Chapter VII

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The concept of decentralised planning was accepted in principle in India even before independence. The importance and need for planning from below has also been recognised from the era of planned development. An experimental attempt in this direction was made through Community Development Programme. The centralised system of planning followed in India, imposing a uniform set of development programmes without giving due regard to the heterogenous conditions of the country failed to tackle many of the problems of mass poverty and unemployment at its grass root level. The planning to be more meaningful, must meet the felt needs of the people and tackle the local level problems effectively. People’s participation is very essential for the success of any planning. Planning from below specially address the task of identifying local needs, harness the available local resources and manpower fully, formulate schemes consistent with the felt needs of the people and are implemented with people’s participation. Kerala state enacted the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, as mandated in 73rd constitutional amendment for the formation of three tier Panchayati Raj Institutions. The People’s Planning Programme, as the means for decentralised planning, was launched in the Ninth Five Year Plan of the state to translate the spirit of the state legislation enacted as enshrined in Part IX and Part IX A of the Constitution of India incorporated under 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments. It envisages the transfer of power and resources to the local bodies at the grass root level by devolving 35-40 percentage of the state annual plan out lay to formulate their own plans and programmes and to ensure people’s participation in decision making and implementation process.
The present study was initiated, as stated at the introductory part, with the following objectives:

1. To study the evolution of decentralised planning in India,

2. To examine the process of People’s Planning Programme in Kerala

3. To evaluate the People’s Planning Programme at the gramapanchayat level

4. To make suggestions to improve the process.

In regard to the first objective, the study reveals that decentralised planning in India is still in its infancy inspite of repeated efforts of the various governments from first fire year plan onwards. But the gratifying thing to note is that the idea has been gaining strength through successive five year plans. The 73rd and the 74th Constitutional amendments provided the base for deepening democracy at grass root level. The amendments compelled the states to enact statutes for the formation of Local Self Governments with uniform structure for rural and urban areas as separate compartments. But the Constitution barred formation of integrated elected governments at the district level comprising both rural and urban areas. Hence, further constitutional amendment is required for the realisation of the dream of the founding father of the nation with respect to ‘Gramaswaraj’.

With respect to the second objective, the study reveals that People’s Planning Programme was organised in the state taking gramapanchayat as a basic unit. The plans are prepared in a phased manner. First, grama sabha is convened for the identification of the felt needs of the people. Then development seminars are organised to suggest solutions for the problems identified by the grama sabha. The
task forces that are constituted to projectise the various proposals and suggestions emerged in the development seminars do so and then prioritising the projects to integrate them into the five year plans of the panchayats. Thereafter plan documents are prepared by the block and district panchayats. Finally the technical and financial viability of the projects prepared are examined before implementation.

In regard to the third objective, evaluation of People’s Planning Programme, was done in dual ways - General and Scheme-wise. The general evaluation was done by mainly considering financial aspects, extent of public participation, political discrimination, corruption and other related issues.

The general evaluation reveals that the notable non-conventional sources of financing made available to local plans are beneficiary and voluntary contributions. The People’s Planning Programme has been more development oriented than the pre-existing centralised planning system. This has helped to record a higher growth rate of 3.82% in agricultural production and 7% in industrial sector during 1998-99 period.

Trend of participation of people in planning and implementation of programmes does not show any encouraging sign. This is an indication that majority of the people are not inspired by the programme. The disturbing fact is that the initial enthusiasm is waning and people are distancing themselves away from the programme. The chi-square test of independence conducted to assess the role of sex, education and occupation in determining the level of participation of people reveals that education and occupation have no significant influence in participation in the gramasabha, but sex has some influence. In the implementation of the
programme, sex and education have no significant role while occupation has some role.

People of all political faith attended the gramasabha meetings and implementation of the programme. But participation of people owing allegiance to LDF outnumbered irrespective of the political colour of the parties ruling the panchayats.

There was allegation of political patronage in the distribution of individual beneficiary schemes. So data were collected to find out the veracity of such allegations. Data reveal that CPI(M) followers had a narrow edge over others.

The patronage in the selection of beneficiaries and corruption in the execution of public works as opinioned by majority of the respondents confirmed the allegations highlighted in the print as well as visual media. This is corroborated by indictment of the authorities by the Comptroller and Auditor General for violating the guidelines and flouting the principles of finance management. In spite of all these allegations and shortcomings the respondents are of the view that People’s Planning Programme is better than the pre-existing system of planning.

The scheme-wise evaluation was done by taking nine major schemes on which panchayats gave much importance. They are, Group farming, lift and well irrigation in the productive sector, housing, drinking water and sanitation (latrines) in the service sector; and roads, electrification and public buildings in the infrastructure sector.

The study reveals that the area under paddy cultivation and its production was showing a decreasing trend while the productivity was showing a fluctuating
trend. Land reform measures implemented in the state resulted in widespread fragmentation of agricultural land. Group farming was introduced as a remedial measure in the agricultural sector. Group farming showed positive impact on production and productivity and decreased cost of cultivation. The paired one-tailed t-test conducted confirmed the success of the scheme statistically. Majority of the beneficiaries are of the view that group farming is essential for the sustainability of paddy cultivation.

Lift irrigation projects selected were executed through beneficiary committees by mobilising local man power resources through ‘sramadanam’. The analysis of the impact of the projects revealed that the scheme helped to increase production and productivity and decreased cost for coconut cultivation which is the crop benefited most under the scheme. The paired one-tailed t-test statistically proved the success of the scheme. The lift irrigation scheme collaterally benefitted the beneficiaries in getting drinking water through sweepage to the wells.

Irrigation wells were constructed to exploit ground water resources in the areas where surface water was not available. Fifty percentage of the total cost for constructing irrigation wells, subject to maximum of Rs. 3000/- were provided by the panchayats from their plan allocation and the rest was met by the beneficiaries. The crop benefited most out of this scheme, as in the earlier case is coconut. The project had increased production of crops and decreased their costs. The paired one-tailed t-test conducted confirmed this conclusion.

Housing and sanitary (latrine) schemes were direct beneficiary schemes implemented in the service sector. Here the beneficiaries were given plan fund assistance in cash directly by the panchayats. If the cost exceeded the assistance
rendered, the excess cost incurred was met by the beneficiaries. Most of the beneficiaries used the housing scheme assistance to construct concrete buildings which entailed excess costs. To meet the excess cost almost all of them availed bank loans. Even though the beneficiaries got new houses under the scheme they fell into debt. Similar is the case in the sanitary latrine scheme also. Such situation arouse as the assistance was meagre. But the positive aspects of these schemes are that they got decent dwelling facilities under the housing scheme and better sanitary latrine conditions under the sanitary latrine scheme which helped to improve their health and hygiene in the locality.

Drinking water was made available through piped water supply schemes in areas where drinking water was not easily available. The selected drinking water supply projects executed in the highly elevated hilly areas substantially reduced the distance and time for fetching drinking water. The time so saved enables the beneficiaries to use it for other constructive purposes. Cost-benefit analysis of these schemes showed that these projects are almost economically and socially viable.

Construction of roads and public buildings through beneficiary committees liberated construction works from the clutches of contractors and also reduced construction costs considerably. Cost reduction was effected mainly through beneficiary contribution and execution at estimate rate less contractor’s profit. The selected road and building works were executed by the beneficiary committees by mobilising additional local resources in the form of beneficiary contribution. It aroused a sense of participation of people in governance, execution and enjoyment. There was transparency in the execution of works by the beneficiaries. It is subjected to social, performance and governmental audit which guaranteed quality of the work.
The works generated additional employment avenues and satisfied the social necessities of the locality.

Electrification scheme, even though socially commendable and useful to people, cast an additional burden on the local bodies. This forced them to keep apart a sizeable chunk of their income to discharge the liabilities. Prior to this scheme repairs and replacement of damaged and fused lamps were done irregularly and occasionally by the Electricity Board. But after the implementation of the scheme repairs and replacement are done regularly and promptly by the panchayats. This has resulted in higher costs for the local administration.

People’s Planning Programme is bold and innovative in many ways. The success of this programme is expected to have wider acceptance not only within but also outside the country. But the programme was taken up without proper devolution of powers and delineation of authority, both administrative and operational and without waiting the completion of the process of decentralisation. Even though the pursued handicaps were inseparable the programmes could have been made more meaningful and the schemes could have been made more operational if the people were armed with ideas after effecting devolution of powers to the grass root level.

On the basis of the findings of the study the followings suggestions are made for consideration of the policy makers to improve the present scenario.

People’s Resource Mapping Programme was developed to create the required data base with respect to human resource, human problems, village power structure and the value systems of people in the villages. The local bodies implemented the schemes identified and selected in the gramasabha but without much regard to
the resource endowments in the panchayats. The resource mapping with local participation should be promptly conducted for yielding better results.

Voluntary agencies who have intimate knowledge of the local situations and capacity to organise and mobilise local people and also committed to rural development should be assigned due role in implementation of programmes connected with development.

Whole hearted participation of the masses is the key to success of any effort at decentralisation. But the study shows that the interest of the people is waning in participating in the gramasabha. So the panchayats should take all measures to whip up the enthusiasm of people in participating all activities including attendance in gramasabhas. Convening gramasabhas in the afternoon on holidays with sufficient notice and publicity might enthuse people from different walks of life to attend and contribute.

In a state where literacy as well as unemployment is high, schemes should be selected to generate maximum employment with minimum cost. Better employment opportunities will facilitate greater participation.

There is serious criticisms of political discrimination in the selection of beneficiaries and projects. To eliminate such criticisms and to ensure justice, beneficiary list should be finalised in the gramasabha in which people from different walks of life participate. Sufficient notice to this effect should be given to ensure wider participation.

The main criticism levelled against People's Planning Programme is corruption. To minimise/reduce corruption the beneficiary list with the benefit awarded
to each beneficiary should be exhibited publicly in the notice board planted in the locality, public library, cultural centre, krishibhavans and panchayat offices. Likewise, for the public works also the amount sanctioned and other details should be exhibited before the commencement of the works and expenditure incurred and other details after the execution of the works should be audited and published.

The area of agricultural operation is diminishing over the years mainly because of high cost of cultivation and non-remunerative investment in the highly fragmented paddy fields. Under the existing form of group farming scheme, the farmers are adventuring in co-operative action for simultaneous cultivation of individual lands availing the subsidies granted under People’s Planning Programme. To save the vanishing trend of paddy cultivation and to minimise the costs further, group farming should be made for joint cultivation of individual farm lands so as to share the costs and yields on the basis of extent of land.

Direct beneficiary schemes (individual beneficiary schemes) implemented were mostly unproductive and a lot of criticism was there in the implementation of such programmes. Financial assistance to individuals under the direct beneficiary schemes should be recollected after a specified period without inflicting any burden of interest so as to recirculate the funds for the benefit of the needy people.

The tendency of constructing expensive houses on the basis of consumerist culture by availing loans over and above the financial assistance granted by the local bodies under the housing scheme plunged the beneficiaries into inescapable debt trap and consequently making them homeless should be dissuaded through imparting information regarding construction of low cost houses within the parameters prefixed by the authorities.
Entrustment of public works to the beneficiary committees for execution at the estimate rate less contractor's profit is a unique feature of the Programme. When the tendering system is thus avoided, there is the possibility of making the estimate at an inflated rate at the instance of contractors who intends to canvass the work as binamy beneficiary committee causing heavy loss to the public exchequer. Government should take all necessary measures to guard against such looting of public exchequer and payment should be made on the basis of actuals subject to strict verification and auditing.

Public works under the People's Planning Programme are being estimated by and executed under the supervision of the salaried technical staff of other departments or the retired hands drawing monthly pensions on payment of additional remuneration on commission basis in the absence of technical staff in the local bodies. Such engagements may be influenced by political or other considerations. Instead of engaging such people, qualified unemployed hands are to be engaged/appointed by local bodies jointly.

Poor accounting, book keeping and absence of auditing are the other major criticisms levelled against the programmes under People's Planning. The statutory provisions regarding publication of estimate and expenditure, the provision for social, performance and governmental auditing and the penal provisions should be strictly invoked.

The decentralisation of planning to the grass root level makes democracy more meaningful enabling to withstand the test of time. Undoubtedly, grass root level planning is the best method available and People's Planning Programme is the best means for implementing decentralised planning to address the developmental problems.