Chapter IV

PEOPLE’S PLANNING IN KERALA - AN OVERVIEW

Kerala is more than a tiny exotic subtropical segment of the second most popular country in the world. The twenty nine million Keralites in this densely populated state have won an international reputation for having accomplished high level of health, education and social welfare generally. Kerala is an experiment in radical reforms as a modern development strategy (Richard Frankei and Barbara Chasin, 1992; Olle Tornquist and Michael Tharakan, 1996).

Panchayats And Participatory Planning - Historical Perspective

Kerala had a chequered history in the sphere of democratic decentralisation. Before the formation of Kerala State, the Madras Village Panchayat Act, 1950 was in force in the Malabar area and the Travancore Cochin Panchayat Act, 1950 was in force in the Travancore Cochin area. After the formation of Kerala State, various committees have been appointed from time to time to suggest measures for decentralisation. Simultaneously several bills were introduced in the Kerala legislative assembly for this purpose. It all started with the Administrative Reforms Committee, 1957 headed by the then Chief Minister E.M.S. Namboodiripad. The Report proposed for two tier set up of panchayats and municipalities at the grass roots and district councils at the district level (Government of Kerala, 1958). But these bills could not become law as the government was dismissed on 31st July 1959 by the centre. The government headed by Pattom Thanu Pillai which followed the E.M.S. government
succeeded in enacting three bills, viz, the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, 1960, the Kerala Municipalities Act, 1960 and the Kerala Municipal Corporation Act 1961. The Kerala Panchayati Act, 1960 unified, consolidated and reformed the law relating to panchayats of Malabar and Travancore Cochin area so as to enable them to function as units of self governments embracing all important aspects of village life as provided for in Article 40 of the Constitution (Siby Mathew, 1992). Even then the grama panchayats confined to traditional civic functions and the departmental control continued to prevail over the autonomy.

In 1964, the Kerala Panchayat Union Council and Zilla Parishad Bills were introduced in the State Assembly by the Sankar government. Before the bill could be enacted, this Ministry also fell.

In March 1967, the Ministry headed by E.M.S. Namboodiripad introduced a Bill called Kerala Panchayati Raj Bill, 1967 in the Assembly, which envisaged a two-tier system of Panchayati Raj at the village level and the district level, and the induction of an organic link between the two tiers by putting the grama panchayat under the supervision and control of Zilla Panchayats. This Bill also could not become law, as the State Assembly was dissolved in August 1970. This Bill was later reintroduced with certain amendments, as the Kerala District Administration Bill, 1971. This Bill also encountered the same fate.

In 1978, the Kerala District Administration Bill was once again introduced after certain alterations and it was passed in 1979. The new Left Front Government that came into power in 1980 issued a number of notifications and rules as a prelude to implementation of the Act. But this also could not be implemented as the Ministry collapsed in 1981.
In 1982, the new Congress government wanted the Act to be modified before implementation. A committee for proposing necessary amendments was accordingly set up. But the matter rested till 1987. In 1987, the Left Front Government again came to power. The new government appointed a special advisor to advise on measures to be undertaken for democratic decentralisation. The Committee’s Report submitted in 1988 was a comprehensive review of the provisions of the 1979 Act. It also included a set of suggestions for rectifying the anomalies in the Act. Even though the recommendations were not fully implemented they served as the basis of the 1991-92 experiment in District councils.

On 29th January 1991, the first elections to the District Councils were held. The provisions of reservations for SC/ST and women made in the Act enabled the marginalised sections of the society to participate in the development process. The state government which came to power in 1992 had little sympathy for the opposition led District Councils and it faced little difficulty in interfering and seriously restricting the powers of the District Councils in a perfectly legal manner (Gulati, I.S 1994).

Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, 1994

The 73rd constitutional amendment envisaged three tier structure for the Panchayati Raj Institutions. In accordance with the 73rd constitutional amendment provisions have to be made in the state enactments relating to panchayats. The State Government consider that instead of making amendments to the existing Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, it would be better to enact a new Panchayati Raj Act incorporating the provisions in accordance with the 73rd constitutional amendments. Accordingly, the State Legislature enacted Kerala Panchayati Raj, 1994 (Dominic Johnson, 2001).
In accordance with the new legislation, the newly elected local bodies of grama panchayat, block panchayat and district panchayat came into power in October 1995.

In 1999 the Government of Kerala introduced comprehensive amendments to the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, incorporating the recommendations of the Sen Committee. The Amendments reduced the scope for governmental interference in the day-to-day affairs of local bodies. The resolutions of the local bodies can be cancelled only in extraordinary circumstances. Dissolutions of local bodies would have to follow a due rigorous process and also only after obtaining advise from the statutorily constituted body of Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is empowered to check malfeasance in the discharge of developmental functions, order corrective measures and enforce penal provision. On the basis of the principles of subsidiarity, complementarity and role clarity as recommended by the Sen Committee the functions and powers of different tiers of local bodies are redefined under the enactment (Dominic Johnson, 2001).

The amendment emphasised people’s participation in the functioning of local bodies. “Genuine participation consists of dialog and partnership leading to full involvement in decision making, in the allocation and utilization of resources meant for collective good. Thus, it is a people centered view of local self-government that the committee has taken. The citizen is on the front stage; it is his voice that has to be listened to; it in his choice that has to be accepted and it is his interest that has to be preserved. The Committee has endeavoured to fashion the legislative framework which embodies this vision” (Committee on Decentralisation of powers, 1997, p.3). Every ordinary citizen has the right and opportunity to intervene in the functioning of local bodies by participating in the gramasabhas.
Another major effort to enlarge the legal entitlement of local bodies is the introduction of Kerala Decentralisation of Powers (Amendment) Bill, 2000. With these amendments it is expected that the local government would emerge as a well defined tier in government working more as a partner than as a subordinate functionary. It is also hoped that this legislative exercise would be a trend setter for the future when the local government implications of most of the legislations would be a significant and would have to be taken into account in the legislature process (Committee on Decentralisation of Powers, 1999).

**Sen Committee Report**

The Government of Kerala had appointed a High Power Committee under the Chairmanship of Dr. Satya Brata Sen on 4th July 1996 to consider and recommend modifications for decentralisation of powers under the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 (Government of Kerala, 1996-a). It was intended to make suggestions to enable local self governments to contribute effectively to the development process, particularly, the creation of assets and to ensure public participation and transparency in local administration.

The Committee had submitted its Interim Report on 4th August 1996. The major recommendation in the Interim Report of the Committee have been approved by the Cabinet on 17th September 1997.

The main suggestion of the Committee is that the importance now accorded to the block and district level administrative machineries shall be given to Block Panchayats and District Panchayats. The District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) may be wound up and the District Panchayat can carry out the function of the DRDA. The staff of the DRDA must be transferred to the District Panchayat.
The Committee has also made recommendations for strengthening the audit system by introducing performance audit. There shall be an autonomous auditing commission headed by experts. Regular social auditing in gramasabha is the most effective measure against corruption.

The Committee recommended for fixing a set of norms for preparation and implementation of various developmental schemes and projects. The panel of technically qualified persons from the local areas may be constituted to offer assistance in the implementation of schemes.

Both the administrative and technical sanctions for schemes formulated by the panchayats shall be accorded at the local level itself. The local self government shall have the right to re-deploy staff from various departments under its control.

The Sen Committee has also recommended for the setting up of functional committees in all gram panchayats to deal with specific functions.

Transparency in decision making should be ensured in all local bodies. All information should be made available to the public for scrutiny, note taking and copying. Transparency is the best guarantee against nepotism and corruption.

In order to ensure greater involvement of people, particularly the poor, in all the stages of the development process, participatory structures like neighbourhood groups may be set up as supportive structures of the gramasabha and ward committees (Committee on Decentralisation of Power, 1997, p.20). The gramasabha should meet as frequently as possible, at any rate not less than once in three months. As gramasabhas are critical institutions in ensuring people's participation they need to be strengthened (Government of Kerala, 1998). Failure to convene the gramasabha
shall be deemed to be a violation of the provisions of Kerala Panchayati Raj Act and calls for penal action.

Community Initiative

The idea of participatory planning for local development has been shown to be materialised by the voluntary organisation of Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishad. The result of their efforts was remarkable. Their effort in the field of literacy, the Ernakulam Model is acclaimed across the world and is replicated elsewhere in India (Michael Tharakan 1990). The resultant literacy has provided a sound base for a mass initiative in the field of environment protection, gender equality and women's empowerment. Thus, social development in Kerala has been the contribution of an awakened and vigilant public.

The expansion of literacy has given an initiative for participatory planning which has been successfully operationalised by the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad in Kallyaseri Panchayat in Kannur District. Through these voluntary activities, various methods, methodology and techniques for participatory planning were developed which led to statutory sanctions.

Planning By the People-Kerala Experience

The People's Campaign for Ninth Five Year Plan, the instrument for decentralised planning in Kerala was launched in 17th August 1996 (Government of Kerala, 1996). The aims of the Campaign were: (i) to make available to the local bodies, official and non-official experts, (ii) ensure support of the masses and (iii) facilitate comprehensive area planning. Every local body was to draw up active year plan related to the functions devolved on them in a transparent, participatory
and time bound manner (State Planning Board, 1996-a). The broad plan of action was set out in the Approach paper titled as ‘People’s Campaign for Ninth Plan.’

Initiation of the Peoples’ Campaign opened many novel possibilities addressing numerous issues which had come up in the context of the functioning of panchayats (Gulati I.S and Thomas Isaac 1998; Thomas Isaac and Harilal 1997; Bandhopadyay 1997; Chattopadhyay 1998). 35-40 per cent of the Ninth Plan Programme will consist of schemes formulated and implemented by the local bodies with respective areas of their responsibilities.

Objectives of the People’s Planning Campaign

The core of this People’s Planning Campaign is to make use of the legacy of collective social intervention and the strength of mass movement to meet the contemporary crisis in development (State Planning Board 1996-b). The most important objectives of the People’s Planning Campaign can be enumerated as:

(i) People’s participation should be ensured in the Ninth plan. The local bodies in the three tier system should decide how the 35-40 per cent of the plan funds to be utilized under their supervision. The priorities should be made on the basis of discussions done in gramasabhas.

(ii) A new vision of development is to be grown in the minds of the people by participating all of them in the various steps of the plan. The optimism, hope and determination shall be cultivated in their minds so as to utilize the unutilized resources including manpower for local development.
(iii) The Campaign is also an attempt to empower the local bodies. Financial crisis, administrative interruptions, lack of proper power etc. can be removed after organising the whole people at the state for the power of decentralisation.

(iv) The People’s Planning Campaign will help to formulate and implement the various schemes that had already been handed over to the local bodies. Voluntary activities and local financial collection can be used to increase the efficiency of the plan funds (State Planning Board, 1996 - b).

A New Development Culture

The People’s Planning Campaign seeks to motivate and bring together the following groups of people in every locality in the preparation of the Ninth Plan.

(i) The elected representatives themselves were made aware of their responsibilities and equipped for a new style of team work.

(ii) The officials were re-oriented to shoulder the planning responsibility under the direction of panchayats.

(iii) The expertise of the locally available non-officials was made available to the local bodies. Unlike most villages in India, every village in Kerala has a large number of educated people. Many of them have technical and professional qualifications as well as practical work experience. The Campaign strives to motivate all of them to come out and actively participate in local level planning.
(iv) The means of the people who remained a passive object of an impersonal remote controlled development process were awakened and energized for new democratic participatory approach to improve their own daily lives.

(v) The mass organisation of people were oriented to mobilise their members for common development initiatives that cut across party politics and conventional decisions.

By this, it is hoped to create an atmosphere for a new development culture, devoid narrow party politics and rivalries on issues hardly touch people’s lives (Rath, R.K. 1997).

Organisational Structure of the Campaign

The framework of the Campaign is illustrated in figure 4.1. The State Planning Board is the implementing agency for the Campaign (Government of Kerala, 1996-b). The basic organisational structure of the Campaign emerged is in the form of Key Resource Persons (KRP) at the State level, District Resource Persons (DRP) at the district level and Local Resource Persons (LRP) at the local level, while the KRP is to function directly under District Planning Council (DPC), the District Resource Persons (DRP) and Local Resource Persons (LRP) are attached to the Block and Grama Panchayat/Municipalities respectively.
Figure 4.1
Organisational structure of the campaign

High Level Guidance Council

State Planning Board

Campaign Cell

District Planning Office

Convener

KRP

Convener

DRP

Convener

LRP

Co-ordination Committee

Local Administration Department

Rural Development Department

District Planning Council

Panchayat Director

Municipal Director

Deputy Director

Regional Director

District Rural Development Agency

Block

Grama Panchayat

Municipal Corporation

Panchayat Office

Municipal Office

Source: State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram

KRP - Key Resource Persons
DRP - District Resource Persons
LRP - Local Resource Persons
The People's Campaign for Planning was organised in a phased manner with clearly defined objectives for each phase. The graphical representation of the objectives of different phases is shown in Figure 4.2.

The diagram shows the phases of the campaign with objectives such as resource assessment, development planning, and task force implementation. The phases are labelled I, II, III, IV, V, and VI, with corresponding activities and stakeholders such as VTC, Study Teams, Seminar, and Task Force.

Different phases of People's Campaign for Planning
Phase I

The objective of the first phase of the campaign was to identify the felt needs of the people in every locality. This was to be undertaken by the gramasabhas in panchayat areas and ward sabhas in municipalities. Given the large size of the grama panchayats in Kerala with fifteen thousand to twenty thousand voters in each, each ward was defined to be a separate gramasabha. Thus, in a panchayat there are as many gramasabhas as the number of wards. In the municipal areas, the Municipal Act recognised only ward committees. However, for the purpose of the Campaign, general body meetings of all the voters in each municipal ward were convened.

In order to ensure greater participation as well as greater in-depth analysis of the local problems, each gramasabha, after a brief inaugural session split into small groups for discussion. There were to be twelve such groups—one each for the major development sectors such as agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, industry, education, health, drinking water, culture, co-operation and resource mobilisation (Charvak, 2000). Trained resource persons acted as facilitators with the help of semi-structured questionnaires. At the end of the discussion, the problems identified were listed and solutions were sought for them. They were also noted and presented at the plenary session. Thus, at the conclusion of gramasabha, every grama panchayat had a fairly comprehensive needs list as identified by the people.

A review undertaken by the State Planning Board revealed the extent of participation in gramasabha. The extent of participation varied widely among the districts as exhibited in Table 4.1. The average participation in the gramasabha was only 180. Although it was much higher than the legal quorum of 50, the fact
remains that majority of the people did not attend the gramasabha (Gulati, I.S. and Thomas Isaac T.M. 1998, p.7).

Table 4.1
District-wise participation in gramasabha
(In percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Average Number of Participants</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>SC/SCT</th>
<th>Officials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thiruvananthapuram</td>
<td>181.17</td>
<td>34.91</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kollam</td>
<td>178.21</td>
<td>25.14</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>8.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathanamthitta</td>
<td>156.27</td>
<td>29.88</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alappuzha</td>
<td>205.26</td>
<td>29.35</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>7.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kollayam</td>
<td>148.36</td>
<td>23.85</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>7.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idukki</td>
<td>205.21</td>
<td>19.26</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>14.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernakulam</td>
<td>189.79</td>
<td>19.04</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>8.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrissur</td>
<td>150.60</td>
<td>26.95</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palakkad</td>
<td>168.11</td>
<td>20.09</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>9.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malappuram</td>
<td>193.40</td>
<td>26.69</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>6.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kozhikode</td>
<td>214.18</td>
<td>27.72</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayanad</td>
<td>215.58</td>
<td>19.99</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>8.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kannur</td>
<td>166.57</td>
<td>21.24</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasargod</td>
<td>198.41</td>
<td>20.96</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Average</td>
<td>179.67</td>
<td>24.82</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>5.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 had endowed the gramasabhas with substantial powers and functions. The law mandates that the recommendations of the gramasabha must be given due consideration. The gramasabhas are to participate in the preparation and monitoring of the panchayat development plans to mobilise resources through voluntary labour and to help in the selection of beneficiaries.

Phase II

The second phase of the campaign was devoted to making an objective assessment of the natural and human resources and the related development tasks was made through systematic recording, data collection, rapid appraisal techniques such as 'transit walks' and semi official review of ongoing programmes. This culminated in the preparation of development reports. Apart from local history and natural resource appraisal, the reports contained separate chapters for each development sector, based on historical and objective analysis of the development problems, a draft list of recommendations was drawn up. These recommendations represented a list of solutions to the problem raised by the local people.

These reports formed the basic material for discussions at the development seminars organized by the panchayats. The representatives of gramasabhas participated in the seminars. The bureaucrats and development experts were also invited in the seminars to express their views. The development seminars were the nodal event of the second phase of the campaign. As can be seen from Table 4.2 on an average, two hundred and thirty one delegates attended each development seminars. The number ranged from one hundred and seventy five delegates in Kottayam to two hundred and eighty in Kozhikode. At the end of these seminars, a list of recommendations of possible development projects emerged for each of the
sectors. All the seminars concluded after selecting ten to twelve task forces, one for each of the major development sectors.

Table 4.2

Participation in Development Seminars (1996)  
(In percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Average Number of Participants</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Officials</th>
<th>SC/ST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thiruvananthapuram</td>
<td>234.61</td>
<td>29.48</td>
<td>13.05</td>
<td>12.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kollam</td>
<td>291.57</td>
<td>22.34</td>
<td>12.33</td>
<td>12.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathanamthitta</td>
<td>203.00</td>
<td>22.64</td>
<td>13.13</td>
<td>13.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alappuzha</td>
<td>253.33</td>
<td>25.40</td>
<td>9.57</td>
<td>12.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kottayam</td>
<td>175.89</td>
<td>26.60</td>
<td>11.23</td>
<td>12.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idukki</td>
<td>205.29</td>
<td>22.64</td>
<td>9.41</td>
<td>16.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ernakulam</td>
<td>196.57</td>
<td>23.20</td>
<td>15.58</td>
<td>9.78</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thrissur</td>
<td>220.75</td>
<td>22.95</td>
<td>11.99</td>
<td>10.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palakkad</td>
<td>197.10</td>
<td>19.35</td>
<td>18.13</td>
<td>10.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malappuram</td>
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<td>18.93</td>
<td>14.55</td>
<td>9.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kozhikode</td>
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<td>13.39</td>
<td>15.97</td>
<td>6.58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wayanad</td>
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<td>27.18</td>
<td>11.61</td>
<td>9.82</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kannur</td>
<td>250.62</td>
<td>18.34</td>
<td>17.49</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasargod</td>
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<td>17.44</td>
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<td>7.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Average</td>
<td>231.23</td>
<td>22.11</td>
<td>13.79</td>
<td>10.50</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Phase III

The third phase of the Campaign started with the formation of task forces at the development seminars. The task forces were to draw up projects with quantifiable objectives, technical and financial details, organisational and monitoring specifications and even a descriptive social cost benefit analysis. The local plan was not to be a list of proposals but a shelf of projects with all the details finalised.

The task forces were the key organisation of the third phase. On an average twelve task forces were constituted in each local body to cover various development sectors (Gulati, I.S. and Thomas Isaac T.M. 1998, p.10). Each task force consisted of officials of the related departments, non-official experts and volunteers. An elected representative was the chairperson. At the end of the third phase, every local body had a shelf of projects, corresponding to the problems identified at the gramasabhas. Obviously the quality of projects varied with respect to technical and financial details. Many of them required corrections before they could be implemented. A review undertaken by the State Planning Board showed that the task forces did not function as effectively as expected. The main weakness was that adequate number of experts could not be attracted to the task forces (Gulati, I.S. and Thomas Isaac T.M. 1998, p.11). According to the opinion of Key Resource persons, at least in one-third of the panchayats, the projects were prepared by a core-team of activists rather than through the task forces (See Table 4.3). In only 12 percentage of the panchayats were all the task forces fully active.
Table 4.3

Assessment of Key Resource Persons regarding the effectiveness of Task Forces in the Gramapanchayats by District

(In percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>All task forces fully effective</th>
<th>Some task forces fully effective</th>
<th>Task force partially effective</th>
<th>Projects written by core group of members</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thiruvananthapuram</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>28.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kollam</td>
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<td>15.2</td>
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<td>33.1</td>
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<td>100</td>
</tr>
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<td>Kottayam</td>
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<td>32.5</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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<td>Idukki</td>
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<td>28.3</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernakulam</td>
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<td>30.7</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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<td>Thrissur</td>
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<td>28.7</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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<td>33.4</td>
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<td>Malappuram</td>
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<td>18.8</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>25.7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>27.5</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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<td>17.5</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Average</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase IV

The fourth phase of the Campaign involved the actual formulation of the panchayat or municipal plans. As the Ninth plan allocation for the local bodies came to be clearly known, that is 35-40 percent of the total outlay, proposals and schemes were selected from the shelf of project that had been prepared by the task forces. Though the local bodies were free to choose any project based on their own priorities, certain broad guidelines were issued by the State Planning Board (Table 4.4). The different development sectors were grouped under three broad categories: (a) productive sector (b) service sector and (c) infrastructure sector. It was prescribed that forty to fifty percent of the grant-in-aid should be used for productive sectors, thirty to forty percent for the service sector and a ceiling of thirty percent was placed on the amount that could be spent for infrastructure sectors.

Table 4.4

Guidelines on Sectoral Allocation Indicated to the Local Bodies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Subsector</th>
<th>Rural local Bodies</th>
<th>Urban local Bodies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Productive</td>
<td>Agriculture, Animal husbandry, Fisheries, Minor Irrigation, Small Scale Industries</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>20-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Education, Health, Sanitation Drinking water, Social Welfare Nutrition, Housing, Culture etc.</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>40-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>Roads, Bridges, Energy, Builds for General Administration</td>
<td>10-30</td>
<td>10-35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within each tier the allotment was made entirely on the basis of population of each local body. Taking population, the sole criteria has drawn widespread criticisms. The importance of a composite criterion taking into account the backwardness and geographical area of the locality was officially accepted. The major stumbling block lay in the absence of sufficient data at the gramapanchayat level for an objective assessment of the degree of backwardness. (Thomas Isaac T.M. and Richard Frankei, 2000, p.177).

Phase V

The fifth phase started with the organisation of district and block level development seminars and integration of the local plans at the block and district level.

Every block panchayat was to prepare a printed Development Report in which the problems identified in the Development Report of the gramapanchayats in the block area and the type of projects included in their plans were integrated for each sector. The vision of decentralised planning in the original approach paper approved by the State Planning Board was for a bottom up process; the gramapanchayats should first prepare their plans, then the block panchayats and the district panchayats would draft plans that took the gramapanchayat plans into consideration (Government of Kerala, 1996).

A seven point methodology for preparing the situation analysis and identification of development proposal was formulated for each development sector. The first step is to prepare a statement of the current situation in the block or districts. This should start with a statement of the level of productivity or the quality of services
in that sector. For agriculture, the situation analysis would begin with a statement of the cropping pattern in the block followed by an analysis of the productivity of each crop.

The next step is to analyse the reason for the current state of affairs in that development sector. For agriculture, it might be the existence of cultivable wasteland or the low productivity of particular crop or of all crops.

Comprehensive discussion can be undertaken on the basic problem of the block using the analysis of panchayat Development Reports and the secondary data available at the block level. It was also suggested that an attempt should be made to produce a map showing the problem. To facilitate this, four maps of the block - administrative, landform, drainage and soil type were prepared and made available to each block.

The fourth step is to analyse the projects that are proposed by the grama panchayats. In this step, the block panchayat could assess the degree of correspondence between problem and projects of panchayats.

The next step in block level planning was to review ongoing schemes. The fifth step is to codify and analyse the recommendations made by grama panchayat to the higher levels.

Once these five steps are completed the block panchayats were to draw up an assessment of the development possibilities and put forth a list of the projects proposals they could take up.

The seventh and concluding part of the analysis should include a statement of the development perspective underlyng their proposals.
Each district panchayat also has to prepare a development report integrating the analysis and programmes of the lower tiers. The guidelines for the preparation for the projects and plan document for the district panchayats are also similar to those of grama panchayats and block panchayats.

Because of the delay in the preparation of the grama panchayat plans, the integration of the plan of different tiers could not be effectively undertaken. As a result there were many instances of duplication between various tiers (Thomas Isaac T.M. 1999, p.38).

Phase VI

The sixth phase was to examine the technical feasibility and acceptability of the project included in the plan of local bodies. This was done by an agency named Voluntary Technical Corps (VTC). The VTC was constituted at every Block Panchayats, Municipalities and Corporation as per the G.O. (MS) No.8/97/Plg. dated 16.5.1997 (Government of Kerala, 1997-a). Any retired and non-official expert who was willing to spend at least one day a week to render voluntary help to the panchayat was enrolled in the VTC (State Planning Board, 1997).

The VTC was to be essentially an advisory body to the District Planning Committee. In no cases the VTCs interfered in the priorities fixed by the local bodies. Their role was only technical and advisory. This is clarified in the Government orders mentioned above as “the VTC/PAT (Plan Appraisal Team)/ DLEC (District Level Expert Committee) shall confine its role strictly in providing expertise to determine the technical and financial viability of projects. They shall not have any power to interfere with the priorities set by the local bodies. They shall have no right to select
or reject the projects approved by the local bodies. Their duties are confined to the approval of technical feasibility and financial viability and necessary corrections and modifications to the projects to rectify deficiencies. Such modifications are to be made in consultation with the consent of the representatives of the local bodies concerned” (Government of Kerala, 1997-a).

The VTC/PAI (Plan Appraisal Team) were renamed as Block Level Expert Committee (BLEC), Municipal Level Expert Committee (MLEC), and Corporation Level Export Committee (CLEC) as per the Government Order G.O. (MS) No. 21/97/Plg. dated 7.11.98. The Government order not only changed the name but also enhanced the powers of expert committees (Government of Kerala, 1997-b).

Despite all these efforts, the technical sanction process took off slowly (Thomas Isaac and Richard Frankei, 2000, p.29). Table 4.5 reveals the obstacles to the effective functioning of the Expert Committees. Twenty-eight percentage of VTC and 34% of KRP's considered that the delay in the submission of the projects of local bodies was the most serious impediment in the smooth functioning of the committee. The delay in the issue of technical sanction was largely caused by the delays in preparing the detailed estimates.
### Table 4.5

Assessment of VTC and Key Resource Persons regarding obstacles to the Effective Functioning of the Expert Committees

(In percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>Opinion of VTC</th>
<th>Opinion of Key Resource Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The most serious problem</td>
<td>Second serious problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-cooperation of officials</td>
<td>17.56</td>
<td>7.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective coordination</td>
<td>9.37</td>
<td>6.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate VTC</td>
<td>9.37</td>
<td>10.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delays in project submission</td>
<td>28.34</td>
<td>12.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory performance of convenor</td>
<td>7.49</td>
<td>4.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delays in submission of modified projects</td>
<td>10.77</td>
<td>12.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate facilities and support</td>
<td>9.37</td>
<td>12.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-receipt of TA and other expenditure</td>
<td>7.73</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Respondents</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>30.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The decentralisation experiment in Kerala is a genuine attempt at planning from below. The basic unit of planning hither to all over India was the district. In contrast, in the new decentralisation experiment in Kerala the gramapanchayats and municipalities are the basic unit of planning. For the first time, gramapanchayats in India are drawing up their own five year plans.

The roots of democracy lie undoubtedly in the participation of people in the ruling process. Thus democracy becomes more meaningful and stronger enough through better people's participation in development works. This does not mean that decentralisation is a one line solution for all problems and struggles in the country. But such a step will surely help to boost the morale of the people who struggle against the exploitative propensities and social inequalities prevalent in the country. Decentralisation is a major tool for national planning and thus the Ninth plan process of Kerala comes up as a model for the whole country to emulate (Rama Kumar, R. 1997 pp.103).
Reference


