

A Manual to Develop Village Decentralized Planning

**Developed and Supported by
Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan
SETU Abhiyan**



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A BACKGROUND TO DECENTRALIZED PLANNING

Introduction

There is a trend in developing countries towards the devolution of governmental responsibilities from strong central governments to localities, and the process of this is referred to as decentralization. Worldwide, the decade 1984-1994 saw 65 out of 75 developing countries with a population of 5 million and above having active decentralization policies and initiatives (Dillinger 1994). In India, decentralization is driven by the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1993 (though it has a history that outdates this) that transfers powers and responsibilities to *panchayats* and urban bodies.

The move towards decentralization has its roots in the crisis of legitimacy of central governments in the 1970s (Beard, Miraftab and Silver, 2008), wherein lack of transparency and exclusive decision-making processes resulted in poor developmental outcomes and indications of government failure. The democratization movement sought decentralization to enable inclusiveness in matters of the state. Similarly, proponents of economic liberalization saw inefficiency of government bureaucracy as the root problem and advocated decentralization to open governance to more efficient non-state actors.

Decentralization's advocates see it as a means by which to bring the state closer to people by allowing for public participation in decision making, by ensuring transparency and accountability, by enabling responsive and inclusive governance, and by increasing the efficiency of public service provision. Its critics see it as a policy promoted in developing countries by large global institutions as a camouflage for the continuation of colonialism and as a rubric by which to sell debt and ensure dependence (George and Sabelli, 1994) and as a re-packaging of status quo (Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

The shifts in the thinking on the role of the state have had consequent implications for the planning profession. Traditionally, planning was equated with state planning in concert with problem solving by technical experts. By the late 1980s, the problems and limitations of central planning had been well recognized and there was a move away from top-down planning to various forms of decentralized planning, wherein the planner's role evolved from 'technical expert' to 'facilitator' and 'social activist' with a responsibility to ensure the articulation and incorporation of local knowledge and expertise in the planning process. Planners had to redefine their roles and relationships vis-à-vis local governments, the private sector, and non-state actors.

As decentralized planning became mainstream in government agencies and global development institutions, it included within itself more public participation, a greater role for civil society, and strategies of collaborative and community based planning. Decentralized planning, much like decentralization itself, has to walk the line between the political logic of democratic, inclusive and redistributive planning as articulated by equity planning and radical planning practice, and the economic logic of efficiency, cost recovery and entrepreneurship. Walking this line, and understanding the balance between

these contradictory objectives, is an integral part of the planner's job profile today and reflects itself across the following field manual.

This introductory essay looks to provide a theoretical background to decentralized planning, and thereby to several concepts discussed and used subsequently in their practical avatars in the field manual. It first articulates an argument for decentralized planning. It then looks into the relationship between decentralized planning and democracy. It follows this with a perspective on decentralized planning from the lens of the Constitution of India. This essay leads into a field manual for village level planning as prepared by the Setu team at Kutch Navnirman Abhiyan in Kutch (Gujarat) on the basis of their practical experience in this subject over the past 12 years.

The Case for Planning by LGI

The economist and philosopher Friedrich von Hayek made an early argument for decentralized planning (Hayek 1945). He saw planning as 'the complex of interrelated decisions about allocation of available resources' and said that the planner has to utilize knowledge (in the form of needs, preferences, priorities, availability, etcetera) that is initially dispersed among all members of society. Deciding upon the best way to convey such knowledge to planners, and then to utilize it, is critical in designing an efficient economic system.

One option for planning is for it to be done centrally, with one planning authority for the entire economic system – in which case the question arises – can all this initially dispersed knowledge be put at the disposal of such a central authority? Alternatively, the task of planning can be divided up and done at decentralized units (even up to the unit of the individual) where this knowledge is already available – in which case the question arises – can additional knowledge be conveyed to these dispersed units so that they fit their plans with those of others? Hayek suggests that comprehensive centralized planning is possible in circumstances wherein detailed plans can be laid down for long periods in advance, and then closely adhered to, and where no further decisions of importance would be required. However, most economies and societies require planning to adapt to changes in conditions. In such circumstances, planning decisions are best left to planning units in which people are familiar with the local conditions, know of the relevant changes directly, and know of the resources immediately available so as to adapt to them. In changing circumstances, planning cannot be centralized.

The thinking that people are better able to communicate needs and preferences at a lower level of decision making, and therefore that decentralized planning leads to better plans and more efficient planning outcomes, is articulated by others as well (such as Tiebout 1961, Niskanen 1971, and Oates 1972).

There are caveats, though! First, the planning of some functions cannot be effectively decentralized to local governments (Olson, 1969). These include public goods such as national defence, and functions that have necessarily large footprints such as, in the case of education, curriculum development or, in health, the running of specialized hospitals. The planning of others may not be efficient

to decentralize because of the coordination problems that arise from many different policies across areas for the same function.

Second, highly decentralized fiscal arrangements (wherein regions are expected to raise their own revenues, plan their own expenditure, and ensure no deficits) would lead to increased gaps between developed and backward regions within a country. A central government has a moral (and political) obligation to narrow such gaps by using tax revenues from some regions for development activities in others through a system of fiscal equalization.

Third, some proponents of decentralized planning assume that local governments have similar access to expertise that upper tiers of government have, an assumption that is rarely applicable to less developed countries.

And fourth, good planning requires effective politics – including a level of diffusion of interests and forums for discussion, debate, and give-and-take between different interests. Local governments tend not to have sufficient diffusion of interests for an effective level of politics within society. In less developed countries, where this is combined with insufficient institutional checks and balances and a less evolved media at the local level, this creates conditions for ‘elite capture’ of government. Higher tiers of government, where institutions and media are more proactive and where multiple interests are involved, tend to be less prone to capture by a single interest group or a particularly powerful section of society (Bardhan and Mookerjee, 2000).

This last point requires greater elucidation, as it is this that makes or breaks the effectiveness of decentralized planning on the practical front. The next section of this essay looks at the linkages between decentralized planning and democracy and points to issues that any planning exercise at the *Panchayat* level needs to take into account and address.

Decentralized Planning and Democracy

Decentralized planning per se need not result in better planning or more efficient planning outcomes, even when the planning exercise is inclusive and participatory. Good plans are a more likely outcome when the planning unit as an institution is itself democratic. This section of the essay borrows from the ideas of Ribot (2007), looks at three aspects of democracy, i.e. representation, citizenship and the public domain, and examines the implications of these on decentralized planning units and planning exercises.

Decentralized planning and representation: A democratic institution must be representative, and democracy requires representatives to be accountable to people and responsive to their needs and aspirations. Accountability requires transparency of information and processes as well as positive and negative sanctions for performance (i.e. good performance is rewarded and bad performance punished). Responsiveness requires representatives to be equipped with powers so that people’s needs and aspirations can be translated into policy, and policy into practise. The planning process needs to enable accountability of and responsiveness within the planning unit.

Elected local governments can be strengthened when they take on the responsibility for planning within their respective jurisdictions. On the other hand, when governments and international agencies avoid using local governments for decentralized planning in favour of other institutional forms (such as parallel bodies, NGOs, line departments, etc.), they deprive local elected authorities of powers being transferred to the local arena. They also empower 'parallel' authorities, and force elected local authorities to compete with them for the legitimacy that follows from the control of public decisions.

And while elected local governments can be strengthened through recognition, they can be weakened as well if they have too little power to be effective, or if parallel institutions overshadow or pre-empt their ability to serve the public interest. Having an under funded local government with a mandate in an arena with overfunded parallel bodies provides for such a scenario.

The means used by governments and international agencies to transfer the power to plan also influence representation because they shape accountability. When transferred powers are conditional or insecure, local planning units are forced to respond to the needs of the institution making the transfer so as to retain their privileges. Transfers made as privileges can be taken back, and the threat of withholding powers makes local planning units upwardly accountable. Transfers made as secure rights, however, provide powers that can be exercised with discretion in accordance with local needs.

Decentralized planning and citizenship: In democracy, the concept of belonging (which infers citizenship) is residence-based – with citizenship being 'the ability to be politically engaged and to shape the fate of the polity' (Ribot, 2007). Belonging, however, is different in other institutional forms. In private groups, user groups and NGOs, belonging is based upon shared interests. In customary or religious institutions, it is based upon various forms of identity – ethnicity, place of origin, language or religion.

The choice of institution to undertake decentralized planning is therefore critical for the establishment of democratic norms in a society. Its choice as a planning unit confers legitimacy and power upon an institution. Transferring powers to non-representative institutions can re-enforce forms of belonging that are not grounded in democratic principles and legitimize the politics of recognition within the political arena. An elected local government, wherein citizenship and thereby belonging is based upon residence, best meets the requirements of democracy in a planning unit in this respect.

However, some disadvantages are conferred on the basis of ethnicity, identity, religion, language or gender, and these affect the ability of a person or a group to engage as a citizen/s within the polity. Planning processes need to recognize this and ensure the inclusion of such people and groups.

Decentralized planning and the public domain: The public domain is the public political space wherein citizens feel able and entitled to influence authorities, a space that maintains and re-enforces public belonging and identity and enables the integrative collective action that constitutes democracy. The existence of a public domain is necessary for the production of citizenship (Ribot,

2007). Retaining substantial powers relating to planning in the public domain is required for decentralization to produce a democratic dividend in the form of better plans and planning outcomes. Decentralized planning that distributes public powers among multiple interests and identity-based groups ends up enclosing the public domain and diminishing the scope for integrative public action. This is, again, against the interests of democracy.

Decentralized Planning in India

In India, decentralized planning is a part of the process of democratic decentralization driven by the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1993 that outlines the setting up of *Panchayats* and urban bodies and the delegation of responsibilities, authority, and financial resources to them.

The Constitution of India states that ‘the State shall take steps to organize village *panchayats* and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-governance’. The responsibility for providing guidance on implementation of this constitutional mandate fell to a series of national committees. The Balwantraji Mehta Commission of 1957 emphasised the importance of community involvement in planning and implementation for effective development and suggested the basic unit of democratic decentralization to be the development block. The K. Santhanam Committee of 1963 looked solely at *panchayat* finances. The Asoka Mehta Committee of 1978 was formed to address the weaknesses of *panchayats*, which it identified as an unsympathetic bureaucracy, an absence of political will, elite domination of *panchayats*, and a lack of role clarity. The GVK Rao Committee of 1985 revisited obstacles in the way of effective *panchayats*. The LM Singhvi Committee of 1986 set the Gram Sabha as the base for decentralized democracy, engaged with the issue of the role of political parties in *panchayat* elections, and recommended a new chapter in the Indian Constitution to recognize, protect and preserve *panchayats*. Towards this, the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill was introduced in Parliament in 1989 and defeated in the Rajya Sabha. It was, however, only in 1993 that elected local governments became an effective reality in India.

This was when the constitutional provisions relating to the establishment, powers and responsibilities of *panchayats* were introduced through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts. In this, Article 243B states that *panchayats* shall be constituted in every state at the village, intermediate and district levels, with a provision for no intermediate levels in smaller states. Article 243C empowers the states to make provisions for the constitution of *panchayats* through law. Article 243D reserves seats and leadership positions for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women. Article 243E provides for a term of 5 years for a *panchayat* and a gap of not more than 6 months between expiry of term and conduct of elections. Article 243G outlines the powers, authorities and responsibilities of *panchayats* – to enable them to function as institutions of self-government, to prepare plans for economic development and social justice, and to implement schemes for the same (including the 29 representative functions listed in the Eleventh Schedule). Article 243H relates to the finances of *panchayats* and their power to impose taxes. Article 243I requires the constitution of a State Finance Commission every five years to review *panchayat*

finances. Article 243J relates to the maintenance of accounts by *panchayats*, and their audit. Article 243K outlines the role of the State Election Commission. Article 243ZD creates committees for district level planning. The spirit of Part IX of the Constitution is to enable *panchayats* to function as units of local self-governance, with an emphasis on empowering them with a functional mandate, giving them a degree of autonomy, and imparting self-sufficiency through fiscal transfers, taxation powers and tax assignments (Raghunandan, 2007).

The Indian experience so far with democratic decentralization can be considered mixed. The political decentralization aspect of it is seen as a success, with states having modified their Acts consistently with the requirements of the 73rd and 74th Amendments and having carried out local elections. Today, there are more than 2.1 million elected representatives in the three *panchayat* levels (of which more than 40 percent are women, 16 percent have scheduled caste backgrounds and 11 percent are from scheduled tribes). At the lowest tier, each elected representative's constituency comprises of about 340 people – making India the most intensely democratic country in the world. Yet, issues of accountability and corruption remain. The administrative decentralization aspect can best be described as hesitant, with functional responsibilities (including planning) not being handed over to local governments or not being matched by adequate resources. And fiscal decentralization is lagging, with unreliable information on the fiscal situation of *panchayats*, with state finance commissions having difficulty accessing the resources to meet *panchayat* requirements, and with dependency upon financial transfers and few sources of untied funds.

The gap between the *panchayats'* constitutional mandate and the effective functional transfer to them can be attributed to several factors (Raghunandan, 2007). One is that the extent of actual empowerment of *panchayats* is left to state governments and determined by their enabling legislations – the language of Article 243G is not one of compulsion. In fact, several states did not constitute *panchayats* until 2003 despite the mandatory provisions in the Constitution. Another is that one of the paradoxes of decentralization is that it requires visionary leadership and statesmanship at the very top. And finally, there is pervasive thinking that *panchayats* cannot effectively plan and deliver.

Democratic decentralization in India is still evolving, with a slow but neither continuous nor uniform trend towards increasing powers, responsibilities and resources for elected local governments. It is time to question the assumption that a *panchayat* cannot effectively plan and implement programmes for the welfare of its citizens.

Some Concluding Thoughts

This essay is a precursor to a field manual for village level planning, and looks to identify and provide a theoretical and/or historical background to the many issues and contradictions that arise from the actual practise of planning at the village level. A basic assumption that the Setu team and the author of this report make is that decentralized planning is a critical element of democratic decentralization. Development planning at the village level, with the participation of the people who will be directly affected by the plans' implementation, is necessary for the success of democratic decentralization as

envisaged in the Constitution of India. The question is – how can decentralized planning be undertaken so that it contributes to the success of democratic decentralization? How can it be done so that it results in ‘good’ plans and successful planning outcomes? The following field manual, which is based on the experience of decentralized planning exercises in 79 *Gram Panchayats* spread across four blocks of Kutch district (Gujarat), looks to address this question. It also seeks to provide a counter to the pervasive thinking among some planners and policy makers that elected representatives in local governments are incapable of planning for their respective jurisdictions and subsequently successfully implementing the plans.

The essay relates decentralized planning to the process of democratic decentralization, articulates the arguments for and against it, and examines the aspects that require attention so that it promotes rather than subverts the processes that enable decentralization to produce democratic dividends. It also looks at the decentralization process in India and examines its successes and failures thus far. It is hoped that this essay provides a sufficient backdrop to the issues around decentralized planning and thereby a base upon which to build upon in the following field manual.

Endnotes:

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A FIELD MANUAL FOR DECENTRALIZED PLANNING

The background note provides a theoretical basis for the practice of decentralized planning. The remainder of this document is a practical guide to village-level planning. It asks questions pertaining to the practice of decentralized planning in villages (Appendix 2 lists out the questions), and uses the experience of the Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan (Appendix 3 lists out the people directly involved in preparing this document) to address them. In the process, it breaks planning up into six different stages, each of which have been discussed and sub-divided into specific steps (Appendix 4 lists out a schedule of activities undertaken to prepare this document, including field visits). It also points out other critical matters such as the necessary qualities of a planning resource team, the importance of money, the causes of failure of planning exercises, and the need to deal with some issues at the level of a cluster of villages.

The layout of this document is as follows –

- Background note
- Stages of decentralized planning
 - o Selection of Village
 - o Gram Panchayat General Sabha
 - o Secondary Data Collection
 - o Ward and Group PRA
 - o Gram Panchayat Body Meeting
 - o Gram Sabha
- Other critical matters
 - o Desired qualities of PRT
 - o Cluster level issues
 - o Others
- Appendices
 - o List of Acronyms
 - o List of Questions
 - o Schedule of Activities
 - o Notes of visit to Khambara Gram Panchayat
 - o Notes of visit to Rampar Gram Panchayat

STAGE 1: SELECTION OF VILLAGE

Introduction: This section looks at the first step towards decentralized planning – the selection of a village/Gram Panchayat for the planning exercise. It identifies the initial qualities that a village should possess so that a successful village planning exercise can be conducted.

Qualities of a village (necessary initial qualities in bold):

- Past experience of working with the planning resource team (PRT)
- People in the village have faith in the PRT
- **PRT knows the dynamics of the village**
- Panchayat body in the village is non-corrupt
- Transparency with funds, or at least a willingness towards this
- **Less party-based politics**
- **Possibility for women to be involved**
- Not too large, not too small
 - o PRT should avoid large and politically powerful panchayats
- Panchayat offers the possibility of a role model to be established
- **Panchayat has the ability to take decisions**
 - o Less role of –
 - Parallel bodies
 - Caste/Traditional panchayats in the village
 - No other authorities with extra-ordinary influence
 - Where such bodies exist, there needs to be a programme for raising critical consciousness before the planning exercise can begin
- **Decentralized power – valid plans can be made at the ward level**
- Presence of (like-minded to the PRT) NGOs in the village
- **Presence of positive and educated citizens in the village**
- Panchayat is active

STAGE 2: GRAM PANCHAYAT GENERAL SABHA

Introduction: Gram Panchayat general sabha - this stage occurs once the village has been selected for a planning exercise, and serves to obtain the permission, compliance and involvement of the elected representatives of the village for the planning process. It is followed by secondary data collection. This section describes the steps within this stage, identifies some issues that come up during the stage, and embellishes these with examples.

Steps, issues and examples:

- **Discussion with the Sarpanch** on the objectives of the planning exercise
 - o Example of the problem at Bhuvad village where the Sarpanch-pati would not allow the woman Sarpanch to be involved in the planning exercise, leading to Setu not working here
 - Issue of difference in values
 - o Example of Mathada village, where the woman Sarpanch got involved in her role as a sarpanch as a direct result of the planning exercise
- **Agreeing** to and formalizing **an agenda**, and getting this signed by the Sarpanch and the Talati
 - o Why are Talatis not a barrier (usually) to the planning process
 - One of the outputs of planning is the preparation of a document on the village, from which they can quote statistics at their own governmental meetings
 - There is evidence in the planning document that can be used for proposals and demands
 - Examples of talatis supporting the planning process –
 - Khambara/Sinugrah villages – the talati was transferred to Sinugrah village, and propagated planning based upon his experience at Khambara
 - Sumrasar Juth/Dhrobana village – Similar
- **Distribution of agenda** to gram panchayat members at least five days before the gram panchayat meeting
- **Gram Panchayat meeting**
 - o Explain the objectives of the planning exercise
 - o Explain the planning concept and the processes involved

- Importance of primary and secondary data
- Importance of sources for such data
- o Decide upon the distribution of responsibilities for the planning exercise
- o Decide upon the ward PRA structure
 - Date, time, location
 - Methods
 - Who will be involved
 - Resources required
 - Including chart paper, etc.
- o Gram Panchayat body should pass a resolution to go in for the planning exercise with a two-thirds majority
- o The meeting should be formally minuted

STAGE 3: SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION

Introduction: Secondary data collection – this stage occurs after agreement on the planning exercise is obtained, and serves to provide the necessary background information for the Ward PRA. It is followed by the PRAs at the ward and group levels. It identifies all the necessary background information requirements for the planning exercise, as well as the useful (but not necessary) along with their sources and the likelihood of their availability.

Secondary Data:

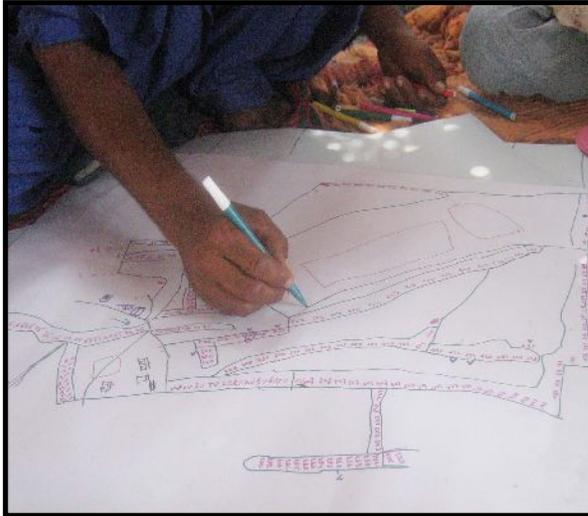
INFORMATION	SOURCE	AVAILABILITY
NECESSARY INFORMATION		
BPL/APL/Antyodaya Lists	Gram Panchayat	The lists are also available on-line
Education related information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilities in school • No. of teachers and students • No. of drop-outs, etc. 	School	
Ration card list	PDS shop	Difficult to obtain because a lot of fraud happens around this
Voter list	Gram Panchayat	
No. of animals	Animal census	Available with the Veterinary department at the district panchayat, or else with the Vet Hospital at the taluka panchayat
Farmers and their categorization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small, medium, large, etc. 	Gram Panchayat	Generally, information from the panchayat is easy to obtain. Problems and delays occur when the panchayat does not have the information and one has to go to the taluka panchayat or higher tiers for it
Panchayat budget (past 5 years)	Gram Panchayat	
Panchayat self-revenue details	Gram Panchayat	
Categorization of land	Gram Panchayat	
Facilities in the village and facilities available to the village	Gram Panchayat	
Panchayat tax information	Gram Panchayat	
Details of work done by the panchayat in the past 5 years	Gram Panchayat	

Panchayat Standing Committees information - Social Justice Committee - Pani Samiti	Gram Panchayat	
House list	Gram Panchayat	
NOT NECESSARY BUT USEFUL INFORMATION		
Land revenue documents - 7/12 - 8a - 6h	Gram Panchayat	This is sometimes particularly difficult to obtain if unavailable in the panchayat itself
Health information - Facilities available - Government data on ICDS beneficiaries, expecting mothers, etc.	ICDS centre With the ANM Taluka Panchayat	
Population analysis - Caste, community and family-wise population data - Census data, SC/ST population, etc.	Gram Panchayat and district panchayat Taluka panchayat	
Panchayat assets	Gram Panchayat	
List of governments servants assigned to the village	Gram Panchayat	
List of the poorest of the poor	Gram Panchayat	

Points to be noted:

1. If any information is not available, the Gram Panchayat can write to the authorities (such as the Taluka panchayat or respective line departments) and demand information. If information is still not available, the RTI Act can be used – all the requisite information falls under the RTI Act.
2. A possible format for collecting and presenting the secondary information is available.

STAGE 4: WARD AND GROUP PRA



Introduction: Ward and group PRA – this stage occurs after the collection of secondary data, and serves to bring up the needs, requirements and resources available in the various wards of the village, or with respect to specific groups within the village. It is followed by a Panchayat Body meeting.

This section describes the steps within this stage and identifies some issues that come up during the stage.

The ward PRA requires at least one facilitator and one documenter.

Steps, issues and examples:

• Before the PRA

- o Inform the date, time and location of the PRA to resource persons, leaders, representatives, women, the educated people within the ward so that they block time for the PRA
- o Meet the ward members and take them into confidence about what is going to be done at the ward level

• During the PRA

- o Explain the planning objectives and concepts
- o Decide the PRA process – mapping, etc.
- o Collect primary information
 - Number of widows, disabled, old, helpless, and their locations
 - Private assets – TVs, fridges, tractors, etc.
 - Information on crafts persons
 - Number of ration cards, and who has and does not have one
 - Electricity connections, toilets
 - Very vulnerable households

- o Need assessment / problem assessment relating to –
 - Infrastructure
 - Private
 - Public at the ward level
 - Public at the village level
 - Issues relating to private benefits – BPL cards, etc.
 - Rights related issues – water supply, PDS
 - Availability of services and functionaries
- o Check findings with participants to the PRA
 - Edit findings
 - List priorities
- o Discuss problems, solutions and priorities through the exercise
- **Keep in mind** the following
 - o The time and place of the ward PRA should be fixed carefully to enable participation
 - o Documentation should be simultaneous
 - o The ward members should be present
 - o The Gram panchayat body can also, separately and previous to the exercise, list problems and issues in the ward, and the PRA findings can be triangulated against these
 - o There is a need for geographical flexibility for the PRA exercise
 - o At least 10 percent of the ward's voters should be present
 - o The resource requirement for the PRA exercise (chart papers, etc.) prepared for beforehand and met
 - o The secondary data relating to the ward should be along side
 - o The ward PRA should be in one go
 - o The ward PRA should be carried out at about the same time as the other ward PRAs in the village
 - o Priorities should be stated and decided upon at this stage itself despite the scope for conflict around this

- **Key problems include –**
 - o People can't give the 5-6 continuous hours that this requires
 - o Women often do not actively participate
 - o People are not used to looking for solutions to problems themselves, and depend upon the Gram Panchayat for solutions and resources
- **It helps when –**
 - o There are educated participants to the process
 - o Colours are used for mapping on the ground
 - o Technology is used – for example, Google Earth



Mahila Sabha



Ward Planning, Kamaguna, Kutch

STAGE 5: GRAM PANCHAYAT BODY MEETING



Patiya Gram Panchayat Body meeting, Kutch

Introduction: Gram Panchayat body meeting – this stage occurs after all ward PRAs have been held and a body of information on the needs and requirements of the village has been prepared. This stage serves the purpose of formally informing the gram panchayat body of the information that has been collected, and discussing the prioritization of different requirements, access to expertise, and

the balance between resource requirement and availability. This stage is followed by the holding of a Gram Sabha.

The rules regarding the holding of this meeting are similar to the meeting of stage 2, i.e. that this is a formal meeting under the Panchayat Act and requires a formal notice to all attendees to attend.

Steps and issues:

- **Before the meeting** – summarize the data from the ward PRAs
- **At the meeting**
 - o The members of each ward should present the information of the ward PRA to the Gram Panchayat body
 - o Edit information – the Gram Panchayat can add and correct information regarding the problems identified and discussed at the ward PRAs
 - o Prioritize problems and solutions, and discuss the resource requirement for solutions
 - o Discuss the technical resources that need to be accessed
 - o Take a decision at this stage that a village plan should be prepared following from these exercises, and pass a resolution to this effect

- o Decide the date, time and location of a gram sabha to finalize the village plan, as well as the mode of inviting people to (and informing them of) this
- o Develop an outline of a village plan
- **Keep in mind** the following
 - o The ward member should represent the ward (and behave as the sarpanch of the ward, and be treated as such by the Gram Panchayat body) at the meeting
 - o Prioritization is always problematic, and there needs to be a strong element of values in this exercise to enable it to go forward
 - o On occasion, the sarpanch has to show power and authority during prioritization
 - o Outside experts are useful at this stage to discuss solutions and resources
 - o Some flexibility is required in the plan for needs that arise but are not expressed, or are of an emergency nature
- **Key problems include** –
 - o Some issues, such as Gram Panchayat inaction and encroachments on to public space, create conflict
 - o Local and political leaders apply pressure on the planning process at this stage
 - o There is often competition between wards for the resources required for solutions to problems
 - o Solutions may not be visible at this stage to the participants

STAGE 6: GRAM SABHA



Gram Sabha, Lohariya, Kutch

Introduction: Gram Sabha – this stage follows the Gram Panchayat body meeting in which the findings of the ward PRAs are discussed, and serves the purpose of discussing the outcomes of the meeting and putting the entire village information and a plan of action regarding needs and

problems in front of the village community for verification and discussion. Once this is done, a plan can be said to have been formalized.

Steps and issues:

- **Before the meeting –**
 - o Notice for the Gram Sabha as per the Panchayat Act
 - o The planning unit has to do homework on solutions, resources and technicalities that follow from the Gram panchayat body meeting
- **At the meeting**
 - o Presentation by Sarpanch to the gram sabha
 - Needs assessment
 - Data base
 - Solutions
 - o Discussion on priorities
 - o Editing the plan – adding and deleting issues and problems
 - o Discussion on solutions
 - o Decisions on solutions and priorities

- o Obtain agreement of the gram sabha for the village plan and pass a formal resolution on this
- **Keep in mind** the following
 - o Ward and village level common issues should be separated and fleshed out in the presentation
 - o Quorum is necessary for the gram sabha
 - o Participation is necessary for –
 - The village’s government functionaries
 - Women
 - Standing committee members
 - o Correct procedure should be followed for informing and inviting people to the gram sabha
 - o The gram sabha participants should give the village plan necessary attention, time and participation
 - o The sarpanch has to chair this gram sabha
 - o The plan needs to be shared in a way that all participants to the gram sabha understand
 - o In the case of joint panchayats (juth panchayats), each constituent village should have a gram sabha using these rules
 - o Documenting this meeting is necessary
- **Key problems include** –
 - o Few women come for this gram sabha
 - o It may be a good idea to hold a special gram sabha for the planning purpose so that issues are not mixed with those of a general gram sabha
 - o There may be competition between wards for benefits
 - o The Gram Panchayat body may need to act in a centralized way, with the sarpanch showing statesmanship, to ensure that the plan is decided upon

DESIRED QUALITIES OF PRT

Introduction: Not everyone can act as a resource to a village level planning exercise. This note identifies necessary values and qualities that the PRT as an institution should incorporate, as well as those that the individual planners should incorporate, in order to enable the planning exercise to be meaningful.

Institutional Qualities and Values (critical qualities in bold) –

- **Focus on panchayats and governance**
 - o Commitment towards these
 - o Knowledge of panchayat processes
 - o Ability to communicate this knowledge
- Ability to maintain, motivate and support a field team
- **Ability to plan in general rather than towards a specific purpose or with a specific scheme in mind**
- Large
- **Field based**
- **Financially stable**
- **Is located in physical proximity to Gram panchayats**
- Should not implement development programmes directly – should facilitate and enable Gram panchayats to implement programmes as a policy
- **Neutrality – should not be attached to any particular political party, caste group, religion, etc.**
- **The values that it professes should be internally believed and practiced**
 -
 - o For example, space for women and transparency of budgets
- **Participatory values**
- **Sensitive to poor and vulnerable sections of the community, and feel that they should be involved in the planning process**
- **Has PRA skills**
- **Believes that the procedures laid out in the Constitution of India should be used to the fullest, including aspects such as quorum**

- o No compromise on this
- **Wants to work with elected representatives and not their proxies**
- **Believes plans should prioritize basic needs of people**

Individual Qualities (all of them are critical) of the Planner –

- Knowledge of panchayat processes
- Commitment to planning as an instrument for development, willingness to work in the field and with panchayats, and self-belief
- Ability to communicate and influence directions
- Mature, knowledgeable, strategic in his/her thinking
- Believes internally what s/he says outside
- Sensitive to the requirements of women and vulnerable sections of the community, and pro them
- Honest, good-charactered, respectful of local norms, neutral
- Gives space for the village and Gram Panchayat to articulate needs

CLUSTER LEVEL ISSUES

Introduction: Not all functions and issues have footprints that fall within the jurisdictional domain of the planning unit. For example, there may be an issue that cuts across a group of villages (such as the state denoting an adjoining area as a wildlife sanctuary, or companies that are setting up operations within a village area), or an issue that is common across all villages.

How can these be planned for?

- For common activities and issues that are best worked at a cluster (of Gram panchayats) level, it is best that a lead role be taken by either the most affected (by the issue) Gram panchayat or the most effective Gram panchayat.
 - o The issue can come in one village's plan, and then that Gram panchayat can organize the other villages around the issue
 - o The types of such issues are –
 - Issues that cut across all villages
 - Making identity cards, obtaining widow pensions, etc.
 - Specific issues that are shared by a set of villages
 - The government denoting areas as wildlife sanctuaries
 - Issues that are particular to a village, but other villages face the same issue
 - A company setting up in a village
- A set of common documents need to be created around the issue

OTHER MATTERS

Money

The Setu team had a significant carrot to offer Gram panchayats while presenting their case on the need for structured planning exercise – the existence of an untied village development fund that the Gram panchayat could use to meet some of the requirements thrown up in the plan, and therefore a considerable lubricant to the entire process. The extent to which the existence of this fund enabled the planning process is a moot point, as is its criticality to the success of a programme to work with Gram panchayats on making village plans.

To those planning resource organizations that have similar resources, the Setu team's advice is not to talk too much about it (and, in fact, this is best discussed in the Stage 5 i.e. the Gram Panchayat Body Meeting) as this component can take over the entire planning process and become its *raison de etre*. Most financial requirements can be met from the following sources –

- Government
- Local donors
- Companies
- Citizen's contribution
 - o The two sarpanches we interviewed in the making of this document had divergent views on the importance of citizen contribution, with one saying that this should not be the focus (or even an important part) of the planning exercise and the other saying that citizens need to realize how hard it is to raise money for requirements
- Taxation
- Self revenue

Failure

The document identifies planning stages (and steps within the stages), critical assumptions, necessary qualities of selected Gram panchayat bodies, and values and qualities of the planning resource institution and the individual planners. Yet, even if all these hold good and are met, failure of the planning exercise can still be a possibility. The reasons may be as follows –

- Communication with Gram panchayats on the concept of planning and the explanations on the need for it need to be very clear – if not, the possibility of failure exists

- o Gram Panchayats pass on what they glean from such communication to their constituents, and therefore it is important that correct messages are passed on from the first communication onwards
- Key functionaries in the PRT leave midway through the planning process
- The panchayat body changes in between the planning process
- Nothing from the plan is implemented
 - o Most electorates are happy even if a few things that were planned are actually done
- The plan is not regularly updated

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF ACRONYMS

GP	Gram Panchayat
Gram Sabha	Village meeting
KNNA	Kutch Navnirman Abhiyan
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
Panchayat	Village level institution of governance
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRT	Planning Resource Team
RTI	Right to Information
Sarpanch	Elected head of the village panchayat
SJC	Social Justice Committee
Talati	State revenue official at the village level
VDP	Village Development Plan

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONS

Relating to the planning process –

- What are the critical assumptions and values that underlie village level planning?
- What are the critical qualities of the planning agency?
- What are the stages involved in village level planning?
- At each stage –
 - o Why is this stage necessary?
 - o Who will do the work at this stage?
 - o How should the work at this stage be done? What are the steps involved in working at this stage? How do these vary?
 - o What are the key issues that arise at this stage? What are the problems and barriers to working at this stage?
 - o What are the good practices and bad practices at this stage?
 - o What are the things to watch out for?
- How do functions that have a larger footprint than that of the planning unit be planned for?
- How can planning provide innovative solutions to problems?
- What are the failures that are faced?
 - o A plan is not developed despite planning efforts
 - o A plan is developed but not implemented
 - o A plan is implemented only partially
 - o A plan is implemented badly
- What are the accomplishments of planning in terms of outputs and outcomes? How important are these to the planning process?

Relating to the philosophical underpinnings of planning –

- How are hidden power differentials handled?
- How is elite backlash to planning handled?

- How set should planning agendas be?
- Can issues such as raising 'critical consciousnesses be built into the planning agenda?
- How can apathy of the population, or sections of it, be addressed?
- Should planning have constraints? In terms of budget (and whether soft or hard), planning horizons, scope of planning, etc.?

APPENDIX 3: SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN TO DEVELOP THIS MANUAL

16th September 2013

- Meeting with Setu team at Setu Abhiyan Office
 - o Presentation on Setus and the planning process
 - o Discussion on agenda for the week
- Meeting with Ms. Sushma Iyengar, Mentor, Setu Abhiyan

17th September 2013

- Meeting with Setu team at Khamir
 - o Discussion on Village Development Plans (VDP)
 - o Group work on VDP steps

18th September 2013

- Workshop on Strategy with the Setu team at Khamir

19th September 2013

- Field visit to Rampar and Khamra villages
 - o Meeting with Sarpanch and members
 - o Discussion on role of planning
- Visit to Thavar Baba Mela in Lakhpat taluka

20th September 2013

- Meeting with Veena Mahor and Manish Acharya

21st September 2013

- Meeting with Setu team
 - o Fleshing out some steps in the VDP process
 - o Identifying characteristics of planning agencies

APPENDIX 4: FIELD NOTES – VISIT TO KHAMBHARA – 19TH SEPTEMBER 2013

Purpose of the visit: This field visit was undertaken so as to get Gram Panchayat members' perspectives on the VDP process and the important activities that were planned and then implemented in the village.

Method observed: Facilitated discussion with selected Gram Panchayat members, and then a visit to see some of the planned and implemented activities.

Discussions:

The discussion was mainly with Dakshaben Chavda, *Sarpanch*.

- On why planning is important
 - o Planning sets a benchmark for the *Gram panchayat* as an institution
 - o Placement of issues in the form of a plan becomes strong when dealing with possible donors
- On the planning process
 - o Importance of women's representation
 - o The ward member should be present at the time of the ward PRA
 - o There are times when the *Gram panchayat* should exercise power
- On plans
 - o *Gram Panchayat* needs to take a holistic view
- Suggestions and comments
 - o The *Gram panchayat* body should make a list of requirements in the ward before the ward PRA and subsequent to the ward PRA check against this list
 - o To implement the plan at the ward level, the *Gram panchayat* body should treat the ward member as the *sarpanch* of the ward
 - o The SJC members should be involved in the planning process as they have access to different sources of funds to implement plans
 - o Individual and common issues should be separated so that they can be treated separately
 - o The citizens' contribution component should become an integral component of plans

- o Citizens need to understand the difficulties involved in obtaining funds
- o Citizens should know the procedures and requirements of government schemes
- o Citizens' contribution component should be accepted by citizens and strengthened
- o It is important to take people along, especially those in the opposition and those who don't participate in the planning exercise
- o *Sarpanches* and members should have a similar knowledge of schemes and processes to that of *talatis*, and training programmes and requirements should factor this in

APPENDIX 5: FIELD NOTES – VISIT TO RAMPAR – 19TH SEPTEMBER 2013

Purpose of the visit: This field visit was undertaken so as to get Gram Panchayat members' perspectives on the VDP process and the important activities that were planned and then implemented in the village.

Method observed: Facilitated discussion with selected Gram Panchayat members, and then a visit to see some of the planned and implemented activities.

Discussions:

The discussion was mainly with Narenbhai, the current (and recently elected) *sarpanch*.

- On why planning is important
 - o It is necessary to know people's opinions
 - o A roadmap gets made that will exist irrespective of who is in office
- On the planning process
 - o It is necessary to hold planning meetings in each ward
 - o 8-10 people in each ward, who have a positive attitude, should be involved in the planning process
 - o The plan should be shared, and needs prioritized, in a *Gram panchayat* body meeting
 - o The prioritized plan should be presented back in the *gram sabha*
 - o Coordination for resources should then happen
 - o The principles to be observed in the planning process are –
 - Transparency
 - Accountability
 - Reaching the Poorest
- On plans
 - o Plans should be detailed
 - Needs and problems should be articulated clearly
 - Public infrastructure and individual requirements should be demarcated clearly

- o A plan should have a summary
- o A plan should be small
 - It should meet basic requirements
 - It should be possible to implement
 - It should be possible to garner resources for
- Suggestions and comments
 - o It is important that citizens' contribution is not a critical element of plans
 - o The *Sarpanch* needs to let go of his pride and remember that he is an agent of the people, not a principal
 - o The *Gram Panchayat* body should be neutral, and the principle of neutrality should be observed during the process of prioritization
 - o A plan should lead to outcomes, things that show from the plan, things that are done
 - o A plan should have flexibility and slack, so that emergency requirements and things that have not been planned for but are suddenly required can be accommodated
 - o Success stories are important
 - o Problems occur when there is a gap between planning and decision making – people who have been involved in the planning exercise should be involved in the decision-making around the plans

APPENDIX 6: PARTICIPANTS TO THE PREPARATION OF THIS DOCUMENT

Ajit Chaudhuri, Phd Fellow with IRMA and Consultant

Aslam Juneja, Setu Abhiyan

Dhawal Ahir, Setu Abhiyan

Abdul Ghani Sama, Setu Abhiyan

Khimji Kanthecha, Setu Abhiyan

Kirit Chavda, Setu Abhiyan

Lalji Parmar, Setu Abhiyan

Manish Acharya, Joint Director

Rajendra Vaghela, Setu Abhiyan

Veena Mahor, Social Research and Documentation Consultant

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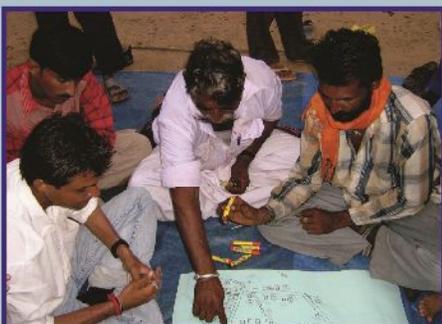
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Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan



SETU Abhiyan



Contact Address: 70-B, Gate no-3, Bankers Colony,
Near Jubilee Ground, Bhuj (Kutch), Gujarat
Email : abhiyanad1@gmail.com, setuabhiyan@gmail.com