

Microplanning : a case study

This case study is based on the work of PRIA as a part of their work on strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions(Rural Local Self Governance Institutions) in Himachal Pradesh, India.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has transformed the face of panchayats nation-wide, from a situation in which they were considered as the implementing agencies of state governments to one in which they can begin to function as local government bodies. Panchayats today have their own constitutional existence and sanction to prepare plans for “economic development and social justice”.

With these developments in the background, the process of bottom-up planning is receiving renewed attention. Based on this and the perspective that bottom-up planning or micro planning is the basis of local self governance, an initiative was taken up by PRIA and a grassroots organisation, Rural Technology and Development Centre (RTDC) to facilitate the process of panchayat level planning with peoples participation. The facilitators initiated the planning process in Kehar panchayat which is located around 25kms from Mandi the district headquarters of Mandi district, Himachal Pradesh. The panchayat is divided into 11 wards and has 6 villages and has a population of about 4000 and around 900 households.

The initial phase of the planning process was very crucial since it laid the foundation for all future activities. The selection of Kehar panchayat by PRIA was mainly due to the presence of RTDC, whose co-ordinator is also the President of the Panchayat. This greatly enhance the ability to establish a rapport with the local community there.

As micro planning requires active involvement from the local community, it is essential to motivate them from the onset. The approach adopted was to form a core team who would work directly with the community. A workshop organised for the core group marked the formal commencement of the exercise. Following this, meetings were held with the gram panchayat leaders and in individual wards. Through these activities it was possible to generate a considerable amount of awareness about the process of planning and how to involve the people in it. At the same time two volunteers were identified fro each ward and they were provided with additional training. During the ward wise meetings where a large number of people gathered especially women, some educational materials in the form of posters and pamphlets were distributed amongst those present.

After this initial phase of rapport building with the people and generating interest amongst them, the next phase was to understand the existing situation in the area through systematic data collection and resource mapping. This is important because in order to plan for the future is necessary to know about the present reality. The focus of this phase was on getting the community members to reflect upon their individual realities employing a combination of data collection methodologies.

As the tabulation of the data was done by the facilitators, it was thought essential to share all the findings with the community soon afterwards. The village level meeting approach was favoured and this enabled the facilitators to move from 'individual' to 'group' realities. The focus of these meetings was on getting the community members to understand the socio-economic situation of the village as a whole and the major problems therein.

This was followed by the phase of community problem analysis and identification of development priorities. They were encouraged through a series of village level meetings to analyse problems faced at the individual, village and panchayat level and then rank these according to their felt needs and priorities.

The community members then went on to identify possible development actions to address these needs. Some guidance was required at this stage in order to get the community members to select the right development strategies. Emphasis was laid on people's contribution (in terms of labour, material and money) towards the betterment of the village. Optimal use of the locally available resources was also stressed. At this stage Village Development Committees (VDCs) were formed in each village. The main function of this Committee (comprising of technical experts, men and women etc.) was to help in the formation and implementation of the development plan.

After this the VDCs organised village wise meetings to draw up and finalise the plans along with the people. These plans were then submitted to the Gram Panchayat who consolidated all the plans to form a Panchayat level plan which was then approved by the people in the Gram Sabha (Village Council) meeting. These Gram Sabha meetings are a mandatory provision of the Constitution and are held twice a year.