Best governance practices in tribal areas : examples & experiences

The Decentralization Community of Solution Exchange, an initiative of the United Nations in India, provides a platform for increasing our understanding of local governance-both rural and urban- through knowledge sharing and collaboration. We bring to you the summary of one of the discussions held in the previous month on the Decentralization Community.

Query: Examples of regional programmes, Initiatives and networks working on local governance in South Asia

*   Information on multi stakeholder platforms working to strengthen decentralization

Summary of Responses

The query seeking experiences on best governance practices in tribal areas aimed at collating these experiences to ensure continuity in the midst of change for the tribal peoples. While many statutory measures have been undertaken for tribal development, these have not achieved the aims of empowerment that they set out to achieve. These include the PESA (Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act), Forest Rights Act (FRA) and creation of the Vth and VIth Schedule Areas. In this context members shared the measures civil society actors have undertaken in various tribal areas for better implementation of PESA, FRA and decentralized planning in the Vth and VIth Schedule areas.

Effective implementation of PESA (Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas Act) and Forest Rights Act

Respondents agreed that people's involvement in programmes is critical in creating ownership. This leads to greater motivation and understanding among people. Therefore, most of the experiences and strategies shared on ensuring effective implementation of PESA and FRA focused on peoples' participation in the development of their areas. There are many civil society organizations campaigning for the rights of the tribals and educating and empowering them for their own development. Members shared the following experiences:

*   The initiatives of the Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath (KMCS) in Alirajpur: campaigning for the development of the Bhil tribals and using the provision of PESA that even small hamlets can declare themselves as Gram Sabhas and then manage the natural resources in their areas, the KMCS has mobilized its members in fifty villages to protect the forests and these have been regenerated. These Gram Sabhas have also initiated voluntary communitarian soil and water conservation work. As a result the forest produce and water availability has gone up leading to greater agricultural yields.
*   Initiatives under the Madhya Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Project (MPRLP) have led to several success stories in better governance and development of tribal areas.
*   The work done by Vayam amongst forest dwelling communities in Thane district of Maharashtra. Specifically, Vayam used the padyatra mode, walking from village to village discussing the advantages of forest conservation and mobilizing the Forest Rights Committees in the movement.
*   The Central India Initiative of the Sir Ratan Tata Trust that has shown results of improving livelihoods of people at the grassroots level
*   Gram Sabha Street Theatre Campaign by Mahila Manches under Mahila Swaraj Abhiyan in Dahod Taluka in Gujarat. Gram Sabhas in Dahod Taluka were not working as per PESA provisions and there was a lack of awareness of PESA and planning in the tribal villages. Through a series of street theatre performances villagers were made aware about PESA and the role of Gram Sabha in planning in these areas.

Apart from the above mentioned experiences, respondents suggested other strategies for effective implementation of PESA and FRA. These included:

*   Motivational/ sensitization interventions like organizing mass campaigns, leaflet distribution, Cycle Rally, Street play, wall painting
*   Development of Community mobilizers
*   Capacity building programmes for PRIs
*   Gender sensitization programmes
*   Regularization of Gram Sabha and Standing Committees

Innovative local/ decentralized planning initiatives in the Vth and VIth Schedule areas

Respondents shared the experience of Vayam in Maharashtra working in the Vth Schedule areas of Thane district for developing informed leadership for planning. Vayam used the strategy of developing youth leaders who are trained in a village camp. The youth leaders are trained to identify development priorities. In one of the camps the leaders chose employment as the priority and were then trained on NREGA and planning related to this programme. As a result two villages planned their 'works' under NREGA and became aware on how to demand work under the programme.

Examples of innovative use of Special Central Assistance-SCA provided under Tribal sub-plan (TSP) for filling critical gaps, or region/state specific analysis of use/ utility of TSP resources

As an example of innovative use of SCA under TSP, members mentioned the 'PRADAN prototypes' in Jharkhand. Here there was innovative demonstration of better utilization of TSP fund where a list of successfully tested livelihood models was prepared, funded from TSP and implemented by a number of NGOs.

Discussants gave other general suggestions for effective implementation of PESA and FRA. They observed that since tribals worked collectively, the community rights approach may be used. Another suggestion was that many of the tribal areas are located in the foothills. In such areas, water from rivers or streams may be tapped for irrigation and drinking purposes. In this context, the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and the Allied Trusts have begun a programme on Diversion Based Irrigation. Such environment friendly schemes for tribal development may be taken up in many locations across tribal regions.

> *For complete responses including related resources and documentation, to join the discussion or to become a member of 'Decentralization Community, please write to Joy Elamon (joy.elamon@un.org.in) or Tina Mathur (tina.mathur@un.org.in) or visit our website www.solutionexchange-un.net.in*