided basic training despite the lapse of a period of one year, the institute thought of about the project. It aims to strengthen Panchayat elected representatives, functionaries and other department officials to perform their roles efficiently in local governance through capacity building across the state of Odisha. The project period (2007-08) is likely to witness capacity building around 28,000 functionaries and elected representatives. Besides, it aims to develop a capacity building system in the state through strengthening SIRD. State and District level trainers were trained who were emerged later on and became resource persons for the state. To carry forward this challenging task SIRD with partner with competent and qualified academic/training institutions, Civil Society Organizations and private agencies at the state and district level.
Each of the trainees would undergo 15 days of training in 5 different modules on:

i. Rules and Role Clarity and Responsibilities of the PRIs.
ii. Financial Accounts and Management.
iii. Transparency and Accountability.
iv. Social Welfare Schemes and other line Department Schemes.
v. Rural Development Schemes in PR Department.

Gender balancing and inclusion of vulnerable and weaker sections will be the cross cutting theme in all the above modules. After accomplishing and achieving this target within the given time, the scope can be enhanced and broadened to other thematic areas.

TRAINING PROGRAMMES BY SEWAK:

SEWAK, the Self Employed Workers Association Kendra, with its well built infrastructure at its rural resource center has been conducting training programmes for PRIs in association with DPNGOs of the State Institute of Rural Development, Odisha since 2008. Empanelled resource persons and officials of the district administrations participate in those training programmes following the curriculum developed by SIRD. In 2009 PRI members from Sadar, Tangarpali, Lephripara and Hemagir Block received training at SEWAK, RRC. About 442 members from 65 Gram Panchayats and 4 Panchayat Samitis were covered in the programme. Between May and October 2010, PRI members from the Tangarpali, Lephripara, Hemagir, Subdega, Balishankara, Baragaon, Raigangpur, Kutra and Kuanrmunda Blocks of Sundargarh district participated in the training programmes. A total of 1171 male and female representatives from 3 Blocks were trained by state and district level trainer paneled by SIRD.

Training and orientation to the elected representatives of PRIs certainly a good job in solving their own problems by themselves. Unless they know the hard realities of the problems, cooperation in the process of solution, Government cannot take the country forward, no matter what amount are spent in developments. It would be better when they are equally efficient in the skill of management and awareness to make the democratic institutions more democratic. The outcome of CB & T programmes in educating the representatives become an assets in the smooth functioning of a democratic country. The new project under new setup to orient and reorient the people on the forward line, irrespective of its success and pitfalls become approximates the dream of Gandhiji. As Gandhi often pointed out, “India lives in its villages and unless village life can be revitalized the nation as a whole can hardly come alive.”

References:

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