Decentralization in Rural Management: An HRM Perspective

Abstract

The Idea of Rural Management is mainly dealing with the management in implementation of various programmes and policies for an individual and community in rural area. This programmes and policies are mainly formulated by the key policy makers who are having the theoretical knowledge and bookish ideology. The main beneficiaries of such privileges are the marginalized and minority population in the country. The main idea is about how the rural management can be strengthened for making the implementation of policies in more transparent and decentralized manner. How can a core ideas of Human Resource Management can be implemented for effective development of the communities? Although there is also a theoretical frame work of HRM but it mainly deals practically on the aspect of outcome. Decentralization can be the base of HRM in managing the community for inclusiveness at the local level. The field experience in some of the villages of Gujarat is been related to this basic idea on strengthening the rural management. On the part of conclusion there are various strategies and tactics which can be implemented by the decentralized manner and HRM perspective.

Keywords: Rural Management, Decentralized Planning, HRM

Introduction

Rural Management can be understood in at least two different ways: it may be a follow-up of a previous rural analysis, or an independent activity that may benefit from a rural analysis study. In the first case, a rural analysis report can be the starting point of a rural management or rural development program. This may be in a project aimed to improve the socioeconomic structure of the rural area, or in a development strategy. Therefore the analysis of a rural area can be used to improve the living conditions of its inhabitants by reinforcing the strengths and avoiding the observed weakness; by linking the area to a wider economic integration area, or by devising new development strategies. The necessity of a rural analysis prior to any management attempt is clear, since a developed knowledge on the different aspects

of the rural area is required to take full advantage of its potentialities, and only a quality rural analysis can provide such insights. (Tapiador, 2008)

Decentralization of the authority over administering redistribution programs to local communities has recently become widespread in the developing world. These initiatives have transferred responsibility of procurement, selection of local projects, and identification of beneficiaries from central ministries to local governments or community representatives. The presumed argument in favor of decentralizing delivery systems is that local governments will be subject to electoral pressures from local citizens, who are able to monitor delivery better than a distant central authority. (Bashaasha, 2011) But Decentralization can be both an end and a means, it can pose almost as many problems as it solves. It is also not a panacea and should not be taken, for example, as a substitute for democratic representation. It seems to work best in situations where a number of criteria are already in place and is not a substitute for those conditions. (Anderson, 2011)

The purpose of Human Resource Management (HRM) is to manage the people who run the organization. Just as organizations must effectively manage their physical, capital, and information resources, they must also effectively manage their human resources. The management of human resources in organizations today has a loan history of different approaches that reflect the social conditions of the time. During the early part of the 20th century, HRM ideas shifted in focus to the interactions among workers. A series of studies carried out in the 1930s established that the social environment of work had a strong influence on the productivity of the organization. (York K. M., Applied Human Resource Management, 2010)

Centralized control vs. Decentralized Management

Implicit in the notion of decentralization is the devolution of some responsibility and authority to local levels, which brings decisions on public service delivery closer to clients while freeing central government of the day-to-day details of local administration. On the other hand, retaining some control at the central level can yield substantial benefits, including national minimum standards for service delivery and wider mobility within the civil service. It is critical for decentralization policy to achieve a rational equilibrium between these opposing but valid considerations. Decentralization policies should not aim to devolve all authority to the local level, but rather to redefine the responsibilities of the center and local governments. Central authorities must recast themselves as guides, providing local administrations with a comprehensive, feasible national policy framework and enhancing their ability to evaluate local performance. At the same time, policies must align the responsibilities and autonomy of local managers. The roles of local governments and their civil servants must be clearly specified and accompanied by the resources and flexibility to tailor activities to the needs of residents, as well as by mechanisms to ensure accountability and prevent proximity from opening the door to elite capture. Clear, locally feasible

standards for minimum performance can mitigate the risks of devolving autonomy to subnational governments, as can better monitoring of performance through the collection, maintenance, and transmission of information on performance across levels of government. (Green)

Process of Decentralized Governance and planning

Planning effort in India for over 45 years now to promote development has yielded mixed results-good progress in some and not so good in others. So now the planning Pandit's were in search of an alternative approach. It is in this background that a 'paradigm' shift took place recently in favour of decentralized planning and governance. The advantages claimed are that decentralization will meet all the drawbacks of macro planning in the sense that it will provide the basic needs by getting inputs from people, reach backward areas and weaker sections and be people oriented and cost effective in so far as it is participatory in nature.

Transfer of powers and Resources

Transfer of adequate powers, functions and resources to decentralized governments is one such important condition. The basic issues that are of interest here are: what powers and resources are to be transferred and on the basis of what criteria? Is this transfer subject to zero-sum game in which case what conflicts arise between the power/resource givers and receivers? Secondly, under the three-tier system how powers and resources are to be distributed among the various bodies? What should be the interrelationship between different levels of government? And how are they linked with each other so that they work in unison?

Planning Process

The second set of conditions is that these bodies should have autonomy of decision making in respect of planning and administration. At the same time, they should be accountable and possess transparency too in their day-to-day working. They should identify people's needs and local resources, on that basis formulate projects, prioritize them, and link these projects in the integrated area development framework such that whatever projects are formulated they become economically viable.

In actual process, the planning process begins with the meeting of the village council (Gram Sabha) where people's needs are identified and priorities are drawn up. These needs are processed at the village panchayat level; an action plan is prepared and passed onto taluka panchayat level which after incorporating all the GP (Gram Panchayat) action plans into its own plan passes it onto the Zilla Panchayat for transmission to the state planning department. The mechanism evolved here undoubtedly appears to bestow autonomy on the governing bodies in regard to planning and implementation. But a deeper

analysis suggests that the processes inherent in the mechanism produce different kinds of noises. This needs to be elaborated a bit considering the importance of the subject.

In the first place, Gram Sabha meetings are not regularly held and, if held, meetings take place in the panchayat office. Attendance of citizens in these meetings is thin. Most of those who attend these meetings are the potential beneficiaries with a desire to seek assistance under the various poverty alleviation programmes. Indeed, the Gram Sabhas are actually reduced to the status of an assembly that is merely engaged in identifying beneficiaries under various schemes of assistance. This knocks out the principles of transparency and accountability to people from the concept of decentralization. Besides, it may be desirable to add that the panchayat planners do not enjoy full autonomy in regard to plan formulation because of the following reasons:

1. The resources allocated especially to GPs (Gram Panchayat) are so minimal that they hardly can exercise any choice with regard to local plan programmes.

2. The ongoing programmes are so many and the Quantum of resources to be allocated to the spillover projects is so large that hardly anything is left for taking up new projects.

3. It is reported that the state planning Department officials, overseeing the planning exercise done by the ZPs (Zilla Panchayat) on the basis of people's needs and priorities, change allocations thereby negating the very spirit of autonomy implied in decentralized governance. Such interventions by the officials reportedly take place at the instance of heads of various state department and the district ministers who would not like to see a cut in or lower allocation going to their own departments.

People's Participation

People's participation in theory would imply participation of citizens, their representatives and organizations like youth clubs, Mahila Mandals, and participation of non-government organizations in the planning and governance process. For various reasons, this condition is not fulfilled because of the following reasons: Low level of awareness among citizens has led to a dismally low level of participation in the governance process. People's organizations are yet to make in this respect, they are still interested in ceremonial functions and getting dignitaries to address the members. The NGOs have some psychological barriers. On the one hand, their self-righteous attitude prevents them from working with the local political leaders and panchayat members. On the other, the latter look upon NGOs as competitors; suspecting their bonafides the panchayat members hardly allow themselves to interact and work with the NGOs.

On the whole, there is a wide gap between what is desirable and what is actual so far as decentralized governance is concerned. (Aziz, 2009)

HRM perspective

Equal employment opportunity

At the first glance, discrimination in employment seems to make no sense. The rational employer hires applicant only based to do the work, not on the race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, all of which are unrelated to their ability to do the work. (York K. M., Equal employment opportunity, 2010)

The schemes which are been implemented in the rural arena which is all for the development of people should benefit the people appropriately by eliminating discrimination in any of the work assign to the people. For instance the work provided under MG-NREGA should be equal for all the people enrolled.

Training & development

All the working Management body must manage four resources: money, equipment, information, and people. Investments in better equipment may speed up production or reduce waste. Information is power; data about products, prices, and customers are essential to every business. Investments in training and development of employees can make them more productive or more effective in their work, directly contributing to the bottom line. The purpose of training and management development programs is to improve employee capabilities and organizational capabilities. When the organization invests in improving the knowledge and skills of its employees, the investment is returned in the form of more productive and effective employees. Training and development programs may be focused on individual performance or team performance. (York K. M., 2010)

For managing the rural society better one must create a proper flow for information's, funds and resources. This can be mainly done through the concept of administrative and fiscal decentralization. The fund which is been sanctioned for development of the rural area can be properly used only when there is transparency and accountability in the system. People must be having all the information about the processes which is going on the name of "Development". The implementers must be specially trained for resisting against any of the improper situation coming up on the ground of implementations and must be always ready with the alternatives. This can be also the way for effective Management of rural society.

Organizational development

Organizational Development uses a number of methods (or interventions) to bring about change in the organization. Sensitivity Training is used to change behavior through the use of unstructured group interaction. The purpose is to give participants a better understanding of their own and other's ideas, beliefs, and attitudes. Survey Feedback is the use of surveys to collect information from organization members about their perceptions and attitudes on a variety of issues such as decision making,

communication, and coordination with other people in the organization. The data collected are given back to members and then analyzed and can be used to identify problems, clarify issues, and seek solutions through informed discussion. (York K. M., Organizational Change and Development, 2010)

The local people residing in the rural area can be the part of this managerial system by getting involved in various aspect of development like going through the all possible route and finding out the key elements that can be helpful in development and can reduce the negative aspect as much as possible in short time and this can be done by their inclusive participation and collecting the information about various problems or issues which is the part of hurdle in to the path of development.

Method of Appreciative Inquiry

The Organizational Development method of Appreciative Inquiry is designed to focus on the strengths of an organization rather than its weakness, on what can be achieved rather than on problems, and on what works well and how success can be extended throughout the organization. Appreciative Inquiry is designed to induce innovation and collaborate through participatory methods, by providing an opportunity for people to participate in series of guided conversations that is explorative. (York K. M., THE VALUE OF A COLLEGE EDUCATION, 2010)

1. **Discover**: The primary focus is on creating an awareness of images, stories, and capacities that are most likely to inspire future actions. Organizational members may become aware of previously unknown strengths in each other, discover common values, or develop a greater willingness to rethink basic assumptions.

   The policy makers would be making the policies for the rural development but it should be more effective and that can be only done by knowing the strength of implementing it with proper strategies and tactics. For this they must try get to know about the previous success stories of that particular Programme or place.

2. **Dream**: The focus of discussion shifts to how the strengths discovered in the discover step can be leveraged, so that organization members can think about the organization's potential.

   The steps which are been taken for effective planning should be also helpful in the future and for that any kind of conditions should be kept in mind so that one can act accordingly and development can go on.

3. **Design**: The major task is to identify concrete, actionable ideas that will move the organization closer to its newly envisioned potential, a shift from reflection to action. There's a clear sense of purpose and identity.

The programmes and policies which is been formulated should be mainly decentralized and should be made at the ground level along with the local people so that the policy can hit the target and result into developmental success.

4. **Destiny**: Organization members now shift from planning to deployment as teams implement their plans to create changes. As implementation work continues, teams create small wins to celebrate and motive organization members to continue the work of implementation.

As the decentralized concept focus on the distribution of authority at the local level the same way the major developmental programmes should be divided at the different level and for each level specific monitoring must be done and through this it can be successful in its each and every part and in whole the major Programme can be success.

Field Experience & Observation

The state of Gujarat is one of the states from the well-developed state in India. As all say Gujarat is a rich state and infrastructural very well developed, but the reality can only be known be getting practical and witnessing the situation. As the part of field work we had been asked to stay along with the tribal families and try to get to know about their culture, traditions, and customs and also about implementation of various policies and Programmes. Field work was in the district of Narmada where there is a highest population of tribals in Gujarat. There was also theme based study which was carried out during the field work on superstitions.

When we are talking about rural management we usually relate the term "Rural" with the marginal or minority population residing in the village instead of the whole bunch of people in to the village. Similarly when we talk about "Management" we casually relate it with balancing/managing the resources been provided to people in rural area. If the thinking of the concept is same as above then one must also understand the effective outcome of the term "Rural Management". There is various aspect of the rural management which is responsible for the people centric benefits. There is been various Programmes and schemes which were ongoing during the field visit, most of them were CSS (Centrally Sponsored Scheme) and were been formulated by the central government ministries and been implemented through the state government. The entire scheme which has been formulated uptill now was basically focusing on the development of the rural individual and family in economical aspect. Some of the schemes like MG-NREGA, NRHM are such a Programme which is been implemented in most of the part of India. But the implementation part is the very critical stage for any policy or Programme to be successful. And for this decentralized planning is must as we can observe that the monitoring people are not at all concerned about their duty rather they are trying hard to get as much as they can from this kind of Programme just to

raise their standard of living. And it result in the failure of the Programme in real as on practical ground no sign of development is been noticed comparatively in the database the scheme is working very effective and also been implemented in most of the rural area.

When we had an interaction with the local people who were in critical economy stage they were revealing the real condition of their life which was in pathetic situation. When they had been asked about the government scheme and their benefit their behavior was much arrogant because according to them corruption is been deeply rooted in any of the activities from the government side. Although they are having the high post facilities and resources they are unable to manage the rural society of this country which originally defines the identity of this country. There's no proper transparent process, villagers themselves are not allowed to know about the scheme perfectly so what can one say about the benefits? Any of the project or any Programme which is been started in the rural area, the workers are most of from the urban area, so there's no chance for rural people to be inclusive into any of the work.

Benefits and problems of HR decentralization

An Interpretation suggests that decentralization undoubtedly has positive effects, but also poses severe challenges in the field of HRM. Basically, government objectives can be achieved by either a more decentralized or a more centralized system of public administration, both of which have several benefits and risks, the advantages of one system often being the shortcomings of the other. Thus, finding a right balance between too much centralization and too much decentralization is a major challenge for all governments.

Centralization generally refers to the extent that decision-making powers are vested in bodies at a high hierarchical level. These central powers or rules are often applicable to the entire public administration. Centralized HR systems were put in place to guarantee politically neutral decision-making and protect employees against political coercion and patronage. Moreover, it has often been argued that the standardization of HR practices secures coherence of policies and service delivery. In addition, centralized approaches are also seen to offer higher efficiency due to economies of scale and a higher effectiveness because of qualified HR experts being in charge of tasks such as reviewing and ranking job candidates. Proponents of decentralizing responsibilities to managers assert that this increases the efficiency and effectiveness of HRM and public administration in general. Decisions can be taken faster, recruitment be tailored to the specific needs of the organization, less complex Procedures are needed etc. In addition, effectiveness is increased, because decentralization increases the manager's discretion, thus enabling him to recruit, evaluate, offer incentives, promote, suggest training needs and communicate directly. The philosophy behind decentralization and deregulation is a well-known argument: centralized

HRM is rigid, unresponsive, slow and ineffective. Finally, there is very little evidence so far whether decentralized HR systems are really more vulnerable to cases of political pressure and politicization. (Demmke, 2006)

Conclusion

For the effective Rural Management planning such as elementary education, primary health, local roads, rural infrastructure and implementation of various schemes like poverty alleviation should constitute the autonomous functional domain of the PRIs for which they should be armed with the requisite technical, financial and human resources to carry out these tasks in an effective and accountable manner. There should be an exclusive functional jurisdiction or an independent sphere of action for each level of panchayats. It would be essential to bring in accountability for the functions that are devolved to the local level institutions because it is almost inevitable that decentralization of functions will in the initial phase be accompanied by "decentralization of corruption". Decentralized planning starting from the Gram/Ward sabha has to be strictly enforced and the planning commission while giving approval to the state plans must verify whether the state plans have incorporated the panchayat plans at appropriate places.

The system is already fitting perfectly in the decentralized manner but it can be more accurate and long lasting if it's been having some inputs of the core functions of the HRM. HRM is beholding the appropriate skills and tactics in managing the Human Resources and it can be more fruitful in decentralized planning. No doubt everyone is having their own planning and strategies for the development and it is effective but in the country like India it is really difficult for any of the best plan to work on as the monster of corruption is always taking upon the human mind and due to which the most effective planning like decentralized governance can also be ineffective. So on the part of strengthening of rural management there must be a strict implementation and monitoring on the plans made by through the perspective of HRM which is adding an extra input which is necessary for decentralized planning for Managing and developing rural society.

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