Rethinking the role of local governments in a post Covid-19 world

Announcement published by John Moolakkattu on Wednesday, September 23, 2020
Type: Seminar
Date: December 10, 2020 to December 14, 2020
Location: India
Subject Fields: Government and Public Service, Political Science, Public Health, Public Policy, Social Sciences

An International Webinar on Rethinking the Role of Local Governments in a Post Covid-19 World
When: 10,11, 12 , 13 & 14 December, 2020
Jointly organised by the Centre for Gandhian Studies, Central University of Kerala & Centre for Rural Management, Kottayam, Kerala, India

Concept Note

People all over the world are making frantic efforts to contain the covid-19 pandemic. Governance has become a challenging one in most countries. In some countries citizens have responded to the call of governments to practise self-responsibility commendably. In most other countries, a mix of measures including some tough ones infringing on human freedom have been tried. It is found that local governments everywhere have responded more effectively to prevent the spread of the virus and in some countries their actions were more effective than intervention by provincial and central governments. This is an opportune moment to revisit the role of local governments the world over. There has to be a movement for further decentralization based on the principle of subsidiarity. COVID-19 has raised challenges related to finance of the local bodies and how it can be improved, the mandate on health given to local bodies and the extent to which health can be handled by the local bodies all by themselves. More important is the question of continued delivery of services and the protection of the livelihood of the people. Since local governments are closest to the people, they will have greater ability to influence behavioral changes among their constituents.

In a pandemic scenario, a municipal body should detect imported infections by limiting the entry of air travellers into the city or at least screen them. A
A decentralised approach is critical in times of a public health emergency. In most cities across India, secondary and tertiary health care units are concentrated, negatively impacting the timely delivery of health services. Decentralized production and marketing instead of highly centralized structures are needed. While central capacity is useful as a resource to be tapped by the other levels, it is decentralized capacity and ability to work with other levels in a multi-level governance system that matters. Some states have done well on this count. Some countries like the UK actually faltered by centralizing measures finally giving way to a decentralizing approach when the situation actually worsened. At the same time, questions relating the nature of the executive at the local level, the range of functions that should be devolved to that level and the ability of the local governments to raise their own revenue by expanding their revenue base have become important points for enquiry.

It is in this context that the Centre for Gandhian Studies, Central University of Kerala and the Centre for Rural Management, Kottayam, proposes to organize a webinar on rethinking decentralization in the post-covid-19 era. We propose to explore the following themes. We welcome contributions on these themes or related ones from across the world.

1. Covid-19 and the regulatory framework/functional domain of local bodies
2. The role of subsidiarity in assigning health-related roles to local bodies
3. Local bodies in federal and unitary systems
4. Recentralization during Covid-19 and their positive and negative effects
5. Issues relating to the efficacy of different types of executive – directly elected vs Mayor-in Council models.
6. Local Government Capacitation for more effective functioning in crises
7. Issues of coordination among different levels of government including multi-tiered local governments
9. Gender of leaders and performance of local bodies
10. Models of co-production at the local level
11. Stimulus packages and local governments

12. Experiences from Asia, Europe, Africa, the Americas and Oceania
13. Experiences from different states in India
14. Similarities between local government response to pandemics and disasters
15. Local bodies in Kerala and the challenge posed by pandemics

Last date for submission of abstracts (250 words): 20 October 2020
Notification of selected abstracts: 25 October 2020
Last date for submission of paper processed in APA format (3000-6000 words): 05 December 2020.

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