

Book Review: Insights on Rural Governance to Facilitate the Development

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Name of the Book: Rural Local Governance and Development

Name of the Author: Mahi Pal

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Sharing his professional experience as a bureaucrat-cum-rural development practitioner, researcher, and trainer, Dr Mahi Pal has remarkably explained the key areas of importance, related issues and contributory concerns in decision-making and rural governance in India. The book has been divided into two parts. The first part consists of seven chapters that elaborate on the concept and basic understanding of rural local governance, evolution, and working of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India and different related provisions. It also takes into account the extent and opportunity of participation provided to different sections of society through local institutions and the role of different stakeholders in the development process. The second part of the book partakes six chapters that talk about rural development, convergence and inter-sectoral linkages of programmes, development, and implementation of programmes and delivery of health and education services. The book language is easily understandable. A summary has been provided at the end of every chapter in the form of a conclusion. The given glossary and index in alphabetic order cover all the important terms, terminologies, and the keywords included and discussed in the book. The attached annexure provides rich information on different constitutional amendments and provisions related to rural local governance in India.

Fulfilling the ethical consideration of no plagiarism, at the end of every chapter, required references have been provided by the author. References for further readings have also been provided that help readers get access to sources and seeking any additional information about the subject matter.

Rural Local Governance

Governance came as an instrument to ensure the collective action and participation of people in local institutions. It ensures proper utilisation of resources and achievement of overall development goals. It was through the concept of local governance that marginalised sections of society say SC/STs, women and others got right to get elected and take part as leaders in decision-making and development process. Panchayats being the basic unit of self-government remain central to the progress of rural areas. Many provisions and amendments have been made from time to time to strengthen Panchayati Raj Institution in India. Latest 73rd and 74th Amendments have created the venues for vulnerable groups and women to participate and become partners in the development process. Still, social inequalities, illiteracy, unemployment, and economic capacities remain important factors that restrict the participation of marginalised in governance institutions. Political will and administrative support are the factors that affect the sustainable growth and development of these local governance institutions. Local governance provides the power and possibility to manage affairs and ensure social justice also. Nyaya Panchayats (NP) in a way, is a progressive step to deal with issues and put an end to the social problems at the community or local level itself. These NPs are functional in the state of Bihar and Himachal Pradesh as they have included the provision regarding bestowing justice

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in their panchayat legislations. These NPs are also accommodating to minimise the workload of the block or state judicial system. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) also act as the catalysts and service providers to ensure local participation and develop competencies of elected representatives through training programmes.

Rural Development

Rural development depends on the effective utilisation of human and natural resources and efficiently optimising these resources. Governance by seeking people's participation in the development process provides scope for availing emerging opportunities and increasing the standard of living and income of rural people. Despite introducing several rural development programmes, the development can be seen as limited some of power-holding groups belonging to a particular stratum in rural areas. Lack of devolution of power and incapacity of people at a decentralized level affect the overall rural development. Decentralized planning and people's participation remained areas of importance in all five-years plans. Basic infrastructure, technical support, and training play

an inevitable role in the capacity development of different stakeholders. Panchayats need financial and functional strengthening to work properly and act as an agent of service delivery to its people in rural areas. For better operationalisation and governance of different services, all stakeholders must work in coordination and cooperation to achieve better governance and rural development.

Way Forward for Effective Rural Local Governance

The author suggests that the goal of rural development and governance can only be achieved by active PRIs and other stakeholders. All stakeholders and beneficiaries must be fully aware of their rights and duties. The capacity building provides for efficient working that further will help in maintaining transparency and accountability.

The book provides a rich literature and updated information on the subject matter. It provides a basic understanding of different relevant concepts as well as in-depth knowledge, which is helpful for students as well as development practitioners.