

MOBILISATION OF RESOURCES FOR LOCAL LEVEL PLANNING: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Part- 1: Problematics of Local Resources Mobilisation

Let me begin the discussion with a few crude and unscrupulous examples to understand the technique how some desperate poor of our country mobilise resources for their survival. In the first instance, take the case of some physically handicapped beggars who flock together and beg alms by singing chorus in the street. Certainly, they attract more alms than others. In the second instance, collection of a blind beggar by an able-bodied one and asking help for both. Third instance may be an able-bodied rural poor going for polygamy and sending all the wives for work or begging which gives him relatively a comfortable living. Lastly, we can also look at the dowry system through which a male person exploits the socially vulnerable position of a female and mobilises some resources for his family. All of these practicing examples are in one way or other mobilisation of resources mindlessly by some of the desperately poor human beings of our society. Had they been supported by the state or community in a decent way they would not had gone for those immoral or unethical practices. If we turn our eyes to the state we do not witness a very different picture. The process is almost the same. Mass poverty, natural disaster and vulnerability have become valuable bargaining chips for the state machinery, as well as for the self-proclaimed social activists to attract the philanthropic wisdom of donors to mobilise resources for uses and abuses.

Given the above unscrupulous background of polemical nature the problematics on the mobilisation of resources for Local Level Plan (LLP) with government initiative may follow a very critical theoretical discourse. The reason for bringing the above half-backed background of Local Resource Mobilisation (LRM) to the notice of the concerned academics and practitioners is only to point fingers to five of the very pertinent questions and issues related to the LRM an LLP in this country. Perhaps this attempt may help to find out the pragmatic answers and may also lead to shed some light on the real problem areas of LLP and LRM. The question and answer together may also culminate into a theoretical framework for further discussion.

Question No. 1 : How do we define resources?

We should have to define first what do we mean by the term resources? By resources do we mean men, material, money and other natural endowments only? I think if this is so, then whole exercise tends to become futile. Resources are not something of static nature composed of matter and materials alone. Matter and materials become resources only in relation to certain social conditions. As a result, relationship is a key factor in identifying and defining resources. This is the relationship between man and man and in turn between man and matter. For example, the natural endowment of a water body, a land mass and natural forests are resources but not in their static existence only, but in relation to the people living around those resources and exploiting of them.

Similarly relationship is even more important in respect of human being who are subject and object of development planning. An ignorant, unskilled, fatalistic and passive human being who is self-in-himself rather than self-for-himself is a liability. On the other hand, a conscientised, empowered and self-actualised person is a resource. Conscientisation, empowerment and self-actualisation is a social process. So in defining resources, making of a static inventory of potential resources only is useless, until and unless it is enmeshed in the existing social relations.

Question No. II : What do we mean by mobilisation?

Is it collection of resources for the people living at the grassroots level from and beyond their locality by the outsiders for the wellbeing of the locals or, is it a process of collecting resources for the locality by the locals?

Local resource mobilisation had been an academic obsession for last few decades in this country. Unfortunately, in spite of the piled-up research reports local resource base had been gradually eroded. Persistent plundering and squandering not only eroded the rural resources bases but also eroded the confidence of the people living in the peripheries. For that reason the term 'mobilisation' itself along with the purpose of mobilisation and ultimate control of mobilised resources need to be spelled out.

For example, whatever surplus is generated from subsistence rural economy is not reinvested in the rural areas, it is being recycled in the urban sector and that has become the established system. If the system cannot be reversed, mobilisation, alone will, not help to retain the resources in the rural community.

Question No. III : What do we mean by Local?

Local is a relational and relative term. Why do we bring the issue in relation to the village development only? We can consider national in relation to foreign as local too. In most of the time, specially in the context of macro and micro level planning perspective, we emphasize on local resources for local level planning which seems most of the time shamefully hypocritical. For that reason, the term local should be redefined from the perspective of total national development.

By local in its limited meaning if we mean village community, then control of the villagers on their own resources should have to be ensured. In the present context, they do not have control over their own community vis-a-vis own resources, which need to be firmly reestablished.

Question No. IV : We are advocating planning for a local community under a globalised market economy. Did we resolved the dilemma of open market and planned economy at this juncture of our national development?

Development of market forces is a pre-condition for sustainable growth and development. Before going for full-scale market economy that people's bargaining power in the market place has to be created, otherwise market itself may become a monster. Because market by its very nature does not care and share the agony of the weak, emaciated and disadvantaged segment of the society. Planning at the local level is untenable if aggression of large capital is not kept in check and balance position for the time being by organizing small persons with limited means

Question No. V : Can LLP and LRM be evolved in an institutional Vacuum?

Institution is one of the fundamental pre-requisites for sustainable development. Currently, country lacks uniform, disciplined and capable local institution which can share and promote people's urge, aspiration and wisdom. The all-encompassing rent-seeking paraphernalia have been outmaneuvering the spontaneous local initiatives on the one hand and destroying the sound institutional ecology through unhealthy competition and wastage of resources on the other. Organisations with outside impetus grow like mushrooms epidemics of mismanagement and corruption put them to death within a very short span of their lives.

Experiments with fresh organisations have become the order of the day. Our development stalwarts love experiments but they seem hate to share the experiences from each other. Certainly this is a

country which can be proud of its well knit institutional network down from the villages to the national levels. Now the old institutions are dying, there is none to mourn. Over experimentation is making the institutional ecology of the country unstable and unsteady. Certainly, we need a break for the time being to look back and consolidate. We should bring our villages, unions, thanas and districts into focus for starting effective planning and development exercises. Without strong, stable and transparent local institutions at those levels, LLP and LRM cannot take any viable direction.

Part- II: Prospect of Local Resources Mobilisation

This is a society with a unique tradition of self-sustenance and resilience. Instead of being fed, this society had fed many other societies. Instead of being served, we had served many other countries. It is unfortunate that now-a-days we wait for others to feed us, serve us and look for the oracles to tell us how to mobilise our own resources for local development.

A request may be made to the proponents of local development to please enquire into the matter, by whom and with whose resources all the existing schools, Madrashas, Mosques, Temples, Roads, Bridges, Culverts and many other social infrastructures were built 50 years back from now. It was neither by the governments nor by any modern NGO. It was the people and the community of this society who created all these facilities. In the history of last 50 years, the intervention of the state, number of state-backed agencies, and the professional philanthropist have increased tremendously which forced the traditional communities to retreat. The intrusion of the state and other outside agencies is all pervasive even in the private life of a humble man. The civil society is in disarray with the continuous intrusion of the state and the bureaucracy. As a result, spontaneous community initiative is gradually dying out.

In a country like ours where many live beyond their means and vast majority without the means for mere sustenance of life, centralised planning simply does not work. For that matter the concept of disjointed, incremental and process plan is being advocated by many and LLP may be one of the such devices. Though LLP is not the only solution. But it can ease at least the problem of the current 'bureaucratic constipation' of the planning system on the one hand and benign patronisation of some uncommitted professionals on the other and the circuit of development may start evolving from inside.

Now again with the initiation of the concept of LLP, the million dollar question of collection of resources resurfaces. The nation at the present point of time can not afford to support one national plan, how it can support 80,000 village plans, 4500 union plans, nearly 500 thana plans and 64 district plans (if these are considered at all as local level planning units)?

BARD, Comilla has done some modest work in this direction. The experiences in Comilla tell us that it is possible. What is needed is firm commitment and readiness to give off power and responsibility to the people. Instead of policing, trust them. Instead of telling what to do and what not to do share their knowledge and wisdom which can make a bridge of mutual trust and confidence. If trust and confidence can be built, resource is not a very serious problem. Money and resources want security. Investment need congenial environment. Plan is not only a piece of paper to be read and analysed for the sake of reading and analysis by scholars but basically a set of human activity to be carried out. Only well prepared framework and rich document will not work, if active and committed human element is absent and that human element can be activated through mutual sharing of experiences and wisdom.

In Comilla the idea had been tried in one of the small projects namely Comprehensive Village Development Programme (CVDP). In CVDP 40 LLP units have been organised in four different thanas

of the country. These forty village level units started formulating their annual development plans by mobilising their own resources. Upto January 1994, Tk. 1.7 million cash has been accumulated by those villagers and they are using those money in implementing their comprehensive village development plans which include income generation, employment creation, development of agriculture, livestock, fishery, plantation, environment, housing, electrification, education, health, infrastructure, recreation etc (Ahmed 1992; Ahmed and Das 1994).

Planning absolutely at the local level by the local people with their own resources can achieve only very limited successes. Commitment of resources and services from the national and regional level is also needed. For that matter the nation does not need additional resources, what is needed is shifting the priority and recognition of the present allocation policy. Before committing resources local institutions should be made strong and capable enough to shoulder those responsibilities. Comilla tried to evolve a planning framework by linking village, Union and Thana under the CVDP; keeping in view the five questions raised in earlier discussion. The experiences gathered through CVDP experiment may be useful for further refinement of the ideas and practices of LLP and LRM in Bangladesh (Ahmed and Qader 1992: pp.40-42).

Reference

1. Ahmed, Tofail Background, Strategies and Principles of Comprehensive Village Development (in Bangla) BARD, Comilla, 1992.
2. Ahmed, Tofail and Abdul Qader Local Government at the Cross-roads: Some Recommendations for Structural Functional Reorganisation (in Bangla), BARD, Comilla, 1992.
3. Ahmed, Tofail and Rakhil Chandra Das Participatory Village Planning (in Bangla), BARD, Comilla, 1994.