
UNIT 10 MULTILEVEL PLANNING: CONCEPT AND PRACTICE

Structure

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10.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to

- Explain the importance of planning;
- Explain a conceptual framework for multilevel planning;
- Describe the factors, issues in multilevel planning;
- Briefly narrate the features of planning in the context of multilevel planning approach;
- Analyse the thinking, practice and emerging issues in decentralised planning; and
- Explain the need for administrative infrastructure and restructuring for planning

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The problems relating to planning machinery, planning process and implementation have all along evoked great interest throughout the world. We have stuck to the process of democratic planning and development with faith and vigour in spite of many vicissitudes – political, economic and international.

The present Unit is written on the basis of India's experience of multilevel planning but is of equal relevance and significance to developing economies in South Asia.

While grappling with the problems of development, the machinery set up for the formulation and implementation of the plans was being continuously reviewed and limitations in the process were being identified. Any dynamic plan effort needs imaginative and continuous appraisal and reappraisal in an environment of accelerating changes. Regional imbalances, particular needs of geographical units, special problems of backward areas and under-developed regions clamoured for attention. Though the first impulse for planning came mainly

from the Centre, the States have been involved in the process. The need for planning from below, however, has been continuously felt. “It is through enlargement of the area of agreement that conditions can be created for the most effective mobilisation of the community’s resources towards the common objective of all round economic development”. The common objective had also to be determined by the community. It was felt that more the smaller the lowest geographical units get involved in the planning process, the more representative the plan would become. With a view to making the plans, therefore, more representative and to get them closely correspond and respond to the local needs and aspirations in the national perspective, it was suggested that the States might set up the necessary Planning Boards and appropriate arrangements even for the District, the regional and even other levels, might be devised so that the planning process might have more scientific basis and the evaluative perspective as well as the necessary monitoring system could be suitably developed. Guidelines for evolving District plans have been drawn up in most of the States. Drought-prone areas, tribal areas, under-developed regions, inaccessible areas, command areas, service and growth centres, metropolitan regions – all these have come up for attention. The Planning process has acquired a new dimension at levels other than the Union and the State. Now planning has thus entered the era of multi-level planning.

10.2 WHAT IS PLANNING

In the limited context of development planning that is being discussed, we may define process of planning as essentially rationalist in approach and interventionist in operation.

Rationalism in approach has to be provided by the technical and bureaucratic inputs as a continuous process but the plan to become operational requires interventionism. The interventionism has to be done by the authority, which has power to intervene in the system, which means basically the political authority. The political authority, which has power to intervene in the context of planning, may exercise such power in a variety of ways. It could be to give maximum regard to rational input or at the other extreme reduce the process to a ritual. Even after accepting a plan-frame, the interventionism may extend to aspects of implementation undermining the rational input.

Rationalist in approach implies in the conventional sense of comprehensive planning, initially obtaining knowledge of relevant conditions. These may be the social conditions, the economic institutions, the current use of the resources, the technical factors, etc. In other words, there are a number of factors such as income, expenditure of the government, private resources, technology, etc. Having identified the various factors, their inter-relationships have to be established and as far as possible quantified. Simultaneously, there has to be appreciation of the constraints imposed, the policy instruments available with the government and its willingness to use them, etc., and setting forth of broad objectives. In other words, there is an implicit assumption that the system left to itself would proceed in one direction and through intervening (by a process of planning) we want the system to operate differently with a view to obtaining objectives in the most efficient manner by manipulating instruments of intervention available, recognising the constraints within which the system and the instruments have to operate. In terms of processes, it will naturally involve the resource-estimation, choice among alternatives, target setting, etc. In terms of timeframe, they involve identification of a framework for perspective plan, a more detailed medium term plan and a rationally relevant annual plan co-terminus with budgets.

As we go down to the lower levels of planning from the macro level, experience has shown that conventional comprehensive approach is not viable. Hence Albert Waterston has suggested what can be called a Problem-Oriented Approach that starts with the identification of problems, elaboration of strategies and selection and implementation of important relevant projects to tackle the problems.

Yet another approach simplified to suit the specific requirements particularly of aid agencies has been developed by Waller called Reduced Planning Approach. This involves a quick analysis of the general conditions instead of comprehensive approach. Key sectors are identified for detailed analysis and key projects picked up. Implementation of key projects with assured implementation of support project constitutes Reduced Planning Approach.

Depending on the circumstances, it is possible to have various elements of the Comprehensive, the Problem Oriented and Reduced Planning Approach appropriate to the level at which the planning exercise is undertaken.

While the above analysis provides the framework within which rationalism is expected to operate, it has to be recognised that there are limits to rationality. These are broadly described as values. There are no technical tools available to make choice regarding values though it is possible to quantify the implications of the different value judgements. For instance, the extent to which the life of an old person who is a burden on the society without a prospect of future productivity element as against a newly born child who is also a burden with the prospect of future productivity element. Similarly, it is possible to identify issues of inter-generational quality, income re-distribution as between the different sections of people, regional distribution of economic activity and benefits of economic development, etc. These constitute certain fundamental values in the context of the social change that is attempted through the process of planning. The value judgements are to be necessarily indicated by the society at large through the political processes and in a way through the elected political representatives. No doubt, the technocrat can expand the vistas available, bring into focus the options that are relevant and influence the choice among the alternatives by indicating the implications. However, the final decision in regard to the interventionism is with the political authority and therefore the need for constant interaction between political leadership and technical work is required. Needless to say, there is no mechanism by which we can define the limits to value frame and also no way by which we can restrict political processes to value and leave rationality to operate. Such interaction can take place either at one level in the society or can take place at the multiple levels in the society and this leads us to the issue of multilevel planning.

10.3 IMPORTANT FACTORS TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT BEFORE PLANNING

Before we discuss about multi-level planning, what is needed is an objective examination of the actual realities prevailing in our rural areas and to make operational plans, on the basis of a scientific concept of a community and a region. A number of factors, like size, nature and distribution of population, level of development, ecology, entrepreneurial level, social structure and value orientation, become very vital when we transform our aggregative macro-plans into developmental micro-plans for the purpose of implementation. A large country of

our size and complexity cannot improve the standard of living of its people, generate employment, and develop agriculture and industry unless it strikes at the base.

In developing countries, which have scarce resources, “all statistics of growth and development have to be read against the growth of population”. Population scattered over other areas tends to concentrate around certain centres. Size and density of population is one of the important criteria for determining the level of economic development achieved by a particular region. Though basically it is affected by resources, like land and water, it may be favourably influenced by availability of other resources, like forests, minerals, a command area project, etc. Utilisation of resources at higher levels of production very often leads to a higher density of population and sometimes results in employment of more people in the same kind of work unless counter magnets in the form of new growth centres are established.

The second important factor is the level of development. In some regions, achievement motivation is strong for cultural and historical reasons; in others, there are islands of backwardness having the social forces operating around. Parliamentary democracy and development planning are bound to unleash such forces the outcome of whose interaction is going to determine the future socio-economic ethos of the country. The past-present-future nexus of forces and events have, therefore, to be fully understood and charted. What is needed is an assessment of the level of economic development of an area taking into consideration the multipliers and the backwashes. Economic growth seems to be linked up with spatial development. Asok Mitra, quoting J. Friedman, refers to four stages in the evolution of spatial organisation in the national economic development. “The first stage is the pre-industrial one, characterised by a number of small independent centres serving its own surrounding regions and linking other centres. The second corresponds to the period of incipient industrialisation characterised by primate cities and towns, which are either ports or are in the heart of one or two centres of industrial activity featuring fan-shaped networks of transportation facilities.... This state is characterised by lack of balance in the distribution of size over the whole spectrum of cities. The third or the transitional stage comes with the recognition and conscious articulation of a hierarchical vertical organisation by means of which new resources from the former periphery are brought into the national economy which enhance the potentiality for further national development but still leave very large pockets of poverty and backwardness between the national and regional centres. The stage is essentially unstable and leads on to the fourth one, consisting of full-fledged spatial organisations based on the hierarchic principle and the so-called rank-size rule....” These stages are generally indicative of a historic process and warn the planner to intervene through either special programmes or other corrective steps to restore the balance.

The geographical and the ecological factors are the next important elements to be reckoned with. All regions are not homogeneous as far as environmental factors go. The location determines the climate and the vegetation of an area and this affects not only the nature and distribution of settlements but also the strategy of development relevant to it. The land-use pattern, the degree of soil erosion, the possibility of floods, the potentiality for construction of dams and drainage, the geological data and minerals are also important constituents. All these factors combine to produce the basic resources.

It is not merely the geographical landscape but the cultural one also which is very relevant to a planner. The social structure, value orientation and leadership profile influence the planning process in a marked way. This is very well illustrated by the problems of hill areas, tribal areas and arid zones. Given all the growth potential, much will depend on the ethos of the people-whether their outlook is traditional or progressive, whether they have acumen for entrepreneurship or whether they are fatalists. There are social, communal and religious factors which interfere with the cold logic of mathematical economics.

Intimately bound up with the above and arising from them is the fact of the growth potential which is not merely a sum-total of the above but is very much more besides. Constituent elements of demographic, physical and cultural landscapes sum up the growth-permitting and growth-conditioning factors. The nature of these factors, their spatial distribution and the inter-relationship, which a planning process will build up, go to enhance or inhibit growth and the quality of life and multi-level planning becomes the most important single element to link plan with implementation. In such a process one will have to identify a watershed mark where the aggregative macro-plans could be transformed into concrete realistic micro-plans for an area or a region. Where economic planning ends, the administrative and operational planning begins. Through all these stages the effort should be influenced and inspired by the basic objectives of planning – economic growth and social justice.

10.4 WHAT IS MULTILEVEL PLANNING

MULTI-LEVEL planning, as the term indicates, is integration of planning at various levels. Our past planning efforts were primarily sectoral in nature and were focused at the national and state levels. Budgets were prepared with specific allocations for various sectors of the economy, such as agriculture, industry, education, health, family planning and so on. These schematic budgets reflected national priorities as well as the availability of funds. The same procedure was adopted at the state level and other levels.

We have, by now, acquired enough knowledge about the efficacy of this system of planning. It is almost universally agreed that a balance has to be maintained between national priorities and local needs. Sectoral planning at the national and state levels with the help of schematic budgets has shown some modest overall gains but at the local level the impact, if at all visible, has been uneven. This uneven impact in the current socio-political context has created problems for backward regions as well as for backward classes. While new wealth has been concentrated in a few regions and in a few hands, unemployment has also increased steadily.

Obviously, our past planning efforts at the national and regional levels were not enough and now more and more attention is being given to planning at the local levels. In India, Planning Commission, for example, has recommended the district as the unit of planning and development. Regional planners would rather have a homogeneous region as the unit of planning. Experiments have been attempted in Indian state like Tamil Nadu to identify regions by regrouping taluks. Whatever the unit of planning may be the idea is not to prepare schematic budgets for units smaller than the State, but to prepare area development plans based on the needs and potentialities of the smaller units. Targets of achievement in this case will be dictated by the needs and potentialities of an area rather than by sectoral allocations.

There is also a danger in making area plans the sole basis of all our planning endeavours. The needs of our rural areas are many and plans based only on these may require astronomical amounts of money. Moreover, priorities have to be considered before finalising these plans. Multi-level planning provides an approach by which local plans can be fitted into the matrix of sectoral plans based on national priorities and the availability of funds. Most of the plans followed by South East Countries at the national and the state levels are sectoral plans. We now need a consensus on the methodology for preparing area-development plans, which can be fitted into the framework of these sectoral plans.

There is increasing attention to the need for decentralisation in planning. Strictly speaking a plea for decentralisation implies that some functions can be more efficiently performed at lower levels in hierarchy than being performed at higher levels. Logically, therefore, any plea for decentralisation implies a hypothesis about the appropriate functions to be performed at appropriate levels. The approach of Multilevel Planning involves identification of the appropriate levels and appropriate functions to be performed at each level in the direction of optimal functioning of a system. In the context of planning for social change such appropriateness of both levels and functions will be determined in the given socio-political context. The Multilevel Planning approach, therefore, tries to answer more important requirement of identifying appropriate levels and functions.

Strictly speaking there can be centralised analysis of all aspects of the system that is sought to be planned, decision making at the centralised level and direction from a single level. Further, it is recognised that there are costs of obtaining information. There can also be loss of time and difficulties of clarifying concepts uniformly applicable to all situations. Further, there can also be similar problems of distortions in transmitting decisions for implementation. In other words, from a purely cost-effective angle of decision-making, multiplicity of agency levels in a hierarchical fashion entrusted with decision-making powers may be called for.

Further, the socio-political compulsions may require that decision-making powers be distributed to more than one level for the same area. Similarly, decisions can be made at different levels by the same agency or by different agencies.

In brief therefore, Multilevel Planning may be defined as the existence of multiplicity of area levels and agency levels operating on the same territory and people inhabiting such territory.

It will thus be evident that Multilevel Planning is different from Decentralised Planning since the need and scope for decentralised planning will have to be derived from analysis of Multilevel Planning framework. Theoretically, a Multilevel Planning approach may result in demanding decentralisation of decision-making power in some aspects and centralisation in some other aspects.

It should be clear that Multilevel Planning is different from regional planning, regional development and area development.

Theoretically, existence of multiple level implies performing different functions in terms of power within the broad spectrum of process of planning namely, feeding information, agents for implementation, performing delegated-restricted decision making functions and decision making itself.

10.4.1 Factors that govern the framework for Multilevel Planning

As already mentioned, there are advantages and disadvantages in centralising and decentralising functions. But these are to be balanced with reference to each activity through mechanism of multiple area levels and agency levels. It will therefore be necessary to list the factors that generally govern the framework for Multilevel Planning. These relate to:

In the interests of consistency and ensuring proper linkages, it is generally believed that centralised approach is essential. On the other hand the capacity and efficiency with which information can be gathered and analysed and most important integrated in given spatial and social context is invoked to press for decentralisation. For instance, in the case of mixed economies, a large number of production units particularly in agriculture, small industries, etc., are involved in making their own decisions about what to produce, how much to produce and how to produce. These production units operate in a variety of climatic, social and institutional contexts. In such an event and to the extent planning implies use of incentive and disincentive mechanisms, it is considered extremely difficult for a centralised planning agency to appreciate variety of situations and modulate the incentive and disincentive mechanisms to suit local conditions. Similarly, the locational decisions which have to be integrated in a given area may require detailed local level information indicating greater efficiency in decentralised decision making even after allowing for sacrificing, to some extent, consistency at the macro level. It is also argued that the recent thrust towards privatisation itself implies decentralisation (since market forces are strengthened) and applying same logic the governmental machinery would demand greater decentralisation of decision-making powers. On the other hand, it can be argued that such decentralisation would make a mockery of macro-level planning involving material balances. In brief, therefore, the centralisation or decentralisation will have to appreciate the advantages and disadvantages in respect of each of the spectrum of process of planning (Namely feeding information to decision making on allocable aspects)

- It is generally argued that decentralised planning would enable better appreciation by the local people of the benefits available and as such better local mobilisation of resources for development. At the same time many studies indicate that the resource raising record of local governments is very poor and that given nature of the societies in developing countries, greater the remoteness of the tax raising authority lesser the unpleasantness. Yet another way of looking at this issue will be that, while the resource raising may be centralised if it were to be more efficient, the expenditure part of it can be decentralised if allocations of expenditures are found more efficient through decentralisation.
- Often it is argued that the decentralisation enables popular participation and feeling of participation is desirable even if the net result in terms of economic efficiency in the short run was neutral or even marginally reduced. On the other hand it is argued that such decentralised approach to popular participation would result in the more dominant elements or feudal elements dominating the decision-making process. However, it has not been established that the class structure of any society and its capacity to influence the governmental decision-making would change depending upon the size of the political unit or sub-unit. It is also argued that the imposition of value judgements on planning in various levels on disaggregated decision-making demands introduction of political elements at disaggregated levels also.

Finally it can also be argued that the institutional development for popular participation would require the instrument of elected representatives and such institutions may tend to be subjected to politics of political parties. To the extent the politics of political parties dominate the local governments also and to the extent such political parties have centralising tendencies, the decentralised governments may not serve the purpose. Thus the issue of introduction of political element in the Multilevel Planning framework will have to recognise the conflicting approaches to the disaggregated political activity.

- It is often argued that the administrative structures are not well developed to enable meaningful Multilevel Planning. Here again there can be a trade off between efficient centralised administrators implementing in a centralised way leading to some diseconomies and the decentralised second best administrators implementing programmes efficiently through decentralised systems through efficiency itself is limited by the capacities of local-level administrators. Secondly it can be argued that over the period the administrative structures are bound to develop and the changing skills and capabilities will have to be taken into account. Further decentralisation itself may lead towards greater skill-acquisition and development of the structures. Often it is felt that the bureaucracy has a tendency to centralise and by this process can also enhance its bargaining power in the socio-political milieu. Again it is necessary to reconcile these conflicting aspects in the Multilevel Plan framework.
- Like the subject matter of planning, the issues of centralisation and decentralisation in planning are also essentially political in the ultimate analysis. The newly independent countries were keen to strengthen the nationalist force and fight disunity within. This had a tendency to centralised government. With the experience gained, it is some times argued that the goal of nation building is better served by recognising the pluralistic nature of some of these societies and identifying area units recognising distinct social characteristics (linguistic, cultural, regional, etc.) and sharing the decision making powers. The general social perception about recognising the objective of nation building is also very relevant in determining the multilevel framework.

10.4.2 Issues in Multilevel Planning

On the basis of the above analysis, the issues that arise in the context of Multilevel Planning are as follows:

- What are the different agencies that have to be identified in terms of sectors and autonomous units? What will be the extent of autonomy each one of them would exercise at the central government and what subordinate functionaries or area level functionaries would they recognise?
- What are the area units that can be delineated and what considerations govern the nature and size of such area units?
- What functions have to be allotted to the different area units and what will be the relative powers of different agency units in each area unit? (For instance the distribution of functions may not strictly follow the economic sector classification)?
- What are the financial arrangements to link resources (owned or shared or devolved) and the functions to be discharged?

- What should be the extent of political element introduced at each of the area levels and the arrangements for ensuring representation of the people? (On a party or non-party basis)?
- The administrative machinery and the extent of its subordination to the political authority and different area levels? and
- How are the interrelationships – vertical and horizontal – between political authorities, technical departments, autonomous bodies within public sector such as public enterprise, and general developmental bureaucracy, defined?

10.4.3 Basic factors in Multi-Level Planning

Multi-level planning, to be a reality, stipulates certain basic factors such as:

- Identification of levels of planning with territorial, spatial and administrative jurisdictions;
- A hierarchy of levels inter-related to a hierarchy of functions, in matters of planning and implementation;
- A system of inter-level or inter-governmental relationships – technical, financial and administrative – including arrangements for reviewing and determining policies, programmes and priorities as well as providing an integrated framework for local, state and national plans;
- Viability of the local and the regional planning and executive units, agencies or levels of government for effective functioning and availability at each level of appropriate expertise for project formulation with necessary guidance and support from higher echelons; and
- A basic commitment to an all out local planning and development efforts with its attendant responsibilities of mobilisation of local resources and exploitation of local potential with such outside support as may be necessary to induce self-generating growth.

Before analysing the administrative problems in multi-level planning, it will be desirable to have a quick look at the performance of the planning functions, particularly at the local levels. India has been a pioneer in national planning in the third world and the Planning commission, with all its limitations, has been an outstanding institution, with a high degree of expertise. Its dominant character, however, combined with detailed schematic approaches had a stifling effect on the initiative of the States, which were themselves hardly equipped for any long-range exercise in planning. The pre-occupation of the Planning Commission with detailed sectoral planning also left some vital gaps in the planning mechanism at the Centre. There were at least three areas essential for multi-level planning, which did not receive adequate support:

- In spite of recent solicitations, spatial planning has not yet found a berth in the Planning Commission and there has hardly been any expert group engaged in integrated rural-urban planning to link up socio-economic development with physical and natural resource planning. The continued omission of urban areas and urbanisation processes from the plans is an admitted fact and it is a measure of this unconcern that even the National malaria Eradication Programme did not recognise the existence of urban areas and it is urban malaria today that threatens to undo the tremendous achievements of this internationally prestigious programme;

- There are problems of planning and development involving inter-state regions for harnessing resources, developing communications and building up the necessary infrastructure in larger national interests. There is need of a special organisation for the purpose in the Planning Commission; and
- A neglected field has been the development of administrative infrastructure to match the tasks of planning and implementation. The administrative organisation has been taken for granted and no attempt was made to build up and try out administrative models to meet the new challenges.

10.5 ADMINISTRATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR PLANNING

The organisation of local and regional planning and development agencies at the sub-state level is a pre-condition of any approach to multi-level planning. This will require identification of viable areas under unified administrations which could ensure effective organisation of productive and social activities and appropriate institutional frames with due regard to socio-economic and geographical factors. They must have the necessary capabilities for data collection, processing and analysis of information to work out probable alternatives and priorities for the most effective utilisation of scarce resources. That they will require higher-level support and guidance is conceded, but some basic expertise must be provided by proper redistribution of available talent.

District as Local Planning Unit

The existing boundaries of districts and the wide variation in their area and population have come in for considerable criticism. Sometimes district boundaries cut across physical, agronomic regions; it is an expert's view that a district is not the most appropriate planning region as it often does not represent homogeneity or possess the attributes of an internally viable entity. That the area and jurisdiction of districts will bear some considerable adjustments cannot be denied. On the other hand, the district has, because of its strong administrative identity, asserted itself as the basic unit for economic and sectoral planning as well as plan implementation. Moreover, if the district is to yield place to scientifically demarcated regions or sub-regions, it would be necessary to reorganise the entire administrative and institutional structure and it will raise a number of political issues and other problems of territorial orientation and adjustment of records. While the adjustment of district boundaries may remain a long-term objective, the odds are overwhelmingly in favour of the district being adopted as the basic unit of local-level planning and implementation. This will, of course, require an overall district level authority for integrated planning for both rural and urban areas.

Metropolitan Regions

There will still be some highly urbanised areas of inter-district dimensions or covering the major part of a district. This will need demarcation of Metropolitan Regions.

Sub-State Regions

While district reorganisation can be deferred, it is necessary to identify and demarcate regional areas at the sub-state level. In most cases, a combination of districts would make a region, and would also help to overcome the inadequacies

of district as a unit of planning. The Commissioners' Divisions as well as the Superintending Engineers' circles have been there with us, although without the necessary administrative frame that could enable them to play a broader role in planning and development. It should not be difficult at all to work out a regrouping of districts with common characteristics and area problems and set up planning and development machinery at that level and even clothe it with certain authority and power.

It may be mentioned in this connection that most countries have undertaken a regrouping of their traditional local areas. In France, for instance, about 89 departments (more or less corresponding to our territorial districts) have been regrouped for purposes of planning in 21 regions with one of the Prefects (the administrative head of the department), functioning as the regional Prefect having a special supporting technical team, as well as the deliberative body known as the Commission de Development Economique Regionne (CODER). It is true that the administrative structure of these 'regions' is still evolving, but it is significant that even in France, where the departments as local units of administration have survived many a revolutions, it has been found necessary to give them a regional perspective to meet the challenges of growth and development, due to the widening range of governmental activity and the change in the scale of operations due to technological advancements. Similarly, the Local Government Act of 1972 in U.K. divides the entire country into 6 predominantly urban metropolitan counties with second tier authorities and 38 counties with lower level rural and urban units of appropriate size.

There is no reason why we should not approach this question of identifying district groupings and set them up as regional units for planning tasks and for coordinating and guiding programme implementation at the district or city levels. The *Perspective Plan of Gujarat 1974-84* (Vol. III) suggests six probable regions. It may be that in the smaller States, with a few districts, the State level organisation may be in a position to function as both the State and regional level organisation because of sheer size. But most of the major States will find it convenient to undertake this exercise of identifying groups of districts which are: (a) administratively feasible and manageable, (b) economically viable, and (c) have a hierarchy of settlements and technical and financial institutions, necessary for a self generating effort.

Needless to say that such a regional set-up will require strong support from the States and the Centre, which should have separate expert Regional and Multi-level Planning and Development Cells to demarcate the regions and to lend technical and administrative support to the field organisations. In this regard the following arrangement could be of much required significance:

- The existing district units should, apart from any possible boundary adjustments, be oriented in the following respects:
 - (a) They should become apex units for both rural and urban authorities and their plans should cover both rural and urban areas;
 - (b) The plans should be based on a physical spatial plan, inter-linking the rural and urban areas for a balanced development of infrastructure in relation to identified growth points and the hierarchy of rural and urban settlements in the district; and
 - (c) All other agencies and organisations should function within the framework of the plan so prepared and dovetailed into the State and National Plans.

This will obviously require a much stronger planning and development authority at the District level.

- Apart from the district units, there are in some of the States dominant metropolitan areas, which will have to be treated as separate urban sub-regional planning and development units.
- In the larger States, these basic district units and metropolitan regions may be grouped into suitable regional units which should have a technical supporting team for coordinating physical and economic plans within the framework of a broad State Plan. This regional authority may also undertake programmes and works of an inter-district nature.
- Grouping of districts cannot, however, be an arbitrary matter. The State Planning Departments should have a inter-disciplinary team including physical planners to divide the State into adjacent administrative units having internal problems of such a character and scale that they need to be brought together as a region for planning and development. The adequacy and viability of the area from the point of developmental administration will also have to be taken into account. The State Plans can then be based on regional plans and the programmes of the respective State Departments will need channelling through the Regional, District and Metropolitan authorities except in the larger spheres of technical and financial support and studies and research.
- At the Centre, the Planning Commission's Multi-level Planning Cell must not only attune itself to lend support for developing appropriate techniques but should concern itself with the planning of inter-State regions and national infrastructure, particularly in matters of Water Management and Communications, in the context of resource regions cutting across State boundaries and ensure necessary allocation of funds for such purposes on a priority basis.

10.5.1 Administrative Restructuring

In the system of multilevel planning, one of the essential conditions for coordination is an agreement on spatial perspective. This would ensure a certain amount of coordination. To this end, the National Planning Organisation will have to be strengthened. At the state level, the effort will have to be directed at strengthening the organisation for planning in terms of:

- Analysis of physical strategies and identification of "areas" or sub-regions even within a district;
- Identification of growth centres with reference to a settlement hierarchy (as of now, these growth centres are identified by each department or agency);
- Guiding district authorities to plan for the district;
- Project formulation capabilities, including prescription of norms for various social services and local infrastructure;
- Systematic and timely monitoring and review; and
- Providing assistance to committees of non-officials (representing the district level, state and even national level, such as *zilla parishad* chairmen, members of the legislature and parliament), who would discuss and advise the government on schemes for development before they are incorporated in the budget. These committees may be constituted separately for different sectors.

In the case of larger states, creating committees for groups of districts (regional level, instead of sector-wise) may be advisable. This would, of course, get secretarial support at the state level only.

In terms of inter-level relationships, the national level would have to deal with only the state level. The National Planning Commission would approve the state plan component, and only the broad parameters of the district plan would be brought to the notice of the National Planning Commission. As long as all programmes of state plans and below are subject to approval at the national level, the “Imposition of standard schemes” would continue. Similarly, the system of schematic grants to second-order lower level by the higher level (such as central-sector schemes) would have to be dispensed with. Instead, only the totals of resources and programmes in identified activities for each level would have to be tallied by the higher level. Further, the emphasis should be changed from function-oriented multiplication of agencies to area-oriented consolidation of agencies. With a tight schedule for annual plans, more attention has to be paid to the systematic formulation of medium-term plans. Finally, exchange of evaluation reports between the levels and presenting them to developmental committees proposed for sectors (or regions) at the state level would ensure better follow-up action.

It may be necessary, if effective democratic decentralisation takes place, to consider the creation of a state-level development council on the same pattern as the NDC, with state chief ministers, important ministers and the chairman of district-level elected bodies as members. This would enable better coordination. Further, staff at the district level has to be effectively brought under the control of district-elected bodies. Finally, smaller municipalities have to be integrated into this system, while the larger ones would be recognised as equivalent to a district-level body.

10.6 ANALYTICAL TOOLS

There is need for a comprehensive approach to developmental priorities and all the instruments available with public-sector agencies. Restricting the flow of information as well as the planning process only to government agencies, and excluding various public enterprises, has resulted in a situation where more effective instruments (such as bank finances) are not mobilised to achieve the goals identified. At present, many of the public enterprises do not formulate a five-year plan – let alone integrate them with plan priorities.

It would be evident from the analysis made that the information flow constitutes the basis on which decisions have to be made, and the information flow becomes a crucial element for coordination in terms of time, space and sectors. Initially, therefore, a broad framework or a line of action followed by details of schemes, will have to be worked out by all the institution involved. There is need for a common time frame. Thus, there may be a need for the formulation of some sort of perspective, five-year plan and annual plan by all agencies including banks, other financial institutions, cooperatives and so on. These should be specific to accepted basic-area units such as the states and the districts. These time-bound plans prepared for different accepted space units or area units by all public-sector bodies, will ensure a certain amount of coordination at each level and over time. They will have to cover the sectors and activities specified for various levels. This process would therefore be essentially one of the continuous flows of information with a definite understanding of the following:

- Agreement on time-dimensions for a plan, that is a perspective, five-year and annual plan;
- Agreement on an area level for which such a frame will have to be prepared, and
- Specifications of the role in terms of each sector and for each one of the agencies involved.

It is not intended to say that these by themselves will bring about the necessary coordination. There would be a need for introducing certain tools of analysis for ensuring integration and coordination. One would be the time discount rate for analysing projects. The next would be an accounting price that will have to be assumed for arriving at social cost and social benefits. The third would be the need for some sort of shelf of projects. It may be necessary to caution that a shelf of projects has to be reviewed continuously and gradually, elaborating them with reference to changing needs. Finally, a total view in terms of not only the activities that are supposed to be planned for a given period, but also the activities that have already been taken up, is necessary. This point is specifically made since budgetary procedures involve the identification of “non-plan” activities that are those, which are committed and being executed, and plan activities cover only those, which are programmed during the plan period.

In brief, the multilevel planning process is a complex process and its effectiveness is enhanced through a process of comprehensiveness in the coverage of public-sector agencies, rational decentralisation, and subjecting the plan process to a more continuous and effective popular participation at all levels, primarily through elected representatives. The key to the success of this process is as much in participative effort to mobilise support at all levels, as in the improving of analytical capabilities in the system itself.

10.7 ACTIVITY

1. Find out what kind of plans is adopted in your country.
2. Discuss the relevance of multilevel planning in your country and the ways for its further efficacy.
3. Highlight the infrastructures available for implementation of plans in your country.

10.8 CONCLUSION

In the end, it must be emphasised that we have for too long been preoccupied with administrative reforms at the top. It is, however, the reorganisation and strengthening of local government and field administration that is looked upon around the world as providing the necessary balance between centralisation and the compelling need of decentralisation of power to lower echelons of Government. The superstructure of the State and Central Government can only be raised on sound foundations of local and regional authorities encouraged and equipped to shoulder the field responsibilities. The field administration has received little attention and is being steadily denuded of capable managerial and technical talent. Realistic planning and effective implementation depends on sound and viable local government structure, which at once needs smaller and larger units reconciling democratic aspirations with a strong executive to carry out programmes and policies.

At various tiers, the limitations and scope of authority, the interdependencies – to ensure the avoidance of cleavages between different points of the planning process – a proper monitoring mechanism and the coordination of local initiative and governmental assistance would all be necessary to see that the up-ward and the down-ward movements are well coordinated and that they lead to a realistic planning effort. In the words of *Aneurin Bevan*, “The whole art of local government is to estimate catchments areas for dealing with particular services before deciding where boundaries of these services should be drawn”. This could be a reliable measure for different levels of planning, from the national level to the villages, so that perceptions of national goals and local needs could converge for the substantial satisfaction of the citizens.

10.9 FURTHER READINGS

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