

Capacity building for Local Level Development Process: An Overview

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Past experiences

In most Asian countries, majority of poor people live in rural areas. Hence the concept of rural development encompasses poverty reduction, with particular emphasis on widening the economic opportunities for gainful employment to the poorer sections of the society.

Over the past few decades, most countries of Asia have accorded high priority in rural development and poverty reduction.

During 1960s, the role of the national governments was prominent to develop physical and institutional infrastructure which contributed to strengthening the supply side institutions and infrastructures in rural areas.

During 1970s and 80s several models such as IRDPs, “target groups”, “basic minimum needs” etc. were tried which did not result in a broad-based rural development nor did attack the growing problem of rural poverty.

Several new players such as I/NGOs, micro-finance institutions, civil societies and private sector emerged in rural development (RD) and poverty alleviation (PA) to generate economic opportunities at the micro level and bring out several socio-economic issues of common concern to the forefront.

On the whole rural development and poverty alleviation strategies shifted from supply side to demand driven interventions and attempted to create wealth, social capital and markets for those at the bottom of the pyramid.

Rural development Issues

Good Governance and Decentralisation - Many governments have been aiming of administrative reform, as one of the pro-poor development alternatives. However, the following are some of the gaps that undermine the local capacity/capability in management of rural development process:

- Authority gap: in many cases the lower level offices are given authority to “propose projects” but important decisions such as allocation of resources

- or deployment of manpower are retained at the higher level. Hence, local level offices do not take any initiative at their own risk.
- Manpower gap: rural institutions are mostly understaffed with inadequate trained manpower and insufficient incentives to retain them in the rural areas.
 - Resources gap: unless the political leadership is committed to rural development, it does not attract attention of the policy makers for greater allocation of resources. Similarly, local resources can be mobilized mainly in kind i.e. local materials and labour contribution. Hence, there is always a resource gap for rural development program.

Human Rights - The recent years have witnessed an unprecedented prominence of the human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Participation - Sustainable reduction in poverty requires active participation of the poor in framing policies and sharing the benefits.

Inclusive growth - The rural women, in general, are among the poor and indicate a growing process of 'feminisation' of poverty in the CMCs. Similarly ethnic and indigenous communities and tribal groups are marginalised in the development process.

Remittance: Remittance has been the major source of foreign currency in several CMCs. But, excessive dependence on foreign remittances from expatriate workers has negative consequences on subsistence agriculture based household economy when the able household members are migrant workers.

Capacity development

There has been a serious constraint of backstopping services such as program designing, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation. Because RD and PA programs are

- Implemented by various agencies, hence coordination among various actors and stakeholders required at different levels,
- sequencing of activities and time management is a big challenge,
- programs implemented in the dispersed and remote geographic setting
- low level management capability of local level institutions.

Similarly the efforts various new players such as I/NGOs, micro-finance institutions, civil societies and private sector are not always sequenced along with the respective government agencies to play a complementary role, As a result, the capacity of the state for participatory development has further been weakened.

National level RD institutions need to be strengthened on the following areas:

- Knowledge development
 - monitoring indicators to be developed and data collected
 - knowledge to be developed on progress and issues
 - advocated and sensitized policy makers

- Training
 - Training needs assessments at various levels
 - Conducting short term on-the-job training
 - Subject specific HRD

Recently held Ministerial Retreat on Rural Development adopted a New Delhi Declaration, which called Member Governments to:

- encourage both public and private sectors to expand market access of products made by rural artisans and self-help groups in order to promote sustainable livelihoods.
- use of ICT in rural areas for e-governance, delivery of services to citizens and empowering citizens to access information;

In this context, Government can develop a two-prong strategy, in which:

- District level should be developed as the convergence point of disaggregating plan and budget and aggregating progress at the local level.
- Capacity of the district level be developed for coordinating all NGOs, civil societies and private sectors.

On the servicing side,

- National level research and training institutions like NCRD, PARD should be strengthened as servicing institutions for rural development policies and programs
- allocate more resources for:
 - research and development
 - HRD
 - Training
 - Technology incubation and dissemination
 - Exposure visits