Chapter - 7

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Introduction

Democratic decentralization in Kerala, over a period of last two decades significantly increased the interest of different stakeholders of local governments to strengthen the democratization process and innovated new systems and procedures for working together to achieve the values of local democracy. The successive state governments have been taken large number of policy initiatives and reform efforts for enhancing people’s participation, strengthening transparency and accountability, promoting inclusive development, develop new administrative culture and enhanced capacity to ensure greater developmental outcomes. The enthusiasm generated by the People’s Plan Campaign set the environment for greater democratization and designed necessary legal and policy framework for translating the constitutional goal of participatory democracy in to practice in Kerala. The People’s Plan Campaign for democratic decentralization has set the path for deliberative democracy and established large number of platforms for democratic participation of people in development planning and local governance.

7.2. Designing Participatory Development Planning and Democratic Local Governance

The Constitutional Amendment Acts in 1992 paved the way for creating democratically elected and representative system of local governments with clearly defined functional responsibilities. In order to realize the goal of
democratic decentralization and deliberative local democracy, concerted efforts have been made by the LDF government in 1996 for greater devolution of financial resources, powers and authorities to local governments. The revolutionary decision to transfer 35-40 per cent the state plan outlay to local governments increased the level of confidence of local government functionaries and their trust in democratizing the development planning process. Along with strengthening the financial health of local governments, policy measures have been taken to formulate and implement development plans in a participatory and transparent manner and provided large number of opportunities for public inputs and result orientation at the local level.

The initiatives for democratic decentralization, massive devolution of financial resources, innovative systems and procedures for democratic governance at the local level, designing and establishing mechanisms for accountability and transparency, better interface between elected and official functionaries in the local government organization and massive efforts for capacity building helped Kerala to become the trend setter of democratic decentralization in India. Even though, local governments have enjoyed high degree of autonomy and functional freedom, considerable pressure would build on local government from various sides to ensure that the responsibilities are to be carried out effectively and the funds are to be utilized properly (Vijayanand, 2009:11). The People’s Plan Campaign was the most effective instrument to mobilize people and ensuring public action in favor of decentralization.

The Kerala experiment of decentralization was really an innovative experiment in the empowerment of citizens and the community to meaningfully participate in development planning and implementation and as a means to promote democratization process in local governance. The importance attached to development of women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and other vulnerable social sections, including the most disadvantaged
sections of society in development planning further promoted opportunities for inclusive development and governance. The vulnerability and special development needs of these social sections was highlighted with the introduction of a separate component plans for women and socially disadvantaged groups as part of development planning. Kerala has been successfully designed the necessary legal framework required for a local democracy and to make it functional as a sphere of government which is closer to the people. Massive capacity building programmes conducted as part of People’s Plan Campaign enhanced the ability of citizens to meaningfully participate in local governance and development planning. The powers and authority of different spheres of governments have been clearly defined in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. Effective models of partnership between non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and community based organizations have been developed and their rich social capital have been utilized by local governments in deepening and broadening local governance and democracy.

The new channels of participation and consultation make the local government system accountable and transparent. Good number of independent regulatory bodies and instruments of accountability have been created to safeguard the interest of people, curbing corruption, to avoid political favoritism and clientelism in distributing benefits as part of development and welfare schemes, redressal of citizens’ grievances and the inappropriate use of resources by local government representatives and officials. The participatory planning methodology developed as part of decentralization itself is a useful tool for enhancing accountability and transparency. The capacity building programmes designed and implemented as part of different stages of local planning and also training for the civil society organizations to exert horizontal accountability and holding the local governments to account.
Effective leadership is central to strong local democracy (CLGF, 2005: 9). In order to make the local government system deliverable to the level of expectation of the people in the changing context of decentralization, the elected and official functionaries, the civil society and community leadership should acquire the requisite capacity to deliver outcomes. There is also a need to promote civic education and build the capacity of civil society organizations to enable them to engage in and participate effectively in the local democratic process (Ibid.). The massive capacity building programmes designed and implemented as part of decentralized development planning significantly contributed to promote the democratization process and transforming local governance.

7.3. Study Design

The present study primarily focused on assessing the effect of decentralization on democratization of development planning and strengthening democratic local governance by using different variables such as, democratic participation, inclusiveness in development and governance, accountability and transparency, dynamics of relations between different actors within the organizational structure of local governments and the effectiveness of capacity building to transfer the new values of decentralization. The present study is based on using primary data collected from the key functionaries of selected local governments with the support of a questionnaire survey and in depth interview with the lead policy makers involved in different stages of decentralization in Kerala over a period of last two decades.

The present study is an evidence based policy study primarily focuses on assessing the effect of democratization on participatory development planning and local governance in Kerala as a result of the decentralization reforms. The present study makes an assessment of the practice of various
democratic principles such as participation, inclusiveness, accountability, transparency, responsiveness and the collective deliberations in the internal management system and its effect on development planning and local governance. This assessment is primarily based on the experience and perception of key functionaries of local governments and the lead policy makers involved in designing and practicing democratic decentralization during the past two decades.

The present study also focuses on identifying the real pitfalls, barriers and shortcomings of democratization of development planning and local governance and to suggest the approach, strategy and policy options to resolve these potential challenges so as to strengthen the democratization process in development planning and local governance.

7.4. Critical Reflections and Research Findings: Implication to Policy Changes

The major findings of the study can be consolidated in to five sections as follows:

7.4.1. Decentralization and Democratic Participation in Development Planning

The enthusiasm of the people of different social sections to participate in development planning and implementation generated during the People’s Plan Campaign period has considerably eroded nowadays. The middle class and upper class people are seldom attend Grama sabha meetings and they are keeping away from this institution of direct democratic participation. The extent of participation in Grama sabha meeting is coming down and it is mostly confined to the participation of women SHG members. The intrinsic values of democratic decentralization and the scope and importance of citizens participation in the decision making process are not internalized by most of the people, even the educated segment of the society. Most of the local
governments are not taking any interest or initiative to undertake the citizen education programme and make them aware of the importance of participation of people in development planning and local governance.

In most cases local governments are not giving sufficient publicity and the notice of the Grama sabha meetings. Most of the people do not know the agenda of the meetings and the points of discussion and deliberations in the Grama sabha meetings. It was found that large number of local governments is not comfortable with the democratic deliberations of the people in matters related to their felt needs and development priorities of the region in which they are living. Very few local governments are doing the sufficient preparatory work to set the Grama sabha venue in a convenient manner to organize small group deliberations in various sub-groups and facilitate serious deliberations. The whole process of Grama sabha meeting is trivialized by most of the local governments. This has considerably resulted in to the erosion of trust of the large sections of people in Grama sabha meetings and they are keeping away from this important institution of participatory democracy.

Large majority of participants in the Grama sabha meetings are the applicants of various individual beneficiary oriented projects. The motivating force behind their participation is not to exercise their democratic right of participation in the decision making process or to fulfill their civic responsibilities, but to get benefits from various individual beneficiary projects. Hence, Grama sabhas in most of the local governments have failed to function as institutions of democratic governance at the local level. In most of the local governments the progress of implementation of Grama sabha decision are not reported back to the people and the action taken report is not presented in the next meeting of the Grama sabha. In large number of Grama sabhas the required quorum stipulated in the legal framework of local governments are not being fulfilled and the attendance of Grama sabha meetings are manipulated by the elected representatives and officials.
Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The organization and conduct of Grama sabha meetings is not conducive to ensure the participation of the people in the Grama sabha deliberations and decision making. Their needs, perception on local development, concern and demands are not properly recorded and reflected in the Grama sabha decisions. In most cases the Grama sabha decisions are not taken as valuable inputs for the decisions of local governments in matters related to local development and governance. Moreover, the deliberations in the Grama sabhas are dominated and maneuvered by very few political leaders and they marginalize large majority of participants. As a result the interest of the people to attend the Grama sabha meetings has been considerably declined and they find no meaning in attending Grama sabha meetings.

Large majority of officials of the various administrative departments transferred to local governments are not providing any proactive support to local governments in development planning and its implementation. Most of the department officials are not supportive to the initiative of the people to design and implement innovative development projects suited to the local or regional development. The different administrative departments do not monitor the participation of officials of the department concerned in the planning and implementation of development and welfare programmes and the physical achievements gained in these sectors.

The dynamics of democratic decentralization and the participatory institutional structures at the local level have been significantly maintained by the strong presence and support of voluntary workers and activists during the People’s Plan Campaign. The voluntary workers supplemented technical and even professional support to local governments to discharge the development responsibilities vested with them in the changing context of decentralization and local democratic governance. The unnecessary controversy flagged by the media and some political leaders during the past years on the role of voluntary
workers and civil society organizations as parallel power centers, demoralized these social sections and they withdrew from the development and governance space at the local level. Thus local governance and development becomes a matter of elected representatives and staff of the panchayats and the spirit of local governance has considerably been eroded.

There is conflict between the development priorities of the people and the development priorities decided by local governments. In most cases the resource allocation is not based on the development priorities suggested by the people and the rationale of violating the development priorities of the people by the local governments are not convinced to them and resulted in to conflict and erosion of trust of the people in local governments.

The division/ward wise distribution of financial resources also resulted in to thin spread of resources and the overall development priorities of different sectors cannot be addressed by local governments as part of development planning. The local government as such is not taken as a unit of local planning and the critical development gaps within the local government is not considered and resolved as part of development planning. This has considerably reduced the allocative efficiency and delivery outcomes of local governments and eroded the trust of people to participate in various platforms of democratic decentralization at the local level.

Most of the local governments are not effectively using the democratic space for consultation and discussion with the key stakeholders of local governance and development. As a result, the stakeholders have no ownership feeling and their participation and creative contribution to strengthen local democratic governance and development is very weak. Most of the local governments are not willing to transform the local government system more open, participatory, transparent and accountable and to utilize their inputs in development planning and implementation.
The mainstream political parties are not seriously taking any interest to ensure the participation of their members and sympathizers in the Grama sabha meetings and to make local democracy vibrant and participatory. The state of local governance and development is not properly assessed by political parties and take appropriate decisions to enhance the quality of development planning and local governance.

The assessment of the functioning of working groups at the local level found that the working groups are not functioning effectively in most of the local governments. Most of the working group conveners are not taking any proactive role to identify the most suitable persons and place them with the working groups. The social capital of the civil society organizations, voluntary organizations, professional associations, academic institutions and research and scientific institutions are not make use for the functioning of working groups and enhance the quality of local plans in most of the local governments.

The elected council of local governments has the democratic mandate to constitute the working groups. In most of the local governments working groups are not constituted with the support of a search team or after consultation with the officials of the line department concerned. Both the ruling party and the opposition consider that working group is a forum to give political birth to their party members in the local administrative system. Most of the members of the working groups do not have the capacity to assess the current development situation in the concerned development sector, the critical development problems and the potential strategy to resolve these development problems.

The present study found that half of the implementing officers and large majority of the voluntary workers and representatives of CBOs are not comfortable with the dominant and arbitrary style of functioning of the political leadership in the selection and finalization of development projects as
part of local plans. This has considerably weakened the credibility and morale of working group members and eroded the democratic existence of this participatory institutional system as part of development planning. Another interesting finding of the study is that only a very small number of respondents said that development projects are originated from the deliberations of the working group meetings.

Other than formulation of development projects, the working groups are not undertaking any collective tasks in plan implementation and monitoring. The mandatory responsibility of monitoring of development projects included in the local plan vest with the working group concerned. The working group conveners are not taking any initiative to make use of the social capital of the working group members in the monitoring process and to enhance the effectiveness of plan implementation.

The study found that development seminars do not exert any significant contribution to change the development strategy already set by the elected council of most of the local governments. The significant findings of this study in regard to the functioning of beneficiary committee is that this institutional innovation greatly contributed to incorporate changes in the public works rules of local governments and beneficiary committees became one of the legitimate mode of execution of public works projects by the local governments. The beneficiary committee system had positively contributed to enhance transparency and public participation in the implementation of public works projects. Beneficiary committees were able to mobilize large number of voluntary labour as part of the implementation of public works projects and significantly increased the allocative efficiency and development outcome at the local level. However, gradually the beneficiary committee system was deliberately manipulated by the nexus of bureaucrats and political leaders at the local level with ‘benami’ committees or fake beneficiary committees in most of the local governments.
Most of the local governments failed to provide the necessary handholding support or facilitating environment for the effective functioning of beneficiary committees. The dismantling of the Technical Advisory Committees and substituting their responsibility with LSGD engineers marked the end of genuine beneficiary committees at the local level. The re-incarnation of contractor-centric and rent-seeking system existed in the pre-decentralization days marked the end of genuine beneficiary committees in the implementation of public works projects with community participation in Kerala.

The present study found that nowadays the linkage between local governments and civil society organization is very weak and the initiative on the part of most of the local governments to make use of their social capital in development planning and implementation is practically absent. Most of the local governments are not ready to partner with CBOs or making use of their expertise and inputs in development planning and local governance. The study clearly found that consultation and participation of CBOs and other stakeholders in development planning is very weak and they are not playing any meaningful role in the decision – making process related to development planning and local governance.

The most significant positive aspect regarding democratic participation is the wide presence of women SHGs functioning as part of “Kudumbasree”. The present study found that nowadays the linkage between the women SHGs and the development planning process has been considerably weakened and not so enthusiastic. In large number of local governments some form of conflict between the political leadership of local governments and the women SHG system developed and worsened their relationship. The reason for this conflict is mainly due to the power struggle between these two different entities.
7.4.2. Decentralization and Democratization of Local Governance

Along with strengthening empowerment and participation of people, democratic decentralization in Kerala have taken large number of measures for exercising power in a democratic manner by local governments. With this objective several measures have been taken such as, inclusion of the marginalized social sections, strengthening systems of accountability and transparency, designing and implementing efficient public management systems within a framework of better interface between elected and official functionaries and also massive capacity building for effective practice of the intrinsic values of democratic governance at the local level. The significant research findings on the practice of the principles of democratic local governance is discussed in the following paragraphs.

7.4.2.1. Inclusive Development and Democratic Governance

The new space for participation of the disadvantaged social sections in development planning and local governance created an enabling environment for them to engage in the decision making process which affect their life. Right from the very beginning of the People’s Plan Campaign the specific development problems of women, the disadvantaged social groups such as, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, disabled people, destitute and other vulnerable groups have been addressed with utmost importance.

The research found that decentralized development planning and democratic local governance in Kerala significantly contributed to enhance the participation of women in the public sphere during the last two decades. The legal framework and policy initiatives, particularly the innovative provision for the WCP substantially sensitized the whole society on the issues of gender in development and governance. It is widely considered that most of the local governments are not properly considered the choice and voice of women in deciding issues related to local development and governance.
Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Even though, the women SHGs and the Kudumbasree movement is very actively involved in most of the local governments and they are part of the decision making institutional structures. Adequate resources are not allocated to address the strategic gender needs of women and the interests of women are not well protected in development planning and local governance. The effective participation of women in local governance and development are prevented by various factors such, lack of support and resistance from the family, the influence of feudal culture and its offshoot of male dominance, lack of economic and livelihood opportunities, lack of capacity to take independent decisions, lack of adequate support from the political parties, lack of control over asset, lack of opportunities for skill up-gradation and so on.

The research findings shows that even though, efforts have been made to strengthen participation of the SC and ST communities in development planning and governance at the local level, the suggestions and demands on the felt needs of these communities are not taken care or properly addressed by local governments. In most of the local governments the resource allocation and utilization is not in accordance with the development priorities identified by the SC and ST members. The inputs of Grama sabha and Oorukottam are not properly recorded and considered while taking developmental decisions beneficial to SC and ST communities.

The grama sabha and Oorukottam meetings have failed to discuss and deliberate the critical development problems of the SC and ST communities and to resolve them by making use of large amount of resources under SCP and TSP at the disposal of local governments. Even though, the basic infrastructure facilities of the SC and ST communities have marked significant progress, decentralization has not produced much change in the human quality of life of the SC and ST communities, particularly the quality of life of the tribal community. The performance of local governments to design an appropriate
development strategy and formulate and implement programmes for enhancing the human quality of life of these most deprived social sections is not at a comfortable level in most of the local governments. Therefore, the local governments have to do a relook in to the policy of inclusion of the marginalized and the most deprived social sections.

Large number of local governments are not utilized the financial resources devolved to them and the major share of SCP and TSP funds are at the disposal of local governments. The performance of local governments to utilize and implement development projects beneficial to the SC and ST communities is not at the expected level that has been visualized by the architects of democratic decentralization. In most of the local governments the allocation and utilization of SCP and TSP funds face critical challenges. This is mainly the result of the lack of capacity on the part of local governments to identify the felt needs of these communities and in the selection of appropriate development projects suited to their socio-economic conditions. The lack of support on the part of the officers transferred from different administrative departments to plan and implement programmes for the SC and ST communities in the development sector concerned also adversely affected the performance of local governments to utilize SCP and TSP funds devolved to local governments.

The capacity of self-determination and the level of empowerment of the SC and ST communities have not been achieved significant progress even after two decades of decentralization in Kerala. Decentralization has not positively contributed to empower these two deprived communities and to develop capacity to articulate their needs and demands in large majority of local governments. These two communities have not yet attained the capability to protect their rights and entitlements and to effectively participate in the different platforms of decentralized development and governance. Large
number of factors still preventing them to exercise their democratic rights and to make use of the democratic space provided by decentralization. Most of the people of these communities are not aware of the democratic potential and space of democratic decentralization. The educational backwardness of the SC and ST communities and the exploitative power relations exist in the society thwart the development process in favor of them. Most of the elected representatives and officials have not yet internalized the humanizing effect of decentralization and they are not sensitized enough to the felt needs of these two most deprived communities.

Democratic decentralization also addressed the issue of development of destitute, challenged and vulnerable sections of the society and efforts have been made to allocate adequate resources for resolving the specific problems of these social sections. The provision for a component plan for a package of services for these categories has also been mandated in the guidelines issued by the state government. However, the performance of local governments to plan and implement development programmes for these poorest of the poor is not encouraging.

Most of the local governments did not convene special Grama sabha meetings to identify the felt needs of these social sections and to have a deeper understanding and wider consultation on their specific development challenges. Another important problem faced by local governments in the planning and implementation of the package of care services for the destitute is the lack of capacity and professional expertise of the officials available with local governments. In most cases the implementing officer of the package of care services of the destitute is the Kudumbasree charge officer or the ICDS supervisor. Most of them do not have the sense of commitment and dedication to carry out such a programme or not sensitized enough to build partnership with the NGOs having resource potential to implement such programmes.
7.4.2.2. Democratic Accountability, Transparency and Responsiveness in Local Governance

Designing and strengthening instruments of accountability, transparency and responsiveness are of obvious importance to build genuine democratic system or strengthening the democratic political culture at the local level. Democratic decentralization in Kerala have made significant efforts to design and operationalize effective systems of transparency, accountability and responsiveness requisite for strengthening democratization process in development planning and local governance. The methodology of decentralized planning itself have an in built mechanism to ensure transparency, accountability and responsiveness in local governance. The innovative institutional systems such as, beneficiary committees, monitoring committees, institutional level management committees etc. have been created to execute public works projects and transparent procedure for selection of beneficiaries significantly contributed to strengthen transparency and accountability at the local level during the initial years of decentralization. The grievance redressal mechanisms such as Ombudsman, Appellate Tribunal, Front Office System etc., innovated to transform the dynamics of relations between local governments and the citizens also significantly contributed to improve the quality of local governance and democracy. During the initial years of democratic decentralization, the elected representatives and officials were more responsive to the needs and opinion of the common people. The People’s Plan Campaign produced significant effect to sensitize the people and other functionaries of local governments towards democratic transformation at the local level. The high degree of political ownership and political will expressed by the state government created an enabling environment for a responsive and accountable system of governance at the grassroots level.
Nowadays, the political ownership of the state government and the facilitative support to maintain the enthusiasm of the people and other stakeholders on the part of local governments has been considerably weakened. Most efforts to strengthen participation of people in different micro level democratic institutions have also been weakened. The space for democratic participation of voluntary organizations and community based organizations is deliberately denied by most of the local governments and the civil society groups became highly demoralized. The withdrawal of voluntary workers and voluntary experts from the different platforms of democratic participations has significantly reduced the vigour of responsiveness and accountability of elected representatives and officials and this in turn weakened the democratization process in local governance.

Most of the local governments are not taking initiatives for proactive disclosure of statement of accounts, performance audit reports, social audit reports, details of the development and welfare schemes, criteria for beneficiary selection, physical and financial achievements of local plans and so on in the Grama sabha meetings. Most of the local governments are not periodically updated and published the citizen’s charter and its copy is distributed to the Grama sabha meetings for wider dissemination.

Most of the local governments failed to observe the provisions of transparency and accountability mandated in the public works rules of local governments such as, priority to beneficiary committees in the execution of public works projects, preparation of estimates in local language, summary statement of the estimates in layperson’s language, fixing of notice boards in the work site regarding the details of the public works project and so on. The citizens or the civil society organizations are not empowered enough to intervene or exert pressure on local governments to observe these legal formalities and legislative provisions for accountability and transparency. The
legal provision for participatory monitoring system which is stipulated to ensure efficiency, transparency and democratic accountability is not effectively practiced in most of the local governments.

The study found that decentralization has failed to produce sustainable effect to enhance transparency and accountability in local governance and development planning. The performance of local governments in practicing the methods and processes of transparency and accountability is not attributed to the legal provisions that envisaged by democratic decentralization. The institutional design of accountability and transparency as visualized by the architects of decentralization has not been effectively working at a comfortable level in the local government system of Kerala. However, the setting up of the Front Office System and its functioning during the last five years positively contributed to produce some desired changes to strengthen the responsiveness of local governments and to enhance the quality of service delivery.

Another important indices used by this study to assess the extent of responsiveness of local governments is the functioning of the grievance redressal mechanism. The study found that other than the statutory institutional mechanisms of Ombudsman and Appellate Tribunal for local governments, large majority of local governments have been taken efforts to redress the grievances of citizens raised in Grama sabha and other formal channels of communication. The complaint box installed in the local government office as part of the front office management system is a useful tool to redress the grievances of the people and to ensure citizen’s friendliness in local governance. The efforts on the part of local governments to redress the grievances of the people are not foolproof and still there is lot of scope for improvising the grievance redressal system and to strengthen the relations between local governments and citizens. The specific responsibility of the finance standing committee to assess the performance of the public
administration of the local governments is not effectively carried out in most of the local governments.

The innovative efforts taken by the local governments to operationalize the citizen’s charter changed the dynamics of citizen’s interface with local governments during the People’s Plan Campaign. Citizen’s charter is used by local governments as an effective instrument of transparency and accountability in the delivery of services. However, the study found that nowadays large majority of local governments failed to prepare, update and publish the citizen’s charter and disseminate the same through Grama sabha or other means of proactive disclosure.

It is expected that the ICT application and the massive e-Governance programme implemented with the support of IKM enhance transparency, accountability and responsiveness of local governments to deliver services in an efficient manner. The present study found that most of the local governments have failed to achieve significant improvement in this regard. Today, one of the greatest challenges faced by local governments is erosion of the extent of participation and the involvement of citizens and civil society organizations in planning and implementation and also in local governance. This in turn weakened the vigor of practicing the principles of transparency, accountability and responsiveness in local governance.

7.4.2.3. Decentralization and Democratic Functioning of the Organizational Structure of Local Governments

Democratic decentralization in Kerala intended to produce changes in the organizational structure of local governments and in the dynamics of the relations between the elected representatives and officials to strengthen local democracy. Along with protecting the autonomy and self-governing status of local governments to take independent decisions regarding matters of devolved powers and authority, organizational structure suited to take decisions through
collective deliberation and with the participation of elected representatives and officials was designed at the local level.

In order to strengthen better interface between elected representatives and officials, the local government organization was designed to forge a complementary relationship between these two major actors in local governance. The officials have to accept the democratic authority vested with the elected representatives and the elected representatives have to recognize the independent statutory powers vested with officials of various administrative departments transferred to local governments. The standing committees provide an effective linkage between the elected representatives and the officials transferred from different administrative departments to local governments. Based on the recommendations of the Committee on Decentralization of Powers, necessary rules have been formulated to strengthen better interface between elected representatives and officials. Hence, democratic decentralization created a strong foundation for the functioning of democratic organizational structure and to establish effective linkage between various institutional settings within the local government system.

The study found that the relationship between the executive head and the official head in most of the local governments is very cordial and they make use of different channels for consultation in the decision making process related to local administration. The effort for consultation between the political head and the official head in taking legal and administrative decision itself is a positive sign of better interface between these two key actors in local governance. However, there are some issues exist in creating better interface between elected members and the political head of the local governments. Large number of elected representatives are not so comfortable with the consultation process exist between them and the political head. There are some
interface issues exist in the relationship between the political head and the officials transferred to local governments.

The present study also found that the relationship between the elected council of local governments and the standing committees is very smooth and complementary. There are very few instances of political rift within the local government organization between the elected council and the standing committees and the relations between them is cordial and mutually supportive to achieve better development and governance outcome at the local level. At the same time it was found that the relationship between standing committees and the officials transferred from different administrative departments to local governments is also very healthy and mutually supportive to discharge the new developmental responsibilities vested with local governments.

The experience of better performing and beacon local governments provide new lessons of better interface between the different actors and effective linkage between different structures within the local administrative system. At the same time it is found that the developmental innovations taken place at the local level and its sustainability is also the result of the democratic relations, functional freedom and mutual support system developed in the internal management of local government organizations.

7.4.2.4. Capacity Building for Democratization of Local Governance and Development

The decentralized and cascading strategy for capacity building implemented during the People’s Plan Campaign significantly empowered the different functionaries of local governments and the ordinary citizens to effectively participate in development planning and local governance. The massive training and capacity building programmes designed and implemented as part of decentralized planning significantly contributed to strengthen democratization process at the local level.
Capacity building and training became an essential condition to build the requisite competence of different functionaries of local governments and civil society groups. The massive devolution of financial resources and expansion of the functional domain and development responsibilities of local governments further broadened the scope of capacity building in Kerala. The systematic efforts for capacity building carried out by the State Planning Board during the People’s Plan Campaign and KILA during the Kerala Development Plan with the support of CapDecK considerably improved the capacity of all stakeholders of local governments and the ordinary citizens to strengthen democratic decentralization.

The SDC supported CapDecK programme significantly helped Kerala to institutionalize the capacity building efforts and strengthened the institutional capacity of KILA to emerge as the lead capacity building institution for local governments. The three phases of the CapDecK programme helped KILA to conduct need based and systematic training and other capacity building programmes to empower local governments and their Associations for effective policy advocacy supportive to decentralization. In order to ensure sustainability of the capacity building of different functionaries of local governments, continuous and concurrent training programmes are to be organized. In every local government election more than 70 percent of the elected representatives are new entrants due the delimitation of electoral constituencies and rotation of reserved seats for the marginalized social groups such as, women, SC and ST. Moreover, 50 percent seats are reserved for women and most of them have no previous experience in holding public offices.

This study found that the effectiveness of capacity building and training has considerably been eroded during the last few years and the training delivery is not effective to help the local government functionaries to exercise
their roles and responsibilities in the changing context of decentralization. The study also found that the large number of training and capacity building programmes are not useful to enhance their capacity to make use of the rich social capital available in every local government region and to strengthen participation in development planning and to democratize local governance. The large number of training and capacity building programmes failed to motivate the training participants and to make use of the human resources available with local governments and to provide space for their democratic participation in local governance and development.

The study also found that most of the training inputs have no practical relevance and operational significance and these trainings are implemented in a delivery mode. There is very little effort to design and implement experiential training programmes and to disseminate the innovative developmental and governance experiences of the beacon local governments. Most of the faculty members do not have operational level competence and they are simply reproducing the content of the handbook in their lecture session. There is very little efforts for documenting and disseminating best practices of local governments and make use of their experiences for peer learning in these training programmes.

Most of the trainers are not good quality trainers and poor in their delivery capacity and they have no moderation skill and other skills required for adult learning. There is very little opportunity to share the views of the training participants and the potential of peer learning is not used in the training programmes. Most of the training materials and handbooks are not useful and user friendly and very little relevance to be used as user guides or operational manuals for improving the individual capacity and the organizational capacity of the training participants. The support of the Local
Government Associations has not been used to ensure the participation and mapping the training needs of different functionaries of local governments.

The training and capacity building interventions are not based on a comprehensive capacity building plan and strategy. In most cases the training programmes are organized on an ad hoc basis and most of the training events are one shot affair and no serious effort for follow up action is taken by the training institution. The learning effectiveness is not properly assessed and evaluated except collecting the immediate feedback of the participants at the end of the training programme. The capacity deficit of training institutions engaged in the capacity building of local government functionaries is a major challenge which result in the poor quality of training programmes. The study also found that there is very little effort on the part of capacity building institutions to continuously assess the training needs and map the critical capacity gaps of different functionaries of local governments and design useful and effective training programmes to enhance the operational capacity and effective performance of local government functionaries.

7.5. Evidence Based Recommendations for Strengthening Decentralization and Local Governance in Kerala

The assessment of the democratic performance of decentralized planning and local governance naturally leads us to evidence based recommendations for strengthening participatory development planning and improving the quality of democratic local governance. These recommendations will definitely help to address the different issues faced by local governments from an immediate, medium-term and long-term perspective. Some of the issues can be addressed by local governments on their own and some other issues can be addressed only with the involvement of other stakeholders, including the state and national governments. The different levels of governments should develop an approach and strategy to resolve the systemic
problems and to improve the quality of participatory development planning and democratic local governance in Kerala.

7.5.1. Policy Recommendations for Local Governments

7.5.1.1. Strengthening Participation in Development Planning and Local Governance

- Massive citizens’ education programmes have to be organized to sensitize the people and to exercise their democratic rights to participate in the decision making process
- Continuous efforts have to be taken to strengthen Grama sabhas and to ensure the participation of all sections of people in the Grama sabha meetings
- Grama sabhas have to be convened with sufficient publicity and advance notice to the entire households and the democratic rights of participation of the people in the decision making process has to be recognized and protected
- The social capital of NHGs, SHGs, Residents’ Associations, voluntary workers, community based organizations and political parties have to be utilized to strengthen Grama sabha participation and convene an organizing committee meeting of the representatives of all stakeholders to discuss the strategy for the successful conduct of Grama sabha meeting
- The decisions of the Grama sabha meetings are to be properly recorded and consolidated and the action taken report has to be presented in the next Grama sabha meeting. The service of the voluntary workers are to be utilized for recoding the deliberations of the sub-group meetings and to present the consolidated report in the plenary session
- Grama sabhas have to give space for deliberations on matters related to local governance such as, service delivery, taxation, rights of the
people, sanitation, safety, responsiveness of public administration and so on to attain increased trust of the people in attending Grama sabha meetings

- The higher tier local governments have to consider the suggestions and recommendations of the Grama sabha meetings in formulating their plans and maintain the trust of the people in integrated development

- Sufficient funds to meet the logistics expenses for conducting the Grama sabha meetings have to be earmarked and allocated to the conveners of Grama sabhas

- Develop political consensus among different political parties and strengthen civic culture to accommodate the views of different political ideologies in taking local development decisions and its implementation

- The social capital of youth organizations, religious and caste organizations and other mass organizations including the trade union organizations have to be utilized for strengthening community participation in Grama sabha meetings and other participatory institutions of development planning and local governance

- The available human resources are to be mapped and a data bank has to be created by local governments and make use of their service in different phases of participatory development planning and its implementation

- Grama Kendras (Ward Level Service Delivery Centres) have to be set up and strengthened so as to provide local government services to the people and strengthen community participation in development planning and local governance

- The human resource support of retired experts, professionals, academics, activists, representatives of financial institutions and representatives of CSOs and CBOs have to be utilized in the working group functioning.
Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

- Strengthen beneficiary committees, user groups and other community based groups in plan implementation and project management as part of development planning
- The experts available at the local level are to be identified by a search committee appointed by the local government and made use of their service in the functioning of working groups and other participatory institutions at the local level
- Stakeholder consultation has to be institutionalized and take initiatives for wider consultation with different stakeholders of local governance and development
- Technical Support Groups have to be formed and make use of their support in plan formulation, implementation, monitoring and social auditing

7.5.1.2. Inclusive Development and Governance

- Deliberate efforts have to be taken to strengthen participation of SC, ST, women and other deprived social sections in development and implementation
- Specific efforts have to be taken to ensure that the development projects are useful to address the felt needs of these social sections and the resources earmarked for the component plan for these social sections are fully utilized to achieve desired development outcome
- Efforts have to be taken to carry out status studies to create a sound data base and to get a comprehensive picture on the present socio-economic status of these excluded groups and to effectively address their specific development problems
- Ensure the participation of officials of different administrative departments in the planning, implementation and monitoring of development programmes for the excluded social groups
• Massive empowerment programmes have to be designed and implemented to strengthen the participation of marginalized social groups and to ensure the development outcome in favor of these social sections

7.5.1.3. Strengthening Accountability, Transparency and Responsiveness

• Strengthen systems of political and social accountability and make local governance and development participatory, transparent, accountable and responsive

• Strengthen systems of participatory monitoring and evaluation and to ensure efficiency in the utilization of public funds and physical achievements with the involvement of representatives of civil society organizations and community based organizations

• Pro active disclosure of all information related to the availability of all public funds, flow of funds and its utilization for various development and welfare activities and the financial and physical achievements by the local governments

• The audit report of the statutory audit systems and the action taken report shall be presented to the Grama sabha for wider discussion and public scrutiny

• The Citizen’s Charter to specify the service delivery standards shall be prepared, updated and publicized through the Grama sabha meetings

• Right to Service Act shall be implemented and make the service delivery function efficient and transparent

• Citizens’ Report Card and other tools to assess the quality of service delivery are to be used to improve the democratic performance of local governments

• Public hearing have to be organized periodically at the ward level to redress the grievances of people regarding delivery of services and effective implementation of citizen’s charter
• Beneficiary committees shall be formed and provide facilitative support to them for the implementation of public works projects with community participation and participatory monitoring

• Measures are to be taken to comply the provisions in the public works rules for local governments such as, fixing the notice boards to publicize the project details, estimate in laymen’s language, project outlay, period of completion and so on to ensure greater transparency and accountability

• Efforts shall be taken to make the front office management system functional and deliver efficient services to the people. The finance standing committee shall oversee the functioning of the front office management system and ensure the efficiency of the public administration of local governments

• An effective system for grievance redressal shall be constituted and make it functional under the direct supervision of the finance standing committee and massive sensitization programme on Right to Information has to be carried out through Grama sabha meetings

• Social auditing has to be carried out with the support of Grama sabhas and provide facilitative support to the social audit team

• Transparent and criteria based selection of beneficiaries has to be strictly observed and complied and the beneficiary list with the criteria and weightage of marks awarded has to be proactively disclosed for verification and public scrutiny

• E-Governance and ICT applications developed by the IKM shall be implemented and make them functional to deliver services and make the public administration efficient

• Massive e-Governance literacy programme has to be implemented to reduce the digital divide and make local governments accessible to the people
The website of the local governments have to be accessible to all without any password protection and all relevant information on local governance and public administration are to be proactively disclosed to the people

Independent assessment of the performance of local governments by a committee represented by all political parties, NGOs and CBOs, social activists etc. and suggest measures for performance improvement

Provide opportunity to the media persons and public to attend local government council meeting as observers and report the deliberations of the meetings as part of doing the advocacy function to strengthen local democracy and governance

7.5.1.4. Strengthening the Internal Management System of Local Government Organization

Strengthen the relationship between elected representatives and officials and develop an environment of mutual respect, mutual recognition, support and cooperation. The democratic mandate and rights of elected representatives in policy decisions by the officials and the professional and technical expertise of officials by the elected representatives are to be accepted

Local governments, particularly the standing committee concerned should design a review and reporting system and take measures to oversee the functioning of staff of local governments and officials of the transferred institutions

The heads of local governments and the standing committee chairpersons have to be taken deliberate efforts to build good team work and to ensure the proactive involvement of officials and staff in the day to day governance and public administration

The heads of local governments have to develop good leadership quality and to take in to confidence of other elected representatives
belonging to different political parties and open effective channels of communication with them

- The standing committees are to be used as an effective platform to forging good relations between the elected representatives and officials of the different administrative departments transferred to local governments

- The heads of local governments and other elected representatives have to be provided facilitative support and other human resource support to officials of the transferred departments to implement the development and welfare programmes with the participation of the community

7.5.1.5. Training and Capacity Building for Strengthening Democratization

- Undertake massive citizen education programme to disseminate the values of decentralisation and democratic local governance and strengthen participation of citizens and the community. Massive campaign on right to Information, right to service, citizen’s charter, roles and responsibilities of Grama sabha etc. have to be carried out to empower the citizens and the community in local development and democratic governance

- Supervision and overseeing on the part of local governments to ensure the participation of different functionaries and other stakeholders in the capacity building and training programmes organized by the different capacity building institutions

- The training needs and capacity gaps of different functionaries of local governments are to be concurrently assessed with the support of the Associations of Local Governments by the capacity building institutions and make use of these inputs in designing capacity building and training programmes
Necessary ICT infrastructure facilities such as broad band connectivity, computers, user friendly software applications, necessary technical and trouble shooting support and system maintenance support etc. have to be set up at the local level for promoting good governance and efficient delivery of services by the staff of local governments.

Design and implement need based training programme for all elected representatives and officials in ICT application and e-Governance in the public administration of local governments.

Political education and training to the political party leaders and elected representatives on the values of local governance and democracy. Clear message has to be transferred to them that the delivery of services and distribution of goods in local governments have to be based on clear cut norms and objective criteria.

The leadership quality of the elected representatives and officials have to be enhanced to build effective team work in development planning and local governance and to mobilize people and to forging healthy relations with the community.

The front office management system has to be strengthened to provide citizen-friendly service to the community and to build good partnership between the people and local governments.

### 7.5.2. Policy Recommendations for the State Government

#### 7.5.2.1. Strengthening Participation in Development Planning and Local Governance

The rules for decentralized participatory planning have to be formulated and enacted to institutionalize the process and procedure of functioning of micro level participatory institutional structures in development planning and local governance.
Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

- The legal provision for disbursing sitting fee for non-official members of the working groups and other participatory institutions which need the support of experts in development planning, implementation and monitoring have to be stipulated.

- The Performance Audit authority shall be empowered to conduct an external monitoring and overseeing of the conduct of Grama sabha meetings and the meetings of other participatory institutional structures and this reports have to be submitted to the District Planning Committees.

- The legal status of the NHGs have to be stipulated in the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act and Grama sabhas are to be constituted by the representatives elected from the NHGs within the ward of a Grama Panchayat.

- The participation of officials transferred to the local governments and the other local level officers such as, the Village Officer, The Sub-Inspector of Police, the Sub-Engineer of the KSEB and so on are to be mandated in the Grama sabha meetings. Their participation and level of involvement in the local planning process has to be monitored by the administrative department concerned.

- A manual for community participation in decentralized participatory planning and local governance has to be prepared and disseminated to strengthen and institutionalize citizens’ participation and their democratic rights in local development and governance.

- There shall be no direction on the part of the state government to convene special Grama sabha meeting as part of implementing the different flagship programmes of the state and central governments. These programmes are to be discussed and the beneficiaries are to be selected in the regular Grama sabha meeting convened by local governments.
A manual for plan implementation shall be prepared and enacted and the democratic roles and responsibilities of the community based organizations and the civil society organizations have to be clearly defined in implementation and monitoring of local plans.

There shall be a legal provision in the Local Government Act for giving opportunity to the people to give their suggestions and responses to the draft project proposals and to the draft plan document to articulate their needs and demands to local governments through e-mail and other means of communication.

7.5.2.2. Inclusive Development and Governance

- An expert officer for social justice has to be appointed in every local government to coordinate and effectively implement the development and welfare programmes specifically beneficial to the socially excluded groups and deprived social sections.
- The different administrative departments have to oversee the facilitative support given by the officers concerned to the local governments to plan and implement the programmes for the development and welfare of socially excluded communities.
- A manual for gender planning and budgeting has to be prepared and enacted to address the strategic gender needs of women and strengthen the involvement of women in development and governance.
- Stipulate to undertake the gender status study, SC and ST status study and status study of the challenged and aged people in every local government as part of formulating a strategic vision and comprehensive programme for inclusive development.
7.5.2.3. Strengthening Accountability, Transparency and Responsiveness

- Audit commission shall be appointed to streamline the auditing function and to ensure accountability and efficiency in financial management of local governments.

- The performance auditing system shall be re-engineered with a permanent cadre of employees and their capacity may be developed so as to perform their responsibilities as the internal auditing team to provide facilitative support and guidance to local governments.

- Strong action may be taken by the administrative departments concerned against the staff and officers of local governments who have failed to discharge their mandated development responsibilities vested with them as implementing officers.

- New legislation may be initiated to include provision for recall of the elected representatives in case of serious omissions and violation of rules and dereliction of responsibilities.

- Provision should be incorporated in the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act to fix financial responsibility to the omissions and commissions of elected representatives in case of illegitimate decisions and wasteful expenditures.

- E-tendering of public works projects shall be made mandatory as part of the execution of public works projects by the local governments for greater transparency and efficiency in public works management.

- The statutory auditing functions carried out by the local fund audit team and the C&AG shall be strengthened and mandated local governments to take follow up action and the action taken reports are to be presented in the Grama sabha meetings.

- Rules for social auditing has to be prepared and finalized and mandatorily implemented at the local government level.
• Policy support for effective networking of local government office and the offices of the transferred institutions of different administrative departments has to be undertaken to promote e-Governance at the local level

• Adequate political will shall be developed to implement e-Governance and ICT applications to enhance the quality of delivery of services.

• The front office management system should be effectively linked with the back office and effective measures are to be taken to digitalize all the legacy data available with local governments

• The local governments have to endowed with adequate powers to take disciplinary action in case of dereliction of duties assigned by local governments in their area of assigned functional responsibilities of the officers concerned

• There shall be a three members ombudsman system for redressing the grievances of citizens and rectifying complaints in a speedy manner

7.5.2.4. Strengthening the Internal Management System of Local Government Organization

• The number of statutory meeting of the local government council, steering committee and the standing committee meeting have to be increased from one to two in a month so as to facilitate the increased participation of elected members in the decision making process of local governments

• More powers have to be devolved to local governments to take independent disciplinary action against the officers transferred to local governments from different administrative departments

• Increase the honorarium of elected representatives and to make them as full time functionaries

• Incorporate provisions in the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act and Kerala Municipalities Act to disqualify elected members who are responsible
for taking illegal decisions and violating rules and regulations in the public administration of local governments

- Networking of local government office with other institutions transferred to local governments from different administrative departments and install user friendly software for effective coordination and management of the local government organization

7.5.2.5. Training and Capacity Building for Strengthening Democratization

- The capacity of the Capacity building institutions at the state level has to be strengthened to meet the capacity building challenges of local governments in the changing context of decentralization and local governance

- The capacity building institutions managed by different administrative departments have to include modules on decentralization and local governance in their stand alone capacity building and training programmes conducted for line department officials and staff

- The State Level Training Advisory Committee has to be formed and make it functional to coordinate all the training and capacity building activities for local governments with the participation of all stakeholders of local governments including, Associations of Local Governments

- A comprehensive capacity building and training policy has to be formulated with the involvement of all stakeholders of local governments at the state level and adequate fund has to be earmarked in the state budget for the training and capacity building of local governments

- The effectiveness of capacity building and training and its effect on the institutional development of local governments has to be assessed with the support of national and international expert institutions and take
necessary measures to build the capacity of local governments at the desired level

7.5.3. Policy Recommendations for the National Government

7.5.3.1. Strengthening Participation in Development Planning and Local Governance

- Evaluation and assessment of the progress of implementation of the provisions in the state conformity legislations to ensure direct democratic devices as part of development planning and local governance and provide special financial incentives for state governments
- The index for awarding financial incentives to the state governments have to be fixed on the criteria of the measures taken to strengthen participatory democratic institutions below the Grama sabhas such as, NHGs, SHGs and resident associations
- There shall be constitutional provision for representation of three tiers of PRIs in the District Planning Committees
- A framework law for local governments could be enacted by the Parliament under Article 252 of the Constitution to lay down the broad principles of responsibilities and functions to local governments and communities (Second ARC report on Local Governance, 2007: 315-16)

7.5.3.2. Inclusive Development and Governance

- The Forest Rights Act shall be effectively implemented to promote the livelihood opportunities of the tribal community
- The Land Alienation Act 1999 shall be effectively implemented to regain the alienated land of the tribal community
Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

- Special assistance for construction of houses to all the houseless SC and ST families shall be provided by the Department of SC and ST from the state plan
- At least one acre of agriculture land shall be distributed to all the landless families of SC and ST communities
- Massive effort for skill development of the SC and ST communities shall be taken to facilitate them to avail the new employment opportunities in the present employment market
- There shall be constitutional provision for representation of SC and ST members in every District Planning Committee
- The delimitation and rotation of reservation of seats for women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes shall be fixed for two terms of five years each so that there is possibility of responsible and experienced leadership from the marginalized social groups
- There shall be a gender component plan and a separate window in the state budget for gender and development to effectively address the strategic gender needs of women
- Implementation and extension of reservation policy for SC, ST and physically challenged social groups to the private sector and in all state budget supported institutions and organizations

7.5.3.3. Strengthening Accountability, Transparency and Responsiveness
- Clear direction and financial support from the central government to the state governments to set up local vigilance commission in the same pattern of the central vigilance commission to redress the citizen’s grievances effectively and efficiently so as to create transparent and accountable local governments all over the country
Clear direction and financial support to constitute the audit commission to streamline the auditing functions and to ensure efficient, effective and economic utilization of funds by local governments

Special assistance for the state governments to constitute the Audit Commission to oversee the integrity and propriety of fund utilization and compliance with the applicable laws in the state

Special assistance to the state governments to constitute the Public Accounts Committee at the local government level. This committee may function in the manner of a Public Accounts Committee of the State Legislature

7.5.3.4. Promoting Better Interface and Internal Management System

- Model Panchayat Raj Manual for the effective functioning of rural local government organization and to develop better interface between elected representatives and officials has to be prepared and circulated

- Mandatory provisions in the Constitutional Act for defining the specific role of the District Planning Committees to oversee the officials of the line departments in discharging their functional responsibilities within the devolved subject areas

- Rules and regulations regarding the functional relations between local governments and the different administrative departments transferred to local governments shall be issued for effective monitoring and performance assessment

- Issue detailed guidelines on the role of ex-officio secretaries with regards to the Panchayat Committee meetings (Decentralized Administrative System: An Analysis, 2002: 20)

- Administrative orders shall be issued to get administrative sanction from local governments to implement all the state sponsored and centrally sponsored programmes within the geographical area and these programmes are to be effectively integrated with the local plan
7.5.3.5. Training and Capacity Building for Strengthening Democratization

- Special financial assistance has to be awarded to the implementation of the National Capacity Building Framework formulated by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), Government of India for comprehensive capacity building for the functionaries of rural local governments.

- The innovative developmental and governance practices at the national level have to be documented and disseminated throughout the country. Special assistance and financial support have to provided for the state governments to document these best practices.

- Monitoring of the progress of implementation of the guidelines issued by the Planning Commission for the formulation of District Plans and to ensure that the District Plans are to be integrated with the State Plan.

- The technical and professional support of the C&AG shall be provided to the Local Fund Audit and Performance Audit authorities for the maintenance of accounts and audit of local governments.

7.6. Areas for Further Research

The field level evidence indicates that there are several other areas which should be given particular attention and to undertake empirical studies and enrich knowledge in the area of decentralization and democratization of local governance. Firstly, the role of different participatory institutional structures and community managed user groups in local governance such as, Parent Teacher Associations, Hospital Management Committees, Water User Committees, Patasekhara Samithis (paddy Land Development Committees) etc has to be explored.

In order to ensure political accountability of elected representatives and officials in local governance and development some innovative institutional systems such as, Ombudsman, Appellate Tribunal etc. for registering and
redressing the grievances of citizens have been set up as part of decentralization in Kerala. Little is known about how the feedback of these institutions is used by local governments for improving the quality of service delivery. Hence these areas should be given particular attention in future studies and research in democratization of local governance.

Democratic decentralization has innovated good number of grassroots level institutional structures to ensure the participation of citizens’ and the community in local governance and development process such as, SHGs, NHGs and CBOs and so on. There is considerably less understanding on the role of these micro level grass roots level institutional structures in democratizing local governance and make it participatory, accountable and transparent.

Another important area which has received little attention is the role of the standing committees in empowering the ordinary elected representatives to participate in the decision making process and facilitate the local government council to take effective decisions after detailed scrutiny and field verification. Hence the role of the standing committees in improving the performance management and service delivery of local governments should be given particular attention.

Little is known about the role of the media in strengthening local democracy and creating accountable, transparent and responsive local governments. Hence, the role of the media in strengthening local democracy and dissemination of good practices at the grass roots level should be given particular attention.

Democratic decentralization has created an enabling environment for the citizens’ and the community to exercise oversight over corruption, procurement, plan implementation and monitoring, participatory monitoring in development planning and implementation. Hence these areas should be given particular attention.
7.7. Implications of the Study

During the past two decades good number of lessons have been learnt in practicing democratic decentralizations and local governance. Some legal reforms to amend the present Local Government Act and other allied sectoral Acts to remove the ambiguities and contradiction between the Local Government Act and allied Acts are needed. The initiative on the part of the state government to take legislative measures to institutionalize the development planning process is the urgent need of the day. The new legislation and rules for decentralized planning is useful to institutionalize the democratic participation in development planning process and to ensure greater local ownership and improved linkages with state plan and national plan. Another implication is that politicization of local governance is the answer to make citizens’ participation sustainable. Giving political opportunities and space to the civil society organizations and the voluntary workers to ensure their democratic participation is necessary to build democratic governance at the local level. Finally, the present study identified a number of issues in need of further strengthening decentralization and democratization of local governments, which will provide a sound basis on which further progress and refinement can be achieved.

7.8. Conclusion

Decentralization has great potential to create an enabling environment for local governments to strengthen local democracy, improve the quality of governance and quality of life of people. Changes in the governance approaches over the past two decades in Kerala have produced significant positive impacts on the reciprocal relations between local governments and citizens. Democratic decentralization in Kerala has significantly contributed to empower the marginalized societal groups to engage in the public sphere and to articulate their choices in development planning. This has also positively contributed to enhancing transparency, expanding accountability and
deepening democracy at the local level. The organizational structure of local
governments have been significantly transformed and set the environment for
collective discussion, public consultation and citizens’ deliberations. This has
also positively contributed to create empowered local citizens and forced the
officials and representatives at the local level to creatively respond to local
needs of the people. A wide range of institutional innovations took place as
part of democratic decentralization strengthened systems of political and social
accountability and positively contributed to improve responsiveness and
accountability of local governments in Kerala.

Democratic decentralization and the massive capacity building
initiative significantly contributed to empower the people to exercise political
and democratic power and to participate in the decision-making process
related to local governance and development planning. Democratic
decentralization endowed new roles and responsibilities to people not only to
participate in development planning, but to make local governments
accountable, transparent, inclusive and responsive to their citizens. The
sustainability of this democratic transition greatly depends upon the greater
ownership of the state government on the one hand and continuous policy
support and facilitative environment from the state government to local
governments on the other. At the same time maintaining the reciprocal
relationship between local government and the citizens based on certain
democratic norms and values is equally relevant to maintain the sustainability
of decentralization and democratic local governance. The democratic
performance of local governments in decentralized development planning and
democratic local governance are to be periodically assessed by using
performance management indicators and give incentives for better performing
local governments to produce sustainable results to improving the quality of
local democracy and quality of life of the people.

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