CHAPTER - VII

GRAM SABHA IN PLANNING PROCESS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Planners and policy makers began to recognise that development requires a basic transformation in social, economic and political structures that enables poor people to help themselves to increase their productivity and incomes. Central planning was not only complex and difficult to implement, but may also have been inappropriate for promoting equitable growth and self-sufficiency among low income groups and communities within developing societies.

Village planning is an attempt to translate into practice the concept of planning from below so that the specific problems each area faces can be assessed and solutions found on the basis of local decisions and mobilisation of local resources human and material. Once, on the occasion of the inauguration of Panchayati Raj, Jawaharlal Nehru reminded, "The time has come when the responsibility for planning and executing development schemes should be entrusted to the people. I shall therefore, ask you to shoulder such responsibility with faith and courage".

The question of decentralised planning is not a new one in India. The second plan clearly paid attention to the significance of village and district
plans, which were supposed to form a basis for the formulation of the state plans. Later on, Committees were set up in order to explore the best possible institution and spatial frameworks for decentralisation. C.T. Kurian, who was a member of the Planning Commission’s Committee on District Level Planning, agrees that the “assembling frame is neither planning nor decentralisation but simply an exercise in administrative devolution”.

“Democratic planning requires expertise. But we should not look for this expertise by expanding the size of the administrative machinery. The people benefit from only a small fraction of the total outlay..... Even as district planning based on representative political institutions will reflect planning which involves the participation of local resident expertise better incorporate the interests of the community”. Local government is extension of the democratic process from the centre to ground. The purpose is that people and their representatives at local levels can participate more intimately and with greater initiative in development of their local potential to meet local needs as determined by them. The prime responsibility of local government therefore is the promotion of local initiatives which can be harnessed for an integrated District development plan and the effective utilisation of the resources, human and material, devolved and delegated by government at the centre and those that can be generated by the people on their own. The growing interest in decentralised planning and administration is attributable to the realization that development is a
complex and uncertain process that cannot be easily planned and controlled from the centre.

7.2. PEOPLE’S PLANNING IN KERALA - A PROFILE

Decentralisation up to the lowest level, of economic and political powers, is a necessary condition for participative democracy. Participative democracy is possible only under high levels of development of productive forces, of science and technology and a high level of development of people’s capabilities. People should be universally literate and educated in the conventional sense, but they should be also literate and educated in science, technology, environment, resources, development, human relations etc. Only a highly educated society can have participative democracy. Education is only a necessary condition, but not sufficient. Practical and effective decentralisation of economic and political power is yet another necessary condition. This cannot be achieved by a single decision even at the highest levels. People can learn only by doing. A participative democracy, and for that matter any societal organisation, can be stable only if it is just to all members of the society. Every citizen should feel its justness. This demands self-restraint on the part of citizens and societal restraint on individuals. Citizens should be ‘cultured’ to accept restraints.

In 1967 when the Left Democratic Front under the leadership of Communist Party of India (Marxist) was voted to power, the question of decentralisation, together with many other shelved issues like land reforms, educational reforms etc., were brought back to the agenda. The issue of
decentralisation and local self-governance was taken up again when Shri. E.K. Nayanar was brought to power. An important seminar was organised at the Centre for Development Studies in 1981 on decentralisation. However, before steps to operationalise decentralisation were initiated, the Left Democratic Front government was toppled again by some of its constituent parties. In 1987, when Shri. E.K. Nayanar was returned to power, the project of decentralisation was once again taken up in right earnest. A committee under the chairmanship of Shri. V. Ramachandran, I.A.S. was formed to work out a detailed programme of action for effective decentralisation of powers. It was suggested that 30 per cent of the Eight Plan allocation should be set apart for projects initiated by Panchayats, Blocks and Districts. But the absence of elected bodies at block and district level and resistance from bureaucracy as well as a number of political parties ultimately reduced this proposal into a provision of a few lakhs of rupees to each Panchayat in the form of ‘untied fund’.

In 1992, with the objectionable sections of 64th amendment bill removed, the Parliament unanimously passed the 73rd and 74th amendments leading to the formation of Panchayats (3 tiers) and Nagarapalikas. It took another two to three years for the states to enact legislations on Panchayats and Nagarapalikas.

The People’s Campaign can also be seen as an outcome of the long-drawn out and extensive development dialogue in Kerala, sparked off as it was by the crisis encountered by the famous ‘Kerala Model of
Development'. Kerala’s development experience came to be hailed as a cost-effective model of development, suitable for copying by other Third World Regions, for the reason that inspite of the burden of economic under development, the state could achieve very high quality of life for its people.

If Kerala is to protect and strengthen its past gains, it can hardly afford to lag behind in production and productivity. The decline in the quality of services, especially of those supplied by the public sector, needs urgent remedial measures, for it has already started affecting the quality of life of people, especially vulnerable sections of the society. The over-centralised system of development planning and implementation is totally unstable to take on these challenges.

In view of the consensus in favour of a decentralised system, the state also witnessed some important moves to evolve a viable mode of decentralised system of administration and planning. In 1990-91 Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad functioned as the backbone of the Total Kerala Literacy programme which mobilised more than three lakh volunteers and more than 1.5 million learners. Kerala became the first “totally literate” state in India. In the same year the Integrated Rural Technology Centre and Centre for Earth Science Studies together initiated the Panchayat Resource Mapping programme which was later to become an important tool in micro-level planning. The experience of a comprehensive micro planning experiment in the Kalliaiseri Panchayat in 1991-92, as a part of a project to be implemented in 25 Panchayats. In 1995 a major action research
programme was formulated by Integrated Rural Technology Centre together with the Center for Development Studies to carry out intensive local area planning with people's participation in five Panchayats. The concept of Neighbourhoods and Panchayat Development Society tried out in Kalliaasseri from 1993 onwards was planned to be tried out in these five Panchayats plus fifteen to twenty other Panchayats.

All these were, still, in the form of 'action research'. They were not part of mainstream planning or thought. It was the experience of such earlier experiments that led to the articulation of the idea of a People's Campaign for Planning.

The Left Democratic Front government in 1996 formed a State Planning Board. The campaign was organised by having a High Power Guidance Council consisting of E.M. Shankaran Namboothiripad as Chairman, the Chief Minister as Chief Patron, former Chief Ministers, Former Opposition Leader and three distinguished personalities as Vice-Presidents, and the Members of Legislative Assembly, cultural leaders, educationists, and scientists as members. The Ninth Five Year Plan was at the door-steps. The Government took a daring decision to invert the entire process and start planning from the Gram Sabha and the Panchayat upwards, with people's participation and arrive at the state plan as a result of this exercise. The decision to go to the people, to invert the planning process, was taken at the meeting of the full Planning Board held on 14th
July, 1996. The programme was launched, formally on Kerala's New Year Day of 1172(ME) 17th August 1996.

7.2.1 Campaign through Phases

The Campaign has gone through six phases. The first stage of the campaign was the convening of a Special Gram Sabha and conducting discussions in a structured way with the expressed intention of understanding the problem of villagers and finding solutions to them in a shared way. The whole exercise was conducted systematically with time allotted for each item on the agenda of the Gram Sabha. The members of the Gram Sabha were required to register their names against the development sector of their choice. There were as many as twelve groups divided into various development sectors. The number of groups could be determined according to the local context. Structured questions pertaining to each development sector was posed to the participants for consensual answers. The purpose of the exercise was to assist people in identifying local problems and proposing solutions to them. Hence, in this stage emphasis was laid on the organisation of Gram Sabhas, especially in ensuring good participation. The involvement of women, Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the Gram Sabha discussions was to be consciously encouraged. It is estimated that over 27 lakh people participated in the Special Gram Sabha. From then onwards, the campaign was carried on by persons who were the conveners of the various groups in the Gram Sabhas and the District and Local Level resource persons. The most important
outcome of this phase was the listing of local development problems. The meeting were also instrumental in bringing about a welcome change in the attitude of people towards development activities.

The second stage was the holding of the development seminars at the Panchayat and Municipal Levels. In order to provide necessary background information for sector-wise discussions, a printed report on the socio-economic status of the Gram Panchayat had to be made available to the participants. The Development Reports were to be drafted on the basis of the consolidation of Gram Sabha reports, review of ongoing schemes, collection of secondary data, geographical study of the area and a brief survey of local history. The output of the second phase includes generation of an extensive local data base, a comprehensive survey of all development sectors for all Panchayats and Municipalities, a list of plausible solutions to the development problems and formation of task forces to prepare development projects for each development sector.

It has been estimated that around three lakh people consisting of representatives from Gram Sabhas, elected representatives, local leaders of political parties, line department officials, local experts etc., participated in the development seminars. The State Planning Board also published a handbook on the preparation of development reports.

The third stage of People’s Planning Campaign was the preparation of local projects. For this stage 1446 persons were given state level
training, 219 of them being women. But the size of the training manual or even the intensity of training could not have replaced years of field experience. Many resource persons who were active during the early stages disappeared from the scene. Panchayat members were directly responsible for the preparation of the projects by virtue of their being the chairpersons of task forces. The Planning Board hinted that those Panchayats who refuse or make delay to prepare projects would not be given grants. The Planning Board has also issued a set of guidelines for the preparation of Special Component Plan and Tribal Sub Plan projects. It was recommended that the local bodies earmark ten per cent of the plan assistance for projects meant for development of women.

The fourth stage was the preparation of the Ninth Plan document of the Panchayat. For finalising the plan, the Panchayat had to; (1) make a development strategy on the basis of problems identified and resource potential of the locality (2) Prioritise and select projects to be implemented and (3) decide on a monitoring mechanism for successful implementation of each project selected. On the basis of the above analysis, each Panchayat was supposed to prepare a plan document comprising of eight chapters, viz., introduction, the development strategy, resource mobilisation sectoral programmes, integrated development, welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, women’s development programmes, and monitoring. The fifth stage was the preparation of block and district level plans for which steering committees were formed.
During the sixth stage the State Planning Board took the initiative to mobilise technical experts, mostly retired officers, to voluntarily take up the job. They were to give their approval of projects which were simple and leave the technically complex ones to the District Level Expert Committee in which some of the members of the Voluntary Technical Corps also found a place. The power to give administrative sanction to the projects lay with the Panchayat Committee. When the process was completed, the first installment of state share in the plan fund was given. Because Panchayats were unable to prepare the plan document for the entire five-year period, it was decided to insist only on the annual plan for 1997-98.

On completion of this process, the elected representatives at the local level were required to convene the Gram Sabha and discuss the plan documents adopted by the Panchayat during the year 1997-98. In some Gram Sabhas the members identified beneficiaries of projects and formed committees to supervise implementation. In subsequent years also similar plan documents were prepared and discussed with Gram Sabha before finalisation.

7.3 GRAM SABHA IN PLANNING PROCESS

Rural progress depends entirely on the existence of an active organisation like Gram Sabha in the village which can bring all the people together including the weaker sections to plan and implement common programmes. As part of this experiment, the Gram Sabha, the base of the
Panchayati Raj system, should function as a vital institution and should be able to exert its influence on the Gram Panchayat.

In Kerala, the Gram Sabha met six times in almost all the Panchayats in the period under study. The first meeting was held as per the Act, which specifies that, it should be held twice a year. The second meeting - special Gram Sabha - was called in the wake of the introduction of people's Campaign for the Ninth Plan. In this meeting the needs of the people were identified and schemes prepared and prioritised by the Gram Panchayat. The third meeting was held for approval of the projects. The fourth was held for the identification of beneficiaries for the development schemes implemented by the three-tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions. The fifth and sixth Gram Sabhas were held for approval of the projects and identification of beneficiaries for the 1998-99 plan.

In the first plan year, there were no clear cut criteria for selection of beneficiaries. The mode of selection was on the basis of consensus, lot method, show of hands etc. and varied from Panchayat to Panchayat. But there were certain pitfalls in such type of selection. Government of Kerala issued guidelines and criteria for selection of beneficiaries. In one instance the Gram Panchayat made certain changes in the list prepared by the Gram Sabha. But in a landmark decision, the High Court held that the Panchayats are not selecting authorities, but only approving authority, in the case of beneficiary selection. The Government of Kerala also issued an order confirming this. As per the Government Order, a procedure for
selection of beneficiaries of various schemes was formulated by the local bodies. The Order makes it mandatory that all beneficiaries are to be selected in the Gram Sabha based on clear objective criteria with weightage given to each criterion in the forms of marks. As per the existing instructions, the District Panchayats and Block Panchayats can take up individual beneficiary schemes for housing, latrine, well construction and giving housing plots to landless. For such schemes the District Panchayats and Block Panchayats should lay down criteria for distribution of the total target among the various Gram Panchayats coming within their jurisdiction.

The Block Panchayats and District Panchayats will have to intimate in advance the number of beneficiaries to be selected for the programmes implemented by it. The usual procedure is to distribute the forms to the people and they will have to mention the scheme in which they would like to be considered as a beneficiary. Once the application forms are received by the Gram Panchayat, a tentative list is prepared based on weightage given as detailed in the following table.\(^{16}\) The marks are indicative. The relative weightage that is to be given to each of these criteria is to be determined by the individual Panchayat.
Table 7.1
Rationale for Selection of Beneficiaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Annual Income</th>
<th>Marks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Up to Rs.6000</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Between Rs.6001-8500</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Between Rs.8501-11000</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Special Families</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Scheduled Tribes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Scheduled Castes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Handicapped</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Widows</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Terminally Ill patients</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mentally handicapped</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Army Jawan who died in battle</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Inter - Caste Marriage</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Divorced lady</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Unmarried girls</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Unemployed ex - service men</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Those above 65 who have to look after families</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Landless household</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. No proper houses to live</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Households having agricultural labourers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Households having Graduates and Post Graduates</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Houses with sole income of women</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Aged people above 65 without dependents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL**                                      | 117   |
7.3.1 Gram Sabha and Neighbourhood Groups

The concept of neighbourhood is not endemic to Kerala. The smallest unit of local self government in Kerala, the Gram Panchayat, remained as a large entity with an average area of 25 to 30 sq. kms and population of 20000-30000, about five to six times that of an average Indian village Panchayat. These Panchayats were, again, arbitrarily divided into wards, separated by either roads or small water courses. Since there was no socio-cultural unit as village the Gram Sabha envisaged in the Constitutional amendment was taken as the council of the all voters within a ward. The size of this council varied from the 1000 to 2000. A general council of this size does not facilitate participation of individual citizens. Further, even finding a venue for the Gram Sabha is also note very easy in all the wards. The concept of neighbourhood groups was evolved to overcome this problem. It consists of a group of 30 to 60 households situated close by, and who know each other intimately for years. The neighbourhood council consists of all the voters in these households.

Following Panchayat Level Resource Mapping, the first set of neighbourhoods and an institution called Panchayat Development Society consisting of neighbourhood representatives was formed in the Kalliaresseri Panchayat in Kannur District. Later in some other Panchayats too neighbourhood groups and development societies were formed. These neighbourhoods are slightly different in concept from the self-help groups, from the women neighbourhoods etc., in the sense that they have an all
inclusive character. So the Kerala State Planning Board, through field experience came to the conclusion that Gram Sabha with 1000-2000 voters can be effective only if they are supported by an effective neighbourhood system – 10 to 15 neighbourhoods per ward. The Committee on Decentralisation set up by the State Government under the Chairmanship of late Dr. S.B. Sen recognised the importance of neighbourhood as a platform for multi-faceted mutual cooperation and an organic constituent in the unit of the ward level Gram Sabha.

There are many areas, where neighbourhood can be active such as total cleanliness, drinking water, nutrition, healthcare, intellectual and cultural health, education, children’s fora, energy, transport, poverty alleviation programmes, women development, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes etc.

The neighbourhood can elect one woman and one man to represent it in Gram Sabha. Other citizens too have Constitutional right to attend Gram Sabhas and these two members should see that as many citizens as possible from their neighbourhood are persuaded to attend the Gram Sabha meetings. The conveners together form the neighbourhood committee. The conveners of any one subject, say health or drinking water- of all neighbourhoods in one ward will become the ward level sub committee for that subject. They can coopt 4 or 5 other knowledgeable persons in to these committees and also elect two ward level conveners-one woman and one man. All the wards level conveners together with 4 to 6 co opted experts
can be the Panchayat level sub-committees for the concerned subject. The central idea is that each and every citizen can and has to contribute something to the running ‘of society’.

The draft list of projects proposed to be included in the annual plan drawn up by the Task Forces and finalised by the Panchayat Samities should be discussed at Gram Sabhas. The proposal for projects in each development sector shall be scrutinized by sectoral discussion groups in the Gram sabhas. It is mandatory to have separate discussion groups for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes development, women development and cooperation. Along with Gram Sabha, which is constituted ward-wise, we have to take into account the role of neighbourhood groups that function below the level of Gram Sabha. In the initial round, discussions takes place in the neighbourhood groups and the outcome would be placed in the Gram Sabha by the conveners of the groups. These mechanisms have brought in transparency at the very bottom level of the grass roots.

7.3.2 Gram Sabha the Agency for Beneficiary Selection

Gram Sabha will identify the beneficiaries. Since the District Panchayat and Block Panchayat cannot convene the Gram Sabha, they will get the beneficiary selected through the respective Gram Panchayat which will carry out selection process through the Gram Sabha and give the selected list to the Block or District Panchayat for approval. For determining this number the District and Block Panchayats have first to lay down objective criteria for dividing the target. These criteria would be
related to the type of scheme. In the case of beneficiaries to be selected for schemes implemented by the Gram Panchayat, the priority list for each ward for a particular scheme would be prepared by the Gram Sabha and selection made at the Panchayat level based on the criteria for eligibility and prioritisation. There shall not be any ward-wise targets, and eligibility will be considered at the level of the Gram Panchayat keeping in view the priority list prepared by the Gram Sabha. From the priority list the selection has to be made on specific criteria of prioritisation which are to be laid down in advance. Priority fixed by Gram Sabha cannot normally be changed.

7.3.3 Procedure for Selection of Beneficiaries

(a) Determination of criteria

In the case of centrally and state-sponsored schemes, eligibility criteria prescribed by those scheme guidelines have to be followed. In the case of schemes/Projects planned for by the different tiers of Panchayats, the eligibility criteria would be determined by that Panchayat as stated in the project approved by the District Planning Committee. The Panchayats at each level should also state clearly in writing the prioritisation criteria to be followed to short list eligible beneficiaries in cases where all the eligible beneficiaries cannot be considered under the scheme.¹⁷
(b) **Publicity**

The criteria both for eligibility and for prioritisation should be given widespread publicity. Publicity should be given through elected persons, resource persons of the Plan Campaign, political parties and their affiliated organisations, voluntary organisations, field staff, Mahila Samajams, Anganwadis etc. A notice clearly indicating the number of beneficiaries to be selected should be displayed at the Panchayat Office, village Office and concerned offices and other prominent places. A separate notice board has to be set up in each ward for this purpose. Pamphlets may also be printed and circulated.

(c) **Application form**

For all schemes application forms are to be designed in Malayalam or local language. The application form should be simple but should contain provisions for incorporating all required details needed for applying the eligibility as well as prioritisation criteria. The application form should state these criteria in its Annexure. The application form should be distributed for a fixed period preceding the Gram Sabha and at the Gram Sabha.

(d) **Verification**

The Gram Panchayat should decide on a system of verification either through designated officers or designated sub committee. Initially before the Gram Sabha as many applications as possible should be enquired into
using the arrangements made by the Panchayat. Then, the applications for which verification is not complete and the applications which are received on the spot should be enquired into on the spot in the Gram Sabha by the Chairperson of the sub-group and the official nominated for this purpose by the Gram Panchayat. In case the factual details are not available during the meetings of the Gram Sabha, the same arrangement made for verification earlier should continue and verify the facts. In such cases the priority list would be prepared by the Gram Sabha subject to the verification report and these should be made amply clear in the Gram Sabha.\(^{21}\)

(e) **Gram Sabha Meetings**

Gram Sabha meetings should be called immediately after verification. Application form should be distributed at the beginning of the Gram Sabha also. Then the list of applicants from the applications received earlier and on the spot should be drawn up. The eligibility criteria and prioritisation criteria should be explained to the Gram Sabha. Thereafter the Gram Sabha should divide into groups for various section and in each sectoral groups the prioritisation of the application of the applicants can be made. In addition to this, sub criteria for prioritisation to match the local perceptions of eligibility can be made.\(^{22}\) All the applications should be vetted according the criteria and the priority list prepared by consensus. If there is no rational method of discrimination then lots can be drawn if agreed to by everybody. In the case of beneficiary oriented schemes under Tribal Sub Plan, selection should not be made in the general Gram Sabha.
Special Gram Sabha consisting of all the tribal families in the Ward would be called and selection made by this general body of tribal families from all the tribal settlements in the ward.

(f) Selection of beneficiaries

With the prioritised list from each ward, after completing verification of facts, a list based on clear criteria of prioritisation should be drawn up in the Gram Panchayat committee meeting. In that special meeting the local press and the public may be given access. Once the Panchayat finalise the list it shall published it as a draft showing the rank and indicating the factors which resulted in the rank in a tabulated form. If any objections are received on the draft list, Gram Panchayat shall consider it after further verification if required and record its views on accepting or rejecting it. Thereafter the final list shall be published. In the case of Block Panchayats and District Panchayats, Gram Panchayats shall send the final list to them with all the applications and documents related to the selections for taking the final decision. The lists submitted by the Gram Panchayats should be published as drafts by the District and Block Panchayats calling for objections if any. This should be published simultaneously in the District and Block Panchayats. Only after clearing the objections should the list be finalised.

(g) Transparency

All the documents like application forms, verification reports, enquiry reports and decisions, minutes are public documents to which any
one has access and copies of which everyone can procure. In the next Gram Sabha meeting, after the selection, the selected list may be given with adequate justification. Comments by Gram Sabha must be recorded. If it is proved later that the beneficiary or the enquiring officer or the selecting authority is responsible for an ineligible selection, such person or persons would be reimbursed the expenses with interest.

7.3.4 Execution of public Works

As part of the participatory planning process the government of Kerala issued a number of rules and regulations that could effectively control misuse of development funds. Among these the most important are:

(a) Beneficiary Committee and workers co-operatives would be given preference to private contractors in the execution of public works.

(b) All the details of public works being executed should be prominently displayed at the work site.

(c) Social audit committees of Gram Sabha can inspect the work and the documents related to it.

Besides the social audit system that the people’s plan campaign has incorporated and control effectively the menace of corruption at the time of measurements and passing of bills.
(a) **Monitoring Team**

A monitoring Team has been constituted to assess the progress in the implementation of the project and to ensure quality in the work executed. Representatives of the Gram Panchayat, beneficiary committee and technical experts are included in the Monitoring Team. It is prescribed that there should be at least five members in the team. The members of the team are selected by the Gram Panchayat and the Beneficiary Committee. Monitoring team is entitled to examine the execution of the project. If the team finds that the work is not satisfactory it can ask the engineer/contractor/convener to take corrective measures. Monitoring is not an evaluation of the project. It is a kind of people's supervision of public works.

b) **Social Audit**

There shall be a unique social audit by the Gram Sabha. For this purpose the Gram Sabha is empowered to get all the relevant details of project implementation. Gram Sabha if it deems necessary, can examine the records, reports and often details of project implementation.

As decentralisation implies participatory development, it is imperative that people's participation is realised fully in the identification and selection of beneficiaries of various schemes. When people are empowered there should be a process of selection based on clear criteria and norms evolved by consensus and applied in a transparent manner. If
the people are empowered the benefits go only to the deserving people. Since the social audit Committees of Gram Sabhas are very active and vigilant the local politicians do not have opportunities for corruption. In Kerala, the Ninth Plan is an attempt at ensuring genuine participatory planning from below, wherein people's involvement is sought to be maximised first in plan formulation and thereafter in implementation. As Gram Sabhas are critical institutions in ensuring people's participation, they need to be strengthened.

7.4 FIELD STUDY

Decentralisation and People's participation have to be the hallmark of People's Planning. Enthusiasm of the masses and their wholehearted participation are the key to success of any effort at decentralisation. It was sought to be achieved by mobilising people regardless of their political affiliations, religion, caste or gender to help the local governments in all the stages of development planning from plan formulation and implementation to monitoring and evaluation. In order to ensure maximum participation, the Gram Sabhas were convened.

The opinion of Panchayat members and participants in Gram Sabhas regarding People's Planning elicit people's awareness about Panchayat Planning and the role of Gram Sabha. So the investigator used questionnaire schedules to collect data. The information so collected is given in the following pages.
Regarding the functioning of Gram Sabhas, the investigator wanted to know whether Peoples' Planning made Gram Sabha lively. Eighty Nine per cent respondents (Panchayat members) expressed that People's Planning made Gram Sabha lively while 11% said that it did not make Gram Sabha lively. Fifty two per cent respondents expressed that there were complaints in Gram Sabha meetings regarding plan projects. Forty eight per cent stated that there were no complaints regarding Plan projects. With regard to the selection of beneficiaries 84% said that they were selected from Gram Sabhas, but 16% respondents replied that there were no selection from Gram Sabhas. As regards information about selection of beneficiaries, the researcher wanted to know from the Panchayat members as to whether all the people were informed about selection of beneficiaries during Gram Sabha meetings. Eight five per cent expressed ‘Yes’ but 6% expressed ‘No’. In order to measure the level of complaints related to selection of beneficiaries the investigator asked whether there were complaints. Fifty three per cent respondents expressed that there were complaints. Forty seven per cent stated there were no complaints. Seventy per cent respondents replied that the selection of beneficiaries through Gram Sabhas were not practicable. In order to know people’s participation and transparency in People’s Planning, the researcher asked whether the respondents seek participation of monitoring committees and beneficiary committees in implementation. Sixty four per cent respondents stated that they sought the participation of the committees but 36% stated that they did
not seek their help. It is observed that most of the common works are executed by contractors, not by people’s committees.

In reply to the query regarding publicity for selection of beneficiaries, 41.5% participants in Gram Sabhas stated that there was publicity and 58.5% stated that there was no publicity. In reply to another question as to whether the respondents were beneficiaries of any kind, 61% respondents replied that they were beneficiaries and 39% of the respondents expressed that they were not beneficiaries of any kind. It seems that material benefits are the incentives that motivate people to participate in Gram Sabha meetings.

The non-participants in Gram Sabhas were also interviewed with the help of structured and guided questionnaire. Their awareness about Peoples’ Planning was elicited through a question as to whether they heard about People’s Planning. Of 200 respondents 49% said ‘Yes’ but 51% said ‘No. To a supplementary as to how the beneficiaries were selected from Gram Sabhas, 28% respondents replied that the beneficiaries were selected from Gram Sabha but, 72% replied, they don’t know that beneficiaries were selected through Gram Sabhas. To a query as to whether there is any possibility of their being selected as beneficiaries, 41% replied that there was. But 59% replied that there was no possibility. The data reveal that lack of awareness about peoples’ planning is the main reason behind non-participation. It also reveals that people are interested in personal benefits.
In order to understand the participants’ opinion regarding people’s planning, the investigator tried to find out their preference between peoples planning and officials’ Planning. In reply to this question, 86.5% of the respondents opined that People’s Planning is better than officials planning. Ten per cent respondents stated that Officials’ planning is better than People’s Planning and 3.5% made no response. An informal discussion with the people’s representatives and focus groups reveals that decentralisation of power may also lead to decentralisation of corruption. But as majority of the people like People’s Planning, we can draw an inference that people want to involve in local decision making process and policy formulation.

Table 7.2
Respondents (Participants in Gram Sabhas)
On Ideal Method of Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People’s planning</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>86.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official’s Planning</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were twelve subject areas for discussion in the special Gram Sabha. It has been given to twelve groups, each person taking part in one particular subject of his choice. It has been witnessed by the investigator that many people did not show much interest as they were ignorant of the logic of the exercise and merely expressed their demands like drinking water, road, electricity, house etc.
Regarding participation in different subject groups in special Gram Sabhas, a question was asked as to the group in which the respondents participated. Of the 200 participants in Gram Sabhas 21.5%, 16.5%, 16.5%, 13.5% participated in the subject groups of agriculture, drinking water, women welfare and housing respectively. Eleven per cent participated in the subject group of power and electricity, 7.5% in the subject group of road and transportation and 5% in the groups of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It was observed by the investigator that in Gram Sabha meetings other castes usually don’t like to participate with Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It was also observed that people are not interested in long discussions. 2% respondents participated in the subject group of education and other 2% participated in the industry group.

Table 7.3
Respondent’s Participation in the Subject Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Groups</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking Water</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Welfare</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power and Electricity</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road and Transportation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Husbandry</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To a supplementary as to why the respondents participated in the above groups, the respondents expressed different reasons. Of the 200 participants, 83% expressed that they participated to be selected as beneficiaries, 6% opined that they had no particular aim but to fill the group with participants. Six per cent opined that they participated at the request of the ward members and 5% opined that they participated in that group as they were charged with the duty to act as convener of the group.

As regards methods by which beneficiaries were selected, 9%, 63% and 28% respondents said methods of lot, consensus and giving marks respectively were used. As one of the functions of Gram Sabha is to select beneficiaries of beneficiary oriented schemes by applying the selection criteria fixed for a particular scheme either by Panchayat or by the Government, the Gram Sabha used different methods to select beneficiaries. In the first plan year the Gram Sabha was free to select the beneficiaries by using lot method and consensus. But in the second plan year, (1998-99) the Planning Board recommended marks for each criteria. So the respondents expressed that the method of giving marks was used. An inference can be drawn from the data that most of the Panchayat members were in favour of consensus as this make them free from much complaints and harassments after selection.
Table 7.4
Respondents (Panchayat Members) On the Methods by Which Beneficiaries were Selected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lot</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marks</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the Participants in Gram Sabha meetings different methods were used for selection of beneficiaries. According to 20% respondents, the beneficiaries were selected through Gram Sabha and 5% respondents stated that beneficiaries were selected by Panchayat committee. As 61% Participants were not beneficiaries, they did not reply. In Kerala as a part of People’s Planning programme the local Administration Department gave special direction for the selection of beneficiaries.

Table 7.5
Respondents (Participants in Gram Sabha) On Methods Used for Selection of Beneficiaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gram Sabha</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ward Member</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panchayat Committee</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As regards to a query as to which is the ideal method for selection of beneficiaries, 43% respondents were of the opinion that for selection by a committee including Panchayat member is desirable whereas, 51% of the respondents demanded selection by Gram Sabha. But 6% respondents expressed ignorance. Some Panchayat members felt that selection by Gram Sabha is difficult, as some people are not satisfied with the decisions of Gram Sabha.

7.5 CONCLUSION

Decentralised planning should be people - directed in the sense that they should have a say in identifying their needs and local resources, and also in formulating projects and drawing up project priorities. Although the Gram Sabha has done something towards identification of needs through People’s Planning programme, in other stages like monitoring, implementation, the role of Gram Sabha is minimal. There is discontinuity between the concept of planning which envisages the Panchayat as the unit of planning and demand from Gram Sabha to which members are made accountable, which is constituted at ward level. As the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes people are not well aware of the projects and fund allotted to these projects and other stages of planning, there is no collective wisdom behind these projects and implementation. The focus of the plan should be for developing backward regions and weaker sections.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


8. *Ibid p. 15*


11. *Ibid*


13. *Ibid*


16. Government Order 220/97

17. Ibid

18. Circular No. 37806/L3/98 LAD, dated 10-9-98 of Local Administration Department. Thiruvananthapuram


23. Government Order 220/97

24. Circular No. 37806/L3/98 LAD


27. Janakeeya Asoothrana Prasthanam, Op, Cit., pp. 176-177)