Commoning as an approach to Community Planning: An inquiry into the role of urban local bodies and commoners

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Abstract— Communities are formed based on the commonalities that exist in a set of individuals, when the group comes together on identifying those commonalities or to achieve their common goals. Thus, community planning with its vision to strengthen the community, mostly involves with making or remaking of commons, which results in making or remaking of communities. This paper looks into few practices of planning around the world and tried to establish a link between commoning (the act of exercising the rights over commons by commoners) and participatory approach to community planning.

Index Terms— Commons, commoners, commoning, community, collective approach, participatory planning, urban local bodies.

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1 INTRODUCTION

CHANGE is inevitable and is directly proportional to time. Transformations that led by urbanization in cities are creating pressure in existing systems and effecting the ecology. Encroachment of common pool resources and mismanagement of assets of community has its serious impact on human beings. A change has to be addressed by a change in the way of addressing, implies a change is needed when the existing system fails to address the change and maintain equilibrium.

Community planning aims at strengthening the community, which can be achieved majorly in two different approaches, either by identifying the assets of the community and sustainable management of its assets or by identifying the issues and needs of the community and addressing them. But the approach to planning has always been from top to bottom along the decentralized levels of the governance. Even though the responsibility of a plan implementation is at every level, the implementation at the end or lower levels has not been as effective as above. The vision of plans have always been oriented and framed to address the issues or the needs of the particular planning area and the actions are divided among the decentralized levels of governance. Regulations at the bottom level of decentralized governance must make sure the plan and the vision that have been formulated at the top level have been implement successfully at the bottom level of governance. A participatory approach to community planning is effective in achieving community goals in such cases.

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2 COMMONS: EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT

The term originated in feudal England, where the waste" or uncultivated land, of a lord's manor could be used for pasture and firewood by his tenants [1]. The concept of commons in 19th century refers to the land held in common by public.

Commons have been studies from a wide variety of perspective, different school of thoughts have referred it differently depending on the context and way of understanding from their perspective.

2.1 An Economist Perspective

Economists viewed commons as a commodity or a resource that are held in common under equal set of rights for every commoner. In the article by Gerrett Hardin's classic "Tragedy of Commons" an economic theory of situation, where an individual tries to reap greatest benefits from commons. The commons in this article refers to common pool resources.

2.2 A Socialist Perspective

Commons from a socialist point of view talks about Rights to the commons and that refers to the collective action of commoners over commons.

2.3 An Anthropologist Perspective

Commons from an anthropologist point of view talks about the commoners and their culture of governing commons i.e. the involvement of commoners in the process of managing their commons.

Thus depending on the context that it is being discussed, commons can refer any of its own characteristics, which are nature of resources, the set of rights through which commons are managed, the commoners and the key players who exercise the set of rights equally [2].

3 COMMONING

The term "Commoning" has been popularized by a historian Peter Linebaugh in his book "The Manga Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All". The book is an excavation of political conflicts between the king and the landed classes on one hand and commoners on the other hand; and the importance of communing for commoners in 12th and 13th centuries.

The term commoning in the book is used as a verb, not in a substantial sense. In the history of Manga Carta, around 13th century, roughly at the end of Medieval England entering into the Modern Capitalism, in reference to the Charter of Forests of that period, he reviews the material aspect in the case if the king's powers is curtailed, how would it effects the rights of peasants to communing [3].

Commoning is an activity, where commoners make or remake commons by exercising their set of equal rights, with which the commons are held in common. The basic law of working in nature is that everything starts with a need and a deed. Thus, even in this concept, where people come together and form groups for managing commons is because of the human needs and deeds. Which supports the statement that, commoners first don't think of title deeds but think of their human deeds. The context and situations transformed the commons with respective transitions in the right to commons, the procedure of commoning, the players and their rights.

4 COMMUNITY PLANNING AS A COLLECTIVE ACTION

Community planning addresses the needs and issues of a community along with a sustainable management of its assets. Community planning is, making a better community for future, where, every individual who is part of the community benefits from it. The individuals of the community might have benefits from different areas and might have different needs, but all they have an asset in common is their community, a social asset, a financial asset, a cultural asset and many.

Thus the common goal developed from their commonalities in broad towards a sustainable management of their community can be viewed as the collective action towards a common goal. Collective action occur when a group of people come and work together to achieve their common need or a goal.

Stakeholders Management:

In decentralized governance and planning process, there were many cases where implementations at community level or ward level were not as effective as at top levels of governance it can be, which is either because of large number of governing bodies and stakeholders that go till top of tree of governance. Thus a stakeholder management is effective in such cases where, stakeholders are identified and analyzed and their roles and engagement and collaboration among them are planned in according to achieve the vision of the plan.

Community Driven Development (CDD):

The Planning model "Community Driven Development" is

introduced by the World Bank in 2002 to address the issue of urban poor by the community, for the community. Community Driven Development is based on the principle of collective action by beneficiary community in development activities and processes. Collective action as a parameter throughout the planning process from community assessment, project identification, needs assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation [4].

5 CASE STUDIES

5.1 Gambia-Community Driven Development Project by World Bank

A. Objective:

The objective of PDD project of Gambia is to address the poverty of Gambia and rural communities, in partnership with Local Government Authorities, targeting the social and economic sectors. The project has three components in its implementation to achieve its objective, which are Community Development Facility, Strengthening Capacity for Community Development and Project Coordination, Monitoring & Evaluation.

B. Components of the Project:

Community Development Facility finances community driven activities identified on the basis of a participatory strategic planning process. Strengthening Capacity for Community Development addresses the technical and fiduciary skills needed at different decentralized levels to implement local development activities. Project Coordination, Monitoring & Evaluation supports project coordination team to monitor and evaluate the progress of the project.

C. The Government that needed an external support

The Local Government Act of 2002 and Audit and Finance Act 2005 of the country has a strong framework for decentralization, but its implementation is lagging, though the political decentralization is in place, Administrative decentralization is only partially effective and fiscal decentralization instruments by the act are not utilized by either central or local governments, which made difficult to for different services at different decentralized levels. At the end levels of decentralization have become non functional unless with an external support. Thus the government of Gambia requested the World Bank.

D. The Participatory approach and the decentralized network in the component Community Development Facility (CDF)

The CDF will finance community-driven activities identified on the basis of a participatory strategic planning process. It provides an opportunity for communities to take charge of local development challenges through experience with participatory planning, budgeting, financial management, and implementation of development activities [5]. The project will be demand-driven, and participating villages and wards will have an open menu of social and economic activities, includ-

ing capacity building activities and income generating activities. The technical and financial review of the activities will be placed at levels corresponding to their area of implementation and their complexity. Each Local Government Authority will manage a project designated sub-account to disburse grant allocations to villages and wards. Village and ward development committees (VDCs and WDCs) will manage funds to implement their own development plans. About five percent o f the CDF will be earmarked for a Good Governance Facility, which will finance activities to strengthen accountability and transparency related to the project. Gambian CSOs will develop proposals and implement activities under the Good Governance Facility [5].

5.2 Bologna, Italy – The Collaboration among citizens and the Administration

A. The Regulation on the Collaboration

The objective of the collaboration regulation in line with the provisions of Italy and the Municipal Statute is to establish collaboration among citizens and the City of Bologna is for the care and regeneration of urban commons. Citizens under this regulation go through a collaboration agreement with the city, which defines the area of application of the interventions about the care and regeneration of urban commons. Management of urban commons of Bologna is carried jointly by citizens and the administration through shared management [6].

B. The Collaboration Agreement

The agreement is an instrument that ensures the shared management of the city by the citizens and the administration. The agreement varies depending upon the complicity and the duration of the collaboration. The agreement is specified and talks in detail about the goal and duration of the established collaboration, mode of action and collective use of commons, the citizen's coaching by the city's staff and many required establishing a clear relation between the city and the citizens.

C. The Procedural provisions of the Frame

The management function of the collaboration is within the municipal organization model. The proposals for regeneration of commons can be formulated based on the solicitation of the administration or default model of collaboration pursuit or the proposal presented by the citizens [6]. If the proposal is from the administration then the procedure of implementations defined by a notice through which city invites active citizens to present the project. If the proposal is a default from the objective of the regulation then the procedure is defined by the managerial act that identifies range, requisites and conditions of the default module of collaboration. If the proposal is from citizens, the structure to implement the proposal gives the proponent the necessary time for the conclusion of the process of the investigation and also the list of which will be included in the investigation [6].

These proposal and effects and the change brought by the proposal are advertised to gather interested parties to evaluate the interests involved towards the proposal and possible ac-

cording changes or additional contributions or inputs needed for the proposal. Then the proposal is forwarded for technical evaluation by different institutions and services involved [6].

D. The civic medium – a digital intervention

A civic network, a citizenship on the Internet for the publication of information and institutional news, an interactive sharing of information is established. Through this civic medium collection, evaluation, voting and comment of proposals are made by the Administration and the citizens.

Civic network develops the collaborative partnership among citizens and the city, a mapping of different subjects and interventions of care and regenerations of the commons in order to facilitate active citizens in identifying sites for interventions [7]. It provides citizens a set of tools and instruments to communicate and propose, mentoring program through communication channels and also favoring support among groups [7].
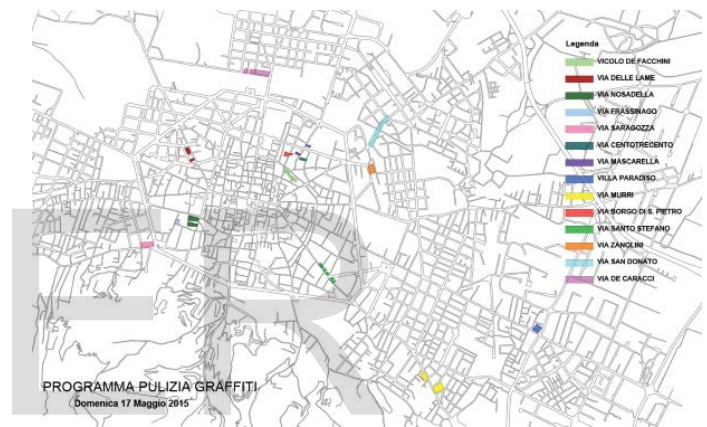

Fig. 1: A real-time of a map developed by the city to track urban commons project activity [7].

5.3 Bangalore – Urban Ecological Commons

Transition of culture over time has its affect on the relation between the communities and the common assets. Water bodies have a strong cultural value in the culture.

Rajapalaya Lake in located in the middle of the wealthy K M Pura neighborhood, the name of the lake derives from the name of adjacent village. The urbanization of the city of Bangalore has led the lake to transform to land, which shows the nature of the governance and the spatial politics. K M Pura neighborhood, where the lake is located once was an agricultural land and the lake had provided the irrigation facility, the City Improvement Board which is now called as Bangalore Development authority acquiring the land from farmers for the expansion of the city. The lake is now used as site for waste dumping and encroachments by the urban poor [8].

As slowly the city grew around the lake and the village Rajapalaya, the village and the lake got trapped by the city and slowly villagers who doesn't have land right have encroached the dried lake.

A. Scenario that caused the concern

Karnataka Town and Country Planning Act gave the state government statutory planning powers, through decentralized governing the city Bangalore has two authorities Town and Country Planning Authority and Bangalore Development Authority, who control the growth and direct the growth of the city. Property documents of the upper MIG housing colony that encroached the lake show that the project received the conversion of land property from revenue department to the urban development department allowing the change of land use from revenue land to residential. The master plans of Bangalore 1985 and 1995 prepared by BDA classified the lake as a public and semi public land use [8].

B. Constitution of a Community to restore the lake

As the ecology has been disturbed leaving no compensation, effects of the mismanagement of the ecological commons is seen and experienced by the people of the community through urban floods and several health issues. When people had slowly understood the problem and issues of the community and its reason, they started writing blogs and writing to the local bodies to let people and the local bodies know about the situation. Residents have tried in all the possible ways and networks available at the end through different acts of BDA, KTCP, and Land Revenue Act found a way to address the planning system and the governance and approach the right one.

They organized special teams among themselves responsible for different issues that they were facing in the community like lake, roads, waste, violations and many. They worked through the legal system with Public Interest litigation (PIT). Unknowingly the interested parties show up on the way and that's how the communities are formed based on the common interests and achieve their goal. The community that formed to conserve the lake had achieved to make the BDA commissioner to change back the land use into lake through their right to the lake and the commons [8].

5.4 Inference from the Case studies

The three case studies discussed above explain in different cases, how communities are formed based on common goals, how can a community driven participatory approach in planning and the collaboration of administration and citizens in remaking their city as commons.

The key player in all the above cases is the citizen. Citizens and their culture are the image of the city or a community not the infrastructure and the static accumulations of property.

A sound and a clear understanding of the rights of citizens to the city and the power of local bodies and a well established collaboration is necessary for well management of the community assets and working against the issues of the community like poverty. Health issues etc.

COMMUNITY PLANNING AS COMMONING

Commons in brief are the common assets that a group of people held in common with equal set of rights towards the commons and equal responsibility to manage the assets in a sustainable manner and regenerate them if needed.

Through the frame of commons, a community is an asset formed by people who have the commonalities that brought them together and is the common asset to every individual. The asset called community have many elements that are nested each other and grow on the heterogeneity of the elements beside the elements of commonality. But the elements of commonality are the first priority for a community as they are necessary for the formation of the community and then the elements of heterogeneity that develops the community socially and culturally strong.

Commoning the act of exercising the rights and fulfilling the responsibilities to manage the commons is managing the community, where every individual of the community exercise his rights and with responsibility to manage his community, which is participatory community planning in terminology of planning.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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6 COMMUNITY AS COMMONS: PARTICIPATORY