

Unit 12

Micro-Planning

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Learning Objectives

This unit helps you analyse the:

- concept, need and objectives of micro-planning;
- background pertaining to the emergence micro-planning as a concept of development;
- strategies of micro-planning; and
- advancement of primary education through micro-planning.

12.1 Introduction

The previous two Blocks dealt with various perspectives on growth oriented development as well as theories that originated as a response or critique to those perspectives. Apart from these theoretical perspectives there are some issues such as the need for community participation in planning and development, environmental sustainability etc. have become a part of contemporary development discourse. In this Block we will be discussing some of these issues in detail.

In a diverse country like India, the concept like decentralised planning has got under-acceptance as it takes cognizance of the dimension of planning and local resources to be utilised for the execution of the planning. Micro-planning or area planning has been an important component of decentralised planning.

In India micro-planning works as a bridge between national orientation of planning and the localised needs. This unit introduces you with various dimensions of micro-planning. The aims, objective and concept of micro-planning at the outset, and the historical background of micro-planning. Its needs are also specifically spelt out. The approach and strategy required for the successful implementation of micro-planning are also examined.

12.2 The Concept, Need and Objectives

Micro-planning is a crucial aspect of development. At the outset let us get clarify with the concept, need and objectives of micro planning. Micro-planning is a crucial aspect of development.

a) The Concept

The term micro-planning is used in many different ways and in vastly divergent contexts. In fact, the term micro-planning remains rather vague unless the actual level of planning is defined. Nowadays a more fashionable term “area planning” is often employed as a synonym of micro-planning. In essence, the

term micro-planning implies multi-level and decentralised planning approach to the overall development of a country.

Micro-planning is essentially a spatial development planning which tends to utilise all kinds of available resources - natural, human and others to the fullest extent. It attempts to distribute the fruits of development among regions and social groups within the region, which can minimize the socio-economic imbalances and improve the living conditions of the masses. In other words, micro-planning is concerned with the ordering of human activities for socio-economic transformation in "supra-local space" in an agriculture based rural economy as against supra-urban space for an urban dominated economy (Singh 1982: 2).

In India, the concept of micro-planning has emerged in order to maintain a balance in "planning and development" between national priorities and local needs. Micro-planning as a development strategy got some importance out of a realisation that general planning done at the national level does not automatically ensure its applicability at local levels, for each area has its own personality, potentiality and needs. A successful plan, therefore, must be sensitive to these micro-level variations, while taking into account the limitations posed by national priorities, resources and investment of funds.

b) The Need

In the development policies of the developing countries like India, the issue of social equity and balanced spatial development has, now, come to the forefront. For this, greater emphasis has been laid on local level or regional/area approach to planning as against the macro-economic sectoral approach. It has been done out of a comprehension that micro-planning, in its true perspective, tends to be much more responsive to the emerging socio-economic problems at various territorial levels.

Micro-planning is suggested for the allround socio-economic development of a geographically diverse country like India against the single national level sectoral planning. Because the space in which the people live and work is real and to ignore the space and its community is to ignore the basic reality of interface between habitat, economy and society. The central argument of micro-planning is that as resources for development are space-bound that planning must be within the spatial framework so that human, natural and all other resources may be utilised fully and benefits of development may be distributed evenly. It may thus help to overcome the possibility of any further regional disparity in fostering economic growth and development.

In order to carry the benefits of development to the poor, to ensure the continuity of balanced growth and to provide social justice, micro-level approach to planning was recommended. It was thought by some experts that micro/regional planning, as such, may take the planning objectives and strategy at the national level for granted, and especially addressed itself to the specific spatial features emerging in the formulation and operation of a national plan in a particular region (Gadgil 1967: 6). Strategically, micro-planning helps in fixing priorities for different regions depending upon their specific needs. And also for the successful implementation of the macro-level planning, micro-planning is often considered necessary.

c) Aim and Objective

The aim in 'micro-planning' is on planning from the lowest level i.e., from the functional community upward to a clearly defined region to fulfil the need of the local areas and ensuring the process of integration of the different areas with an objective to attain balanced regional development. Therefore, location of specific socio-economic activities and their inter-linkage over a region or particular geographical area are the major concerns of micro-level planning.

Micro-planning takes into cognizance the evolution of the spatial pattern of human activities without which economic, social and environmental goals of planning cannot be achieved upto expectation. It is thus put greater emphasis on those sectors which support the people of lower income groups, particularly the poor and the weaker sections in rural areas with an aim to offer them a better quality of life and ameliorating their deplorable socio-economic conditions. Thus, to alleviate rural poverty and inequality, emphasis has been laid on spatial type of economic, social and environmental management through micro-level development planning. There is no denial of the fact that India's approach to development planning has been predominantly macro-oriented, emphasising national goals and priorities. Micro-planning, on the other hand, was developed to functionally maintain a balance between national priorities and local needs.

Reflection and Action 12.1

What do you mean by micro-planning? Highlight its need, aims and objectives.

12.3 The Background of Micro-Planning in India

Since the very beginning of Indian planning emphasis has been given on promoting a better standard of living of the people by efficient exploitation of resources of the country, increasing production and offering opportunities to all for employment in the services of the community within an ideology deeply rooted in the concept of democracy and socialism (Singh 1969: 254). For achieving these objectives, special significance has been laid on the welfare of the rural areas and the weaker/backward sections. But in reality, a larger share of the benefits has been appropriated by some privileged/forward classes as well as a few economically developed/advanced regions of the country. That has resulted in mass rural poverty, unemployment and underemployment, and social tension particularly among the weaker sections of rural population, and ultimately brought into being regional disparity and sectoral imbalances.

The first two Five-Year Plans of India made no effort in the direction of micro-level or regional planning and development. During the Third Plan, the regional focus in planning became more explicit and for the first time, it gave a serious thought over the problems of regional development. But due to lack of proper national policy with regard to spatial dimensions of planning, the micro-level regional approach to development could not be initiated in the actual planning strategy.

The Fourth Five-Year Plan (1969-74), however, noted that certain regions in the country are advancing at the cost of others and that certain sections of the population who already have some resources are prospering, while an overwhelming proportion of the population has generally remained outside the mainstream of economic progress. In order to correct some of these regional imbalances, it had emphasised the need for 'micro' planning (district level) on the assumption that plans made at the national and state levels can be brought down to the people of more lower levels in a much more efficient manner. So the Fourth Plan put considerable importance to planning at the district level and to experimental studies on 'growth centres' for evolving an appropriate micro-planning strategy at the grass-root level (*Fourth Five Year Plan* 1969: 229-30).

The Fourth Plan, in fact, marked a watershed in Indian Planning by emphasising the need to strengthen regional development through some kind of micro-planning. For the first time in Indian planning, it stressed upon the necessity to strengthen micro-planning at district and lower levels. The Fourth Plan initiated micro/regional planning from the grass-roots under the name of area development taking due note of regional resource potentialities and limitations.

It was strongly felt by the planners and policy makers that the planning exercise at the macro (nation/state) levels cannot take into account the local variations in resources and needs. Hence, an area development framework drawn up at the district and block levels was considered to be more realistic than one formulated at the state level. Therefore, for micro-level regional planning, initially, district was selected as a planning unit.

With the aim to accelerate development of backward areas and to reduce regional disparities in socio-economic advancement, the concept of integrated area development had emerged for sustained development of the targeted 'area'. Various models like growth centers, growth poles, service centers, central place, etc., had been advanced during the Fourth and Fifth Plans to serve the hinterlands of backward and tribal areas taking into consideration the economic base and population potential of that area. Integrated area development thus referred to the appropriate location of social and economic activities over a physical space for the balanced development of a particular region. The concept of integrated area development therefore offered a new framework for decentralising economic and social activities by locating specific functions in appropriate places (Sen 1972: 3-9).

Reflection and Action 12.2

Write a short note on the historical background of the micro-planning in India.

12.4 Approach and Strategies

Micro-level planning is considered as a method to bring about integrated area development in the countryside. It is, however, not limited to any particular settlement. Micro-planning takes a whole hierarchy of central places and its hinterlands as its focus. The emphasis in micro-planning is a planning from the lowest level upward to a clearly defined area or region. In many cases, this region may be co-terminous with the district. In doing this, the needs of the local areas as well as the purpose of regional development are served. The location of specific socio-economic activities and their interlinkages over a region are major concerns of micro-planning (Ibid).

The national plans while providing a broad framework of development, strategically, micro-planning helps fix priorities for different regions depending on their specific need. It has been realised that without micro-level planning, no national plan can be properly implemented. At the same time, without national priorities, no micro-planning is possible. Therefore, for all practical purposes, both the 'macro' and 'micro' methods of planning are complementary to each other, and their combined use is essential in bringing about an overall socio-economic development of the country. Or, to put it in another way, to make any development planning effective, there is a need to follow a two-pronged approach working simultaneously and in a coordinated way from the grass roots level up, and the national level down (Singh 1999: 247).

Micro-planning, in its true perspective, attempts to address the emerging socio-economic problems at various territorial levels. It offers a planning within a spatial framework so that all kinds of resources and endowments may be utilised fully and the fruits of development could be equally shared socially. At some point, micro-planning is often made synonymous with 'regional' and 'area' planning. From policy considerations, micro-planning provides a realistic approach for the socio-economic development particular for a country like India where regional disparities and imbalances are acute and problems of poverty and unemployment are alarming with specific features in the rural areas. It emphasises spatial process of development within the broad framework of the national plan giving due consideration to the spatial problems, resources and needs at the grass-root level.

The basic idea behind the micro-planning is to offer a “grass-root” approach in discovering growth potentials and various impediments to development spatially. In 1970s, the “growth centre” model had been identified as a basic tool for micro-level planning and development in rural India. In micro-planning, major emphasis has been given to the development of weaker sections of the population and of the backward regions/areas.

The concept of micro-planning was developed to bring planning efforts to district or block level for a balanced growth of all regions and all sections of population. Micro-planning came as a real breakthrough in the area of planning by offering a scientific local plan at the micro level. Taking into account the geographical scope of micro-planning within which various development programme can be effectively organised and implemented, “micro-regions” were identified as suitable units for the formulation of area development plans because they were found sufficiently close to grass-roots and afford opportunities for direct and active people’s participation and implementation of the plan.

The spatial process of development, being the sole criterion for micro-planning, emphasises planning from the lowest level i.e., from the cluster of villages upward to a clearly defined region. The rationale behind micro-level area planning is that, there is hierarchy of settlements based on availability of services with specialisation in an area and population which need to be located at the most appropriate places. Micro-planning approach provides opportunity to the backward areas for development through different integrated area development programmes. It also offers a framework for decentralising economic and social activities by locating specific functions at appropriate places. Thus, location of specific socio-economic activities and their interlinkage over a region are the major concerns of micro-level planning (Singh 1982: 33).

The approach of micro-planning in later period also led to introduction of several new ‘area specific’ development programmes. The more prominent of them are the Command Area Development (CAD), Desert Development Programme (DDP), Drought-Prone Area Development Programme (DPAP), Integrated Area Development Programme (IADP), Hill Area Development Programme (HADP), Tribal Area Development Programme (TADP) and Whole Village Development Programme (WVDP). They are directed at specific areas or region which suffer from some disabilities or are prone to certain hardships.

Reflection and Action 12.3

Try to locate a micro-project operating in your area, collect information about, nature and source of fund, aims, objectives and achievements of this project. Based on your information write a three page note on the reasons for the success/failure of this project.

12.5 Advancement of Primary Education through Micro-Planning

The strategy of micro-planning is applied in various areas of social concern. As education is an important component of human development, in this section we shall be examining how micro-planning is used for advancement of primary education in India.

As you are aware education is in the concurrent list, both the central and the state government can make laws on education. Both the central and state governments have been expanding the provision of primary formal and non - formal education to realise the goal of Univerilisation of Elementary Education (UEE) since independence. There are several strategies formulated at the state, district, even at the village level to attain the objective of UEE. The

challenge now is to sustain and deepen current reforms in education and encourage local planning and management of strategies for expanding and improving primary education.

The National Policy on Education, 1986 and its policy of action (1992) envisaged the formulation of Village Education Committees (VECs) for management of elementary education. It emphasised on micro-planning as a process of designing a family-wise and child-wise plan of action by which every child regularly attends school continues his or her education at the place suitable to him/her and completes at least eight years of schooling (Government of India 2005).

The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments provide for decentralisation of the activities and facilitate transfer of power and participation of the local self-government institutions or the Panchayati Raj institution. These institutions have widely been used by women, Scheduled Castes and Tribes, minorities, parents and educational functionaries for the implementation of the UEE programme at the grass-roots. As the Panchayati Raj institutions have also been delegated with responsibilities to location and relocation of existing primary and upper schools on the basis of micro-planning and school mapping, these have emerged as effective tools for decentralised school management at the village level.

Since the Eighth Plan period the District Primary Education Programme has shifted the planning mechanism from the state to the district level, and '*Lok Jumbish*' has gone one step further by assigning decision making processes to a Block level committee. At the village level, a Village Education Committee has the main responsibility for community mobilisation, school mapping, micro-planning, renovation and construction of school buildings and improvement of pedagogical curriculum. A brief account of these community based programmes follows:

i) Community Mobilisation and Participation

At the grassroots, educational innovations are based on the strong foundation of community support and participation. When educational progress is discussed and analysed at different levels within the project, "people's acceptance and participation" is used as an indicator. Mobilising the village community to take responsibility to ensure quality education for every child, is the core strategy of both '*Lok Jumbish*' (LJ) and '*Shiksha Karmi* Project (SKP) in their efforts to universalise primary education and deliver quality education.

ii) *Shiksha Karmi* Project (SKP)

The SKP constituted VECs in 2000 villages also aims to promote community involvement in primary education and encourage village level planning. The role of the VEC is to mobilise resources for maintenance, repair and construction of school infrastructure, determine the school calendar and school timings in consultation with the local community and '*Shiksha Karmis*' (educational workers). The '*Shiksha Karmi* Project (SKP) is being implemented since 1987, with assistance from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The project aims at universalisation and qualitative improvement of primary education in the remote and socio-economically backward villages of Rajasthan, with primary focus on girls. Since teacher absenteeism has been found to be a major obstacle in achieving the objective of UEE, the project uses the novel approach of substituting teachers in dysfunctional schools with local youth known as '*Shiksha Karmis*' who are provided with rigorous training and supervisory support. An important feature of this innovative project is the mobilisation and participation of the community in improving the functioning of primary schools.

iii) *Lok Jumbish* Project

Lok Jumbish (LJ) project works to empower the locally elected people, especially the female representatives at village level, who are often active as members of the LJ core teams or women's groups. The Village Education Committees (VECs), are carefully formed and are trained to handle the LJ programme. Barely five years old, *Lok Jumbish* (LJ) has made an indelible impression in the primary education landscape of Rajasthan. The coverage of the project has extended to 75 blocks, covering a population of approximately 12 million. Significantly, it has also achieved a major breakthrough in welding together government agencies, teachers, NGOs, elected representatives and the people into an interactive group effort to promote universalisation of primary education.

The seven guiding principles of *Lok Jumbish* are:

- A process rather than product approach;
- Partnership;
- Decentralised functioning;
- Participatory learning;
- Integration with the mainstream education system;
- Flexibility of management; and
- Creating multiple levels of leadership committed to quality and mission mode.

Special focus has been given to environment building in all training programmes under LJ. This helps in the development of an understanding about issues involved in people's mobilisation, use of different media forms and clarity about the messages to be given to the people (Ibid).

Reflection and Action 12.4

Visit a government aided primary school functioning in your locality to collect information on the involvement of the local people in the management of the school. Also collect the information on how did the involvement of the local people affect functioning of the school and student enrolment and retention in the school. Write a note based on your observation in about 500 words.

12.6 Micro-Planning: The Need for a Holistic Approach

In India, micro-planning became a matter of concern and subject of study only in the early seventies of 20th century. The concept of micro-planning emerged taking in view the emerging socio-economic conditions of the country and the inadequacy of past planning efforts in checking regional disparities. Micro-planning is a novel approach for an integrated and balanced development of an area. The location of specific resources and socio-economic activities, and their interlinkages over a region are major concerns of micro-level planning.

Micro-planning addresses itself to the specific spatial features of particular regions laying due emphasis on local problems, varying widely in potentials, perplexities, resources, infrastructures and needs. In a nutshell, micro level planning is concerned with the allocation of resources of the planning entity concerned, to maximise whatever goals the entity may have (Singh 1999: 246).

Till the Third Plan, India had gone through the exercises of macro-level planning without evolving any micro-level plans for implementation. The Fourth Plan, however, envisaged the necessity of micro-planning in rejuvenating an under developed area by proper utilisation of the natural and human resources. It stressed upon the need to strengthen micro-planning at district and lower levels with an area development programme to provide infrastructure and

other growth requirements in each area. The proponents of micro-planning felt that the planning exercise at the national and state levels cannot take into account the local variations in resources and needs, hence, an area development framework drawn upon at the district and block levels was considered to be more realistic than one formulated at the higher level.

In case of any micro or regional planning, four prime considerations are involved for its actual policy formulation and successful performance. They are : (1) identification of the specific needs of the area, (ii) an accurate assessment of the limits and opportunities imposed on available resources of the area, (iii) selection of suitable strategy for development, and (iv) proper coordination at multiple spatial levels.

Moreover in preparing a comprehensive micro-level area development plan there is a need to integrate the economic and social goals into a single whole in a more coordinated fashion.

To conclude, in a country like India with its heterogenous composition of people and regions, the wide local variations in the levels of development calls for a different approach in which the plan is based on local resources potential and is sensitive to local needs. For this purpose micro-level regional and spatial planning could be proper instruments for promoting 'area-specific' development within the overall framework of the national plan. It could expedite rural transformation from the deplorable state of stagnation, poverty, unemployment and inequality to the progress, prosperity, self-employment and equity. However, if micro-planning is to be effective, micro-planning requires an interdisciplinary approach.

12.7 Conclusion

Even though the concept of micro-planning became a part of popular discourse, the concept varies from layman to policy makers. This unit familiarises us with the concept of micro-planning, its needs and objectives. It examines how the concept has been emerged in India and how it has been conceived in different Plans. Micro-planning is aimed at discovering growth potentials at grassroot level. Besides this, in India, micro-planning has been applied on various areas of social concern. In this unit we have seen how micro-planning is used for advancement of education in India. Finally it highlights the need for a holistic approach in micro-planning of human development.

12.8 Further Reading

Gadgil, D.R. 1967. *District Development Planning*. Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics: Poona

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