

State Strategies

The government of Madhya Pradesh has, in the last eighteen months, attempted a paradigm-shift in development strategies. Recognising the importance of accelerating the pace of human development in an economically and socially backward state like Madhya Pradesh, and also recognizing that the key to rapid and sustained reduction of poverty lies in such all-round human development, it has attempted to put in place a pro-poor, people-centred agenda for action, with state missions called Rajiv Gandhi Missions in the vanguard. These Missions seek to strengthen livelihood security, as well as expand access to education and basic health care for the poor in the state. The state has also adopted a model of delivery that relies on people's direct involvement and action. Direct involvement of the community has been facilitated by the constitutionally mandated Panchayati Raj which was introduced in the state last year. As a result, nearly 5, 00,000 grassroots representatives, of whom over 1,80,000 are women, have taken charge of development at the local level.

The state's strategies take into account worldwide lessons on the optimal strategies to reduce poverty. These lessons suggest that effective and sustainable poverty reduction interventions must aim at:

- Promoting productive employment generation, since labour is usually the only asset of the poor which can generate income, and
- providing basic social services to the poor, particularly in terms of access to basic education and health care. The state's Missions reflect an internalization of these lessons

THE STATE'S MISSIONS

Labour supply pressures are building up in the rural areas as a consequence of population growth, at a time when the technological possibilities for productive labour absorption in agriculture are becoming increasingly limited, restricting opportunities for income growth of the rural poor. The farm sector in Madhya Pradesh has been lagging behind primarily due to lack of an extensive irrigation infrastructure, and consequently of agricultural practices such as single-cropping. A number of irrigation projects are underway, and the state government is making a concerted effort to complete these projects. These projects will mature in the medium term.

At the same time, the immediate needs of the poor for livelihood security cannot wait. There is a pressing need for more programmes of productive employment generation outside traditional agriculture in the rural areas, mainly in the rural non-farm sector. As it is, the share of rural non-farm employment to total rural employment in Madhya Pradesh is only 10.7 percent (1991 Census). Therefore, in order to strengthen livelihood security, one very high priority for the state has to be generation of rural employment, with special emphasis on non-farm employment.

Accordingly, the three Missions for livelihood security center around watershed development, development of rural industries and development of fisheries. The Mission on Watershed Development is aimed at providing livelihood security to the poor and vulnerable groups living in the drought-prone areas of the state.

It seeks to promote conservation of water sources and prevention of environmental degradation that is so central-prone regions of the state. Active association of non-governmental organizations is a part of the strategy for implementation of this Mission on Development of Rural Industries targets neglected but potentially productive groups in the rural economy, such as rural artisans and craftsmen. And the Mission of Fisheries Development aims at creating and enhancing the income-earning potential of the poor and generating productive non-farm employment opportunities in the rural areas of the state.

Madhya Pradesh also ranks very low among Indian states in social attainment indicators, particularly education, and this is a major reason behind deep-rooted patterns of poverty that transcend generations. Experience has indicated that of all the social sector interventions, the spread of education is the building block of broad-based poverty-reducing economic growth. Investment in education is the best way of helping the poor break free of the state has taken up the Mission on Basic Education, which dovetails ongoing programmes in this area, and combines the twin objectives of universalisation of primary education and literacy. This Mission has formulated a strategy to make total literacy a mass campaign by involving educated youth to voluntarily teach other youth. So far over 5.6 volunteers have been mobilized to teach about 11 million people. The momentum generated through the mass campaign for literacy has been channelised also for universal enrollment of all eligible children in schools. Panchayats provide leadership to this campaign and in the current year, through a 'School Chalo Abhiyan', 18 lakh children were enrolled in schools.

In health care, the two Missions seek to impart a thrust on control of diarrhoea diseases and on elimination of iodine deficiency disorders. Control of diarrhoea is critical to efforts to reduce infant mortality, since

it accounts for nearly 28 percent of deaths of children in the state. This is being addressed through an ORT com-Health education package, the successful implementation of which is expected to reduce infant mortality by 70 percent in the next three years. Similarly, the poor living in the tribal and remote areas of the state are more prone to iodine deficiencies that create physical and mental retardation. These deficiencies can be directly controlled and prevented through supply-side intervention for universal use of iodised salt, and through demand-side interventions by generating community awareness. This is the strategy adopted by the Mission working in this area.

The choice of the agenda for the Missions has resulted in automatically targeting development interventions towards the poor, towards vulnerable groups like the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women, and towards less developed areas like drought-prone and tribal areas. Thus, the Missions are self targeting. The poorest regions and the poorest section of the state's population represent its clientele.

These Mission have been successfully operationalised due to a combination of positive factors and forces.

- First and foremost was the recognition at the policy level that to effectively target the poor, attention to education and health care should go together with a focus on rural employment; taken together, these have the potential of catalyzing economic and social development of the poor in the rural areas.
- Secondly, the enactment of Panchayat Raj legislation and the rejuvenation of the local government made real the possibility of a people-centred development process in which people are seen as active agents of development instead of as objects of development.

- Thirdly, a new openness in the institutional framework of governance enabled the state to accommodate non-governmental agencies in a cooperative effort; this opened up possibilities of multiple channels of delivery of social programmes.
- Fourthly, economic policy changes at the national level reinforced the effort, since the withdrawal of the Government of India from business and economic activity released finances to enable the state to step up its intervention in the social sectors, and provided a facilitating environment for this concerted thrust toward the social sectors at the state level.
- Fifthly, and most importantly, the commitment of the political executive to such an agenda made this thrust possible.

The Mission mode has succeeded in imparting a sense of urgency to the tasks it has taken upon itself. The development of action plans for each of the Mission areas with clearly defined goals and fast-track transparent monitoring mechanisms are beginning to make a difference in accelerating the pace of development in the rural areas of the state. The collective challenge addressed by these missions to make a significant difference to indicators relating to human development. Seen in this light, this Report acquires a special relevance for the state at this juncture.

DELIVERY MECHANISMS: PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVES

More important, the torch-bearers of these new initiatives for poverty reduction and human development are the people of the state. Their energies, so far on hold, have found a release through Panchayati Raj. Madhya Pradesh is the one state in the country that has most aggressively

implemented Panchayati Raj. It was the first state in the country to implement the 73rd Constitutional Amendment and begin the process of energizing grassroots-levels democracy and popular empowerment by (a) election of representatives to Panchayati Raj institutions at the district and village levels, and (b) delegation of substantial financial and administrative authority from the state government to the district (Zilla), block-level (Janpad) and village (gram) Panchayats.

The Missions were accordingly developed in synergy with Panchayati Raj, at around the same time. The effort has been to use the revitalization of these local institutions to build up popular enthusiasm and unleash collective action at the grassroots for achieving the objectives of the Missions. Demonstrated political commitment at the highest levels has catalysed the process and enabled the Mission objectives to be internalized and become people's movements all over the state. This has also helped in imparting a creative focus for the newly empowered popular representatives at the district and village levels.

Along with the attempt to put in place a pro-poor agenda that focuses on basic needs, improvements in the efficiency of delivery of programmes have also been sought to be addressed through effective and participative democratic decentralization. Traditional models of delivery of programmes at the state level tend to rely heavily on government personnel. Programme success has accordingly been dependent on the quality and quantity of the staff deployed, and the sustainability of the programmes has often rested on an unsteady foundation. With the state's initiative for decentralization of power to the villages, and the new methods of functioning, programme delivery will

necessarily have to be undertaken with the active participation of elected district and village-level popular representatives. The Rajiv Gandhi Missions therefore build in popular participation into their implementation framework. In addition, alternate channels of delivery through active NGOs are being consciously encouraged by the state. Much has been heard about the need for planning from below in the past; this is the first time that planning for specific activities would be bottom up, i.e., they would emanate from the panchayat decision-making structure.

Thus, the state government has set for itself an agenda for handing over the implementation of development programmes in both the economic and social sectors to these grassroots institutions. Some of the specific features of the Panchayati Raj initiative are;

- *Delegation of power:* This is the single most important step in the entire Panchayati Raj initiative. Panchayats are now involved in every level of decision-making in the districts, outside of revenue and law and order. It is for the first time that PRI members are not just involved in an advisory or passive capacity, but in an executive role.
- *Integration with the district administration:* The Collector has been made the chief executive officer of the zilla panchayat (ZP). This integration has gone even further at the block level, with the block office merged with the janpad panchayat, and the block officials
- *Working control of government staff:* The elected panchayat bodies have been formally vested with working control of the staff in the development departments functioning in their jurisdictions. Government staff now have to

respond to their directions in development planning and programme implementation.

- *Appointment of personnel in social sectors:* Many specific powers and responsibilities have been given to panchayat bodies, to enable them to relieve local staff constraints in the implementation of social sector activities that contribute to human development. Specific instances are powers of appointment of education officials, like shiksha karmis, and the equivalent of barefoot doctors.
- *Control over rural development programmes:* These have been specially put under Panchayati Raj institutions. All district, Janpad and village-level programmes for rural development and poverty alleviation are now under the direct control of panchayats. At the district level, the ZP chairman has been designated the chairman of the District Rural Development Agency, a position hitherto held by the Collector. Madhya Pradesh is the only state to make this arrangement. Thus panchayats can now plan, allocate funds, and direct the implementation of these schemes and projects.

While the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution and the subsequent enactment of legislation for these local bodies has put in position the legal framework for action, the government has gone much further in its all-out implementation. It has cut through bureaucratic and administrative hurdles to make for a simpler and more responsive administration, closer to the people, that can address local issues, respond to local needs and developments aspirations.

LOOKING FORWARD

While significant inroads into cutting down administrative structures have been witnessed during the last year and a half, the agenda is yet unfinished, and the state has to travel a long way to realize its aims of bringing about people-centred governance for effective poverty reduction and human development of the poor in the state.

The tasks before the state government in the near future revolve around the agenda to effectively transfer greater administrative and financial powers to the local bodies. This can be achieved with a strengthening of the initial commitment to decentralize and its internalization in the value systems of state-level politicians and government officials from the state down to the cutting edge level. Vested interests have to be overcome.

The Panchayati Raj institutions are in a nascent stage of development. Training of elected representatives and administrative personnel will continue to be an important near-term task.

Keeping administrative structures lean and efficient will be yet another important task. The establishment of these institutions is not without financial costs, which would strain the resources of the state unless corresponding adjustments are made to effectively downsize the administrative machinery.

Despite the daunting challenges ahead, it is very likely that with continued political commitment and enthusiastic popular participation that has been a hallmark of these initiatives so far, the state's strategies will be able to deliver on its promise of a better future for the poor in Madhya Pradesh.

