

# Policy as Instrument for Reconciling Diversity

Experience of the Indian Federal System

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## 1. Situating the Problem

Unity and diversity have often been discussed in terms of religious, ethnic, linguistic, and caste diversities and their reconciliation. While this approach is important and interesting, the perspective that I would like to bring in is to examine this question (can unity and diversity be reconciled?<sup>1</sup>) in the public policy framework with special focus on ongoing development policies. To make the discussion more realistic and contemporary, the question that seems more relevant is not whether the diversities can be reconciled, but what initiatives need to be taken for its satisfactory reconciliation.

Achieving “reconciliation” is not a final point of either achieving it or not but striking a balance between competing elements, with the pendulum moving towards one side at one time and the other at other times. Properly formulated policies attempt to keep the pendulum at a comfortable point of the continuum where diversities do not pose a problem and unity does not try to overrun diversity. In situations where diversities exist not only in sociopolitical and economic terms but also geographically, the policy framework has

<sup>1</sup> This is the Conference poser.

to be geared towards, and firmly rooted in, such existing diversities. Policy initiatives aimed towards achieving a macro-level unity especially in the presence of such diversities might create aberrations at different levels in different forms.

A UNESCO meeting of the Management of Social Transformations group pointed at “diversity as a turn of the century . . . characteristic that would come to replace the trend towards homogeneity . . . since the end of World War II” (Diego 1995). Over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries several factors have contributed to the multiplicity of populations in the countries along several dimensions—ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, etc., resulting into a situation where “almost no country is entirely homogeneous. Nearly 200 countries in the world contain some 5000 ethnic groups in total, two-thirds having at least one substantial minority—an ethnic or religious group that makes at least 10 per cent of the population” (Human Development Report 2004: 2).

The conception of unity and diversity should be replaced by the concept of “unity within diversity”. The first formulation belongs to the older generation of theorization where nation-building was the expressed policy framework, especially in new countries. This formulation proved to be flawed theoretically, conceptually and in practice. Diversities emerged in different contexts with different intensities, putting the nation-building efforts at peril. It has now been recognized that diversities and nation-building do not present alternatives, but exist together. It is important for the policymakers to recognize diversities and to mould policies in such a manner that satisfactory and favourable reconciliation of the two are conducive to the processes of socioeconomic development.

## **2. Power Sharing as a Mechanism of Reconciliation**

Power sharing has been adopted by many countries facing the problems of diversity and federal arrangements have become an important approach to power sharing. A “territorial solution” has been supplemented in many states by adopting “national cultural

autonomy". The federal framework is an accepted scheme of territorial power sharing, though the details of power sharing differ from country to country. The second scheme called a "federacy" by Daniel Elazar "grants national minorities . . . special status within a unitary state or a regional federation whose internal borders otherwise do not reflect ethno-national cleavages" (Boubock 2004). This non-territorial arrangement refers to "special territorial status to Indian Tribal reservations in the US and Canada or island politics like the US Commonwealths of Puerto Rico and Northern Mariana Islands, the British Isles of Man and Channel Islands, the Finish Aland Islands, and the Portuguese islands of Madeira and the Azores" (Elazar 1987: 55-8 quoted in Boubock 2004: 2). We find both kinds of power sharing arrangements in India illustrated by the federal arrangement and the reservation policy.

The federal solution is worked out in different ways in different situations where units have defined powers and functions. It seems, however, more important to proceed further and look inside the "black box" and see how decisions are made, who makes these decisions, who initiates the policies and programmes, especially with regard to development, and where do the finances come from? And more importantly, what are the policy outcomes, especially with regard to the minorities, cultural, and ethnic groups? The real test of power sharing lies in the answer to the question of details. It may well be the case that the power sharing arrangement does not actually exist with regard to the actual operational aspects and their impact on development. The analysis of the policy framework is important in this perspective where a policy, however well-conceived, may be thwarted by faulty implementation and accountability. It does not, however, mean that the policy itself cannot be faulty. The policy framework will have to be analysed at every level of implementation. With the increasing consciousness and assertiveness among diverse groups and identities, often supported by viable movements, the *reality of power sharing* is what is really important.

In most of the diversity–multiculturalism discourse the emphasis has largely been on the ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and economic

factors, so far as they cut across the identities. This is understandable because they are not only more complex and more problematic in terms of finding solutions but also because many countries are facing problems of reconciling these identities. They are perhaps the most salient of the diverse identities which effect national and pan-national processes.

In carving regions from the point of view of power sharing, all these considerations are equally important. It is, therefore, necessary to keep in view this aspect of diversity also for working out an arrangement because besides political power sharing, the concept of empowerment includes not only sharing of political and representational power, but also the right to development. I intend to argue that development policies in India have not been able to achieve this broader objective.

Power sharing has mostly been referred to in terms of “sharing of political power” in the form of representation. It must be acknowledged that while this is important, efforts towards reconciling diversities also include empowerment, providing different social groups, especially the poor and other excluded groups, sufficient opportunity for asserting their right to development and enjoying the fruits of development. The making and implementation of development policies, however, has been dominated by the four-decade-old Central Planning Model. This is visible in many of the decisions on schemes of development that have been in operation even after the liberalization phase of development planning. The Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) still constitute 49.44 per cent of the Central Plan allocations. Most of the flagship programmes of development such as National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojna (SGRY), and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) are centrally financed and administered. Sometimes the arrangements for these programmes have attempted to reflect power sharing or federal arrangements, but the institutions at the state and the local levels have actually not been participants in the process. Those programmes implemented through genuine power sharing have generally fared better. This paper will illustrate this point through some field cases.

In India different types of overlapping diversities—social, ethnic, economic, regional, linguistic, cultural, and agro-climatic—are well known. There are 106 dominant languages belonging to five linguistic groups. The unique phenomenon of 2000-3000 castes and subcastes make it more complex. The 461 tribal communities include 174 subgroups. The number of religious groups is eight with seven in the minority category. Writers have located “about sixty socio-cultural sub-regions marked for their distinct internal homogeneity and sub-national identity within the seven natural geographical regions” (Khan 1992: 108-22). The “overlapping and reinforcing character of cultural and symbolic inequalities” makes the situation more complex. The Planning Commission has demarcated 15 agro-climatic regions in the country. These are further divided into more homogeneous 72 subzones. The Indian federal system has to negotiate all these complexities. The constitutional, political, and institutional elements of the federal arrangement have suffered from a degree of ambivalence between unity and diversity. Many policy trends, such as the liberalization of the 1990s onward, have resulted in further decentralization and a power shift from the centre to the states (Jha 2001: Chapter II). But the persistence of centralized planning and the policy making has created a disjunction between the sociopolitical processes on the one hand, and policy making for development on the other. While the first has tended to pull the process towards emphasizing diversity, the latter leaves most of the development initiatives and policy making in the hands of the centre.

### **3. Patterns of Power Sharing**

Along with federalism, there have been other attempts at political, administrative, and financial decentralization. But these attempts have been constantly plagued by ambivalence when powers and resources transferred to the next level of government are made reluctantly. Each level is parsimonious in relinquishing powers and resources which are meant to be passed further down to other levels. Each level works like a layer of “blotting paper” where powers and resources are absorbed. There has also been some reluctance on the

part of different levels of the decentralized structure to take decisions which they are meant to take and they look upwards for directions and, more importantly, funds. These tendencies further hamper the proper functioning of policies, which ideally should be working at these levels, effectively accommodating the diversities existing at each level and at the same time ensuring the proper implementation and functioning of programmes and policies. This seriously reduces the utility of decentralization as an effective instrument for managing diversity.

The centralized mode of operation is best illustrated in the growing scope of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS). The number of such schemes stood at 190 during 2005-6 with a budgeted outlay of almost Rs. 55 trillion which comes to 38 per cent of the Gross Budgetary Support (GBS) of the Ministry of Finance grants and 49.44 per cent of the Central Plan. Out of these, 63 per cent were meant to go directly to various implementing agencies, bypassing the state budget (Bagchi 2006). Most of such agencies are central meant to manage the implementation of the CSS. The flagship schemes of the government, such NREGS and NRHM, come in this category. This situation also creates a parallel network of administering schemes which in fact are supposed to be done by lower levels of the chain of decentralized institutions like the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) and the state administrative structure. This top down approach is again a reflection of a skewed policy framework which is unable to encapsulate the diversities existing in different parts of the country. The very fact that most of these development policies are in the form of CSS, with central budgetary support, means that the actual implementers look upwards for the support, rather than downward as decentralization would dictate. This ambiguity is also reflected in many of the post-liberalization initiatives. The central government's invitation to private players in the electricity sector, for instance, illustrates this tendency. From the policy formulation, through the negotiations and till the signing up of the MOU, the central government was the main party, with minimal involvement of the state governments. The well-known Enron project in Maharashtra is an example of this tendency (Jha 2003).

#### **4. Power Sharing and Federalism: Towards Reconciliation**

Federalism is a widely prevalent system of power sharing that aims at “reconciliation” of different identities in a multicultural society. A key element in achieving this is institutional flexibility, or the ability to adjust to newly emergent forces and identities. The Indian federal system has faced such challenges and has made adjustments from time to time, with varying degrees of success.

Immediately after Independence there was the problem of dividing the diverse country into viable political units of the federation. The reorganization of the states in 1956 adopted a linguistic basis for devising the states as homogenous language-based territories. In later years new states were created, and then again new states were carved out from within the boundaries of the existing ones. A major addition of new units was made in 1971 when a reorganization of the state of Assam and the north-eastern states of Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh were created. The process has continued with the three states of Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, and Chattishgarh carved out in the year 2000 from the existing states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh, respectively. This was mainly to cater to the demands around tribal identities because the “six states (Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Orissa, Gujarat, and Rajasthan) together account for 71 per cent of India’s tribal population . . .” (Jayal 2006: 69). There has been continuous demand for the creation of new states, for instance Telengana in Andhra Pradesh and Vidarbha in Maharashtra (Saxena 2006). This exercise of creating new states has mainly been in response to linguistic groups but also to accommodate the demands by other identity-based groups such as the tribal groups, often backed by tribal movements. Besides creating new states, Indian federalism has also “experimented with sub-state regional development councils to satisfy regional, ethnic and tribal aspirations, such as Gorkhas in West Bengal, Bodos in Assam and Ladhakis in Jammu and Kashmir” (Saxena 2006: 111).

Another mechanism to accommodate linguistic aspirations and demands has been to include languages in the Eighth Schedule of

the Constitution which now recognizes eighteen languages as official. While inclusion of the languages in the Eighth Schedule is mainly symbolic, it allows “the privilege of simultaneous translation facilities in Parliamentary proceedings; the possibility of taking the Civil Services Examinations in the language; the allocation of Central Government Funding for developing the language and its literature; the eligibility to compete for literary and film awards; the right to submit a representation for a redressal of a grievance; and so forth” (Jayal 2006: 19). The latest addition in 2003 to this list was of Maithili, Dogri, Bodo, and Santhali. *The Hindu* quoted the Deputy Prime Minister that in the year 2003 demands from 35 more languages were pending for inclusion in the Eighth Schedule, including Rajasthani, Bhojpuri, and Brajbhasha (Jayal 2006: 19). These efforts of reconciliation of linguistic identities are also an effective policy tool to include the periphery in the mainstream. A perceptive analyst has concluded that “the management of linguistic diversity has indeed been among the more successful experiments of institutional engineering . . .” (Jayal 2006: 47).

The Constitution also makes special provisions for protection of languages claimed by the minorities: “. . . to preserve their distinct language, script or culture” (Article 29); to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice (Article 30); to make representations for the redressal of their grievances to state or Central government in any language (Article 350); to receive instructions in their mother tongue (Article 350A) (Jayal 2006: 20). The Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities acts as a “watchdog” for protecting the rights of the minorities.

As mentioned earlier, the linguistic challenge was taken up by India not long after Independence. The relatively prompt response to address the issue has allowed the country to reconcile linguistic demands with more success than in other countries. This reinforces the suggestion made by the World Development Report that “power sharing arrangements . . . introduced early enough, when tensions are mounting . . . can forestall violent conflict” (Human Development Report 2004: 8).



#### 4.1 *Accommodating Emerging Identities*

Being the predominant and unique phenomena of the Indian society, caste and tribal identities pose unique challenges to the policy makers. As the political process has evolved and democracy has taken root, a struggle has emerged for the sharing of political space. This has led to the emergence of new identities and demands on an ongoing basis. This has indeed resulted into new forms of diversity, and the consequent demand for reconciliation in the form of “mainstreaming”.

Besides the mandatory reservations, the tribal population has been granted a special status with respect to protection of their forest rights and special consideration for their customs, traditions, and traditional institutions in the PRIs under the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act 1996. Reservation for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) has been an effective way of accommodating the most deprived caste and ethnic groups and its continued existence has subsumed many of the demands from these groups. Such reservations have also been extended in the distribution of benefits from different development programmes like the Public Distributions Systems (PDS), housing, and so on, where these groups are included in greater proportion.

With regard to the population below the poverty line (BPL), SCs and STs are also overrepresented. But this is also plagued by problems when the lists of BPL, supposedly monitored by the population through the self-governing gram sabhas, suffer from the usual problems of partiality and discrimination. The status and strengthening of “watchdog” institutions like the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the National Commission for Minorities, and the National Commission for Backward Classes have made these protective and other measures more potent (Jayal 2006: Chapter 4; Jayal and Mohapatra 2004). It must be added that there has been a continuous demand from newer castes and other identity groups to be recognized as “deprived” social groups, claiming reservations. The Other Backward Castes (OBCs) are the newest categories that have gained reservation in different spheres. The race for being included in the lists eligible for reservation has been ever increasing, the Gujjars in Rajasthan

being the latest example of agitation for inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribes in the state. The reservation policy is perhaps the most contentious and emotive point of policy debate at the present juncture. Another interesting aspect which has to be taken into account is the resilience of the policy framework where it is subjected to various pressures. At the moment, it seems that the policy framework is operating in an ad-hoc fashion with little or no long-term perspective or solution to accommodate the emerging demands and identities.

The religious cleavage has been perhaps the most complex from the point of view of management. With 80.5 per cent of Hindus, and 13.4 per cent of Muslims in the population, the remaining percentage is accounted for by Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Jews, and Zoroastrians. Here again, it has been a challenge to provide space to the minorities in the scheme of reconciliation policies of the state.

The Indian federal scheme of sharing power has taken many policy steps to reconcile diverse socio-political-economic diversities, some of which have had a considerable impact. The policy outcomes and their effectiveness in terms of improving disparities, however, remains a potent point of analysis. The question of the reconciliation of unity and diversity has to be looked at from a fresh perspective where the diversities are an existing reality and an evolving phenomenon. The policies have to be geared towards “reconciliation” rather than towards achieving the ideal form of “unity”, striking a balance between the two. In an ever-evolving diverse society such as India’s, policies have to be rooted in these diversities in order to strike an effective balance.

## **5. Policy Framework and Diversity Gap: The Case of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS)**

**NREGS and its implementation:**<sup>2</sup> Unity and diversity and whether they can be reconciled have to be looked at within the existing policy

<sup>2</sup>The author draws primarily from two studies for the case studies quoted in and illustrations in this section:

context. In this light let us look at the operation and implementation of NREGS and how far it has been able to root itself in the existing diversities at the grass roots level.

Largely based on the “Employment Guarantee Scheme” introduced in Maharashtra in 1972 and in operation since then (Sujata Patel 2006), the NREGS was introduced by the central government in 2005. It was meant to provide 100 days of employment to rural households, especially during the lean season. The programme is unique in terms of the fact that it is the first time that a development programme has been formulated and implemented as an Act of Parliament, making it legally enforceable. The scheme was launched in February 2006 and was initiated in the 200 most backward districts in India. Recently the programme has been extended to all the districts of the country.

The implementation of the legislation is the responsibility of the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) and Ministry of Panchayati Raj, jointly with the state governments.<sup>3</sup> If we examine the programme in various states closely we notice certain hurdles that the programme is facing are due to its inability to fine tune itself at the implementation level. Problems arise due to anomalies inherent in the programme and also because of its failure to address local-level diversities.

As the panchayat<sup>4</sup> is the level at which most of the works sanctioned under NREGS has to be completed, it is imperative that

1. Study on the Status of NREGA Implementation: 2nd Monitoring Report (forthcoming) by Samarthan-Centre for Development Support, Bhopal and Poorest Area Civil Society (PACS) Programme-DFID, Delhi, March 2007.
2. Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions: National Study Phase II, by Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) September 2007.

<sup>3</sup> For detailed information on the administrative and implementation arrangement of the scheme please visit <http://nrega.nic.in/>

<sup>4</sup> Panchayats are units of rural-local government established under 73rd Amendment of the Constitution and are at work across the country. The structure of this rural-local government is constituted of gram panchayats at the lowest level, zila parishads at the district level and panchayat samitis representing the intermediate level.

panchayats are involved in the decision making. In the Samarthan-PACS study it was observed that when the panchayats were involved in the decision making and were given complete authority to implement it, the programme was running successfully and the panchayats were able to complete the majority of the works assigned to them under the stipulated time frame. In the state of Jharkhand only 38 per cent of the total work was completed under NREGS, perhaps the lowest in 2006-7 period. The main reason for this seems to be the absence of panchayat institutions in the state. Development policies are generally more successful in their implementation when they are rooted in the micro-processes and local institutions. In a health-related programme in Kerala, for instance, an analyst found that the control of panchayats over the programme resulted in “better health services outreach” (Baru and Gopal 2006: 157).

NREGS stipulates a five-year period to enable effective bottom-up planning, and for all the work to be undertaken at the panchayat level. But at the implementation level these plans are in most cases either subcontracted to local NGOs or are prepared in little or no consultation with the gram sabha. In some cases, these are prepared in consultation with the village leader (sarpanch) and the secretary without any popular involvement. As a result, plans fail to capture the needs of the region and citizen’s perspective is missing. In the case of Jharkhand, for instance, most of these perspective plans were prepared at the district level.

A recent national study conducted by Participatory Research in India (PRIA) found that:

- Most of the planning was being done at the district or the block level, which are administrative units of the government outside the panchayat structure.
- There was a lack of popular participation, and that the gram sabha meetings were not being held their true spirit.
- The planning process and implementation approach was top-down and dominated by the bureaucracy.
- Most the works in the panchayat area to be implemented by them were not identified by them but were “allotted” to them, making the panchayats mere implementers of the programme.

At the implementation level the focus has shifted from the gram panchayats to the individuals in the panchayats or the Block Development Officers (BDOs). “And since BDOs and other district-level functionaries possess a great deal of power they find it convenient to sideline the individual Sarpanch completely, thereby stopping any kind of effective community intervention” (InfochangeIndia.org 2006).

The bulk of the planning follows a top-down approach, failing to keep into account the local knowledge or wisdom prevailing in the region, which is time-tested and can prove to be more cost effective often more successful (see Box 1).

### **BOX 1: Lack of Local Wisdom in the Perspective Planning**

Bundelkhand region in Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, now a very dry region, had a rich history of water harvesting. Tikamgarh has been irrigating fields through water tanks built by Chandela rulers between 900 and 1200. The famous Chandela tanks over the years supported relatively low-cost irrigation in the region. Several studies conducted on the traditional water bodies of the region have argued that the judicious rain water harvesting and rejuvenation of tanks can substantially reduce the water shortages of the region. A large number of open wells are irrigating more than 50 per cent of its farms. Even a government report estimates that Chandela tanks in the district can irrigate more than 24,000 hectares of land at less than half the cost of other irrigation projects. However, tank renovation was not taken up under NREGS as a special initiative. Many wells in the region are unserviceable and ponds have dried up. However, in the name of drought-proofing and water conservation, NREGS is either digging new ponds or wells or promoting plantation on a large scale. Meanwhile, a study conducted in 10 panchayats of Bundelkhand of Uttar Pradesh showed that about half of the wells and ponds are not in service and demand repairs.

A successful case of a planning done closely with the panchayat and gram sabha can be seen in Doongargaon in Chhattisgarh where local wisdom was visible in the planning (see Box 2).

### **BOX 2: Panchayat's Involvement in the Planning: A Success Story**

The Gram Panchayat Tappa started the planning process with the gram sabha. The community identified a fifty-year-old pond on the outskirts of the village for renovation. The pond was constructed but it was lying unused and in dire need of some repair and restoration work. The pond was not de-silted for a few decades and was covered with weeds. The estimated cost of renovation of this pond was only 290,000 Rupees. It already had channels for irrigation. The work on the pond is half-completed and will eventually irrigate land for 11 villages. Not only this, it will allow a second crop on 550 acres of land, which is quite uncommon in Chhattisgarh.

The technical aspect of the works undertaken at the panchayat level has got another ramification, where the panchayats have to depend on the district officials who finally issue the completion certificate. There are numerous cases where the panchayats have completed the work and the local people are satisfied with it, yet the completion certificate has not been issued by the concerned authorities.

The Samarthan-PACS study found that underdevelopment had a direct effect on the implementation of the programme, especially in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Assam. This is again a case of a centrally conceived programme being implemented mechanically at the state level with little or no mechanism or effort for adjustment or correction by way of "fine tuning". A development programme of this magnitude and potential needs a careful attention, especially from the point of view of regions which are already backward and are most likely to perform poorly in the implementation of the programmes.

The need for the responsiveness and ability of the policy framework to "fine tune" itself in terms of such diversities cannot be more evident than in the case of Bundelkhand and Vidarbha regions of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Maharashtra respectively. Bundelkhand has been reeling under severe drought conditions for the last four years and Vidarbha is facing an enormous agrarian crisis illustrated

by a spate of suicides among farmers. An employment support programme like NREGS should have provided some relief in the region; instead these regions have performed poorly when compared with the national average. Table 1 shows the poor performance of the scheme in the selected districts in the region. The mechanical implementation of the programme with little scope and effort to correct at the implementation stage is illustrated by these poorly performing regions in UP and Maharashtra.

**Table 1: Performance of Selected Districts of the Most Backward Regions under NREGA**

<i>Districts/ Regions</i>	<i>Employment Generation (person days) Per Job Card</i>	<i>% of Families Completed 100 100 days against Employment Provided</i>	<i>Available fund for Per Job Card Holder</i>	<i>Expenditure Incurred on Per Job Card</i>
Bundelkhand-UP				
Banda	12.36	0.2	2126	1297
Chitrakoot	14.85	4.0	1243	1168
Jalaun	19.53	4.0	3359	1907
Vidarbha				
Chandrapur	4.63	0.0	2282	379
Gadchiroli	6.09	0.0	2002	600
Yavatmal	4.93	0.5	1741	1388
National	23.91	10.28	3189.5	2328.3

*Source:* Study on the Status of NREGA Implementation: 2nd Monitoring Report (forthcoming) by Samarthan-Centre for Development Support, Bhopal and Poorest Area Civil Society (PACS) Programme-DFID, Delhi, March 2007.

## 6. Conclusion

The Indian system of power sharing has made several efforts at reconciling and accommodating complex diversities through policy initiatives, such as granting territorial and cultural autonomy and incorporating them into the federal system, granting reservations

in the elective institutions and government services at different levels, and granting special quotas in the availability of different developmental allocations. While a few of these initiatives have been successful, in most of the cases the impact of these policies and initiatives has not had the desired results. While steps like reservations have given visibility to the existing and emerging identities, they have remained at the bottom of the developmental chain. In terms of almost all the human development indicators these groups remain in the deprived category (Shariff 1999), as well as in terms of capabilities (Majumdar and Subramanian 2001). Much of this has to do with policy failures, rather than a failure of institutional design. This has affected the reconciliation process, while the diversities and demands for equity and a prominent place in the political agenda have become more intense. The public policy framework, especially at the operational level, has not been able to adapt to these diversities, leading to the emergence of aberrations, as in the early phase of the operation of NREGS. The spirit of the federal system which envisages an enhanced participatory role for the local institutions is intended to root the policies in the grass roots realities. But there is a gap between the “rhetoric” and the “reality” where at the operational level it fails to adjust to local needs and priorities.

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