

## **Revamping planning practices for the underprivileged:**

### **An examination of special component plan**

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In India, the planning process holds a key role in building bridges between the national development goals and the aspirations of the poor. Planning in India in general and Kerala in particular has always emphasized social justice, which is connected to all other set targets. The economic development of the poor helps to utilize the nation's human resources better and the reduction of inequality as well.

#### **Planning process in India: An overview**

The planning process in India has undergone a significant evolution since its inception, playing a pivotal role in shaping the nation's economic and social trajectory. Rooted in the post-independence era, India's planning process has traversed through distinct phases, responding to dynamic socio-political and economic factors. In the pre-Independence periods and the early years of independence (1947-1950s), the nation embarked on a path of economic development through a centralized planning framework. Influenced by socialist ideals and inspired by the Soviet Union's Five-Year Plans (FYP), India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, introduced the First Five-Year Plan in 1951. This period saw a focus on agrarian reforms, infrastructure development, and the establishment of key public sector enterprises (Dasgupta, 2002).

The second phase of planning in India witnessed a shift towards import substitution and industrialization (1960s-1980s). The Second and Third Five-Year Plans emphasized heavy industries and aimed to reduce dependency on imports. However, by the late 1960s, the limitations of this approach became evident, leading to a balance of payments crisis (Siddiqui, 2014). This crisis marked the beginning of economic reforms and a move towards a more market-oriented approach. The early 1990s marked a watershed moment in India's

planning process with the initiation of economic liberalization and globalization (1990s-2000s). The introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1991 signalled a departure from the traditional planning model, focusing on deregulation, privatization, and opening up of the economy. This phase witnessed a greater emphasis on private sector participation, trade liberalization, and integration into the global economy (Narayana, 2008).

The planning process in India evolved further in the 21st century with a renewed focus on inclusive growth and sustainable development (2000s-Present). The Eleventh and Twelfth Five-Year Plans emphasized social sectors such as education, health, and poverty alleviation. Additionally, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provided a global framework, aligning with India's development priorities.

### **Components of planning process**

Planning typically involves several key components that help to structure and guide the decision-making process. These components can vary depending on the specific context, but the common elements of any planning for development includes, goals and objectives, analysis and assessment, stakeholder engagement, strategy and action plan, allocation of resources, time lines and milestones, monitoring and evaluation, collaboration and coordination, risk assessment and contingency planning, communication and implementation.

In the plan process it is necessary to define clearly the desired outcomes and objectives that aims to achieve which provides direction and purpose for the planning efforts. Once the objectives and outcomes are finalised, it is needed to understand the context in which the planning will take place through the assessment of the current situation, the challenges and opportunities after the careful collection and analysis of relevant data. Identification of the development gap involves conducting research, evaluating existing programs or policies, and consulting with stakeholders. The consultation with of key stakeholders provides their input, perspectives and feedback helps to ensure diverse viewpoints, needs and concerns are taken in the planning process. Developing a strategic framework or roadmap which include defining strategies, priorities, and specific action plans to guide implementation that outlines the overall approach to achieve the goals and objectives is also necessary in the planning process.

Resource allocation is another important component in the planning process. Resources include financial, human, and material resources, required for the implementation process. After considering the resource availability, budgeting of resource will be done based on the optimum utilisation of resources. Establish a timeline with specific milestones and deadlines to track progress and ensure accountability through breaking down the planning process into manageable phases or stages helps monitor progress and make necessary adjustments along the way. Planning process also include to develop mechanisms to monitor the implementation of the plan and evaluate its effectiveness. This involves setting up indicators and benchmarks to measure progress, collecting data, and regularly assessing outcomes and impacts. Monitoring and evaluation provide feedback to refine and improve the planning process. Foster collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders and entities are also involved in the planning process. This may include government agencies, community organizations, private sector entities, and other relevant parties. Effective communication and coordination help ensure that efforts are aligned and complementary. Clear communication to all relevant stakeholders and ensure their understanding and support which mitigate potential risks, challenges, and uncertainties by assigning responsibilities, establishing accountability mechanisms, and mobilizing necessary resources. In this context, this article attempts to examine the planning process for the development of Scheduled Castes, one of the disadvantaged communities

### **Planning needs special care when plans for the less privileged**

When planning for the development of disadvantaged sections of society, it is essential to recognize their specific needs, challenges, and barriers. Special care and attention are necessary to ensure that development initiatives are inclusive, equitable, and effective. An inclusive approach seeks their participation, listen to their perspectives, and involve them in decision-making. Their active involvement helps ensure that their voices are heard and that the solutions developed are relevant and responsive to their needs.

When planning for the poor the first step involves to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to understand their unique challenges, barriers, and aspirations. This may involve gathering data, conducting surveys, and engaging in consultations with community members and relevant stakeholders. Secondly, the development of targeted interventions that address their specific needs. Recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective and that tailored strategies are necessary. Consider factors such as gender, age, disability, caste,

ethnicity, and socioeconomic background to design interventions that are inclusive and address the specific challenges faced by different groups.

Moreover, the plan process needs to emphasise to ensure equitable access to basic services such as education, healthcare, clean water, sanitation, and housing and address the barriers that prevent them from accessing these services, such as affordability, distance, cultural norms, and discrimination. Social Protections programs that provide a safety net for disadvantaged communities. This may include targeted cash transfers, social insurance, healthcare subsidies, and other social assistance programs that help alleviate poverty, reduce vulnerabilities, and promote social inclusion.

Invest in building the capacity of disadvantaged communities by providing skills training, vocational education, and entrepreneurship development need high priority and for empowering individuals from less privileged communities with marketable skills and knowledge are essential to enhance their employability and economic independence. Besides, some other dimensions such as affirmative action measures including reservation in education and employment, women specific schemes for gender equality, awareness creation and sensitisation, effective monitoring and evaluation etc to be considered into the planning process, it is possible to develop more targeted, inclusive, and impactful strategies that address the specific needs and challenges faced by disadvantaged sections of society, leading to more equitable and sustainable development outcomes.

### **Planning for the disadvantaged: The case of special component plan**

The Special Component Plan (SCP) for Scheduled Castes (SCs) is a pioneering policy initiative in India aimed at uplifting and empowering marginalized communities. Its evolution traces back to the Constitution of India, which recognized the historical discrimination faced by SCs and mandated their socio-economic advancement. The SCP was first introduced during the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-79) to address the glaring socio-economic disparities experienced by SCs.

The idea of SCP could be presumed to have originated from the idea of the Tribal Sub Plan. The first attempt to introduce SCP was started in the 1978-79 Annual Plan period, although in a token form. The idea of the Special Component Plan was introduced in the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) because earlier plans were lackadaisical in giving much importance to the

problems of Scheduled Castes. The broad objective of SCP ensures that resources are channelled directly into projects and programs that directly benefit SCs, helping to bridge the gap between them and the rest of the population. The broad vision of SCP includes:

- Social Empowerment through the removal of all the still existing inequalities, disparities and other persisting problems besides providing easy access to basic minimum services;
- Economic Empowerment through employment-cum-income generation activities with an ultimate objective of making them economically independent and self-reliant;
- Social Justice through elimination of all types of discrimination against the socially disadvantaged groups with the strength of constitutional commitments, legislative support, affirmative action, awareness drive among target groups and change in the mind-set of people.

For the effective implementation of SCP, the following imperatives are to be followed:

- 1) Funds at least in proportion to SC population in the State and UT and Centre should be set apart first from the total plan outlay for formulating Special Component Plan.
- 2) A separate SCP plan document must be prepared by the nodal department giving the details of the schemes and programmes with physical and financial targets to be implemented during the annual plan.
- 3) A separate budget head and sub-head to be allotted to the SCSP funds for various sectors for effective monitoring of the schemes and expenditure of the fund.
- 4) The SCSP earmarked funds should be backed by 100% budget provision and sanctions and release of funds in time to the implementing agencies.
- 5) The funds allocated to SCP in the Annual Plans should not be diverted and allowed to lapse.
- 6) The other line departments should cooperate in the proper implementation of the schemes of SCP.
- 7) The thrust should be given to income generating and asset creation programmes.
- 8) Scheme benefits should go directly to individuals, families to include female headed households, settlements/colonies/habitats, recognized institutions or organisations among the SC community.

To what extent these imperatives are followed in the plan process needs to be examined.

### SCP allocation during 12th and 13th five-year plan periods

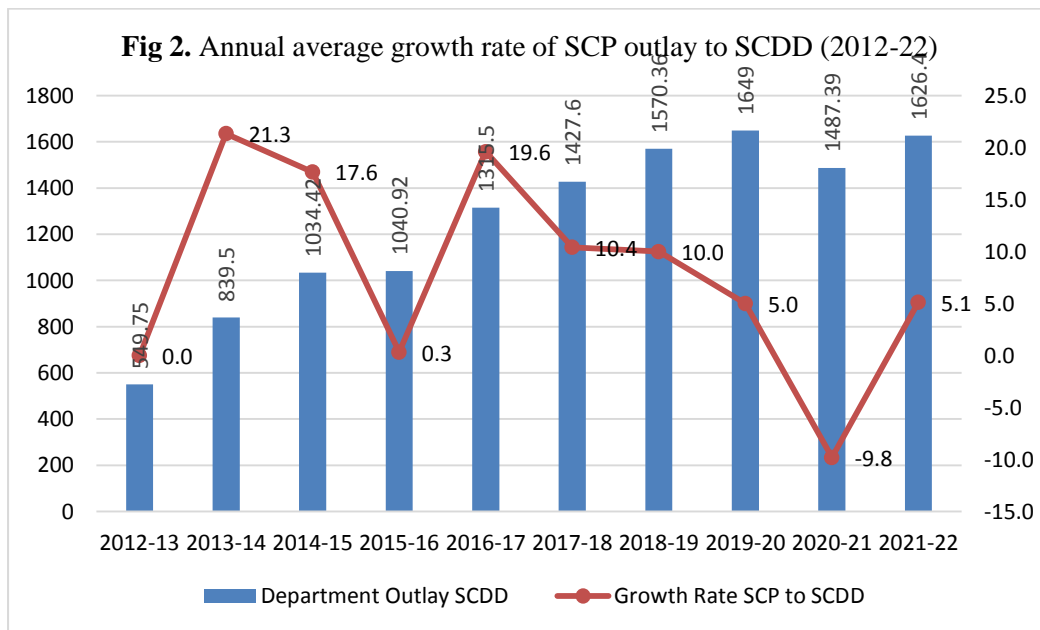
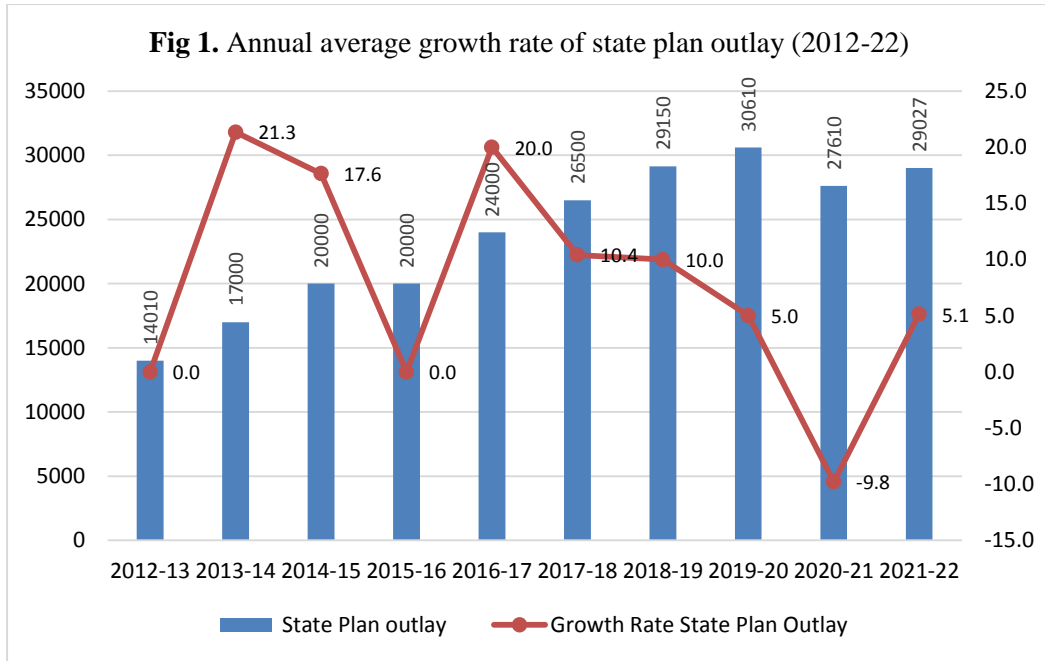
Table 1 shows the allocation to special component plan in the 12th (2012-17) and 13th (2017-22) in the state of Kerala.

**Table 1.** Allocation of Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan funds to Scheduled Caste Development Department and local governments, Kerala, 2012-13 to 2021-22 (BE) in crore

Year	State Plan outlay	Total SCP	per cent to total State Plan outlay	Department Outlay SCDD	Per cent SCDD	Outlay to LBs	per cent (LB)
2012-13	14010	1374.38	9.81	549.75	40.00	824.63	60.00
2013-14	17000	1667.7	9.81	839.5	50.34	828.2	49.66
2014-15	20000	1962	9.81	1034.42	52.72	927.58	47.28
2015-16	20000	1968.5	9.84	1040.92	52.88	927.58	47.12
2016-17	24000	2354.4	9.81	1315.5	55.87	1038.9	44.13
2017-18	26500	2599.65	9.81	1427.6	54.92	1172.05	45.08
2018-19	29150	2859.62	9.81	1570.36	54.91	1289.26	45.09
2019-20	30610	3002.84	9.81	1649	54.91	1353.84	45.09
2020-21	27610	2708.54	9.81	1487.39	54.91	1221.15	45.09
2021-22	29027	2847.55	9.81	1626.4	57.12	1221.15	42.88
Total	237907	23345.18	9.81	12540.84	53.72	10804.34	46.28

*Source: Compiled from budget documents*

During the 12th and 13th five-year plan periods, Rs. 233455 crore have been allotted for the welfare of SC which constitutes 9.81 per cent of the total state plan outlay. Since allocation to SCP is in proportion to the population of SC in the state, the annual average growth of state plan outlay and the annual average growth of SCP show similar trend. (Fig 1 and 2) In the 12th FYP the growth rate shows an increasing except the 2015-16 but in the 13th FYP, generally the growth rate of state plan outlay declines and during 2020-21, the COVID year, it shows a negative growth rate of -9.8. The total amount allocates to SCP is distributed to two agencies such as Scheduled Castes Development Department (SCDD) and local self-governments and the allocation and the annual growth rate of SCP allocation to local self-governments is shown in Fig 3.



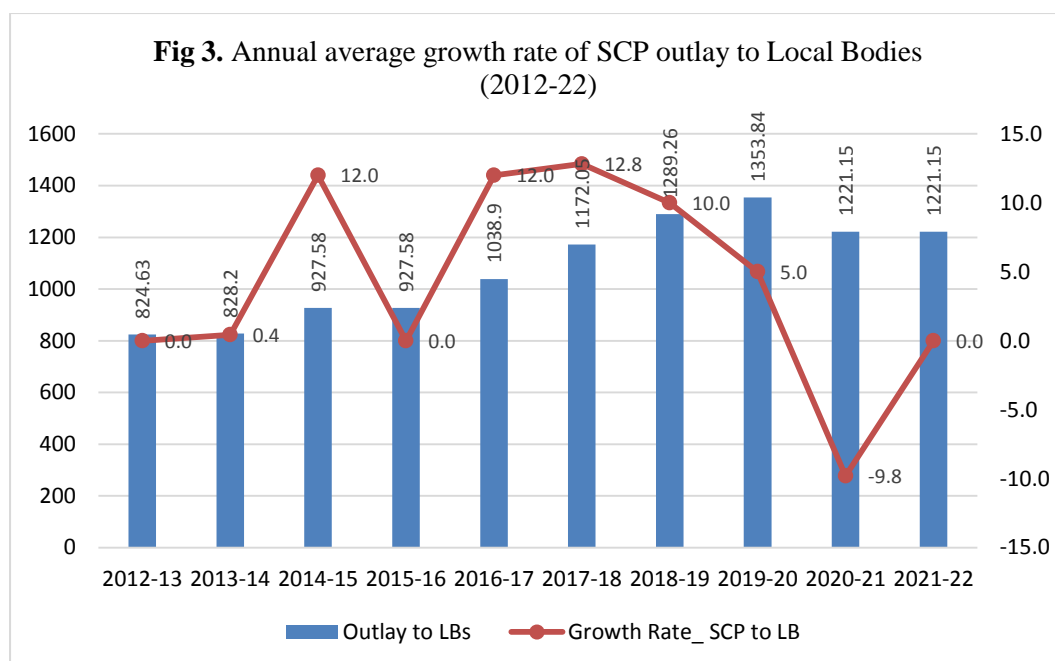


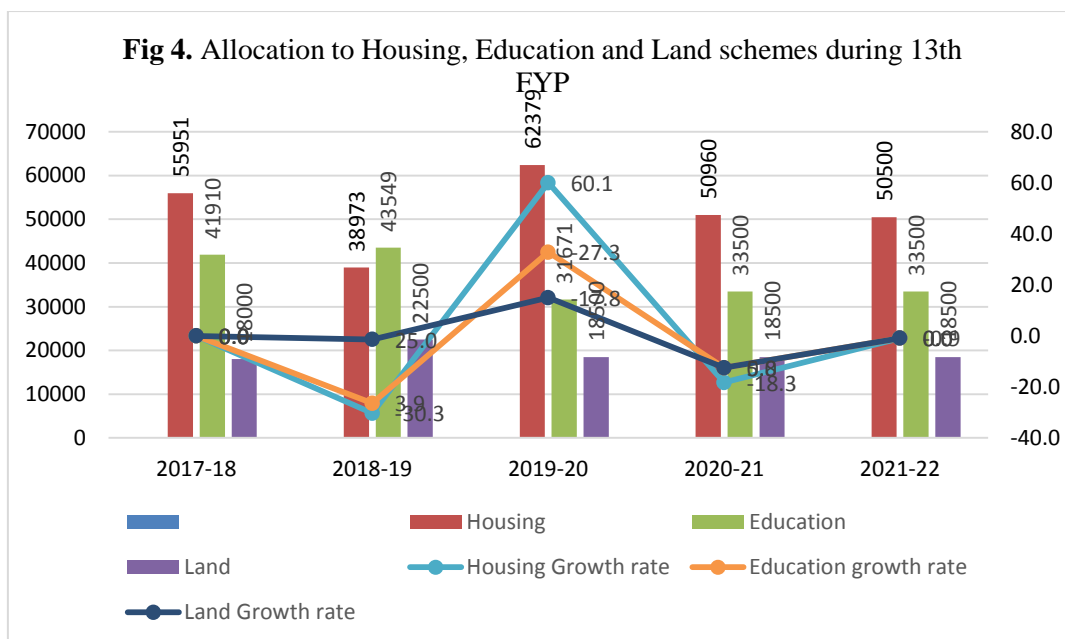
Table 2 shows the sector wise allocation of SCP in the 13th FYP. The analysis of the sectors into which primarily the allocation goes gives a clear picture of the current planning process. Generally, the schemes for SC development are arranged under 12 sectors as shown in the Table 2. Though Table 2 provides the sector wise details of 13th FYP, it was same in the period of 12th FYP. The housing sector includes 3 sub scheme components such as house to houseless and completion of partially constructed houses, housing scheme for the homeless SCs (LIFE MISSION) and Pradhan Manthri Awas Yojana-Gramin- (PMAY-40% Sate share). The sector education also has 3 sub scheme components such as management of Model Residential Schools, assistance for Education of SC Students and additional State assistance to post matric students. The sector women and girl child has two components such as financial assistance for marriage and Valsalyanidhi and the sector skill and employment has also two components such as assistance for Training, Employment and Human Resource Development and Deendayal Anthyodaya Yojana (DAY NRLM) (40% Sate share). The sector infrastructure has four sub components such as Works and Buildings, Modernization and e-governance initiatives in SC Development Department, Construction of Boy's hostel (50%Sate share) and Working Women's hostel in all districts. All other sectors don't have sub components.



Sl. No	Sector	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	Total	% against total
1	Housing	55951	38973	62379	50960	50500	258763	33.95
2	Education	41910	43549	31671	33500	33500	184130	24.16
3	Land	18000	22500	18500	18500	18500	96000	12.60
4	Pooled Fund/ Corpus Fund	7988	10100	10100	6100	6100	40388	5.30
5	Women and Girl Child	6500	7600	8100	8200	9539	39939	5.24
6	Skill and Employment	4700	7974	7550	8250	8250	36724	4.82
7	Habitat Development		10000	10000	7879	7000	34879	4.58
8	Vulnerable communities	1700	5000	5000	5000	5000	21700	2.85
9	Health		5000	6000	5000	5000	21000	2.76
10	Support to Federation and Cooperation	2650	3165	2700	2700	2700	13915	1.83
11	Infrastructure	2586	2175	1650	1400	1400	9211	1.21
12	Social Justice	775	1000	1250	1250	1250	5525	0.72
	<b>Total</b>	<b>142760</b>	<b>157036</b>	<b>164900</b>	<b>148739</b>	<b>148739</b>	<b>762174</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source

The general trend of the allocation shows that major share of the total allocation goes to housing sector (34 %) followed by education (24 %) and land (13 %) which means more than 70 per cent of the total allocation goes to these three sectors. Four sectors such as Pooled Fund/ Corpus Fund (5.3 %), Women and Girl Child (5.3 %), Skill and Employment (4.8 %) and Habitat Development (4.6 %) nearly get around 5 per cent of the total allocation. Two sectors, vulnerable communities (2.9 %) and health (2.8 %) have nearly three per cent of the total allocation and other two sectors such as support to federation and corporation (1.8 %) and infrastructure (1.2 %) get below two per cent of the allocation and social justice sector gets below one per cent (0.7 %). The allocation and the growth rate of major three sectors such as housing, education and land is given in Fig.4.



### The stagnation in the planning process

The allocation of SCP funds including sector wise allocations in the 13th FYP shows that the sectors and the amount allocated to each sector are seen almost same which shows a stagnation in the planning process. This stagnation is visible in three areas such as allocation to SCDD, allocation to Local Self Governments and sector wise allocation by SCDD.

The SCP allocation is seen to be a simple routine process in which 9.81 per cent of the total plan allocation of the state which is based on the population of the SCs in the state. This is the only condition considered for the allocation of plan fund which literally dismisses the question of adequacy of fund for their development. In this stage of allocation, no fruitful discussions were not seen conducted to assess the adequacy of fund after considering their current socio-economic status. The funds are earmarked without considering any other parameters such as the number of houseless and land less, unemployment, skill gaps etc. Whatever funds have been allocated as plan funds in a financial year, SCs will be allocated 9.81 per cent of it. This blind allocation itself is a symbol of stagnation in the planning process because it prevents the need of mapping the developmental requirements and assessing the financial obligations and resources.

The second stagnation is seen in the SCP allocation to local self-governments. The total SCP allocation for the year is shared between SCDD and local self-governments which is based on an average ratio of 55: 45 respectively. This 45 per cent will be again shared to 1200 local

self-government institutions (except Edamalakkudy Panchayat) and the share of each local bodies is shown in Appendix IV or LSGD budget appended to the state budget. The SCP allocation to local bodies and its redistribution to various local self-governments is seem merely a mechanical process without considering the local level needs and requirements. Because of the allocation without considering the special needs of the less privileged people, their speedy development to bridge the development gap between them and the developed sections of the society becomes an unattainable goal.

The third stagnation is seen in the sector wise allocation of funds. In the 12th and 13th FYP periods the SCDD has distributed their allocation primarily to 12 sectors which is shown in Table 2. The sectors and the allocation to each sector are seen fairly permanent and if we examine the schemes formulated under each sector, are also the same since the last decade. Even the unforeseen calamities could not shake these sectoral fabrics of planning process. For example, during the COVID time (2020-22), there was no planned initiatives for the SCs using the SCP funds and even the total allocation and the sectoral allocation for the years 2020-21 and 2021-211 were almost same. (Table 2).

This stagnation in planning for the disadvantaged is occurred due to various reasons. Lack of clear and measurable objectives, insufficient data, inadequate planning tools, lack of stakeholder engagement etc are the major reasons of this stagnation. Though SCP was envisioned to fill the development gap between them and the developed communities, clear goals with milestones were not fixed yet which leads to confusion and indecision in the planning process. Inadequate or unreliable data is also contributing to hinder the ability to make informed decisions, leading to delays in the planning process. The planning process is still rallied around the conventional reporting of the officials and pre-budget discussion exercises and lacks the use of innovative technological tools and software for the planning process. The lack of broad based, in-depth and fruitful stakeholder consultations especially with the beneficiary class prevents the smooth flow of inputs such as the needs and the aspirations of the community also causes for the stagnation of planning process.

Besides stagnation, plan to equip the less privileged sections to enjoy the fruits of emerging opportunities is also seen lagging. It is a hard but a loud statement that at least in this point of time, the present planning authorities are not considering the new innovations and evolvments in the development era when they plan for the poor. This is evident when we analyse the ideas of knowledge economy and artificial intelligence.

### **Planning for the era of knowledge economy**

The government of Kerala has been declared to develop a knowledge-based economy to fulfil the future development agendas. Knowledge economy is an economic system where the generation and exploitation of knowledge play a predominant role in the production and distribution of goods and services. In a knowledge economy, the traditional factors of production (such as labor, land, and capital) are supplemented, and sometimes even replaced, by the production and utilization of knowledge, information, and expertise.

The indigenous communities such as SC and ST, can harness the knowledge economy to promote their rapid economic development in a sustainable and culturally sensitive manner. They can use knowledge economy for their rapid economic growth in so many ways such as preservation and promotion of traditional knowledge which can be a valuable asset in various industries, including agriculture, herbal medicine, and sustainable resource management, cultural tourism and heritage industries through guided tours, cultural events, and the sale of traditional crafts and artworks, natural resource management and sustainable practices which include responsible forestry, agriculture, fisheries, and eco-tourism initiatives that respect the environment and traditional territories, intellectual property rights and cultural heritage protection through patents, trademarks, and copyrights for traditional knowledge and cultural expressions, community based tourism and eco-tourism by highlighting the unique cultural and natural heritage of the indigenous community etc. Here the question is, are our existing planning processes concerned about the optimum use of knowledge economy for the economic development for SC/ST? Whether such understanding is reflected in the annual plan process?

The effective use of knowledge economy for community development is closely interlinked with some other sectors such as education, infrastructure, innovation and development, access to finance, entrepreneurial ecosystem, government initiatives, community awareness and their cultural factors etc. The education and the curriculum need to be aligned with the requirements and demands of the knowledge economy to equip the students adequately with the essential skill sets and such a special drive for SC/ST youth is absent in the planning process. Both the physical and technological infrastructure including roads, hubs, innovation parks, high speed internet connectivity etc are yet to be provided in most of the SC/ST hamlets to enjoy the fruits of knowledge economy. The complex and lengthy bureaucratic processes and the outdated or restrictive regulations could impede the establishment and

growth of knowledge-based industries among the scheduled communities. The limited access to venture capital and other forms of funding and the lack of comprehensive support mechanisms, such as incubators, accelerators, and mentorship programs, might hinder the growth of knowledge-intensive start-ups among them. More over there must be a need for increased awareness and acceptance of the benefits of a knowledge-based economy among these communities to remove some of the cultural and behavioural attitudes towards risk-taking to engage in knowledge-intensive activities. To achieve these the government might need to enact and enforce policies that encourage and support the growth of the knowledge economy including fiscal and non-fiscal incentives, like tax breaks and subsidies, but such an attempt exclusively for the disadvantaged classes is not seen in the planning process.

### **Planning for the era of artificial intelligence**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the development of computer systems or machines that can perform tasks that typically require human intelligence. The era of AI has been exponentially developing in India in various vital sectors of development. India has a burgeoning AI ecosystem with a rising number of startups, research institutes, and companies working on AI-driven solutions across various industries and the National AI Strategy has been developed to promote research, development, and application of AI technologies. In the sectors such as agriculture, education, industries, governance, economic growth, job creation, skill development, planning, regulation etc, the use of AI has become an unavoidable technological advancement. In this situation how can bring and place the development of disadvantaged sections of the society into the ongoing AI enabled future of our country has become a million-dollar question. To what extent the planners are concerned about the lives of disadvantaged sections of the society in an AI enable social life and how can we prepare the poor people to enjoy the benefits of the life management solutions provided by the AI ecosystem?

Using AI for the upliftment of poor people requires thoughtful implementation and a focus on addressing specific needs and challenges faced by them. There are several ways AI can be applied for the betterment of the economically disadvantaged. In education AI can ensure personalised learning providing tailored instruction to students by considering their individual learning styles and paces. The level of digital literacy among SC/ST is not yet sure even to the planners. To provide employment opportunities for the poor people, AI-driven job platforms can be developed to match job seekers with suitable opportunities based on their

skills, preferences, and available openings. AI-driven digital payment systems can be implemented in to facilitate secure and convenient financial transactions for those without access to traditional banking services. Moreover, in the fields of health care, disaster management, access to information etc AI can be used effectively to empower less privileged sections of the society. Such thought process and initiatives are not reflected in the planning process for SC/STs.

## Conclusion

Planning as the back bone of any development process requires a careful thought process especially when plan for the development of the less privileged sections of the society. Unfortunately, in the existing system of planning for the poor, need based and resource-based planning is rarely seen due to various reasons such as lack of clear and measurable objectives, insufficient data, inadequate planning tools, lack of stakeholder engagement etc which eventually leads planning into a stagnation mode. In the case of SC development, this stagnation is visible in the allocation and distribution of funds both to institutions and schemes. Additionally, the plan process is not equipped to deal the unforeseen incidents like pandemic and the emerging development and technological trends such as knowledge economy and artificial intelligence. In this context, the planning process of the state for the development of disadvantaged communities needs to be critically reviewed and revamped to achieve the national developmental goals and constitutional promises as ensured to them.

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