

PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION OF NEED-BASED DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PANCHAYATS

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It is common knowledge today that, in order to be meaningful, development endeavors have to be based on felt needs of the people to whom they are meant. It is because of this fact that Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have been given prominence in India's rural development set-up. It is believed that due to their proximity to the common people, PRIs are better suited than the development bureaucracy to make the development responsive to the needs of rural people. This is one of the major reason to assign large number of functions and rights to the PRIs under the framework of the 73rd Constitutional (Amendment) Act, 1992 (here after referred as the 'new panchayati raj act').

Keeping this in view, present study was undertaken to seek people's perception on the issue 'whether the PRIs are proving helpful in making the development responsive to people's needs and taking the benefits of development schemes to the needy people, after implementation of the new panchayati raj act? If yes, how?'

METHODOLOGY

This study was undertaken in one district each of Rajasthan (Distt. Alwar) and Haryana (Distt. Gurgaon) States. From each of these two districts two Panchayat Samities were randomly selected and from each Panchayat Samiti two Gram Panchayats were again randomly selected. In district Alwar, Panchayat Samities Kishangarh Bass and Tizara, whereas in district Gurgaon, Panchayat Samities Gurgaon and Nuh were selected. Three kinds of respondents were selected for this study - Panchayat Members, Non-members (i.e. common villagers) and Government officials (i.e. government employees working with panchayats).

A total of 139 panchayat members, 40 non-members and 31 government officials served as respondents for this study. Respondents were personally interviewed with the help of an interview schedule consisting of open-ended questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data shown in table 1 indicate that, in both the districts, nearly 40 per cent panchayat members and two-third government officials felt one or the other positive aspect that have emerged as a result of PRI's involvement in development activities. In their view, now attention is being given to more number of problems and that problems felt by different sections of the rural society are being included in development plans prepared by the panchayats because people of all sections have now been elected to panchayats. They told that because panchayat members are better aware of the problems in the villages than the officials and because of the fact that panchayats are now being involved in the selection of beneficiaries, the process has improved.

It is, however, alarming to note that two-third non-members felt no change in making development responsive to local felt needs, even after the implementation of the new panchayati raj act. None of the non-members accepted that, due to the intervention of panchayats, benefits of development programmes are reaching to the needy persons. Instead, they said that the panchayat members are not fair while selecting beneficiaries for development schemes and as a result, many people who, in reality, are not

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eligible, get benefits whereas, other eligible ones are left out.

Several problems were perceived by the respondents in the development process. Nearly half of the panchayat members perceived 'less resources to undertake development activities desired by the panchayats' as major obstacle in need-based development. They said that

panchayats pass need-based proposals but many of them are not materialised due to less funds. They told that even when funds are available, there are certain conditions regarding the type of activities in which these funds can be used. This creates hindrance in using them for locally relevant purposes. Few officials also agreed to it but none of the members accepted it.

Table 1. People's perception of need-based development through panchayats

Perception	Distt. Alwar			Distt. Gurgaon		
	Members N=73	Non- members N=20	Govt. Officials N=16	Members N=66	Non- members N=20	Govt. Officials N=15
❖ Positive aspects felt						
1. Attention paid to more number of problems of the villages	41	25	75	30.3	15	60
2. Problems of different sections included in development plans	13.7	20	62.5	7.6	0	40
3. Increased awareness of development issues in villages	13.7	30	37.5	22.7	25	66.6
4. Increased reach of the development programmes to the needy people	43.8	0	9	42.4	0	66.6
❖ No improvement	16.5	65	0	15	75	0
❖ Problems perceived						
1. Villagers fail to realise actual problems	13.7	0	37.5	7.6	10	26.6
2. More attention paid to problems of less relevance	11	25	37.5	0	20	46.6
3. Less collective feeling for common good.	13.7	0	43.7	7.6	0	33.3
4. Personal loyalty causes approval for proposals beneficial for few people	6.8	75	31.2	12	90	53.3
5. Unnecessary resistance from opposition members	34.2	15	43.7	22.5	0	66.6
6. Dishonest identification of beneficiaries for Govt. schemes by panchayat members	0	55	0	0	65	0
7. Unrealistic proposals being put up by panchayats	0	0	62.5	0	10	66.6
8. Less resources to implement plans prepared by panchayats	54.8	0	31.2	45	0	13
9. Conditions attached with the grants coming from the Govt.	27.4	10	31.2	22.7	20	53
10. Non-transfer of rights to panchayats in several matters of local relevance	30.2	0	0	22.7	0	0
11. Delay in development works due to lack of consensus among panchayat members	0	35	37.5	0	45	53
12. Too many expectations from Govt. and panchayats	41	10	50	30.3	0	33.3
13. No problem	11	0	0	15	0	20
❖ Can't say	8	10	0	12	0	0

Panchayat members were also of the view that people expect too much from panchayats and the government, and when their unrealistic demands are not fulfilled, they do not cooperate with

panchayats. Considerable number of officials also supported this view. Panchayat members were also unhappy about non-transfer of actual rights to the panchayats in some matters of local relevance.

Majority of the non-members expressed the view that, due to personal loyalty Sarpanches get certain proposals passed through the panchayats, which are beneficial to limited number of people. It will be appropriate to mention here that respondents did not cite examples/incidents while telling this.

Government officials were of the opinion that sometimes village people do not understand their real problems properly and give more emphasis to less important matters. As a result, resources are consumed on matters that could be postponed while many needs remain unfulfilled. Officials told that sometimes panchayats pass unrealistic proposals that are difficult to implement, and when such proposals are not approved at higher levels, it creates discontent among people. Officials also opined that village people lack community feeling, therefore, several works which can be done at the village level with the intervention of panchayat, are not done.

CONCLUSION

❖ Nowadays lot of faith is being deposed in PRIs as a vehicle of need-based, self-reliant local development. However, the picture that has emerged from the above discussion is not very encouraging. Though panchayat members and officials felt that with the involvement of panchayats, the development process is becoming responsive to the local needs, a critical look at the problems perceived by different kinds of respondents, tells a different story.

- ❖ There are contradictions in views of the three kinds of respondents. Panchayat members felt problems related to the government machinery like non-transfer of rights, less funds, etc; whereas non-members are very critical of the attitude and intentions of the members. On the other hand, officials do not seem to have faith in people. None, however, seems to look forward to enhance one's own contribution to the cause of need-based development. This is basically a question of attitude and faith towards, not only one's own contribution, but also that of others'.
- ❖ Therefore, it would not be out of place to conclude that, before the objective of need-based development through panchayats is realised, lot of ground work needs to be done.
- ❖ Carefully focussed behavioural training programmes for government officials and members can contribute in developing a better appreciation among them, of each other's contribution.
- ❖ Systematically planned educational campaigns may be helpful in developing better understanding between panchayat members and the common villagers, which will ultimately lead to need-based development through increase in people's participation.
- ❖ However, all these efforts have to be made along with the speedy transfer of rights to panchayats so that, they are fully equipped to tackle the problems relevant to the local circumstances,

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