

Role of Maharashtra Government and Administration in Tribal Development

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Abstract: *Maharashtra is one of the ten states which have Fifth Schedule areas. With more than ten million tribal persons in the state, Maharashtra has an important role to play in tribal welfare. The Tribal sub - Plan (TSP) strategy is central to the approach of planning for tribal welfare as a special component of overall planning. The goal is to ensure progress of tribal communities and to prevent diversion of funds meant for the progress of tribal communities. The "Maharashtra model" of the Tribal sub - Plan is appreciated throughout the country. It aims to allocate a percentage of Plan funds for tribal welfare in proportion to the tribal population. It also provides for a focused approach to tribal development by concentrating on social sectors like health, education, social justice, etc., and by making the Tribal Development Department responsible for planning for tribal welfare. The last two decades have thrown up a number of new challenges to which the TSP needs to respond. There is a need for effective implementation of progressive legislations like PESA, and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act, 2006. This study also attempted to understand the perceptions of the tribal community about the tribal welfare schemes/programmes and the working of the Tribal Development Department.*

Keywords: tribal communities, Tribal Sub - Plan, Administrative, TSP, ITDP, PESA, etc.

1. Introduction

The Tribal Sub - Plan is broadly divided into two categories namely State Plan and District Plan. The government guidelines say that the state plan will be planned at the state level and the district plan will be planned at the district level as per the recommendations of the Sukthankar Committee. District Administrative departments are entrusted with the responsibility of identifying priority areas and recommending TSP schemes. Accordingly, the District level Tribal Sub - Plan is planned separately as per the requirements of the local community, and funds are allotted to administrative departments at the district level for the effective implementation of TSP schemes. As per the GR of December 16, 2009, changes have been brought into the planning of District Tribal Sub - Plan. According to these guidelines, the DPC should consider certain aspects such as human development indicators, fundamental requirements of district, social needs, social and physical growth of district, while framing the annual district tribal plan. There are more than 15 departments which are directly involved in the implementation of TSP schemes at district level. Some Administrative departments get funds directly from the state for large scale community programmes such as the Irrigation department, Public Works Department (PWD), Maharashtra State Electricity Board (MSEB). On the other hand, most of the departments, which run individual family or village level schemes, receive funds at the district level. Some of the departments that receive funds from the state plan also receive funds from the district plan for small scale programmes at village level. The planning and implementation of district schemes is more or less similar to the usual implementation of programmes by the administrative departments with slight variations. For example, the subsidy for some programmes under TSP is higher than if it were offered otherwise.

Planning for Funds

The Administrative departments are provided with a certain share of TSP funds. Their minimum and maximum ceilings are defined in terms of percentage of total allocation to TSP. Every year, the TDD asks each department to submit its demand. All the administrative departments at block level send in their proposals and requirements for the following year to their respective departments at district level where they are consolidated and sent to the nodal ITDP. The demands from different administrative departments are consolidated at ITDP level and presented to the DPC. The DPC, earlier known as DPDC, reviews the demands and formulates it as a district Tribal Sub - Plan and forwards it to the Tribal Development Department with the administrative sanction of the District Collector and other signatories. The DPC has the responsibility of finalizing the draft district annual tribal plan. The Collector holds the power of administrative sanction at the district level as per the new guidelines provided in the GR issued on December 16, 2009. The district Tribal Sub - Plan for all the districts will be finalized in a meeting conducted at the state level by the TDD, based on the allocation of funds for the TSP by the state planning department. Interviews with different officers of administrative departments revealed that often planning for annual funds/demands are made on the basis of population size and the demand of the preceding year. Some officers mentioned that they review the demand for a particular scheme, and based on the waiting list for the scheme, they plan for potential demand. On this basis they decide the number of beneficiaries for the following year and demand funds accordingly. There is a slight variation in the planning process for departments like PWD, Irrigation or MSEB. At block level, these departments are supposed to carry out only small - scale projects. Their proportion of share of funds in TSP is predetermined they receive their share on this basis. From the discussions we had with the officials of administrative departments, we learned that, generally, the proportion of funds for each department is predetermined irrespective of the demands made in the

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proposals sent to the ITDPs. However, it was also observed that the demands of the departments are more or less in line with the minimum or maximum ceiling given to them. This means that, often, planning is not based on community requirements but on the predetermined amount of funds. This practice needs to change urgently so that funds and schemes are made to fit in people's plans and not the other way round. The process of planning should not be influenced by availability of funds. Most of the CEOs, Collectors and other district level officers mentioned that they had a minimal role when it came to TSP planning. The officers maintained that the TSP planning that takes place at state level determines the schemes and quantum of funds. Their role is just to send demands for funds as indicated to them. They felt that they are mainly implementing agencies and not planning agencies. One CEO maintained, "CEOs and Collectors are positioned in the middle of the hierarchy and there are multiple agencies above and below them. Our major responsibility is to act as a bridge between TDD and other administrative departments, and ensure their smooth functioning at the district level." Discussions with Block Development Offices showed that they play an important role in implementing the programmes but their role in planning was limited to sending proposals (demand for funds) to respective ITDPs and to district head offices. Most of the officials said that they are implementing agencies of various schemes of which the TSP is only a small part. Therefore, according to them, TSP does not attract special attention and is just any other scheme they implement. They also said that, for each program, say, for example free or subsidized housing, they pool resources under different sub-plans for a particular scheme. They fulfil the targets for the scheme and account the expenditure under different sub-plans. Thus, the departments are not implementing the schemes separately; they only maintain separate performance statistics for each sub-plan.

Flow of Funds to the Administrative departments

As discussed above, according to the administrative departments, it is the responsibility of TDD to finalize the plan. Once the amount for TSP is budgeted at the state level, it is channelized according to the guidelines. By the end of June - July of the current financial year, a proportion of the budgeted funds (about 30 percent) is made available through the budget distribution system (BDS) under various heads. In some cases, the funds are allocated in instalments, while in others lump sum funds are distributed. In Chikhaldara block, it was observed that, generally, the first instalment of funds is received only by end of July - August. The second instalment is released by January - February (next year), but only after 60 percent of the first instalment has been spent. Funds are made available to district administrative departments through BDS as per demand. The cash does not flow below district level. The block level offices receive goods, or equipment and not cash. Only the departments which offer cash incentives/ rewards to the beneficiaries can issue cheques. Alternatively, the amount is directly deposited into the beneficiary's account. Block level administrative departments do not deal with cash. Re-appropriation of funds happens in the second half of the financial year. As per the GR of December 5, 2011, the core and non-core sectors are defined under TSP, while re-appropriation of funds from non-core sector to core sector

can be made but the reverse is not permitted. Likewise, OTSP funds can be diverted to TSP area, but TSP area funds are to be spent within the TSP area only and cannot be diverted to OTSP areas. Further, the TSP funds are non-divertible, which means that funds for TSP area cannot be diverted to non-TSP areas. Even within TSP areas funds cannot be diverted from one district to another. Discussions with state officials revealed that re-appropriation of funds are made only with the consent of the TDD. When asked if there were instances of fund diversion, the officers replied in the negative and claimed that the guidelines are being followed strictly. However, it is a common practice that funds are transferred from one department to another after re-appropriation, but they remain in TSP's domain. Most of the officers said that the funds were sufficient and received on time. One of the CEOs, who were earlier Project Officer in an ITDP, mentioned that administrative departments receive funds on time but funds to ITDPs from TDD often get delayed. Therefore, he felt that the problem lay in the TDD's system. One Collector said that there was a gap between demand and availability of funds. Demand is generally on the higher side but budgetary provisions are made within ceilings.

Selection of Beneficiaries by Administrative departments

Benefits of TSP fall in three categories: individual benefits, family benefits and community benefits. The selection procedure is in accordance with the nature of benefits. While community benefits are determined more by the department and less by the community (through representations), the selection of beneficiaries for individual benefits are characterized by the criteria laid down, such as BPL family, student and so on. However, the usual procedure is as mentioned below. For the selection of individual/family beneficiaries, the respective departments inform villagers about the schemes and call for applications. Programme/scheme publicity is given through various Information, Education and Communication (IEC) activities with the help of the Gram Sevak and the Gram Panchayat. The applications are collected by the Gram Sevak and scrutinized by the Gram Panchayat office and then sent to the respective administrative departments at the Block Development Office. These applications and accompanying documents are verified again at the BDO level. In case of agriculture and animal husbandry departments, field inspectors are expected to visit applicants, verify their socioeconomic status and submit a report to the department. The BPL list is referred in order to determine the economic status of the applicants. The list of selected beneficiaries is then forwarded to the district level office. At the district level the list may be further shortened and beneficiary list is finalized. Those not in the final list is kept on a waiting list for the following year. The reach of information about the benefits depends on the coverage of villages by the Gram Sevak. The reach of information to remote villages, and receipt of applications from them is limited. In many cases, the deadline is over by the time information reaches remote villages. Even within the panchayats, the information is disseminated more in the main village where the panchayat office is located than in the hamlets located some distance away. With the adoption of a concept similar to 'first come first served basis', people from the villages that surround the taluka and panchayat villages are the ones who apply first and receive the benefits,

and tribal people from remote areas largely remain deprived of the benefits.

Monitoring and Evaluation by administrative departments

One of the many important points that came up repeatedly during the interviews is that the administrative departments are the implementing agencies and ITDPs are expected to monitor their work at different levels. Administrative departments are expected to monitor their programmes at the field level. It is the responsibility of the departments to send fund utilization certificates (UC) and other progress reports to ITDP. An audit is conducted in every department, and the list of beneficiaries and monthly progress reports are forwarded to the ITDPs. Contradicting this, while interviewing ITDP officers, we were informed that ITDPs have to send reminders to the administrative departments to submit the UCs. It was also reported that, sometimes, ITDPs receive neither UCs nor the list of beneficiaries; but they themselves seldom call for such reports, the only exception being the expenditure statement. Unfortunately, the performance of the administrative departments has not been evaluated or monitored by the Tribal Development Department. The monitoring and evaluation, if any, is restricted to within the department itself. Though the CEO of the Zilla Parishad and BDO often conduct review meetings of their departments, the reviews often included all schemes and programmes and were not specific to the TSP. According to the officers, as they have to look into many schemes, they are unable to give special attention to every scheme. However, they did admit that they sometimes give particular attention to a few programmes/schemes if they receive specific instructions to do so. All departments reported that they conducted monthly meetings to review progress.

2. Issues and Suggestions

During the study, many officers highlighted the issues they were facing and suggested some changes for the effective implementation of TSP schemes and programmes. The officers felt that the planning process is not goal/outcome oriented and that it was based only on the size of the population. There are local variations in TSP areas and it is necessary to understand the requirements and expectations of the community before planning. Schemes and programmes are designed by the higher authorities and it was suggested by the officers that the administrative departments at the block level also be consulted before finalizing the TSP schemes and programmes. Most officers from the administrative departments also said that although the Tribal Development Department has delegated the work connected to various schemes and programmes to the administrative departments, the TDD lacked coordination with the departments track the progress and performance. Many officers were of the opinion that, over the years, the a few schemes that are being implemented by the TSP have become irrelevant to today's needs. Examples of such schemes are tailoring courses and the distribution of sewing machines. They suggested that schemes for benefiting individuals should focus on employment generation and job opportunities. Tribal societies are primarily agrarian societies and, therefore, there should be more agriculture

related schemes (as examples, dairy farming, fish farms, animal husbandry, irrigation, levelling of land, horticulture, guidance on good farming practices, easy access to credit, water facilities, etc.). As a matter of practice, the Gram Sabha/Gram Panchayat should be supported and mentored so that they are able to identify areas which require skills building of tribals according to their need, and which will enable them to access better employment opportunities or become better entrepreneurs. The focus should be on arresting forced migration. A few officers who were PO earlier also expressed the belief that the Project Officer's position is a weak link because he/she has only nominal powers. The PO are not in a position to exercise their authority over other stakeholders. For this reason, they should be given more powers and the autonomy to directly deal with administrative departments.

3. Conclusion

The developmental gap between the ST and non - ST is not only large, it also has been widening over the years. While the TSP strategy was supposed to address this situation, it has been only partially successful. The TSP strategy of Maharashtra, which is markedly different from most states has the advantage of being owned and guided by the TDD. However, the lack of depth and diversity of schemes, and the lack of linkage to the outcomes to be achieved, leads to poor results. The TSP is beset by poor expenditure percentages, lack of flexibility in planning, and the denial of ownership of the plan to the people. Despite the mandate of PESA, the TSP does not incorporate its provisions. The TSP also does not adequately provision for rights - based interventions, and for livelihood. The schemes also do not ensure that adequate strategies are formulated through the Plans to combat malnutrition, and ensure superior health outcomes. The service delivery structure of TSP, i. e., the ITDP, is characterized by lack of human resources, and poor monitoring structures. The TDD has not been able to decentralize administrative and financial powers to its far - flung various units. Despite, the absence of a technical, implementing structure, and despite manpower constraints, the Tribal Development schemes are often chosen to be carried out by the department itself. However, the report suggests that it is possible to carry out the same through the Panchayati Raj Institutions wherein both reach and accountability, through public representatives, are inbuilt in its structure. The Report recommends that powers need to be delegated at each level. Beneficiary selection is one of the weak links of the system, and often can be arbitrary or non - transparent. There is need to involve the Gram Sabha's in selection, as also to use IT tools to ensure that duplication, or corruption, do not occur. The role of Collector in coordinating between departments and in giving leadership to TDD schemes has also been brought to the fore in this report. We have given a number of recommendations in the Summary and Recommendations part of the report as also across the breadth of the Report which derives largely from the principles of people's participation and subsidiary. The report recommends building on the rights - based approach, and in trusting local communities to effectively govern themselves. Devolution, decentralization, and effective social audit are the pillars of such interventions. The damage to the delivery mechanisms of the tribal development

department through excessive centralization, and the distance of the planner from those he plans for, are very evident. We are optimistic that the report will contribute in converting the TSP into a more people - centric, responsive, and efficient tool of tribal welfare.

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