CHAPTER 4

PLAN FORMULATION BY PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN KERALA

One of the most distinguishing aspects of the functioning of panchayati raj institutions in Kerala is the formulation of development plans by the three-tier panchayats. It is significant to observe that these institutions were instrumental in the formulation and implementation of the Ninth Five Year Plan of the State during the period 1997-2002. The importance assigned to these institutions is evident from the fact that they were provided with nearly 40 per cent of the plan fund by the State to introduce the development plan during this period.

The panchayati raj planning introduced in Kerala is a multi-stage process. The approach paper introduced in this respect by the State government envisages a six-phase dimension involving formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the plans by the three-tier panchayats. In order to discuss the plan formulation by the panchayats, it is significant to analyse the various stages envisaged in the process.

4.1 Phases of PRIs Planning in Kerala

Phase I- Grama Sabha
Phase II- Development Seminars
Phase III- Task Force
Phase IV- Annual Plan Finalisation
Phase V- Preparation of Higher Tier Plans, and
Phase VI- Plan Appraisal

4.2 Grama Sabha- The beginning phase.

The beginning phase of the panchayati raj planning in Kerala is the convening of gram Sabha. It is an assembly of eligible voters in a ward and it is defined by the consti-
tution as a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a vil-
lage, comprised within the panchayat.

In Kerala, each constituency of a Village Panchayat has been treated as a unit of
grama sabha. They have been endowed with substantial powers and functions. The act
stipulates that it has to be convened at least twice a year. The constitution envisages that
the gram sabhas should formulate proposals relating to the schemes and programmes
to be implemented in the respective area. The Village Panchayat has to make a presenta-
tion in the gram sabha regarding the work and development activities implemented
and the programmes intended to be undertaken in the respective area by it. The law stipu-
lates that the recommendations made by the gram sabhas be given due consideration by
the three-tier panchayats. The gram sabha is also expected to participate in the prepa-
ration and monitoring of the panchayat development plan, mobilisation of resources
through voluntary labour and also help in the selection of beneficiaries. The following
discussion shows the operation of gram sabha in Kerala.

4.2.1 Operation of Grama Sabha

Grama sabha is a very important unit in the decentralisation process introduced
under the panchayati raj planning in Kerala. It is convened by the respective ward mem-
er in consultation with the functionaries of the Village Panchayat. Two meetings of
grama sabha are to be convened every year for the operation of panchayati raj planning.
While convening the meetings of gram sabha, a number of guidelines are to be followed
to ensure the maximum participation of people, particularly that of the women and the
weaker sections of the society. The guidelines require that gram sabha must be
organised on holidays rather than on working days and the ideal time would be in the
afternoon. The meeting of the gram sabha should, if possible, be convened in the
respective village school. The grama sabha may also be convened in public places with sufficient shade for group meetings. The decision on the venue and time of the meeting should be communicated through squads that would visit every house and distribute a printed invitation. An active propaganda using posters, advertisements and involvement all branches of media may be resorted to. It is, therefore, evident that many measures to ensure maximum participation of people in grama sabha are undertaken in the panchayati raj planning introduced in the State.
Table 4.1
District-wise Attendance of People in the First Grama Sabha in Kerala in 1996.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Average attendance by Panchayat</th>
<th>Average attendance by ward</th>
<th>Average as % of voters</th>
<th>Females as % of attendees</th>
<th>SC/ST as % of attendees</th>
<th>SC/ST attendance as % of SC/ST population in panchayat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thiruvananthapuram</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>11.25</td>
<td>35.01</td>
<td>17.61</td>
<td>13.43</td>
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<td>Kollam</td>
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<td>150</td>
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<td>28.11</td>
<td>13.13</td>
<td>9.45</td>
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<td>Pathanamthitta</td>
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<td>162</td>
<td>12.43</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>15.36</td>
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<td>Alappuzha</td>
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<td>203</td>
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<td>31.49</td>
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<td>26.89</td>
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<td>12.51</td>
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<td>Ernakulam</td>
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<td>20.26</td>
<td>14.58</td>
<td>12.38</td>
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<tr>
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<td>9.43</td>
<td>27.54</td>
<td>11.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palakkad</td>
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<td>22.29</td>
<td>14.58</td>
<td>12.82</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malappuram</td>
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<td>167</td>
<td>12.61</td>
<td>27.43</td>
<td>11.48</td>
<td>16.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kozhikode</td>
<td>2440</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>15.32</td>
<td>26.76</td>
<td>13.16</td>
<td>12.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wayanad</td>
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<td>16.15</td>
<td>10.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kannur</td>
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<td>Kasargod</td>
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<td>13.11</td>
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<tr>
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<td>26.22</td>
<td>14.72</td>
<td>12.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Economic Review, State Planning Board, Trivandrum, 2000, p. 238
Source: Economic Review, State Planning Board, Trivandrum, 2000, P.240