CHAPTER IV

E-GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES AND DECENTRALISED PLANNING IN KERALA

The present chapter analyses the efforts put up by the Government of Kerala for the installation of E-governance programme with defined objectives. It also discusses the major E–governance programmes and the role of the institution associated with these programmes in Kerala. The history and growth of decentralized planning in Kerala, its weakness and the role played by E-governance to ameliorate the difficulties associated with decentralized planning in Kerala are also discussed.

4.1 E-governance Initiatives in Kerala

The Government of Kerala has already implemented many citizen-friendly E-governance projects. The State Government is entrusted the process of reforming the way it works, shares information and deliver services to internal and external clients. E-governance does not stop at data collection in digital format. It has to convert raw data into useful information required for village-level planning. E-governance affects everyone, helps to build trust, collaborative, and engages people. The broad objectives of E-governance in Kerala are (Information Kerala Mission, 2005):

- To make Kerala a leader among states in India in using ICTs to achieve economic and social development, environmental and cultural promotion, and benefits to its people.
- Delivery of high-quality citizen-focused services.
- Improving overall performance as measured through better policy outcomes. The focus would be streamlining and re-engineering government processes and routines so as to obtain measurable benefits.
- Improving efficiency in revenue mobilization and public expenditure.
4.1.2 Various E-governance Programmes in Kerala

A large number of E-governance programme affecting all walks of life of citizens are being implemented in Kerala. The most important among them are summarised in the Table: 4.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programmes</th>
<th>Targeted Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FRIENDS</td>
<td>Single window schemes for Taxes and other utility projects. It integrated departments like Revenue, Motor vehicles, Civil supplies, Local bodies, Universities, Electricity, Water and Telephones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKSHAYA</td>
<td>Bridge Digital Divide, Public Delivery Services, Creation of employment, E-literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWAN (Secretariat)</td>
<td>Integration of Secretariat, Vikas Bhavan and Public Office. Paper less Filing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWAN (State)</td>
<td>Integration of various District Headquarters with Capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPARK</td>
<td>G2E Web based Personal Administration for service, Salary, IT and Account Matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KISSAN</td>
<td>Agriculture Information System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPCS.org</td>
<td>Transparent Window for Recruiting Govt. Officials in Kerala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-nabling Paddy Procurement</td>
<td>Using IT for Procurement, Processing, Marketing and Distribution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Filing of commercial tax returns</td>
<td>Paperless, Error free and Transparent tax collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATI</td>
<td>Avail Information about Kerala University at any Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWEET</td>
<td>All Information and Services Relating to Kerala University Examination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-Law</td>
<td>Digital filing, Speedy Digital Advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VDCCs</td>
<td>e-Literacy, Digital Inclusion with Social Equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutharyakeralam</td>
<td>Compliant and Grievance Handling directly by the Chief Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDEAS</td>
<td>File Tracking System for Government Offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MESSAGE</td>
<td>Internet based application for the citizen services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AASTHI</td>
<td>Automated e-Inventory Management of Computers and Related Equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPARSH</td>
<td>Information regarding Fair-value of land, PSC notifications, SPARK salary slip etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Krishi</td>
<td>Enables the farmers with access to information on market demand, prices, good agricultural practices and quality agricultural inputs supported by a technology enabled robust transaction platform that facilitates all their off line activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES @ Kerala</td>
<td>Provides soft skills and technical skills training to students from various colleges in the State</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Various Publications Kerala State IT Mission

A) FRIENDS

One of the very first and the most successful initiatives Government of Kerala put in place was the Fast Reliable Instant Effective Network for Distribution of Services (FRIENDS). The aim of the FRIENDS project is to create a single window, enabling the citizens to pay taxes and other utility payments. The project was first launched in Thiruvananthapuram Corporation in 2000. The participating departments were given the freedom to maintain payment counters in their office premises as well. The project was then rolled out to other districts. The FRIENDS counter today handles bill payments of seven departments – revenue, motor vehicles, civil supplies, local bodies, universities, electricity, water, and telephones. Close to around a million people have used the FRIENDS service so far and it is growing at about 150% every year. The FRIENDS centers were initially conceived as a multipurpose service center, helping not only bill payment services but also acting as information kiosks on government activities. But due to various constraints this has not been implemented so far, but the government recently has taken the lead and decided to set up a call center for the FRIENDS facilities. To start with, the Thiruvananthapuram facility was enabled with a call center that provided information to the citizens on various government procedures and norms. For instance, if anybody wants to acquire a ration card or a building permit, the person can just ring up the call center and get the procedural details.
B) The Akshaya Project

Launched in November 2002, Akshaya (perpetuating prosperity) is an effort on the part of the IT department to ‘bridge the digital divide’. By the end of the 3-year project, organizers hope to have set up a network of 6000 information centers that have the potential to impart basic IT literacy to at least one member in each of the 6.5 million families in Kerala; generate and distribute locally relevant content; improve public delivery of services; and create employment opportunities. The Akshaya project is being implemented through Panchayati Raj Institutions, and involves private enterprise in the development of training institutes and content generation. The project has helped in taking IT to the remotest part of Kerala- Malappuram. Incidentally, Malappuram has become the country’s first 100% e-Literate district. People of this district are today conversant with the use of IT and are even savvy with Internet usage. The project has created over 620 kiosks and generated employment to over 2500 people in the area. "With the success we have derived from Malappuram, the government has decided to replicate the Akshaya model in other districts of Kerala. Our vision is that by 2006, Kerala should become India’s first fully e-Literate State." (Sundararajan, 2000)

Akshaya e-Centers provide training that not only familiarizes people with the basics and scope of IT, but also ensures hands-on skill in operating a computer. The project aims at providing e-Literacy to one person in every family. A carefully designed content module in Malayalam of 15 hours duration per person is a major highlight of the project. The process of providing the skill sets is creating a long lasting relation between the Akshaya centers and the families in the area. On a macro level, this will generate a statewide data warehouse and repository of relevant content for the families. Around 6 lakhs people in Malappuram were trained since June 2003.

C) Secretariat Wide Area Network (SWAN)

A massive automation process of the state Secretariat, which houses 37 departments across six blocks, is in full swing. The project christened SWAN, will link
key areas of the Secretariat- the annex, Vikas Bhavan and the Public Office in a phased manner. These implementations will also scale up the current system: Secretariat Internet Communication System (SICS). Meanwhile, the government is also in the process of establishing a State Wide Area Network aimed at linking the various district head quarters with the capital. This infrastructure, once completed, will become a platform to deliver various E-governance services. Also, the government has decided to set up accelerated data centers at Kochi and Kozhikode. The bandwidth for interconnecting is also being given free of cost by the service providers - Asianet, Reliance and Bharathi.

D) Service and Payroll Administrative Repository for Kerala (SPARK)

SPARK is G2E web based Personnel Administration and accounts software for Government of Kerala covering 5.25 lakhs employees. Permanent Employee Number for all employees is allotted through the system (VS Raghunathan, 2009). The system addresses all requirements in Service, salary, Income Tax and Accounts matters. Centralised database helps in quick decision-making and applying rules and regulations uniformly for all employees. Activity driven procedure linked data capture is ensured. All reports are generated in PDF format. Provision is available to send alert messages to employees, when payments are credited. Provision to generate Identity Cards is another facility (Piyush Gupta, RK Bagga, 2008).

E) KISSAN

Karshaka Information Systems Services And Networking (KISSAN) is an integrated, multi-modal delivery of agricultural information system, which provides several dynamic and useful information and advisory services for the farming community across Kerala. It is one of the leading citizen centric E-governance projects of the Department of Agriculture, of Government of Kerala. The project was conceptualized, designed, developed, implemented and managed by the Indian Institute of Information Technology and Management- Kerala (IIITM-K) for the Department of Agriculture, Govt. of Kerala (www.kissankerala.net.2010). The project has matured, having served the farming community with for over five years. The core achievement is the integrated,
multi-modal delivery of Agriculture Information Services to farmers in a manner that is accessible anywhere, anytime.

F) KPSC.org

KPSC.org is considered as a transparent window to the recruitment of government officials in Kerala state. The online operation of the Kerala Public Service Commission (KPSC) selects itself, on the basis of its sheer size and reach. It has processed more than 10 million applications and advised 150946 candidates for appointment in the last ten years. The logistic challenge of handling such a vast human resource enabler prompted the Kerala government to automate as much as possible of the task. With help from the Centre for Development of Imaging Technology (C-DIT), KPSC launched its web window in September 2003.

G) E-enabling paddy procurement: The Supply Co way

The intervention of the Kerala State Civil Supplies Corporation, across the entire supply chain of the paddy ecosystem – procurement, processing, marketing and distribution -- has been one of the more dramatic illustrations in the state, of what information technology, appropriately applied, can do. In a fairly short time of less than three years, it has helped to transform a sluggish, system into one that is efficient, swift and a transformational tool for whose for whom it is a livelihood. Today in the districts of Kottayam, Pathanamthitta, Thrissur, Ernakulam and Malappuram, rice farming is once more a viable and attractive proposition for the farmer – thanks to the virtual elimination of the ‘middle man’ in the business.

Procurement is made directly by Supplyco, and the farmer receives, a Paddy Receipt Sheet (PRS), the duplicate goes to the Paddy Payment Officer (PPO) of Supplyco, before the paddy is sent to the mill. The miller in turn enters the details of paddy that is processed online and this is reconciled with the PRS, before the payment is transferred electronically to the farmer. The processed rice is checked by quality assurance officers before it is shipped to Supplyco’s outlets and the public distribution system. The system has registered over 50,000 farmers and over 60 rice mills who
process 250000 metric tonnes in every crop season. The payout within two weeks is typically Rs 250 crores (2.5 billion) (www.keralasupplyco.org). The web portal has multiple sites for farmers, millers, marketing officers, payment officer…as well as public interfaces, where one can locate farmers and mills in any panchayat, or register to be part of the procurement process.

H) E-Filing of Commercial Tax Returns

In January 2009, Kerala implemented the electronic filing of Value Added Tax (VAT) across the state – making it the first state in India to shift commercial tax collection to a paperless, online regime. For over 1, 60,000 registered dealers who now make use of the system; it has been a seamless, painless transition to a new Web-enabled era which promises to be transparent, error free and efficient – for all stakeholders. The change-over was implemented in stages, starting with the online facilitation of e-returns (there are 10 types of returns) and invoice details; e-declarations for movement of goods through the state’s commercial tax check posts and finally, from September 2009, VAT related payments went the e-way.

A simple but well designed web portal, facilitated this transition and for the benefit of dealers who might be challenged by having to do all their tax transactions online, the system also harnessed the presence of over 1500 Akshaya e-centers across the state as e-filing facilitators, allocating IDs and passwords to each centre. Dealers need only visit the nearest Akshaya centre to file their returns free of charge.

For e-payments, the Commercial Taxes Department has tied up with the State Bank of India and the State Bank of Travancore who enable instant payment into the government account as well as automatic credit to the dealers’ ledger.

With a wide area network (WAN) linking all commercial tax offices and major check posts in the state; with a secure SSL (Secure Socket Layer) transaction backbone and 24 by 7 by 365 availability, Kerala’s e-enablement of its commercial tax collection systems has been a pioneering effort and other states have expressed a keen interest in seeing how it works for Kerala – and adopting the system in a way that works for them as
well. Another milestone in the e-highway of Kerala’s commercial tax department was crossed on December 1 2009, when products coming under the Kerala GST – principally beverages and petroleum products, also moved to an e-filing regime.

I) E-governance in Higher Education.

Two Universities in Kerala have embraced information technology to make the entire teaching and administrative ecosystem more efficient, even while providing a friendly interface for all stake holders: teachers, parents and students (http://kucc.keralauniversity.edu). The details of the most significant portions of their IT-enabling initiatives – almost all of them achieved in-house, using substantially open source tools and solutions are given below.

Kerala University has developed E-governance projects like Any Time Information System (ATI), SWEET (System for Web-enabled Exam Transactions), and Web-enabled Management information system. The Computerization of University of Calicut started in 2000. The different computerized branches in University of Calicut are Finance Branch, Pareeksha Bhavan, University Public Library, Department Libraries, Cash Counter, G&A Branch, Legal Section and University Website.

J) E-governance and Law

In March 26, 2008, the Law Department became the first department of the Kerala Government to be fully computerized. The modernization of the Law Department was a Plan scheme approved by the Planning Commission. The Digital file flow system has been introduced in Law Department as part of this Scheme, with central funding. The Project introduces Information Technology in Law Department to speed up legal advice by building up a data base which can be accessed by other departments. All functions of the Law Department have been automated including its critical knowledge-based functions.
K) Sameeksha- Village Documentation and Community Computing Center (VDCCs)

Village Documentation and Community Computing Centers (VDCCs) is a local unit run by community members trained in all aspects of computing services and media production. VDCCs imparts e-literacy to local communities and provide essential computing services to the communities and empowers them to combat rights violations, isolation, exclusion from mainstream media and their lack of control over decisions affecting their lives. VDCCs are particularly relevant for isolated and disenfranchised communities which have limited or no access to mainstream technologies and media. Though Kerala has a wide network of e-services across the state, many communities continue to be isolated and unable to make use of these resources due to issues of access and costs. VDCCs aim to fill an essential gap in this regard.

L) Sutharyakeralam

It is the innovative initiative of the Government of Kerala, helps to bring the complaints and grievances of citizens directly to the notice of the Chief Minister, thereby ensuring transparency and efficiency in the functions of the Government. This is achieved through the automation of Chief Minister's Grievance Redressal Cell and convergence of all the available forms of communication to redress the grievances of the citizens.

M) Information and Data Exchange Advanced System (IDEAS)

The Information Technology Department has implemented ‘IDEAS’, an advanced file information system, to track files of the offices of the State government, in a manageable realm of electronic governance, utilizing the core strengths of Information Technology. This system makes the government more transparent and approachable for the citizens, bringing benefits in its overall governance.
N) Modern Electronic Systems & Services Agility & Governance in Enterprises (MESSAGE)

It is an Intranet based centralized application for the internal use of offices and internet based application for the citizen services. MESSAGE can be instantiated for multiple offices from the same intranet database. The files, letters, petitions are captured at source and their movements across the office can be easily tracked.

O) AASTHI

AASTHI is an automated e-Inventory management of computers and related equipment, based on open source software. Implemented in Kerala State IT Mission, the AASTHI Version (I) is currently under test implementation.

P) SPARSH- Information Kiosk

To provide information quickly to the not-so-computer savvy and untrained citizens visiting the Secretariat for various needs, Govt. has installed four touch Screen Information Kiosks at the Secretariat. Available for free access to citizens coming to the State secretariat, visitors are now able to make enquiries and find the replies displayed on the monitor before them. Some enquiries that can be accessed through the kiosk are fair-value of land, PSC notifications, SPARK salary slip etc. Currently information pertaining to more than 25 Departments has been made available through this Kiosk. Similarly, two Kiosks have also been set up at the Kerala University Campus.

Q) E-Krishi

E-Krishi is a market driven agricultural initiative through IT enabled Agri Business Centers to address the existing gap in agriculture information flow and transaction management. The project envisages facilitating and enabling farmers and other stakeholders through Agri Business Centers to interact with agricultural service providers in the private, Government and Non-Government sectors. K-Krishi project, which envisions a connected farmers with access to information on market demand, prices, good agricultural practices and quality agricultural inputs supported by a
technology enabled robust transaction platform that facilitates all their off line activities, is slated for roll-out across the State.

**R) YES @ Kerala**

The ‘Youth Employability and skills-YES@KERALA’ was launched in the State in June 2008, to provide soft skills and technical skills training to students from various colleges in the State. The purpose of this project is to hone the skills of the students and make them ready for employment in the industry; especially considering that Kerala is making sustained efforts at attracting investments in the IT sector all over the State. In its pilot phase, the programme targets 3750 students from 15 colleges and polytechnics in the State.

**4.1.3 INSTITUTIONS FOR E-GOVERNANCE IN KERALA**

Kerala is often credited with the formulation of an innovative Information Technology policy and is known for its powerful repository of educated human power. It is recognised that Information and communication Technologies (ICTs) can be an extremely powerful tool in community development. Access and control over technologies by the community for computing services and to produce media content offers the potential to accelerate social change and engage large numbers of disenfranchised people, helping them realise their self-worth. Following are the institutions responsible for accomplishing much needed E-governance programme in the state.

**A. Centre for Development of Imaging Technology (CDIT)**

Government of Kerala in the year 1988 established Centre for Development of Imaging Technology (CDIT) with a vision to ensure advancement of research, development and training in imaging technology with an implied role in socially relevant science & development communication. The mission of CDIT is “to become the leading service provider and product innovator in new media information technology systems, tools, applications and content development with thrust on deployment of sustainable and
appropriate imaging and imaging technology for science and development communication.” (www.cdit.org).

Uniqueness of C-DIT comes from the rare combination of its human resources - a co-existence of the talented pool of creative personnel with technological work force. In its 19 years of existence C-DIT has successfully completed many prestigious projects of the Government of Kerala. Over the years C-DIT has evolved into a centre of convergence. Currently the organization is in a position to offer a plethora of services covering a wide range of information appliances and deploying all conceivable media formats.

B. Kerala State Information Technology Mission

Kerala State Information Technology Mission (KSITM) is a Society registered under the Travancore Cochin Literary Scientific & Charitable Societies Registration Act. The mission considers E-governance as an engine of economic growth and as a tool for increasing productivity, speed & transparency in governance and improved quality of life for the common mass. The major objective of KSITM is to formulate programme and its software for various G2G, G2C and G2B services in Kerala. Major E-governance Projects undertaken by KSITM are Digitization of Government Records, e-District, e-Pay, e-Payment initiatives in Departments, Integrated Govt. Service Gateway (IGSG), Kerala Innovation Foundation (KIF), National Portal of India, PSU Workshop and Sutharyakeralam.

C. Indian Institute of Information Technology and Management-Kerala (IIITM-K)

IIITM-K is a premier institution of excellence in Science, Technology and Management related to Information that develops professionals and leaders of high caliber imbued with values of entrepreneurship, ethics and social responsibility. IIITM-K will actively promote higher education and industry across Kerala and beyond through its IT facilitated education programs and services. The institute has undertaken several projects, namely Kerala Education Grid, Karshaka Information Systems, Services And
Networking (KISSAN), Computational Chemistry portal, AKM India and ILCI among others.

**D. Kerala State Electronic Development Corporation Limited (KELTRON)**

Keltron is India’s first and the largest electronics corporation in the State sector. Keltron has been a catalyst in making electronics work in almost every aspect of our daily life, since 1973. Keltron specializes in the assimilation, adoption and integration of technology for creating innovative solutions. Its strength lies in the stable foundation and experience built over the years, its strong human capital, its nation-wide network and its ability to adapt itself to change.

Building upon its vast resource of high quality trained human resource capital, rich experience of over half a century of executing technology intensive projects, and an untainted reputation for delivering quality, Keltron has formed a Consulting Services Group in 2008 to make its expertise available for a larger audience (www.keltron.org). In a short period, Keltron has carved a niche in this segment and have successfully implemented an integrated, GIS based Traffic Management Solution for Kolkata Police; Intelligent Transportation System for Pune Municipality; several projects for Kerala IT Mission and for Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO).

**E. Institute of Management in Government (IMG)**

The Institute of Management in Government, Thiruvananthapuram was established as an autonomous body under the auspices of the Government of Kerala in 1981 with the objective of developing managerial skills, organisational abilities, leadership qualities and decision making skills among different categories of employees of Government, Private and Public sector. IMG is a premier E-governance training institute and it has a E-governance cell. E-governance Cell comprises of a team of faculties heading the E-governance initiatives for Government. This cell manages the Post Graduate Diploma in E-governance course conducted by IMG and also developing appropriate modules and materials for conducting E-governance training programme suit to the requirements of different levels of employees.
F. Information Kerala Mission (IKM)

With the above objective in mind state planning board submitted a project named ‘Kerala Information Network for Local Bodies’ (KINLB) to the Planning Commission for the financial assistance. Planning Commission approved the project and allocated Rs 30 crores. Out of the total project outlay Rs 10 crores was released during 1999(www.lsg.kerala.gov.in/sulekha). Taking into consideration the accumulated wisdom and prior experience, government of Kerala entrusted the Centre for Development of Imaging Technology (C-DIT, Thiruvananthapuram) with the task to set up and implement a local body information network called ‘Kerala Information Network for Local Bodies’ (KINLB). For speedy and time bound implementation of the project, the State Government initiated ‘Information Kerala Mission’ (IKM) in June 1999. IKM was entrusted with the responsibility of implementing KINLB project and imparting training to staff in LSGIs (http://www.infokerala.org/new/Links/evolution.htm.2008).

I. IKM – Objectives.
Objectives of IKM as specified on their official web site are given below (http://www.infokerala.org/new/Links/objectives.htm, 2007)

a) To establish a state wide network connecting the State Planning Board and the District Planning Offices with the 1214 (later 1215) local bodies.
b) To develop a mechanism for regular monitoring of local body plan implementation and targets achievement, over the network.
c) To establish an office operations and public services automation mechanism at the local body level.
d) To develop an integrated micro-level resource based developmental information system, for meaningful planning at the local body level.
e) To provide trained manpower for renationalizing the hardware and software.
f) To provide continued technical support to ensure that the network applications are up and running throughout.
B) Funding to the IKM.

While E-governance could have very laudable objectives and ambitious Work Plans, these have to be weighed in terms of available resources both in the Plan sector and outside it. It is here that leveraging of ongoing projects can be made more cost and value effective with the use of IT in a modulated fashion without any critical incremental costs. The Private sector resources have to be also carefully dovetailed with their commercial interests and those of the Government to provide Value Added Services. The Kiosks by themselves can bring in little in terms of better delivery of Services, unless the same are made economically viable and of demonstrated use to the stakeholders. The IKM proposed for the allocation of Rs.250 Crores during 11th plan (2007-12). Following Table explains the year wise allocation of fund from the state government.

**Table: 4.2 Year Wise Allocation of Fund to IKM From the State Govt.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount (in lakhs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>175 (Source: Compiled from Various Annual Plan Documents)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Annual Plan Documents, Kerala State Planning Board

From the Table 4.2, it is clear that plan allocation to the LSGs for computerization has increased substantially especially in the recent years. Besides this each Gram Panchayat should provide following amount to the IKM. For Technical assistance Rs.2000/- every year (GO (R.T) NO 1265/09/LSGD), Annual rent for Webb Site Rs
1500/- (GO(M.S) 41/2004/Planning , GO(M.S) 183/07/LSGD), training purpose expenditure through KILA Rs.15000/-. For providing error free birth and death registration, data backup is needed from 1970 onwards. Each record cost Rs.6 of which Rs.2 should be remitted to IKM (SR.NO.5078/I.B/09/LSGD). For the assessment of property tax and its data entry and verification each record cost Rs.8 of which Rs.1.103 to be given to IKM (IKM/G.P/Sanchaya/09 letter).

In order to meet annual maintenance contract, each gram panchayat should pay 8% of the total value of AMC and Rs.2495 for UPS. Those panchayat having the connection other than KSWAN have to pay Rs.17, 604 per annum to the BSNL (G.O. (Rt) 3239/2009/LSGD).

4.1.1 Evolution and Growth of Decentralised Planning in Kerala

Kerala is one of the prominent states in India that evolved a methodology of decentralised planning (for that matter with no parallel elsewhere in the world) and sought to implement it. Every day the gram Panchayats and Municipalities are approached by people for a variety of services and the efficiency of local governments are greatly judged by the efficiency with which they can deliver services to the people (Oommen M.A, 2009, Sivakumar.D, 1995). Perhaps the effectiveness of decentralisation and empowerment of LGS would largely depend on their capability to deliver services to the people in time, at the standard quality and with prudence and in a people-friendly manner. The tormenting ordeal which many people experience at the door steps of these ‘democratic institutions’ have to change and change significantly (Isaac, Thomas, 2000).

Decentralization is a “process” and, in the initial years, it throws up several issues and challenges, many of them difficult to predict in advance. The evolution of local bodies in the different parts of Kerala comprising the princely states of Travencore, Cochin and Malabar district of the erstwhile British Indian province of Madras Presidency came to be considerably influenced by Viceroy Lord Ripon’s resolution of 1882, establishing local bodies called “little republics” in urban centers. Later it was extended to rural areas. Following the report of the Royal Commission of
Decentralisation (1909) a two tier system was introduced in Malabar- the Malabar District Board at the district level and panchayat board at the village level. The recommendation of the Royal Commission (1909) and the Govt. of India Act (1919) influenced the formation of panchayat acts in Cochin and Travencore which considerably modified the traditional village system of these regions.

After the native state of Cochin came under the British supremacy they enacted the Cochin village panchayat act which divides the state into five Taluks, with five govt. nominated local prominent persons to take care of villages. Only those who paid Rs.50 or above as taxes, or govt. officials and retired officials and graduates along could be members of the governing body of villages. Slowly powers of the Gram panchayat increased and in 1919 Panchayats were allowed to run Ayurvedic hospitals. It was too early in history to expect a more democratic base.

In 1925, a Village Panchayat Act was passed in Travencore and seven panchayat were formed. The assigned functions (constructions, maintenance and improvements of wells and tanks; maintenance and improvement of communications and drains; primary education; lightning of public ways and places; improvement of minor irrigation works and public health and sanitation) and taxes (land cess, profession tax, vehicle tax etc) were way ahead of the times (Velu Pillai.T.K.1940. PP.244). A special feature of the 1925 Act was that it delegated certain judicial functions to the Panchayats (Govt. of Kerala.1986:pp2).

In 1940, a new form of panchayat called Village Unions were constituted in several villages of Travencore in order to promote rural development. However, they had the same function as that of the early Panchayats. The govt. gave a matching grant equal to the own collection of local revenue, subject to a maximum of Rs.1000/ panchayat (Pillai, G.K, 1986). After the formation of the Travencore –Cochin state in 1949 the term village union was changed into Panchayat.
Although Travencore started with only five Panchayats, by 1934, it covered the entire state and the number of panchayat rose to 87. The major functions of panchayat were construction and maintenance of minor irrigation works, village roads, control over vaccination and supervision of elementary education. There were no taxing powers and the primary source of income was the liberal grant from government.

In the Malabar district, which was a part of erstwhile Madras province before it was integrated with Travencore – Cochin, village panchayat were functioning under the Madras Village Panchayat Act 1950, which came into force from 1st April 1951. Under this Act, every village or hamlet with a population of 500 and above will have a panchayat. Village with a population of less than 500 were made part of an adjoining panchayat or grouped with other contiguous villages and a single panchayat formed for the group. Panchayat having a population above 5000 and with income exceeding Rs10000 were classified under Class 1 and all others Class 2. Duties and the functions of the panchayat under this Act were almost similar to those contained in the Travancore – Cochin Act 1950. The main sources of revenues of the Panchayats were share of land cess and duty on transfer of property. Further house tax, professional tax and vehicle tax were compulsorily levied. Under the Madras Act, panchayat were not eligible for statutory grants. The entire Malabar area was not covered by Panchayats. Such areas which are not covered by panchayat were under the administrative jurisdiction of Malabar District Board. The District Board carried out all the statutory functions of the Panchayats in respects of the non-panchayat area. The District Boards continued to exist even after the states re organization in 1956 till Kerala Panchayat Act, 1960 was brought into effect from 1st January 1962.

When Malabar was integrated with Travencore- Cochin state to form the present day Kerala, there were 892 Panchayats. Their major source of revenue was land cess, building tax, vehicle and entertainment tax. The history of panchayat raj system in Kerala from the first Kerala ministry (1957) till date has been on chequered one and has been influenced by the ups and downs of coalition politics in the state.
The reality turned out to be much different. The local bodies could discharge only the traditional civic functions defined by the Act as the mandatory functions. The Act, stipulated that the government would authorize the Panchayats to exercise any of the numerous optional development duties that were listed; but no government ever entrusted any of those powers down to Panchayats. The absence of an intermediate tier between the State Government and the grassroots-level local bodies at the district or block was a major lacuna. In 1964 another attempt was made by the Congress ministry to pass a new legislation on the model recommended by Balwantrai Mehta Committee. In that report the elected Panchayat Union Councils with vital planning and development functions at the block level were proposed to be established. But the Zilla Panchayat at the district level was envisaged as an advisory board, with the collector as the chairperson, and officials and the presidents of Panchayat Union Councils as the members. Due to the falling of the ministry, the Bill could be enacted. The Left government that came to power in 1967, after two years tenure of President's rule, introduced a Kerala Panchayat Raj Bill in the lines of the 1957 Bill. A two-tier structure with Panchayats as the basic unit and Zilla Parishad at the district level was proposed. The Zilla Parishad was then visualized as an executive agency. The recommendations of the legislative select committee further strengthened the district-tier by renaming it as District Council. The District Council was not a mere development agency, it should govern the district. The government might delegate to the district council duties such as collection of taxes, registration, inspection of factories, labour welfare, and even police administration. This bill also lapsed with the fall of the Leftist ministry and dissolution of the Assembly. The contents of the bill were later reintroduced with certain changes, as the Kerala District Administration Bill. 1971. This Bill also lapsed.

The Kerala District Administration Bill was once again introduced in 1978 after removing reference to police functions and restricting the district administration to revenue functions. It was passed in 1979. The new Left Front Government that came to power in 1980 issued a number of notifications and rules as a prelude to implementation of the Act. But that government also fell. The new Congress government that took charge in 1982 wanted the Act to be modified before implementation. A committee for
The new government appointed a Special Advisor to advice on measures to be undertaken for democratic decentralisation at district and lower levels. The report submitted by him in July 1988, was a comprehensive review of the provisions of the 1979 Act and a set of suggestions for rectifying the anomalies in the Act, complementary legislation and also the administrative changes that were to be undertaken urgently. Even though many of the recommendations remain unimplemented, they formed the basis of the 1991-'92 experiment in District Councils. Many defects remained in the District Administration Act 1979, even after a long legislative scrutiny. This calls for a re-look at the poor legislative process in the State. Leaving aside certain obvious errors, corrections made by an amendment did not raise any serious conceptual problem. There were a few anomalies in the listing of powers and functions of District Councils numbering 152 items under 19 different heads.

To cite certain example, the housing is suitable for decentralisation, the only role given to District Councils in housing was identification of 'houseless families'. In education, the powers provided was "opening and establishment of new schools", which if not judiciously exercised might met with serious consequences in the context of Kerala. Omission of planning from the purview of the district councils was another major defect. This was surprising, even though planning was considered a subject for local level participation on almost every occasion, from drafting till discussion stage.

The parastatals such as Kerala Water Authority, Command Area Development Agencies, and Khadi and Village industries were left untouched. Existence of such boards and authorities on subjects that could eminently be operated at the local level became important factors that dis-empower the local bodies in the development process in India at large. Kerala is no exception to this. The worst offender in this case was Kerala Water Authority Act, which acquired a monopoly in the supply of piped water and compulsory transfer of even water supply systems that were run efficiently by the
municipalities to the newly-constituted authority. The list of powers and functions was left untouched (in fact, planning was added to the list). But the magnitude of these powers was retained by reserving government's arbitrary right to interfere and lay down conditionality. The populist stance adopted might have been politically expedient but it gave large scope for an unsympathetic administration, legal means to arbitrarily throttle the local bodies. On 29 January 1991, the first-ever election to the District Councils was held. The ruling Left Front was swept to power in all but one of the District Councils.

The State Government, assumed office later, was not tolerable to the District Councils led by the left parties and had restricted the powers of them with unquestionable legal perfection. They passed an amendment in the assembly authorizing the government with the right to amend the list of powers through government notifications. The legislation had provision to de-link the office of district collector from the position of ex-officio secretary of the council. Most of the district offices and institutions of the agricultural and allied development departments were taken back. Paucity of resources and absence of technical staff made the district councils to remain ineffective for some time. The district councils were formally disbanded by the amendment of the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act in 1994.

The enactment of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment in 1992 had the impact of highlighting the importance of local self governance and has resulted in continued thrust towards achieving the vision of complete self governance at the grassroots level (Raphel, Jose C, 2000). To operationalise decentralisation, Kerala chose the path of participatory local level planning as the entry point. This succeeded to a considerable extent in harnessing public action in favour of decentralisation. In order to push the system and force the process a campaign approach was followed for decentralised planning - known as the ‘People’s Planning Campaign’(Oommen,2004). This campaign created a powerful demand factor for decentralisation to be guided along the right path. To a large degree the campaign succeeded in setting the agenda for decentralisation.
Table: 4.3 Milestones in Kerala’s Decentralization Initiatives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Major Milestones</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April/May 1994</td>
<td>Enactment of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act and the Kerala Municipality Act.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1995</td>
<td>Transfer of powers and functions to local governments; along with institutions, offices and functionaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1996</td>
<td>Introduction of a Special Budget Document for local government allocations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1996</td>
<td>Launching of People’s Plan Campaign for decentralized planning and announcement of earmarking of about 35% plan resources to local bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1999</td>
<td>Restructuring of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act and the Kerala Municipality Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2000</td>
<td>Amendments to 35 Acts having relevance to local government functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2000</td>
<td>Transfer of district level offices and staff to District Panchayat Decision to redeploy surplus ministerial staff and engineers to local governments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>Actual redeployment of surplus ministerial staff and engineers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Sharing/devolution of selected taxes converted into fixed shares from total own tax revenue of State – 3.5% as General Purpose Fund and 5.5% as Maintenance Fund. System of automatic monthly release of funds introduced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Institutionalization efforts begun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Recommendation of Third SFC operationalised with local government-wise predictable grant system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Re-launch of People’s Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Formation of common engineering cadre for all Local Self Governments Policy decisions to set up ministerial and executive cadres.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


4.1.2 Limitations of Decentralised Planning in Kerala

Fifteen Years have been completed and it is still considered as one of the biggest achievement in the history of Kerala. The state has undoubtedly progressed well on certain dimensions of local governance. Around 25 to 30 per cent of the plan resources of the state are spent through these local governments. A cadre of local leadership (including women) has developed along the process, with many of them sincere, committed and reasonably knowledgeable. There is also evidence of money spent on poverty eradication or individual oriented schemes increasingly reaching the needy unlike
during the earlier department-driven delivery system (since it is difficult to neglect the really needy when resource allocation decisions are taken at the local level) (Oommen, 1995). One visible improvement that we see as an impact of decentralization in Kerala is in the construction and the maintenance of rural roads. However many glaring weaknesses or limitations are in evidence in the functioning of local self governments (LSGs) in Kerala.

A significant part of the funds allocated to the local governments is spent without deriving much benefit (M.A.Oommen, 2009). Such wasteful expenditure exists apart from corruption (of which there exist not so infrequent cases). Many schemes are planned and implemented by the local governments (especially in productive sectors of agriculture and industry) with scant regard for their potential impact on the economic situation of the locality, or for the ability of the LSG to manage such schemes.

There is a serious confusion on what local governments should (shouldn’t) do or what they can (cannot) do effectively. One reason for this state of affairs could be the absence of a conceptual framework such as ‘local market failure’ for guidance in deciding the activities of local governments. The State government also gives guidelines to local governments without the backing of a well articulated theoretical understanding. It is not surprising, that in such a situation, many ‘productive sector’ schemes of LSGs have turned ineffective.

The weakest outcome of decentralization in Kerala is in the realm of basic governance and service delivery. For example, services such as issuance of birth certificate, or collection of building tax, which are the basic functions of local governments continue to be carried out lethargically and strategies such as ‘citizens’ charter’ to speed up such processes have not been very successful (Santhakumar, 2008). Cleaning of public spaces, another local public good - a prime justification for the existence of local government – is also indifferently carried out.

The introduction of decentralized planning has been accompanied by the transfer of a set of development functions from the state government departments to the local village panchayats. As a result the workload of employees has increased considerably
The completion of many projects formulation, monitoring and execution within the time frame work stipulated by the Panchayat Raj Act proved to be unattainable. All these lead to delay in starting the projects.

Generally, there is low participation in the Grama Sabha meetings especially women and weaker sections of the society. The attendance in Grama Sabha used to be thin even from the beginning, and they, later on, became assemblies of persons who expect direct benefits and of activists of dominant political groups. The opportunity cost of public resources is not reflected adequately in the choice of the schemes made by Grama Sabha, even in cases in which participation is lively (Santhakumar, 2008). When development needs are listed through participation, it becomes a mere wish list, and the trade off involved due to the limitations of available public resources are not reflected in the ‘participation’ process, may be due to the inadequate local resource mobilization, lack of adequate consideration of options in the selection, lack of clear information on available resources for a ward at the time of selecting the schemes, etc. To some extent, this inadequate consideration of opportunity costs discourages people and their representatives from carrying out adequate monitoring and evaluation of schemes implemented, and from designing appropriate institutions and financial incentives to see that the benefits of schemes accrue on a sustainable basis.

In the execution of projects, it was planned to avoid contractors, and their role was to be taken over by beneficiary committees. Such committees however proved non-functional, as genuine people who had been associated with such committees got disenchanted with the difficulties to implement projects within the prevailed red-tape regime. Soon such committees became the cover of ‘benami’ contractors (Oommen, M.A, 2009). It was also expected that along with the transfer of a substantial set of functions to local governments, adequate number of employees would also be transferred. But this has not happened due to the inability of successive governments to confront the resistance of government employees and their trade unions, who are unwilling to move out of their comfortable postings in cities, and in large organizations with great possibilities of corruption. Thus local governments struggle to cope up with the workload with few employees, over whom the elected representatives do not have much control.
The elected representatives themselves do not have adequate incentives or ability to carry out the tasks entrusted upon them.

There are other problems as well such as: (a) little progress made in the use of IT in improving the governance of LSGs; and (b) continuation of a dominant role for centralized bureaucracies (whether through centrally sponsored schemes or the requirement of getting permissions from line departments) in many activities that could have been planned and implemented at the local level. Thus Kerala experiences several second generation problems in decentralization. First generation problems include difficulty in (a) convincing the political and administrative elites of the need for genuine decentralization; (b) actual transfer of resources to local governments, even if there is agreement on formal forms of decentralization, and (c) elite capture – by which the local elite take over the control over local governments and decentralized allocation of resources. The first generation problems have been sorted out to some extent in Kerala. It is the second generation problems, of improving efficiency and effectiveness, designing of incentives for stakeholders to align their interests with those of society as a whole and ultimately of creating institutions that lead to sustainable welfare of local people, that the State currently encounters.

4.4 Need for E-governance at the Panchayat level

As local governance is an experienced reality and decentralized planning is its foundational building block, creating adequate, timely and relevant data at the local level is crucial. Generation and transmission of data is basically governed by supply and demand. The Kerala Panchayat and Municipality Acts and the various schedules of these Acts outlining the activities and sub-activities, and the people’s plan campaign heralded in mid-1996 created a compelling and continued need for a new set of information to help the formulation and monitoring of local level planning and development in the state. The local governments in Kerala handle over Rs.3000 – 3500 crores per annum which include besides revenue rose by them, a substantial amount transferred from higher level governments. The task of building, monitoring and managing a set of reliable data is the
essential prerequisite for good governance. For monitoring purposes base line data may be identified and created. Wherever good data are absent bench mark surveys have to be done. In brief, data demand is massive and the challenging task is to build a good supply system that suits it.

4.4.1 Revenue Management of Panchayat

Fiscal Decentralization initiatives in Kerala constitute a best practice with the State following the classical principles of devolving funds to Local Governments. The source of revenues of Panchayat mainly consist of grant in aid and own source revenues. Following the decision of the government to devolve a sizeable chunk of the state’s plan outlay to the local bodies, the government initiated a mass movement, popularly known as People’s campaign for decentralized planning to empower local self governments, and to prepare plans in a transparent and participatory manner (Isaac, et al., 2000). As far as grant in aid is considered as substantial allocations of funds to local bodies (35 to 40 percent) are realized. This also led to the transfer of a number of development functions along with implementing officers to the village Panchayat (Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, 1994). Even though Panchayats were entrusted with more powers their responsibilities latter on increased, especially with regard to the formulation and implementation of plans.

The annual plans of local bodies involved the preparation of project documents which they themselves visualised as participative local interventions to solve issues of public interest. These project documents were generated through structured interactions of the Panchayat functionaries, functionaries in line departments, local development activists and beneficiaries. The documents were highly local specific and hence the standardisation of objectives, achievements and targets were extremely difficult since the same infringed upon the creativity of solving local problems.

The Information Kerala Mission (IKM), entrusted with the task of computerizing local bodies in the state developed a web based tool ‘Sulekha’ to handle the issues in plan project monitoring, data acquisition and consolidation. Information on Local Body
Plan, implementation in the public domain can substantially enhance transparency in decentralized plan process leading to better participation. This project handles various aspects of plan formulation, plan expenditure and monitoring of annual plans of Local Governments. (Unnikrishnan, P. V, 2000).

Own revenues of Panchayats comprised of both tax and non-tax revenue. The Panchayats need not introduce any new taxes, as it has a very good and well-framed tax base. But the assessment and realization machinery are to be geared up to the maximum available potential. The main source of income for the city is Property tax, Profession tax, Entertainment tax, D & O license fee, Rent etc… The manual system of assessment and realization of property tax is vogue. There were ample chances for under assessment and evasion. No concrete criteria are envisaged for the assessment in the act and rules. For better integration, better targeting, hassle free collection, enhanced revenue, IKM introduces Sanchaya, the revenue collection system.

Handles collection of various sources of revenue including property tax, profession tax, entertainment tax, advertisement tax, issue of licenses relating to dangerous and offensive trades, license for prevention of food adulteration, various other licenses, rent on land and buildings, fines and fees etc.

Specific criteria for the assessment of property tax on the basis of plinth area, type of construction and locations are to be formulated by the Govt. of Kerala. A new method of self-assessment by the owners on the basis of plinth area, type and location is prepared to be introduced from the next financial year. The annual rents per Sq.m. for each type of building in different locations are to be fixed from time to time. The owner needs to have an awareness of his property tax on the basis of plinth area before she/he starts constructing a building. If such a reform is implemented and the entire structures are re-numbered using modern G.I.S data, the property tax demand is expected to increase by more than 300 percent. There was a practice in Kerala to revise the property tax in all local bodies every 5 years. But no revision of property tax has been done during the last 13 years. This has created heavy shortfall in the income of local bodies. The revision of the property tax is to be done in a scientific manner.
Financial Sustainability of local self-government is primarily rests on self-sufficiency to meet their own expenses. Hence, exploring the potentiality of own source revenue is considered as one of the major objectives of decentralized planning.

Professional tax rates are fixed by the Govt. of Kerala through a notification. The tax from employees of Govt. and other institutions are collected half yearly through their heads of institutions and therefore there is not much evasion in that. But in case of traders, professionals, legal practitioners, consultants and similar category the assessments are not made in full. The tax evasion in this category is assessed to be above 20 percent. By enlisting the entire persons in this category and bringing them in the tax frame the Panchayats can have additional revenue to the tune of 30 percent of their revenue expenditure. The revenue officials can manage this if they are provided with required facilities. They need to visit door-by-door and enlist all persons without omission.

This can be continued with D & O (Dangerous and Obnoxious) License listing activity. The data can be computerized once, the primary data are collected. Another area where the Panchayats lacks in tapping the full potential is the collection of D & O License fees. The entire traders and commercial institutions liable to take License need to be listed visiting door-to-door by the Health staff. They can institute criminal prosecution against defaulters. If this is done properly and faithfully the Panchayat will get additional income. Along with the above said changes in assessment, the collection machinery has to be geared up to have 100% collection annually.

4.4.2 Services given by the Panchayat

ICT is gaining prominence as an engine for economic growth, it also promises to have far reaching potential for the delivery of social services and enhancing the effectiveness of government administration. However to achieve improvement in services, building up of community databases is critical in third world, where record keeping systems are deficient (Vongpanitlerd et.al, 1992). The task of recording all births, deaths and marriages have been entrusted with the local bodies in accordance with the registration of Birth and Death Act, 1969 and the Hindu Marriage act, 1957. The
system of registration at the local body offices is called civil registration to distinguish this from registration data collected through sample surveys called sample registration. The civil registration data can be used for generating vital statistics which shall be very useful in demographic and public health research on fertility, mortality etc. The present civil registration system in most developing countries including India is incomplete and hence the sample registration is utilized in demographic studies. In the case of cause of death, details are not necessarily documented by the physician, even when filled up by medical practitioners the documentation is not often complete and even when the data is complete it is not analysed properly. There has not been a serious effort to popularise a coding scheme for the medical certification of cause of death in accordance with the guidelines issued by World Health Organisation (WHO) [Seal et al. (1998), GOI (2001)].

Birth and death registration coverage levels in Kerala are the highest in the country, geographical coverage is very good and so is the accuracy of information, leaving aside the problems with recording causes of death. However marriages under the Hindu marriage act alone are presently registered in local bodies. Marriages of Christians, Muslims and citizens belonging to other religions are not covered. Similarly marriages under special marriage registration act also not covered. Full coverage systems are feasible in Kerala condition since an in depth network of local bodies is available for registration. A demographic surveillance system could easily be built up based on this. Improving cause of death registration is feasible through an appropriate intervention among the medical community. To start with verbal autopsies can be carried out in the case of non-institutional death with efforts to improve institutional reporting as well. Apprehensions of medical personnel or complications arising out of accurate reporting have to be removed and public opinion built up to ensure proper reporting. Improving the documentation system through Sevana can be a major step in improving civil registration (Unnikrishnan et.al, 2001).

Another aspect covered by Sevana is the pensions and social welfare schemes. It was in the light of the seventy-third and seventy-fourth constitutional amendments endowing upon the Panchayat raj and municipality institutions the responsibility for
preparation of plans and implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice that pensions and social welfare schemes handled by various departments was transferred to local bodies.

Thus Sevana has excellent features for registration of birth, death and marriage, and provides for a very simple user interface for entry and generation of outputs. A scheme of standardisation of names and for more complete capture of addresses has also been attempted. Undertaking entry of past data on registration, facilities convenient handling of search in an electronic database, which improves the issue of birth, death and marriage certificates significantly. In the pilot computerization exercise of IKM data on marriage, birth and death in five Grama Panchayats has been recorded in computer (IKM, 2001). In these Panchayats the issue of certificates has taken only 15 minutes in contrast with a normal delivery interval of seven or more days.

4.4.3 Accountability of Panchayat

The major difficulty arise in doing manual system of work is that the entry of vouchers and bills relating to payments based on approved account heads, entry of receipts based on approved account heads including cash, cheque and other instruments, provision for recording adjustments as journals, general ledger with budget tracking, accounts receivables, account payable, capital projects, grants, assets, liabilities etc. Creation of cash book, ledger, trial balance and balance sheet facility for providing opening balance figures based on fixed assets and liabilities and current assets and liabilities etc (Isaac Thomas, Richard Franke (2000). In order to make comprehensive reforms in accounting in Local Self Government Institutions, IKM introduced the accounting packages Sahatha and Saankhya. Even though it is on the primary stage of installation it can have a serious effect on the whole accounting system of the panchayat.

Upholding of right to information is one of the major objectives of decentralized planning. Accomplishment of this is possible only through E-governance system. In order for that the application software such as Stapana-the decision supporting system,
Sakarma—The decision support system, Samvedita—the LSGD website were created. Following Table explain about various E-governance software programme developed by IKM being implemented at Panchayat level in Kerala.

**Table: 4.4 IKM’s Software Programmes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No</th>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sulekha</td>
<td>Monitoring Plan Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sevana</td>
<td>Interface for transactions between local bodies and citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sanchita</td>
<td>CD based information repository of legislations, executive orders, promulgations, judgments etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Saaphalya</td>
<td>Employment information system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sahatha</td>
<td>Revenue collection at the local bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sanchaya</td>
<td>Revenue management at local body level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Soochika</td>
<td>Work Flow Based File Tracking Software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sankhya</td>
<td>Accounts &amp; Finance Management Software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sthapana</td>
<td>HR Management Software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sakarma</td>
<td>Decision Support System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sugama</td>
<td>MIS for Purchase &amp; Works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Sammohya</td>
<td>Integrated Citizen database</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from Various Publications of IKM, Kerala.

**4.5 Progress of E-governance in Kerala**

The extension of pilots to state wide rollout did not take off due to the delay in finalizing the procurement of equipment for Panchayats. At the same time, the E-governance activities in Urban Local Governments (Corporations and Municipalities) took off during the 2003-2005 period, with the establishment of Janasevanakendrams—a single window project. Complete pilots in Grama Panchayats like Thalikulam and Thanalur during 2005-2006, in addition to the Vellanad Grama Panchayat taken up in 2003, also helped in firming up the application software. The activities in Panchayats really took off in 2007 with the Government approving the procurement of hardware by the Local Governments availing the DGS&D rate contract. Ensuring site-readiness in
these 1165 Panchayats (999 Grama Panchayats, 152 Block Panchayats and 14 District Panchayats) had been a most intense activity during the past two years. Even though it was the responsibility of the Local Governments, it had been achieved with the active follow up by the Local Self Government Department, Rural Development Department and Directorate of Panchayats. Regular reviews and interactions by Information Kerala Mission personnel at the district and block level, with the Local Government leaders and staff helped in achieving this. Now the infrastructure has been readied in more than 95% of these Panchayats. The deployment of application software is also progressing.

During 2007-08 (first year of 11th Five Year Plan) the entire projects under the decentralised planning of Local governments was captured electronically at the TAG level and used for appraisal and later approval at DPC level (Information Kerala Mission, 2009). In 2008-09 it went one more step ahead with project formulation being done electronically using the Sulekha software at the 1223 Local Governments (Information Kerala Mission, 2010). The Sevana software for Civil Registration (birth, deaths and marriages) and Sevana Pensions (for handling social welfare pensions) are the other application software widely deployed. These are operational in nearly 700 and 200 local governments respectively. The Hospital kiosk project for online registrations of births and deaths directly from hospitals and issue of certificates through the hospitals had been a programme that made substitution impact in service delivery. This is implemented in selected Local Governments (39) where there are large numbers of registrations.

Cadastral Maps using GIS have been prepared with the ward boundaries for nearly 70% of Local Governments, and released fully in 5 districts. The finalization of database of Kerala Panchayat Employees Provident Fund (KPEPF) is in the final stages and is expected to be integrated with the salary disbursement application deployed in Panchayats soon. More than 20,000 local government elected representatives and staff have been trained in the use of computers and the application software. The tasks ahead includes customizing the Panchayat accounting module as per the new rules to be finalized by the Government, finalizing the revenue and other databases and completing the deployment of the software modules in all Local Governments. Training needs to be
extended to all the Panchayat staff. All these are anticipated to be completed by 2010 but not yet completed.

Thus E-governance in Kerala plays a vital role in realising the objectives of decentralized planning. Vertical and horizontal integration of planning is possible only through computerization. Various government agencies in Kerala have already implemented the E-governance programme. In some areas like Universities, Law department, Supply and Co etc, the success rate is very high. Even though local self governments are already implemented E-governance but the speed of the installation process is too low due to multifarious reasons, which are already explained.

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