

URBAN GOVERNANCE DECENTRALISATION: AN EVALUATION OF THE POLICY MAKING PROCESS  
IN INDIA

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**ABSTRACT**

The demand for decentralisation as a policy solution has been a widely prevalent feature of India's urban governance initiatives in the past two decades. However, one of the main challenges was to understand the manner in which these policies have been translated and implemented across the various levels of a federal structure, including the state governments, city governments and associated city agencies. Every tier of government within a federal system has varying interests and perspectives on how a specific policy should be developed. Urban Governance is one such policy area that has also been subjected to this challenge. For instance, the need to preserve the autonomy of states is considered to be as important as the necessity for collaboration between various levels within the federal structure. Therefore, an important issue was to determine whether the policy making process compromises on the original intent and objective, in order to accommodate the demands and conflicts of the various tiers of a government. Adopting a qualitative multi-level study, we then seek to understand the challenges involved in the process of designing, implementing and evaluating decentralization policies within a federal system. This research was designed using three objectives. Firstly, by using the framework of a conventional policy making process, we critically evaluate the adequacy and the effectiveness of the policy making process employed in the decentralization of urban governance in India in the period 1993-2008. Secondly, we analyse the how the meaning and concept of decentralization has evolved during the period under study. The objective here was to determine the perception and comprehension of decentralization across the various tiers within the federal system using the content analysis of qualitative data. The third section focused on the challenge of multiple agencies in urban areas and, argue that horizontal agency interactions and accountability are an important factor to understand the process of decentralization at the city level. A significant contribution of this study was to propose a policy making process specific to the phenomenon of urban governance decentralisation. We argue that every form of decentralization (political, administrative and fiscal) requires an elaborate process of adoption, implementation and evaluation. Secondly, we posit that the decentralized policy approach in India has evolved through a process that begins with a constitutionally mandated mechanism, followed by strong resistance from the state governments in the stage of adoption, and then move on to the use of coercive practices by the Central Government, and finally leading towards more of a collaborative approach towards governance reforms. Thirdly, we describe that collaborative and information sharing mechanisms between various agencies at the city level should also be included to understand the effectiveness of decentralisation in urban governance along with the existing conventional parameters of deconcentration and devolution. The research suggests a need for balance between centralisation and decentralisation initiatives which is critical to understand the implementation and adoption of policies by the sub-national governments. We conclude with implications for theory and practice.