

**DELEGATION OF POWERS AND
RESPONSIBILITIES BY THE
STATES TO VECs, KEEPING IN
VIEW THE NEED TO BUILD THE
LOCAL LEVEL
PLANNING CAPACITIES**

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Introduction

The objective as defined above is in line with the National Policy of Education 1986. This policy proposed an overhaul of the entire system of planning and management of education with an emphasis on decentralisation and autonomy and at the same time ensuring proper participation, involvement and accountability till the grassroot levels. The Panchayati Raj Act of 1992 (the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments), also laid down that the responsibility for taking decisions regarding activities at the grassroot level should rest upon the elected members of local bodies themselves.

DPEP focuses on decentralised management structures. VECs are a part of the envisaged decentralised management structures and work towards the management and development of educational activities at the village level. More specifically, VEC establish linkages between the school and the community. This has been ensured by involving not only the Gram Panchayat representatives but also a wider spectrum of community representatives, i.e., women, economically weaker sections, SC/ ST, etc. VEC have been entrusted with specific powers, functions and resources. The objective of transferring management authority to local bodies would have two significant fallouts, i.e., to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of schools, and to promote further democratisation at the local level.

Decentralised management structures built on community participation tend to increase people's sense of control over issues which affect their lives, helps them to learn how to plan and implement and make optimum utilization of the available resources. The major benefit would be that effective participation would also provide opportunity to sustain the efforts initiated for decentralisation.

Present role of VECs

VECs have been formed in all the DPEP states. They have been entrusted with certain powers to effectively fulfil the responsibilities conferred upon them. The major tasks envisaged to be taken up by VECs are of school based planning/ management and community mobilisation. They would be responsible for planning, implementing and monitoring of school education at village level together with an active supervisory role in managing of NFE, AS and ECCE centres. The role would also encompass local accountability, responsive planning, gender sensitization and civil works.

The Mid-Term Review study on 'Community mobilisation and Roles and Functions of VECs in DPEP' indicated four broad categories of roles being performed by VECs viz., facilitation, supervisory, attitudinal and school improvement role. The majority of VECs (75%) are involved in their role in



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relation to school improvement, and 60% in facilitation. In addition to this some of the more active VECs are involved in other type of functions:

- local resource mobilisation
- organisation of cultural activities
- supervision of civil work and
- compilation of elementary data

The study further reveals that:

- most VECs have yet to play an active role in bringing about significant attitudinal change among parents and families in the village towards the importance of education for their children.
- supervision of teachers and teaching-learning process in the school is not a role commonly performed by the VECs. However, where such VECs have been active in these areas, improvement in education of girls and quality of teaching have been clearly demonstrated.
- VEC members themselves as well as other important officials and villagers do not have a clear understanding of the expectations of VECs.

The overall picture emanating from the above is that an average VEC would be playing a larger role in the area of 'facilitation' and 'school improvement', and least likely to be more active in areas of planning and management of education.

Framework for decentralisation

Decentralisation in the sense of a substantial devolution of power and responsibility to the VECs needs to be turned into a reality. Autonomy, accountability and participation are the three important issues in this regard.

Autonomy: In the absence of ability to take decisions independently, no institution can be expected to discharge its functions efficiently. The requirements for autonomy in local bodies should give weightage to the following:

- Structural continuity
- Clear cut delineation of local functional responsibilities
- Framing of guidelines regarding financial matters
- Independence to take day-to-day working decisions without interference from the Government

Clarity regarding various types of functions to be performed by the VECs and how each of them are to be carried out is essential. It is equally important that an unambiguous statement of circumstances which can lead to state intervention needs to be stated.

Accountability: This refers to holding the VECs responsible for performance which has to be measured as objectively as possible. It aims at optimum use of resources by ensuring a mechanism of accountability. However, the effectiveness of the accountability mechanism would depend upon the influence of all the members of the VEC. An effective accountability system would monitor performance specifically aimed at attainment of VEC goals. In this context the following points merit consideration:

- Development of suitable incentive/ penalty systems to induce performance of VECs.
- Strong pressures on the VECs to perform is essential.
- Evolving a transparent system of checks and balances to regulate the behaviour of VEC members.

Participation: Participation of the community in decision-making is likely to induce responsiveness to local problems, optimal use of local resources, fiscal responsibility, and accountability to people.

The possible ways of involving the VEC members (who would interface with various sectors of the community) are: (1) convincing them about the importance of education, (2) need for better planning with people, (3) need to consult other relevant local organisations, (4) inviting the villagers for discussion, and (5) taking into consideration the felt needs of the people.

Another important factor is awareness and the extent of participation would depend on the degree and level of knowledge attained by the VEC members. In the absence of clear, correct and complete information, the VEC members would not be in a position to take the required decisions.

The way in which decisions can be made in VECs needs guidance. Are decisions to be based on a simple majority? If majority voting is envisaged, then the documents need to state explicitly whether each member has an equal vote or whether votes will be weighted in favour of certain members such as the Sarpanch, Headmaster etc. It should be assured that if consensus is to operate then a mechanism for breaking deadlocks and arbitration is required.

Hence clarity about the powers and functions and transparency of rules and procedures are of crucial importance for ensuring effective and efficient VECs.

The requirement to achieve devolution of powers/ responsibilities would be towards establishing a structure at the grassroot level which can take on the functions of pronounced decentralisation. Accordingly the present VEC set up would have to be examined carefully so as to ensure development of an institution which has sufficient capacities to ensure quality education and continued follow up of DPEP's initiatives. This can be achieved by evolving a specific programme of action. The micro level processes would relate to participatory planning and monitoring.

The entire process of decentralisation would centre on consolidating the various aspects of the DPEP programme at the grassroot level so as to ensure delegation of responsibilities to a relevant local level organisation i.e. the VEC. The next step would be to offer guidance, support and articulate strategies to strengthen VECs. The structure and process of the VECs needs to be articulated so that a process of enrichment could follow. The members need be oriented towards the process of teaching, learning and conscientization.

Community based mechanisms for school management and support have to be strengthened. This would involve not only formation of VECs but also to train them and other community based organisations in micro-planning exercise, conducting school mapping, community level monitoring system and establishing purposeful interaction between VECs and Zila Parishads, Block Panchayats and Gram Panchayats.

The Mid-Term Review study on VECs has highlighted certain points which merit consideration:

- It is important to clarify to the project officials and the Headmasters that VECs are village representative mechanisms for building the inter-face between the village and the school.
- At the district level, efforts should be made to encourage linkages between project officials, Headmasters and others with existing bodies and agencies. Such linkages at district, block and village level contribute positively towards improved functioning of VECs.
- Close linkages with Panchayats and other local bodies is important.
- Clarity of officials about the reasons for forming VECs was found to have positive impact.

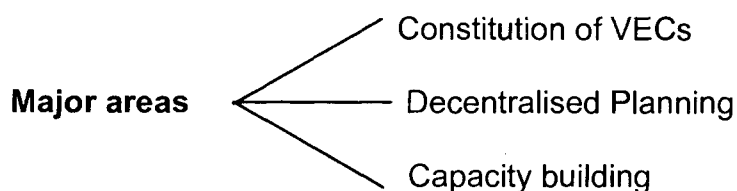
Each state has conferred certain powers/ responsibilities to VECs in their `State Government Resolution, which in itself is an effort to empower VECs. However, enacting a Resolution is not enough, the States should ensure that devolution of powers to VECs actually takes place. For the VECs to be really empowered there is a need to create awareness in them vis-a-vis the main features of the Resolution and what it entails in terms of their rights and duties.

Following is a proposed list of powers/ responsibilities which can be delegated by the States to the VECs (some of them may already be in the State Resolutions).

1. Appointment of para-teachers .
2. Setting up the annual targets of enrolment, attendance and retention of students.
3. Review and evaluation of educational institutions - primary schools, NFE/AS centres, ECCE centres.
4. Sanctioning casual leave of teachers/ HMs. Recommendation of medical and long leave.
5. Motivating parents to send their children to school.

6. Ensuring proper use of educational aids in the school.
7. Monitoring attendance of teachers and students.
8. Planning and approval of expenditure of the grants received from Government or any other schemes.
9. Assisting in execution/ monitoring of civil works.
10. Preparing village level plans.
11. Mobilisation of people and resources.
12. PRA and mapping exercises.
13. Distributing uniforms, textbooks, etc.
14. Informing the concerned authorities about educational inadequacies and requirement, and infrastructural problems.
15. Convergence with other development departments for mutual co-operation and support.
16. Review of educational progress of schools.

The three major areas which have to be considered with regard to delegating powers/ responsibilities by the States to the VECs are as follows:



Constitution: There is a need to critically go into the merits of formation of VECs, kind of representation provided and its impact on the functioning of the committees. The model which can result in ensuring best success to VECs would have to be adopted so as to eliminate factors like gender bias, lesser representation of weaker sections, non-representation of illiterates, etc. which would ultimately negate the very purpose of decentralisation.

The Mid-Term Review study on VECs indicated the following:

- widespread consultation with the village community prior to formation of VECs resulted in effective functioning of VECs.
- non-representation of illiterate and semi-literate parents in VECs created an impression that the VEC is a technical advisory body to assist the Headmaster.
- norms of women members were not fulfilled in 50% of the VECs under study. Where women are Presidents of the VECs greater information sharing and consultation has taken place.
- most active VEC members are Presidents and Headmasters. By and large, women members of VEC are less active.
- project support in terms of guidance provided by DEO/BEO or other officials to local panchayat or school at the time of formation of VECs is an important support towards effectiveness of the VECs.

- clarity of officials about the reasons for formation of VECs was found to have positive impact. Wherever officials were clear, they have suggested practical methods for constitution of VECs.
- the membership guidelines issued by the State Governments have in some cases created notional forms of membership overriding the issue of active participation of these categories.

Decentralised Planning : The notion of active participation and involvement of the people in the plan processes including plan formulation, implementation and monitoring has, by and large, remained a myth despite successive policies and programmes put forth by Governments from time to time. There has been little effort at getting the mass of the people involved in the planning process or in the setting of plan priorities.

To resolve this issue the cooperation from the VEC representatives, educational functionaries and people at large is essential. Therefore the organisational arrangements need to be evolved locally, rather than be super-imposed from outside. A common pattern found in areas where micro planning exercises are seriously initiated is to form a core group consisting of different segments of populations of the village, orient the group members to the idea and help them in the initial stages to organise some of the activities under the micro planning exercises. The Sarpanch can play an important part by mobilising the influential people in the village and ensuring their participation. Realisation has to be given to the VEC members that planning is not a one shot exercise.

Moreover planning from below cannot succeed without tackling the problems/ limitations facing the decentralisation of the planning process. Absence of experience in planning from below, absence of necessary laws, rules and regulations, non-availability of adequate number of trained government personnel and experts are some of the glaring limitations.

In the above context, the '**Kerala Model**' of peoples' participation and planning is characterised as the first instance of 'planning from below' with 'peoples' participation' in the real sense. The Planning Commission has taken over the responsibility of training necessary personnel for each level of planning from below. Such a massive campaign for training personnel for planning from below is a significant step towards mass mobilisation and conscientisation. The programme is to be carried on in six stages :

1. Preparation of campaign materials and training of resource persons.
2. Organising convention at Gram Sabha and Ward levels to identify local problems to indicate priorities and select representatives for seminars on panchayat/ municipal development seminars.
3. Organising Panchayat/ Municipal development seminars.

4. Block Panchayat seminar to integrate the Block Panchayats' own proposals with those evolved by the Gram Panchayat for a Block Panchayat Plan.
5. District development seminars to integrate district reports with Block Panchayat Plans to prepare a District Plan.
6. State level development congress to integrate state reports with the District Plans to prepare a State Plan.

Decentralisation would be effective only if the State authorities ensure that the village level plans formulated by the local bodies are given the required weightage. The plans prepared at the village level need to be implemented by them within their own resources and technical competence. Those elements of the plans which they would not be able to implement either because of lack of expertise/resources or those which have effect outside their respective jurisdiction would be forwarded to the next higher level. Moreover, to get people involved they must have some assurance that what they would decide would bear some fruit, that it would not be a futile exercise.

The Kerala State Planning Board has given the assurance that 35-40% of the Ninth Plan would consist of plans prepared from below, thus endowing the planning process with seriousness and dignity it deserved. The peoples' campaign is not merely a programme to get some suggestions regarding some projects from the masses directly. The real agenda is that "through the campaign, the planning process will hopefully become an instrument of mass conscientisation in regard to the issues in development".

Capacity building

The objective of decentralised planning can be attained when people are empowered with the knowledge and the means to decide their own priorities. Decentralisation of the educational programme with regard to capacity building could focus on the following two features:

1) Training

- a. To create empowered self-directed teams, more focused training/ orientation on the following management aspects is essential:
 - communication skills
 - building effective teams
 - inspiring high team performance (motivation, team morale)
 - leadership
 - managing conflicts.

b. It is equally important to provide specialised training in different aspects of organisational activities as given below:

- resource mobilisation
- resource management
- cost benefit analysis
- account keeping
- documentation

c. Microplanning and school mapping

The training programmes need to be adequate in content, and appropriate in methodology and training, to promote the combination of personal growth and increased skill and knowledge that are the pre-requisites in participatory development. Task-oriented training is important, but it should be complemented by learning experiences which build confidence, release creativity and strengthen the sense of shared effort.

Since VECs are grassroot level bodies the training/ orientation provided has to be suitably designed and simplified. A strong sense of solidarity has to be inculcated between individuals and consequently a stable form of group participation and representation in the VECs would result.

It would be relevant to mention that a **school management capacity building programme** may be evolved which would deal with some of the following important areas:

- Key policy matters relating to language, fees, religious observance, recommendations for employment, code of conduct.
- Day-to-day matters would relate to time table, maintenance of physical assets and purchasing.
- Financial matters would relate to financial accounting and raising of revenues.

2) **Social Mobilisation**

Social mobilization has been defined as a process for engaging a large number of people in action for achieving common goals through self-reliant efforts. The relationship of social mobilization to empowerment for decentralised planning needs to be given some thought. The success of social mobilization relies on the creation of popular will and its creation of political will. Popular will, which will lead to empowerment is the key element to decentralised planning. Social mobilisation is not a one shot campaign. It requires a strong strategic framework and a complex of interrelated tactics and activities within that framework. If it is properly executed social mobilization can prove to be an important starting point for moving towards decentralised planning.

Kerala's initiative to organise a '**Peoples' campaign for the Ninth Five Year Plan**' is in tune with the above strategy of social mobilisation. The growth of awareness among the masses and collective action by them to utilise the available facilities is the gist of the Kerala Model.

The spirit of the 73rd/74th Amendments has not been appreciated by most states. Little progress has been achieved in the direction of empowering the panchayats because in most cases the ruling elite is not interested in decentralisation and devolution of authority. Matching limited resources with competing demands, necessitates a planning process where priorities have to be fixed for fulfilling them within a fixed time frame. In the fixation of priorities the dominant classes would always try to ensure that they get what they like to serve their class interest. In this process the silent sections of the community, even though numerically in majority, would get bypassed. The Kerala model of peoples' campaign for decentralised planning aims at preventing this contingency.

Conclusion :

The transformation from a centralized bureaucratic organization to a strategic capacity-building community-service-oriented organization will often depend on changing almost every aspect of the organization, including its policies, staffing patterns, organization structures, budgeting, and evaluation systems. The State needs to be transformed from a controller to a facilitator. It has to assume a stronger role in coordination, in helping and complementing existing activities.

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