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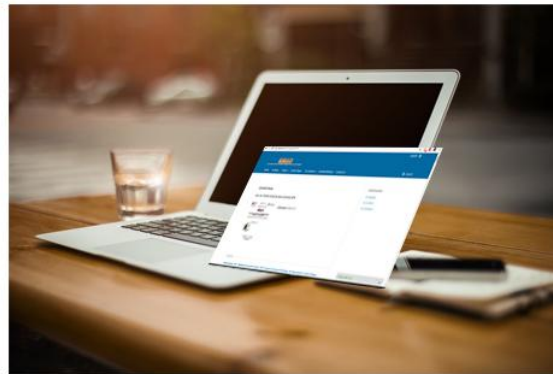
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Political Will Drives Community Participation in Centrally Sponsored Watershed Development Programmes

Abstract

This paper explores the reason of inefficiencies in implementation of community participation in centrally sponsored watershed development programmes. The participatory model has received incremental treatment due to lack of political will which roots from reluctance to share power. The main reasons is the founding principles on which participatory development is based namely Participatory Democracy and Decentralisation, both of which pose threat in terms of shift in power from powerful decision makers to local level. Thus the resultant policies which were outcome receive incremental treatment and lack of commitment by decision makers of the government.

Key Words: Centrally Sponsored Scheme, Community participation, Watershed Development and Incremental Policy Making, Decentralisation, Participatory Democracy

1.1 Introduction:

Community participation in watershed development projects under centrally sponsored scheme in India is an Achilles heel. Participatory dimension has faced partisan treatment and has not been seriously applied. Ever since, it was brought in as an approach to develop and manage watershed programmes sponsored by the Central-State, community participation has been compacted down to the tangible output as physical and financial numbers rather than a phenomenon. This is mainly due to policy neglect by the policy makers (Baviskar; 2004). The policy makers have time and again meddled with participatory format and have incrementally dealt with addressing the constraints that prevent its realisation on ground. The biased mindset towards people's participation in community development programmes is deep-rooted in government and bureaucratic setup.

Government, which is the major player in supporting the program is not tuned to mobilizing people effectively and this is majorly attributed to the bureaucratic, top- down approach of

handling community development projects at the local level since colonial period. The inclination towards that top- down bureaucratic approach of managing watershed jeopardizes participatory aspect of watershed programs.

The policy makers while designing the policy do not acknowledge the fact that watershed community is a group of different people with different aspiration and expectations. The designed policy does not account the differences within the community in terms of power and access to resources. The policy is not sensitive to the local socio, economic, political and environmental situation. It is “one model fits all” without space for local level discretion and flexibility according to local situation. Further, the need of resources, structures for organisation and collective actions that are sustainable and empowers community is viewed as risky, painstaking and time consuming task in policy corridors. Decentralisation of decision making power and resources to local level is taken with distaste among the centralised policy makers (Bauman; 1998, Shah; 1999, Baviskar, 2004, Chottray; 2012).

These indicate that inclination and commitment towards people’s participation in community development projects on natural resource management such as watershed development at policy level is meagre.

The goal of people’s participation in reformed participatory watershed development programmes in India sponsored by State under centrally sponsored scheme, seem to suffer from a policy constraint called lack of “political will.”

The term “political will” has been blamed quite often when there are unexplained inefficiencies in policy that affect its materialisation. This term acts as connecting link between policy process and politics as it is considered as a force that motivates political action¹

Political will can be simply defined as the commitment that people in decision making position exhibit to act to address a policy issue at hand. Most often political will is spoken in context of policy reforms (Hammergren; 1998). In formal terms, Political will is defined as “*Commitment of actors to undertake actions to achieve a set of objectives...and to sustain the costs of those actions over time,*” (Brinkerhoff; 2000).

Being complex and abstract in nature , Political will is visible with a more concrete notion or in context of another issue or in relation to a concern at hand. Concrete and focused

¹ Charney, Craig. Political Will: What Is It? How Is It Measured?, Newsletter clip, Charney Research, May 5, 2009, accessed June 5, 2018, <http://www.charneyresearch.com/resources/political-will-what-is-it-how-is-it-measured/>

decisions, actions and inaction of state and its actors in implementing policy (Woocher; 2001) for instance in context of anticorruption, education, participatory governance, etc., (Brinkerhoff; 2000; Rose and Greeley; 2006, Malena; 2009) is understood as political will. It can also be defined as “*Sustained commitment of politicians and administrators to invest political resource to achieve specific objectives,*” (Rose and Greeley, 2006).

Although, participation of people in watershed development programmes in rainfed areas across India is critical. But, the policy makers have reduced the process of people’s participation to tokenism since reforms that made watershed programmes participatory.

If people’s participation needs to be materialised for ensuring watershed management in centrally sponsored project, public policy measures need political commitment to bring people together for collective actions in development interventions. The measures have to be directed in building public participatory local grassroots level platforms that are sustainable and allow people to come together to decide, plan, execute and assess.

However, the participation of people in watershed development residing in watershed areas in India have suffered policy neglect. The local people are not actively engaged in identification, planning, implementation and monitoring. Most of the works is largely taken up the State and State appointed actors (Bahl; 1999). Despite the policy reforms in 1994, the top -down technocratic model of watershed project implementation is still ongoing with people participation taking a back seat. Therefore, community participation in watershed development projects is a concern that needs to be understood from the lens of political will and test if the political will of decision makers (politicians and bureaucrats) to support policy reforms in centrally sponsored decentralised participatory watershed Programme drives community participation. What needs to be questioned is, how decision makers of State influence community participation in the state sponsored watershed development Programmes.

1.2 Literature Review:

People’s Participation involves ensuring accountability and transparency, building capacity and empowerment by capturing the local preferences and expectation and meeting them².

² Foreword by Joachim von Braun, DG, IFPRI, Research Report 143, in Adato *et al* (2005).

The process of facilitating people's participation in decision making is based on the idea of democracy where citizens are either directly involved or get involved through their elected representatives (Korfmacher; 2001).

The ground level implementation of community participation is based on the fundamentals of participatory democracy. People come together and undertake collective action to address the issue at hand, which is affecting them (Knopp and Caldback; 1990). Participatory democracy is exercised with this spirit and manner (Gawthrop and Waldo; 1984, Shannon; 1990). During the process of collaboration, the conflicts and individual expectations of the people have to be overcome so that people can work together for achieving common good (London; 1995). Similar ideology is applied in participatory natural resource management (Moote *et al*; 1997). Although, community participation is seen as a critical aspect of natural resource management, examples of inducing people's participation in community are difficult to find empirically (Adato *et al*; 2005). Engaging community in the process of participatory development is challenging and there is no clear agreement among scholars, development practitioners and policy makers (Korfmacher; 2001). There are contradictions in ideology, practices and expectations from the community participation model among funders which include government, external aid agencies, NGOs, private sector, academicians and researchers (Adato *et al*; 2005).

Moreover, in a system which is deeply embedded in representative democracy with a technocratic model of development planning as in the case of India, the expectations and preferences of people are left at the mercy of elected representatives and bureaucrats. The people's preferences and issues are treated as data and representatives of people exercise their political will in policy making along with bureaucrats and influencers in the policy corridor. The policy process is further problematized when it is tested on the altar of power and resource needed during the policy making process. The technocratic mindset further complicates the treatment of policy as it considers community development a technical issue that can be dealt by experts and not people (Korfmacher; 2001). Due to these reasons policies that include citizen involvement approach receive incremental treatment and rarely given

emphasis in policy performance. It is at this cross roads, policy making process shakes hands with politics.

Incremental policy making process was propagated by Charles Lindholm, who proposed that policy making is a political process and not a rational choice. The decision of policy makers is a compromise and adjustment of mutual interest of multiple actors in policy making. The changes proposed is not a radical takeoff but small steps drawn ambiguously to maintain the status quo. The small changes may be made from time to time gradually but not at ones that shall shake the boat. Prime interest among the participants is retaining the power and resource that each one holds and ensure the policy drawn out in policy making process does not imbalances it³.

Another reason of why participatory process attracts distaste from the policy makers is its footing in decentralisation. It is based on the philosophy that communities are able to manage their natural resources sustainably by applying their discretion and decision based on local situation and they are accorded resources and power to do so.

Decentralization in management of natural resources is considered necessary for survival of natural resource management (Ribot; 2004). Further, decentralization is also crucial from the point of view of political efficiency. The lowest level of decision making and allotment of resources is based on the situation and local needs as the lowest level of government are aware of the conditions and issues faced by the people (Nsibambi; 1997).

Decentralization can be simply defined as transfer of power and functions to local level government such as Panchayat Raj Institutions (Ribot; 2004). To specify more decentralization is a shift of power from central authorities to peripheral level i.e. lower rung of political and administrative actors (Saito;2003, Agrawal, 1995).

Power is needed by the local representative to legitimately regulate their citizens, civic bodies for providing them sustainable livelihoods for economic improvement and for equity. Entrustment of the power with local government aids discretion in making decisions, rules and adjudication with regard to their local natural resources status. Further, it helps in garnering support of local population which the local government represent and in harnessing local democracy (Ribot, 2003). Decentralization brings in equity in allocation, it also fosters accountability, enhances local participation, builds social capital and brings in social equality which in turn brings sustainability in resource management (Ostrom; 2001, Ribot, 1999).

³ Hayes, Michael, " Incrementalism and Public Policy Making, April, 2017, accessed, 6 May, 2018, <http://politics.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-133>

It may be noted that rural population has had very limited control over decision making on issues affecting them. They have been governed as subjects rather than citizens who are empowered to influence decisions affecting them (Mamdani; 1996, Ribot 1999a). In order to convert rural subject to citizens requires their representation, platforms for exercising rights and participation in local issues and as natural resource management concerns their livelihood (Crawford and Ostrom, 1995). Decentralised natural resource management which also includes watershed development needs radical policy reforms in centralised states where natural resources policy have been centrally governed since colonial times as in case of India. This would mean a reform from experimental community mobilization and inclusion methods to a more institutionalized, replicable and more sustainable form of participation through local democracy (Shackleton and others, 2002, Saito; 2003). The role of state in advancing policy to achieve effective decentralization reforms which would in other words mean that political commitment is necessary for decentralization to be effective.

However, this decentralisation of watershed development again is vulnerable to incrementalism as it requires power transfer. There is resistance from Central government in choosing appropriate decentralized institutions for transfer of power and further insufficient powers are entrusted with these local authorities (Ribot; 2002; 2004, Baviskar; 2002). There are various reasons which are often surrounded by fear, vagueness about maintenance of social, political and environmental well being that make bureaucrats and political leaders at central level unsupportive towards decentralization (Ribot; 2002a, Baviskar; 2002). The job of policy makers does not end with merely creating and designing policies but also support the policy with commitment which is also reversibly referred as Political will. The state needs to not only design enabling policy in this direction but also support the policy with actions in terms of resources which includes institutions, finances and process to evaluate the policy on its performance in enabling community participation.).

1.3 Incremental Behaviour Towards Participatory Policy:

Major challenge about the terrain of rainfed areas is that it is interlinked ecologically. The water from the ridges i.e. hilly terrain flow down in the valley, which is below. The actions uphill affects the ecology and water balance downstream. For instance, if forested valley is denuded through deforestation activities, the soil upstream will be eroded and flow along with water leading to siltation and flooding downstream. Similarly, if residents in the downstream create trenches and carry out plantation in the slope or build bunds to stop the flow of water, it helps in preventing soil runoff and improves ground water table. Further, the residents of a given watershed includes both land owners and landless families. Land

owners engage in farming while those without land may work as agricultural labour and own livestock. Due to this, both the groups may compete in using natural resources with one another i.e. grazing versus farming. This inter dependence and linkage has its proposition as isolated actions is not very useful and therefore collective action by the watershed community members is indispensable in rainfed areas.

However, bringing people together for collective action is not easy⁴. As community is collection of individuals with conflict of interest and aspiration and this becomes even more challenging in case of India where community is heterogeneous unit of class, caste and religious groups (Agrawal; 1995). Therefore, for enabling collective actions in rural India for development projects sponsored by state need a sustained directed effort supported by political will. This especially holds a lot of weight in the intervention is sponsored by external agency such as the state. If the community collectively comes together organically on its own with the realisation of the importance for collective action to manage its natural resources, the role of external agency would not be detrimental. Political will thus becomes important. Government's commitment to create and improve instruments and processes that can act as a platform for community participation is crucial (Adato *et al*; 2005).

The transition period for watershed programmes in India was 1993 onwards. In the year 1993, Prof. CH. Hanumantha Rao, headed Committee assessed the performance of Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP), Integrated Wasteland Development Programme (IWDP) and Desert Development Programme (DDP) which were being undertaken on watershed basis at that point of time. The Committee was disappointed with the finding of the programme. It mentioned that both the schemes had miserably failed due to ad hoc and poor planning without taking into consideration the integrated watershed approach. Various agencies which included Ministries, State Government and NGOs were implementing the programme with different approaches in a compartmental fashion without any convergence or integration. The Committee observed that rural environment is effected by several other economic forces and one needs to address these adversities too along with the large scale natural resource conservation. The community has to be involved for sustainability and to address the local needs. For community to participate and derive economic profits out of it, it also needs to be done holistically in Common Property Resources. This will need providing community with sufficient support in the form of infrastructure, technologies and institutional support.

⁴ Foreword by Joachim von Braun, DG, IFPRI, Research Report 143, in Adato *et al* (2005).

A common set of operational guidelines were formulated for watershed programmes in India governed by Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. Centrally Sponsored Schemes for Watershed Development namely DPAP, DDP and IWDP were put under the new policy of Participatory Watershed Development under the Common Guidelines of Watershed Development, 1994 (also known as Hanumantha Rao Guidelines). The Guidelines prescription was heavily inspired by the success stories of community led development that were initiated by the community themselves organically for instance Ralegaon Sidhi and Indian Council of Agricultural Research supported experiment like Sukhomajri, External agency supported KRIBHCO in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh and WoTR and NABARD supported by Indo-German Watershed Development Programme and pilot projects funded by the World Bank were also influencing the policy debate (Kerr; 2002). They all had reported success and owed their success and sustainability upon people's participation which was clearly missing in state sponsored technocratic watershed projects. Led by these success stories, Government of India, redesigned its watershed development program from a top-down, technocratic model to decentralised, participatory development model in the newly formulated guidelines of 1994. The guidelines brought in the so called shift in implementation of watershed approach.

Central Government is resisting decentralization by virtue of the choices it is making such as multiple local institutions, assigning limited and specific powers to a variety of local institutions that are not accountable in a systemic manner to local population and is unrepresentative of heterogeneous groups within the local population, lack of financial support and discretions (Ribot, 1999a & 2002). State funders depend on these variety of patronized local groups/ institutions for obtaining patronage, popular support, electoral base and fulfilling their development agendas without accounting the interest of local people (Schroeder 1999; Ferguson 1996; Baviskar 2002, 2004). This approach often sidelines locally accountable and representative institutions.

Locally accountable institutions are missing that are downwardly accountable, representative, with meaningful discretionary powers (Mawhood, 1983; Ribot, 1996; Agrawal and Ribot, 1999). There is haphazard implementation of decentralization with insufficient power, funds, management with poorly defined powers and functions of local actors and replication of hierarchy as top to down model in watershed development even after participatory guidelines was introduced(Porter & Young, 1998, Ribot, 1999a, Walker, 2000,

Onyach-Olaa and Porter, 2000, Bazaraa, 2002) this is counter-productive and leads to increased conflicts and undermine local participation (Baviskar, 2004).

The reforms on participatory watershed development programmes had been incrementally designed by the State largely Central Government in designing centrally sponsored scheme. Many of the powers lie with it such as smooth transition of power from central management to decentralized systems at state government level, by establishing structures, developing legal environment including dispute resolution at local as well as between local and central actors/agencies, designing policies, setting properties, supporting local efforts technically and financially. Central government can promote civic education so that local people and local governments know about their power and obligations. Civic and legal text and policies and acts affecting the local people and government can be translated to local languages for encouraging participation of local people so that local government can effectively carry out its responsibility (Ribot, 2003).

However findings in case of the reformed centrally sponsored scheme on watershed development since 1994, reveal that community participation is nothing close to the understanding of community participation. Community is nowhere in control of very aspect of watershed development including sharing of benefit and review of performance.

The participation of community has been reduced to formation of groups, membership, collection of information, allocation of benefits in the form of cash and kind, involuntary deduction to contribute to watershed development fund. The participatory platforms are created specifically for the scheme during the project period of 5-7 years. However, the platforms become defunct after the local level implementers stop the support. At policy level, since 2008 and beyond, the community participation is reported in the form of number of groups created, number of beneficiaries covered as per the target of the plan incorporated in the Detailed Project Report (DPR) prepared at the beginning of the project like other components which are reported for their performance tangibly as per the percentage of target achieved during the project period. The process part of decentralised community participation has not been touched upon and remains a major lacunae of the policy performance based on shift in approach to decentralised participatory development from technocratic approach in Centrally sponsored Scheme (Baumann, 1998; Shah, 1999; Farrington and Turton, 1999; Hanumantha Rao, 2000; Baviskar, 2004; Chottray, 2012). This is very unlike the community participation as understood in context of community development which involves voluntary social organisation of community for development in which community has control over decision on their development (Oakley, 1995).

Conclusion:

Flexibility, inclusion, decision making and involvement in all stages with ample stress and investment on capacity building and planning before resource development are key features which are weak in state sponsored projects.

The central argument that state being the major sponsor drives empowered participation in state sponsored participatory natural resource programmes like watershed development holds substance in context of centrally sponsored participatory development. There is lack of Political will which is in form of inefficiencies in actions for facilitating empowered participatory spaces.

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