CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 PREAMBLE

Planning is one of the accepted tools of the socio-economic development of most countries. S.J. Anwar Zahid and Md. Mizanur Rahman, in "Framework on Management of Local Level Planning in Bangladesh," quoting Syed Abdus Samad, say:

Planning is necessary for the implementation of different activities of a State and society. In order to achieve social and economic objectives we need to make plans. In simple words, planning refers to identification of problems and resources, determination of preferences, selection of strategies and distribution of responsibilities. For all these activities we need to take decisions before-hand. Planning is considered as a scientific tool for decision making. . . .'

In all developing countries, in the beginning, development plans were formulated by professional planners on a centralised basis. But, from the sixties onwards, underdeveloped social and economic infrastructure, large and unevenly distributed population, and diverse, often complex local conditions have driven many developing countries to switch over to decentralised planning. Decentralised planning envisages increased people's participation in the initiation, planning and implementation of development programmes. Today decentralised planning has come to be recognised as a useful strategy for developing the local economy.
These ideas caught on fairly early in India's experimentation with planned economic development, and decentralised planning was embedded in the Constitution. Planning was decentralised to the State level in the early fifties. Several attempts were subsequently made to decentralise planning to the district level. Though centralised planning is inevitable, glaring imbalances between sectors, regions, and segments of population exposed the inadequacy of centralised planning and highlighted the importance of decentralised multilevel planning and micro level planning in India.

1.2 MICRO LEVEL PLANNING (MLP)

1.2.1 NATURE AND SALIENT FEATURES

MLP implies a system that can meaningfully harness the potential energies of the local people and give shape to their initiatives. MLP, essentially refers to planning from below, with people's participation for qualitative and quantitative economic, social, cultural and political development, with emphasis on distributive justice, appropriate technology and maximum utilisation of local resources on a self-help and self-reliance basis, thereby transforming the backward society into a democratic and advanced society.

An important characteristic of MLP is that it is essentially problem-oriented. This characteristic of MLP urges the people of an area to identify, specific problems, think about solutions, and, mobilise resources for execution, seeking, whenever necessary, help from external agencies. In this way, MLP essentially aims at activating community spirit and mobilising and harnessing it for greater community good. Thus MLP is participatory to the core.
MLP necessitates enhancing mass consciousness, trust in people, participatory democracy, decentralised decision-making and a continuous self-correcting mechanism which the people themselves devise. Except those decisions which involve the vision of the society and matters related to the larger issues of social transformation, all the other decisions are to be taken with direct involvement of those affected at the micro level. The role of experts in MLP should be to enable the people to take viable decisions.

So MLP implies that each village should be in a position to plan and carry out an integrated multi-phased family and village plan directed towards increasing the agricultural production and farm income, improving the existing village craft and industries, organising new ones, providing basic minimum needs and reasonable leisure for all on a self-help, self-reliance and felt-need priority basis, according to the available local resources, within a prescribed period of time through its own organisations. Its ultimate goal of development becomes the enrichment of the total quality of life and its availability at the grassroots level to all sections of the population.

1.2.2 UNIT OF PLANNING UNDER MICRO LEVEL PLANNING

The term micro stands out in the context of a country and the regions within it. Micro refers to the unit(s) which represent(s) the subdivisions of the regions of a country. In the Indian context the district, the block and the village are the micro units. MLP can be done from grassroots level at the bottom upto any higher level. For example, preparation of plan with people's participation is possible at village, block, (panchayat union/sub-district) and district levels. The village can be considered the primary unit of MLP while the block can be considered its next higher unit or stage. The block plan can be prepared by integrating all the village plans of the villages under the block.
In the same way the district plan can be prepared by integrating all the block plans.4

All over the world, the village is regarded as the original settlement. All other spatial units have been created at later stages for administrative or other convenience. Therefore, the village lends itself to organising people for participatory action. What kind of planning is possible at the village level is a relevant question deserving examination. Admittedly it is not the kind of planning that economists and planners are trained to undertake for the nation as a whole. MLP liberates planning from myths and mysteries and takes it to the people. Every person is assumed to be capable of planning for solving problems affecting personal life, be it constructing a house or giving a daughter in marriage. MLP harnesses these talents of the common people for solving problems collectively by the community. This community involvement is the key element in MLP. Hence, for the purpose of this study, the village panchayat is regarded as the basic unit of MLP.

1.3 PANCHAYATI RAJ AND 73RD CONSTITUTIONAL (AMENDMENT) ACT

MLP is an approach that brings the planning process closer to the people so that they can decide their developmental priorities and participate in planning and implementation. The panchayati raj system provides an institutional framework for operating MLP and the 73rd Constitutional (Amendment) Act of 1992 provides constitutional sanction for such efforts.

The panchayat is a very ancient Indian institution. The system was first introduced by King Prithu while colonising the Doab between the Ganges and the Jamuna. In the Manusmriti and the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata there are many references to the existence of gram sanghas or rural
communities in India. A description of these village assemblies is also found in the *Arthasasstra* of Kautilya who lived around 400 BC. In the *Ramayana* of Valmiki we read about the Ganapada, which was perhaps a kind of federation of village republics. An account of village commonwealths during the seventeenth century is found in Shukracharya's *Neetisara*. In fact, the village has been regarded as the basic unit of administration in India since the Vedic times.5

The functioning of the village assemblies is also referred to in the records of the periods of the Buddhists, the Brahmins and the Moghuls, but its importance varies from one regime to another. The history of the Pallavas and the Cholas of Tamilnadu speaks of village committees, which functioned like micro republics. Details available about the constitution and working of the sabha (village assembly) at Uthiramerur, a village in Tamilnadu, are regarded as the basis for the development of local self-government in the later phases of the history of South India.

Early British rule almost destroyed these ancient village republics and their corporate life. It was Lord Rippon, the Viceroy of India (1880-1884), who revived the village panchayats by enacting laws, thereby earning the title of the father of local self-government in India.6 From 1919 to 1940 there was a spate of legislation relating to the establishment of village panchayats, covering a major part of the country.

After Independence, the idea of panchayats and decentralised planning was incorporated into the Directive Principles of State Policy. Article 40 of the Constitution of India directed the state governments to organise village panchayats and endow them with powers and responsibilities to function as units of self-government.
On the recommendation of the Balwant Roy Metha Committee in 1959, panchayati raj (PR) institutions were introduced at the district and the sub-district levels for the speedy implementation of development programmes with active people's participation. But the endeavour did not make much headway due to lack of sufficient resources, power and statutory backing.

To rectify these deficiencies, the government enacted the 73rd Constitutional (Amendment) Act of 1992, which provided constitutional backing for establishing PR institutions at the district, sub-district and village levels with a statutory mandate to plan for the area within their territorial jurisdiction. The Act allocated 29 items of work exclusively to the PR institutions and empowered them to prepare plans for economic development and social justice. Thus, the act paved the way for the preparation of micro level plans by the PR institutions.

1.4 MILESTONES IN MICRO LEVEL PLANNING

MLP is not new to India. The planning function of the village assemblies down the centuries has already been referred to above. The rural reconstruction efforts undertaken by various leaders in India during 1920-1947 show India's potential for operationalising MLP. The various experiments undertaken by the government and others in many parts of India after Independence bear testimony to this.

The efforts under the Community Development Programme and the National Extension Service Scheme of the Government of India, the Somangalam Pilot Project on Integrated Rural Development Programme in Tamilnadu, The Nagaland Village Development Boards in Nagaland, the Kudrakudi Village Planning Forum in Kudrakudi. Tamilnadu, and, the efforts under the Village Planning Committee promoted by Gandhigram Rural
Institute (GRI) in its 30 service villages in Dindigul District, Tamilnadu have provided empirical evidence to measure the feasibility and the importance of MLP in India. All these experiments have highlighted the need for attempting the task in an integrated manner with active people's participation.

The most interesting examples of MLP abroad can be found in neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, The Philippines and Sri Lanka. Some of these countries have had extensive experience in MLP over a fairly long period. Their valuable experience and experiments may serve as an impetus for India to venture into MLP on a nation-wide scale.  

1.5 MICRO LEVEL PLANNING IN INDIA—PAST AND PRESENT

1.5.1 PAST EFFORTS

Free India's initial attempts at decentralised planning did not have the desired impact. The first concerted attempt, initiated in 1971 as a perspective planning exercise, turned out to be a non-starter. The second one, attempted in the 1980s as a pilot project exercise, did not have a lasting impact. The third attempt was the scheme of Decentralised District Planning started in 1993-94, which has had some impact and is being continued. Now it is expected to merge into the PR institution-based multilevel planning process being initiated in the current Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002).

1.5.2 PRESENT SCENARIO

With the passing of the 73rd Constitutional (Amendment) Act, the democratic system has been strengthened in the country and constitutional status and backing have been accorded to panchayats to ensure the involvement and participation of people in the preparation and implementation of development plans. The salient features of the 73rd Constitutional (Amendment) Act are establishing three-tier PR institutions at village,
intermediate and district levels and providing them with powers and financial resources to enable them to function as institutions of local self-government. Article 243G of the Act specifically provides for the panchayats to take up the responsibility of the preparation and implementation of such plans for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them, including those in relation to the 29 items of work listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Act.

Article 243ZD of the 74th Constitutional (Amendment) Act of 1992, relating to municipalities and corporations, provides for the constitution of a District Planning Committee (DPC), which is mandated to consolidate the plans prepared by the panchayats and the municipalities in the district and to prepare a draft development plan for the district as a whole. Tamilnadu has passed a conforming Tamilnadu Panchayat Act 1994, in which the above constitutional provisions have been incorporated.

1.5.3 MICRO LEVEL PLANNING IN THE NINTH FIVE-YEAR PLAN

Besides the above-mentioned statutory and constitutional package, the Planning Commission has underlined the need for taking up plan preparation from the village level.

The State Planning Commission, Tamilnadu, quoting the Approach Paper to the Ninth Five-Year Plan of India, states:

the District Planning Committee will provide the umbrella for the preparation of integrated district development plan. . . . The Gram Sabha would list out priorities and assist in the selection of beneficiaries for various programmes and projects. In this way the aspirations of the people would be articulated. Thereafter the planning process would begin from below with the preparation of
village plans, which would be incorporated into the intermediate level plans and finally merged into a district plan.9

1.5.4 METHODOLOGY FOR VILLAGE PLAN FORMULATION

The Working Group on Decentralised Planning and Panchayati Raj constituted by the State Planning Commission, Tamilnadu (1997), prescribed the following methodology for operationalising village level planning: (1) Understanding the village and constructing a village profile, (2) Survey and rapid appraisal of natural resources, (3) Assessing and prioritising the felt needs and problems, (4) Appraisal of on-going programmes; and, (5) Framing proposals for the development plan.11

1.5.5 PROCEDURE FOR FORMULATING PROJECT PROPOSALS

The United Nations Industrial Development Organisation has suggested a scientific methodology for preparation of project proposals, which includes the following steps: (1) Project identification and selection (2) Setting goals and objectives (3) Technical and economic analysis (4) Preparation of project design and work plan (5) Resource planning (6) Manpower planning (7) Financial planning (8) Planning for monitoring and evaluation (9) Final appraisal.11

This methodology can be used by the village panchayats for framing project proposals with necessary simplification and modifications to suit local conditions.

1.5.6 INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM

For the purpose of getting the plan prepared, a small representative body should be formed which will function as a core team for planning at the village level and initiate the planning process. It will consist of members of
the village panchayat representing different wards, members of any standing committee(s) constituted by the grama sabha, selected elders, teachers and youth of the village. This core team may be divided into various small working groups according to the subjects delegated for planning at the village level. The responsibility of putting together the proposals emerging from each group into a related plan of action will rest with the core team and ultimately with the grama sabha. For this purpose, the core learn may require some training. If necessary, the core team can make use of the services of technical officials from the higher tiers.

1.5.7 FORMULATING THE VILLAGE AREA PLAN

A village profile must be prepared first. On the basis of the information, and considering the problems, needs, and resources of the village, a village development plan is to be designed. Such development plans may be designed for five years, and, based on them, annual development plans can also be designed.

To design a five-year village development plan, areas and sectors of development have to be first identified considering the problems and the needs of the villages. These areas and sectors can be divided into a few major categories like physical infrastructure of the locality, agriculture, rural industry, social welfare, and, development of any special group of people or community. Under these sectors specific projects have to be prepared.

After the various project proposals are ready, they have to be compiled into a plan, after prioritising and carefully examining the objectives, beneficiaries, funding sources, duration, sectoral balance, linkages, equity and social justice. The final village development plan, after being discussed and approved by the grama sabha, should be forwarded to the
panchayat union for inclusion in the union and district plans, and, ultimately, to get integrated into the state plan.

1.6 DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF VILLAGE PANCHAYAT LEADERS

The duties and responsibilities of the village panchayat leaders and other personnel in preparing and implementing micro level plans are:

(1) Rapport building and motivating the people
(2) Organising gram sabha meetings
(3) Organising the village panchayat planning team
(4) Forming subject-wise committees
(5) Collecting data and preparing village profile
(6) Organising planning meetings and discussions
(7) Planning and preparing projects
(8) Project implementation planning
(9) Coordination
(10) Accounting and recording
(11) Directing and controlling
(12) Monitoring and evaluating.

1.7 NEED FOR THE STUDY

The background to MLP and the overview of the duties and responsibilities of the elected village panchayat leaders in preparing village panchayat plans given above call for adequate knowledge and skill on the part of the village panchayat leaders in designing and implementing village panchayat plans successfully.

The village panchayat leaders need to be trained and equipped properly to discharge their roles as planners and implementers of village plans at grassroots level for the reasons given hereunder:

(1) Reservation has been made for SC, ST and women in the panchayats in all the three tiers of the PR system;
(2) Many are first-generation members of panchayats;
(3) The PR has become a third tier government after the central and the state governments and so the administrative environment has changed;
Training the elected panchayati raj functionaries in planning is mandatorily required under the 73rd Constitutional (Amendment) Act; MLP insists on participatory planning and development, which require training for the practitioners to realise its promise; The Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) has earmarked around 40 per cent of the total financial allocation for the local bodies. A sum of Rs.60,000/= crore has been allotted for rural development projects channelised through the panchayats. However, due to lack of training and information about the enlarged responsibilities of the elected PR functionaries, the National Development Council and the Slate Finance Commissions are not able to decide on devolution of funds to the panchayats.

Reservation of positions through legislative means alone will not empower the hitherto disadvantaged groups. If they are to fulfil the aspirations of the nation they should be equipped to take up their new assignments. They will have to be provided with sustained professional backup after they have acquired adequate knowledge and skill in the dynamics and process of preparation and implementation of development plans in their panchayats.

S.P. Jain and Thomas W. Hochgesang, quoting the Government of India, say, "There are, today, more than 2,17,300 village panchayats in the country covering over 96 per cent of about 5.79 lakhs [sic] inhabited villages and 92 per cent of the rural population of our country." Most of the chairpersons of these panchayats are not equipped to cope with the demands of their office. The majority of them, particularly those belonging to SC, ST, women and first generation categories, are taking up the role of decision makers for the first time. The success of planned development through PR bodies largely depends on the competence of these leaders. It is therefore of utmost importance to equip them with necessary knowledge and skill in MLP.
Notable institutions of national eminence like the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), Hyderabad, The Lai Bhadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie, the Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, GRJ, Gandhigram, the Institute of Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bangalore, and some voluntary organisations have designed training modules intended for PR functionaries. Of late, some of them have also started offering training to the elected panchayat leaders. But these have not specifically concentrated on MLP.

In this context it is imperative that a training strategy for training the elected Village Panchayat Presidents (VPPs) be designed empirically and offered for further use. Hence this study.
NOTES'


•The sub-district unit is interchangeably referred to as block or panchayat union in Tamilnadu. This study also does so.

4The terms micro level planning, micro planning, village development planning, village level planning, local level planning, village panchayat plan, planning from below, bottom up planning and grassroots planning are generally used synonymously. This study also does so.


7Government of India, notification, qtd. in Kurukshetra, June 1993, 29-34.


