



Democratic Land Use Mapping is Critical

Under the Goa Town and Country Planning Act, 1974, as amended to date, Planning and Development Authorities have to prepare an existing land use map for the planning areas under their jurisdiction. However, this provision is not implemented in letter and spirit. Further, there is no such corresponding requirement for those areas which are not declared as planning areas. In that for those areas which are not declared as planning areas, there is no provision to prepare an existing land use map and an outline development plan. It would be useful to have a land use map drawn up even for non-planning areas, because it can provide a useful baseline for planning. It can ensure that the uses that the land has been traditionally put to are duly documented and people's uses of land are recognised.

Sometime in 1993, the Tourism Department of the Goa Government was proposing to acquire 6.40 lakhs square metres of land for a golf course on behalf of the promoters. They suggested, in a response to a query, that the environment and ecology would not be affected in any way but would on the contrary be improved in view of the fact that the site was rocky and barren. Implicit in this response was the notion that a rocky and barren site is of no use for anyone. Implicit also in such a response was the ignorance, deliberate or otherwise, about the use of the place as a grazing ground. Similarly, when the Government gave a go-ahead for the Tiracol Golf Course to be set up by Leading Hotels Pvt. Ltd., it claimed that the land where it was proposed was barren land, when actually the land was tenanted and used for cashew plantations and cultivation and housing.

Again when the IT Park was being proposed at Chimbel, the State failed to recognise that the location is an ecologically sensitive wetland near a lake; a site housing medicinal plants which were being harvested and dispensed by the local traditional *vojinn* for treatment of various illnesses, and that it also includes paddy fields cultivated by the villagers. Similarly, when the Information Technology (IT) Park was planned to be set up at Dona Paula, implicit in the articulations of the IT Ministry was a disregard for the use that the land for the IT Park was hitherto put to. Portions of the area were being used – primarily by the tribal community, for cultivation, for gathering firewood, for grazing, and a portion for burial ground for the same community. This is because its uses, or the nature of occupation, were not documented.

Therefore, in spatial planning, as well as in deciding on giving permissions/ approvals/no-objection certificates for projects, it is absolutely necessary to know the uses that the land was earlier put to. Actually, quietly within the folds of Goa's Town and Country Planning Act, is a provision that every planning and development authority is required to prepare a land use map and a land use register, indicating the present use of every piece of land in the

planning area. After preparing the same, it has to invite objections in writing from any person with respect to the map and the register. Those who objected have to be heard, only after which the Authority can adopt the map and register after making necessary modifications.

It would only logically follow that the outline development plan and thereafter the Comprehensive Development Plan would have to be prepared using the land use map and register, as baseline information. If the baseline information is faulty or outdated, everything will go faulty. The entire planning exercise will be unfruitful. Hence the faultlines have to be rectified at the very start in the process by which the land use map is being drawn up.

Like everything else, land use mapping is also dynamic and has to take other developments into account such as the evolving socio-economic, environmental, and technological factors in evolving the prescribed format. Also, a mapping exercise has to be dialogical and participatory. Recently, concerned citizens of Taleigao petitioned the Village Panchayat of Taleigao and the North Goa Planning and Development Authority (NGPDA) to hold a meeting and provide technical guidance and share the method and terminology used in drawing up the land use map and register of Taleigao.

The Member Secretary, NGPDA, an IAS officer, was gracious enough to organise the meeting, setting a good precedent for evolving land use maps and ensuring informed objections. There seems to be an impression that people's participation begins at the stage of objections. But objections can come in only when there is a complete map and register drawn up. Strangely, there were gaping holes, with names of occupants missing against critical properties in Taleigao. When drawing up the register, site visits and local information can be of invaluable use, as compared to the drones and google satellite maps which the agency entrusted with land use mapping said they used, and from which they seem not to have got a clear overview.

At the meeting with NGPDA, citizens of Taleigao sought to know what is meant by the words 'roads', 'playgrounds', 'water bodies' which were some of the legends in the land use map. The agency which was given the task of mapping, and the engineer, informed people that 'roads' means existing tarred roads, 'playgrounds' means developed playgrounds, and 'water bodies' means nullahs and ponds. Wells were not mapped, and neither were pathways mapped as such.

In the prescribed format for a land use map, under Rule 10 of the Goa Town and Country Planning (Planning and Development Authority) Rules, it is stipulated that the land use map has to be drawn up to a scale not less than one centimetre to fifty metres, that it is not enough to mark blanket legends such as agricultural land, or open spaces, but further details are to be indicated in the map. In so far as agriculture is concerned, there are classifications

such as market garden, orchards and nurseries, land under staple crops, forest land, and marshy land. It is required to mark public utilities such as drainage and sanitary installations, electric power plant, but much of this is not at all reflected in the map. Also, within the land use map, it is also necessary, to incorporate within Rule 10, other forms of land cover not specifically mentioned in it, such as hills, considering that regulations pertaining to planning also involve permissions for hill cutting.

Further, in drawing up a land use register, the status of the person using the land has also to be documented. Because under the Goa Land Use (Regulation) Act, 1991, land vested in a tenant cannot be allowed to be used for any purposes other than agriculture. Therefore, when planning, the zoning has to keep that aspect in mind. The prescribed format for the Land Use Register was drawn up way back in 1974, and hence it may not have been updated, to include a column about rights such as tenancy rights.

How on earth can people give objections to these land use maps when they are so incomplete? How on earth can people give objections when the land use mapping process is not participatory from the start, or is faulty from the start, and has not factored in emerging concerns of arbitrary land dispossession, climate change and disasters, while deciding the features and uses to be set out in the map and register?



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