

of reclamation and its sustainability, role of various institutions such as NGOs, WUG, SHGs in the reclamation process which tries to bridge the gap between the State and public participation in land degradation and reclamation process.

The impact studies have externalities in every corner of the development and sustainability. The impact analysis of the sodic reclamation attempted in this book raises questions about its environmental, economic and institutional sustainability. Although many institutions have come forward in the direction to reclaim degraded land through a participatory approach, the impact has been far from satisfactory. One of the limiting factors has been that the grassroots level institutions are characterised by inadequate facilities and inefficient management, which leads to improper dissemination of knowledge about the new land reclamation technology to the beneficiaries particularly among the small and marginal farmers. Much effort is needed to bring light on indigenous knowledge and traditional practices.

This book will be a source of both guide and reference material for many young researchers, academicians, policy makers, economists, rural development professionals, planners and other stakeholders engaged in land degradation and reclamation process.

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**Bench Marking of Rural Local-Self Government in India: Some Ground Realities at Grassroots Level** by Sukhvinder Singh and Haqiqat Singh, 2015, Published by Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial

Development, Chandigarh – 160019, India, pp: 240, Price: ₹ 500.

The book makes an effort to assess the ground realities prevailing at all the three levels of Panchayats across 14 Indian States, and provides a benchmark in terms of suggestions and recommendations. The book is based on a study undertaken by Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID), Chandigarh by organising 67 workshops and some contact programmes in 14 selected States at all the three levels of Panchayats. The focus of the study relies upon examining and understanding the functioning of rural local-self government institutions covering 14 selected States across India. The book provides a comparative framework by way of measuring the performance in terms of devolution of funds, functions, functionaries; people's participation in decision-making; transparency and accountability systems and inclusion of SCs, STs and women in rural local-self government institutions of the selected States. The methods adopted for the study include workshops with elected representatives of PRIs, members of the Gram Sabha and Government officials of the Department of Rural Development and Panchayats. Apart from this, the study has also conducted Focus Group Discussions in the selected States to know the status of Panchayat functioning. Moreover, the study also derived relevant secondary information from State Panchayat Acts, rules, regulations, guidelines and published reports of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

The book comprises 15 chapters which are built around the identified 18 assessment indicators. Barring the introduction and

conclusion chapters, all the other 13 chapters deal with the analysis and findings of the study undertaken in the selected 14 States. The second chapter describes the profile of the study area and the socio-economic status of respondents who are drawn from each State as the participants of the workshops. The authors give a detailed enumeration of State-wise number of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), number of elected representatives in PRIs and caste and gender composition in the study area. Subsequently, in the third, fourth and fifth chapters, the authors discuss the status of devolution of functions, transfer and availability of funds and effective devolution of functionaries at all the three tiers of PRIs in the selected States. The authors, after analysing the status of devolution of functions, funds and functionaries, graded all the 14 States according to their effective devolution. The sixth chapter discusses in detail about the effectiveness of Gram Sabhas (GS) by analysing the State-wise position of issues taken up during GS meetings for discussions. Effectiveness of GS has also been assessed in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, where Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Area Act 1996 is in compliance.

The authors delineated the process of grassroots planning, in the seventh chapter, by analysing the status and challenges of decentralised planning at all the three tiers of PRIs in the selected States. The chapter also suggested various points for making decentralised planning a reality. Planning and implementation of different development schemes and the effective role of Panchayats were addressed in the eighth chapter. The main

objectives of different development schemes implemented in the PRIs were discussed and limitations in effective planning of these programmes were chalked out by the authors. Effective participation of women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the functioning of Panchayats is an important issue across all the States. This concept of inclusive development was extensively discussed in the chapters nine and ten of the book. The analysis indicated variations among the States regarding the active participation in decision-making and capability in implementing and monitoring of rural development programmes by members of the marginalised groups in the PRIs.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act accorded Constitutional status to the Panchayats and made it obligatory for the States to conduct elections to the Panchayats after every five years under the supervision and control of the State Election Commission (SEC). The eleventh chapter titled as 'Panchayat Elections' outlines the status of elections conducted at all the 14 selected States. The authors also showed a State-wise grading of Panchayats based on performance in elections. The twelfth chapter in the book examined the ground realities under social audit in all the 14 States. The overall performance with regard to conduct of social audit in the selected States was examined and the States were ranked on the basis of the inputs provided by the participants during workshops. The authors also suggested certain measures to be undertaken for an effective social audit.

The increasing responsibilities and roles to be played by the elected representatives of

the Panchayats created the need to strengthen capacity building and training activities of State Institutes of Rural Development. The chapter thirteen depicts this issue by assessing the ground realities prevailing under the capacity building programmes in fourteen States covered under the study. Different State initiatives undertaken to strengthen Panchayati Raj system were discussed in detail. The authors also provided an exhaustive measures and suggestions for effective capacity building programmes to be conducted by the States. Analysis of some important indicators relevant for effective functioning of Panchayats like role of information technology, harmonisation of other laws with Panchayati Raj Acts were discussed in the fourteenth chapter. The fifteenth chapter depicts the conclusion by

providing a benchmark for the fourteen States on the selected eighteen indicators.

The book may be considered as a Status report on the functioning of Panchayati Raj Systems in India. Besides providing a comprehensive picture of the functioning of PRIs in different States, the book also highlights the reasons as to why PRI system is functioning efficiently in some States and not so efficiently in others. The best practices of different States are discussed in the book as 'benchmarks' for other States to replicate. With empirical insights from different States of India, this book will be of great use to researchers, trainers, civil society organisations as well as academia and policy makers.

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