

Decentralization and development in India: Issues and challenges

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This paper analyses the possibility of empowering human rights – particularly citizens’ rights to development – by utilizing the process of decentralized development within the broader context of globalization. It examines various contemporary theoretical perspectives of participatory development and social justice. The paper discusses issues concerning the creation of decentralized democratic institutions of development at the grassroots level within the existing constitutional provisions in India in order to erase the adverse impacts of global markets and increase productivity, efficiency and equity. The paper is broadly divided into four sections. In the first section, issues concerning the theoretical perspective of social justice, decentralized governance/development and empowerment are examined. The second section analyzes experiences of development planning and ground results in India. The existing constitutional provisions for initiating a process of decentralizing development at local level and how the state governments have implemented these provisions in practice are highlighted in the third section. Finally, the fourth section is devoted to concluding remarks.

Thus far, decentralization of development has been very slow in India. Numerous varieties of state-sponsored ‘socialism’ may be treated as the basic subject matter of bringing in distributive justice and social development in an economy/society in context. The Gandhian system of Panchayati Raj was visualized for evolving a decentralized economic and political structure with economically self-sufficient and politically self-governing village republics in India. The government introduced the 73rd and 74th constitutional Amendment Acts in 1992 to realize this Gandhian Vision. The acts sought to deliver power to the people and aimed to evolve a true and transparent democratic social order. Unfortunately, most of the state governments until now have failed to create institutions of local self-governments by truly transferring power to them. Only the state of Kerala today presents a fruitful model of social development with high levels of human and social development worthy of being replicated elsewhere. By learning lessons from within such progressive states, the lower-performing states may come forward to improve social justice. In order to ensure the

fully empowered third tier of governments called 'Village Republics' and evolve an effective participatory development and democracy, a complete devolution of power to the grassroots level needs to be put immediately in action.