

Development Schemes: Need for a Remodelling

The social welfare state to realise an objective of an egalitarian society endeavours to ensure maximum good of maximum number of its people. And in its bid to do so, it tries various measures including launching multiple schemes for the hoi polloi. India also has its share of welfare and development schemes and programmes targeted at different sections of the society. Such schemes are executed and implemented by the huge bureaucratic machine in close coordination with the governments at various levels including the local self-governments. The contours of a liberal democratic state could very well be delineated by an overview of the detailed planning and execution of such schemes.

Today, there are numerous such welfare schemes and development programmes being run in our country. The multiplicity of schemes by creating various layers of execution often complicates the execution by making the system cumbersome. The same invariably creates problems during the execution of schemes. It is here that a proposal has been mooted for the integration and consolidation of all such schemes. This proposal, if minutely planned after factoring in all relevant aspects and practical problems envisaged, shall go a long way in not only improving the planning and execution of these schemes but in also reaching their benefits to the targeted beneficiaries in a more efficient and effective way.

To begin with, such integration and consolidation of schemes/programmes relating to construction and creation of permanent assets or infrastructures should all be pooled together to be one overarching programme. However, the entire programme could be suitably sub-divided into different components with earmarked percentage of the total allotment to be spent on particular sectors e.g. for connectivity improvement, for rural housing, for watershed development, for minority development, for agriculture and so on, depending upon the weightage as perceived by the government.

These sectors could still be named variously like now, but they should all be an inalienable part of a single programme with uniform guidelines including those relating to fund

management and account keeping. Such uniformity shall facilitate better fund management and efficient account keeping, thereby obviating the need for maintaining multiple ledgers and cash books for multiple schemes. Even if the records or ledgers are maintained sector-wise, there shall still be uniformity. The need for opening and maintaining multiple bank accounts shall no longer be there, thereby making accounting relatively simpler than now. This would ensure better account keeping and better financial management.

The NREGA model is a good example to fall back on. The new programme after integration and consolidation of the multifarious welfare and development schemes should function in the same way as NREGA. Even though NREGS visualises an important roles for BDOs, SDOs and DMs, the role and responsibility of the local self-governments shall still be very important and critical as it is the latter that would do the micro-level planning and execution of the programme as done now. As the scheme has enough allowance for employment of surplus/additional manpower and other administrative desiderata, the various NREGA schemes are never constrained at the executional level in the way as many other schemes are marked as they are by delay and sundry executional snags.

Similarly, the new programme should be modelled on NREGS to be able to benefit from the experience gained through its implementation. It has not only ensured more efficient fund utilisation and better creation of community assets, the various measures visualised to ensure executional transparency have also minimised the scope for corruption and leakage. Hence, NREGS model should be the ideal template for modelling this new avatar on.

However, one still feels that the new scheme should be based on NREGS only after making some rectification and modifications in some of NREGS parameters. These include stipulations relating to employment for minimum number of man-days for every household, wage-material ratio, kind of schemes to be executed and permissibility of scheme execution through contractors. One feels that that after all these schemes are merged together, the pool of financial resources available with the government shall be significant enough to allow for demand-based employment throughout the year. Therefore, the NREGA cap of a minimum of 100 days of work in a year for a rural household should be removed completely.

Also, the wage-material ratio should be made 50:50 instead of present 60:40, thereby maintaining the material-intensive work at the level where they are at the moment. But pooling other schemes' wage components with the new scheme shall create enough leverage and leeway to provide work throughout the year to a rural household. Also, deviating from the present NREGA norm of not executing any scheme through contractor, there ought to be a little scope for 15 per cent of the total schemes to be executed through contractors. The scheme permissible to be executed through the contractors shall be material-intensive (say those which shall require 80 per cent material) and which shall require to be executed emergently. The decision for selection of such schemes must be left to the discretion of the local self-government.

The transparency norms imported from NREGP shall ensure that the common public remain duly informed and participate at the various levels of planning and execution of the schemes. Also, the manpower now engaged in implementation of different other schemes

shall become available and could be pooled together for better supervision and monitoring. Many of the present schemes require identification of beneficiaries which often become cause of partisan politics and friction. After the new programme comes into being, there shall be no need for beneficiary identification as the new scheme shall not be confined to BPL families only but shall be available to all sections of society.

There could, however, be a priority list to be decided by the local self-government, e.g. Gram Sabha in accordance with which various individual benefit schemes (IBSSs) including low-cost housing or sanitary toilets shall be built. The number and kind of schemes to be taken up under individual benefit schemes could be further diversified to include rural housing, sanitation, kitchen gardens et al to cater to many other perceived needs of the people in the countryside. So, we need to get ready in advance to prepare for future by modifying the way we reach various benefits to the underprivileged sections of the society. The local self-government shall have a shelf of schemes which shall be executed in order of priority. This would save a lot of time and cost over-runs would be avoided, thereby improving creation of capital assets in the countryside and thereby also bridging the rural-urban divide.

Whether such a programme shall be extended to urban areas or not shall depend on the decision to merge the schemes executed by the municipal bodies with the proposed programme. But if we do it, it shall not be such a bad idea as it shall give a better fillip to development process in the municipal areas provided a customised execution plan is visualised for the same. The proposal for consolidation and integration of government schemes needs to be considered, discussed and debated thoroughly before operationalising the same. One does feel that such a programme shall definitely revolutionise the way different welfare and development programmes are planned and executed in this country.

Salient Points

- Multiplicity of schemes by creating various layers of execution often complicates the execution.
- Proposal has been mooted for the integration and consolidation of all such schemes like consolidation of schemes/programs relating to construction and creation of permanent assets or infrastructures should all be pooled together.
- Such uniformity shall facilitate better fund management and efficient account keeping.
- MG-NREGA model is a good example to fall back on.
- Role and responsibility of the local self-governments shall still be very important for the micro-level planning and execution.
- No need for beneficiary identification as the new scheme shall not be confined to BPL families only but shall be available to all sections of society.
- There could, however, be a priority list to be decided by the local self-government.

Glossary

Desiderata: things wanted

Snags: any obstacle or impediment