CHAPTER- 5

LOCAL LEVEL PLANNING AND PARTICIPATORY INSTITUTIONS

People’s Planning Campaign (PPC) launched in Kerala in 1996 was an attempt to develop a participatory methodology for local level planning (Isaac & Franke, 2000). Different institutions had been created to facilitate the requirements of this objective. There were no set models of the local planning for the state to follow, which made the situation more complex. The PPC introduced three major institutions exclusively for local planning. Subject wise Task forces (TFs) for planning, Expert committees for plan vetting and Beneficiary Committees for plan implementation were these institutions. The Kerala State Planning Board (KSPB) suggested that the local bodies should form subject wise Task forces for plan formulation in each sector. This kind of subject wise Task force system was working in the State planning board to enable the formulation of the five year plans of the state (KSPB, 1999). This system was tried out by the Kallilassery Panchayat, as a joint effort by the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishath (KSSP) in 1993, as part of KSSP’s attempts to develop a participatory methodology for local level planning. The same experiment had been replicated by the KSSP when they had undertaken local level planning projects in the selected panchayats of Kerala, namely PanchayatLevel Development Programme (PLDP) (Parameswaran, 1999). The Peoples Planning Campaign adopted this idea when it initiated the local planning process all over the state (Isaac & Franke, 2000). The Kerala state planning board (KSPB) expected that TFs would become the informal planning boards at the local level. The other institutions introduced by PPC for planning are the Expert Committees to vet the plans prepared by the local bodies. This institution had been established at the block, district, municipal and corporation levels. Since our objective is to discuss the planning processes in the panchayats, we restrict our discussion to the experiences of the Task forces in the selected panchayats.

Each Panchayat was to form subject wise Task forces including the sectors such as agriculture and animal husbandry, energy and industry, education and culture, infrastructure and housing, health-drinking water supply and sanitation, social welfare, co-operation and local resource mobilization, women and child development,
development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Each Task force was to be formed by incorporating experts from the concerned field, officials, elected representatives and volunteers. It was hoped that this system could act as a planning board at the local level (Isaac & Franke, 2000). When there was a change in the state government following the assembly elections of 2000, the PPC changed to KDP, and some changes came about in the name and structure of Task forces\(^1\). The name of the Task forces was changed to ‘Working Groups’ and some changes were also made in the number of Task forces during the KDP phase. Certain groups were merged together and Task forces of poverty alleviation and local economic development were added. The number of members in the Working Groups was also reduced (Government of Kerala, 2002). Notwithstanding these changes, the institution continued as a sole body for local level planning.

Some broad instructions had been proposed by the Kerala state planning board on Local Self Governments (LSGs), regarding the allocation of money to each sector. The PPC had taken a decision to devolve 35-40 percent of the state budget to the LSGs. Along with this devolution some restrictions had also been imposed to ensure a balanced earmarking of funds to different sectors at the LSG level. At the inception phase of the PPC itself, it had been declared that more emphasis would be given to the rejuvenation of the productive sector and the empowerment of marginalized groups such as Women, SCs and STs. In order to realise these objectives it was suggested that the LSGs should earmark at least 40 percent of their plan allocation to the productive sector comprising agriculture, animal husbandry and small scale industries (KSPB, 1999). The minimum allocation for the productive sector had been reduced to 30 percent during the KDP phase. Though this reduction occurred the productive sector continued to be a prominent sector for the interventions of LSGs. The provisions for the special component plans continued in the KDP phase as well, except for alterations in the case of the Tribal Sub plan (GOK, 2002).

The responsibilities of Task forces continued in the KDP phase in spite of the change in name. The Task forces have the task of evaluating the resources in each sector, prepare a plan by understanding the actual requirements of the GP area and the people, to prepare a long term vision in each sector, evaluate the ongoing and finished projects, and update the development report periodically (KSPB, 1999; GOK, 2002).
In order to meet these functions, they were advised to include experts from various streams (KSPB, 1999; GOK 2002). The PPC had trained a group of Resource persons (RPs) to facilitate the plan preparation and implementation of the panchayats. There was a network of RPs as local resource persons (LRPs) from each ward of the panchayats, District resource persons from the panchayats(DRPs) and the state level Key resource persons (KRP s) who were expected to take a leading role in the local planning process (Isaac & Franke, 2000). This system of RPs had been neglected and were later taken off from the local Planning system during the KDP phase (Isaac, 2005).

While examining the functioning of the Task forces in the selected gram panchayats during the PPC and KDP phases, the following indicators can be used. The cross section of the TF members and the presence of experts in it, and member’s level of involvement in all the stages of TF functioning would be analysed. The TF member’s involvement in the formulation of the plans, the system for evaluating the implemented projects and the experience of the implemented projects in the development of the gram panchayats could be indicators for further discussion. We will also compare long term development projects that could further contribute to development, and the projects that have been given more emphasis to please the people rather than target the long term transformation in the productive sector. The analysis would emphasize the functioning of TFs in general while special emphasis would be given to the Task Forces of Agriculture, Women, SCs and STs.

5.1 Composition of members, expertise and training

The Task Force was a combination of members from various streams, representing each related subject. Special emphasis was given to the inclusion of experts from the respective subjects while forming the groups. Retired people from various departments, people who were working in various departments, experts working in the private sector were to be included in the TF by preparing their lists. Along with the elected representatives, former elected representatives, representatives of political parties and Resource persons were to be included in each TF. In the initial phase of PPC a trained Resource person was to be Convener of the TF and an elected representative was the Chairperson. An expert from the respective field was suggested as a Vice chairperson of the TF, and a volunteer activist was Joint convener. Later on
it was suggested that an official from the institutions transferred to the panchayats and from the respective field should be the convener of the TF (KSPB, 1999). After this decision, Agricultural Officer, Veterinary surgeon, Health Inspector, Medical Officer, Heads of Schools, Village Extension Officer, ICDS supervisor, Fisheries Inspector etc. had become Conveners of specific Task forces. The Convener was expected to lead the activities of each Task force. Various training programmes were arranged for the Chairpersons of the Task forces, officials and Vice chairpersons. One round training was provided to the other members as well (Isaac & Franke, 2000). The trained Resource persons (RPs) also had an indispensable role in the functioning of the TFs during the PPC phase. The role of the trained RPs was removed in the KDP phase. Greater emphasis was placed on the training of officials during the KDP phase (KILA, 2006). It is significant that in both the phases there was no grassroots level training covering all elected members, except for one round of training during the PPC phase. At the end of the PPC the Kerala State Planning Board came to an understanding with various organizations in the state, who were experts in different fields, to train the TF members. This attempt was not continued in the KDP phase (Rajesh, 2009).

While we examine the composition of the TF and the presence of experts, the picture seems to be different in the three panchayats. One general point that could be observed in the panchayats is that initially the elected grampanchayat had made considerable effort to bring in the various experts to join the activities of the panchayats. In Vallikkunnu, they formed a subject wise sub-committee for the Panchayat development committee (PDC) even before PPC, as part of the Panchayat Level Development Programme (PLDP). The former President of the GP during the PPC phase recollected, “We formed each sub-committee of the Panchayat development committee by organizing massive seminars, and by incorporating interested people in each subject, within the GP. The participation in such seminars was very high. We were able to bring experts from various streams to the planning process through this system.” This system of Panchayat development committee and subject wise sub-committees served the purpose of a resource pool in the panchayat. The Venkitangu gram panchayat prepared a list of retired professionals and officials from various streams and invited them to the TF. The President of the GP during the PPC phase observed, “We had made several attempts to locate and include experts
from various walks in the TF. Most of them co-operated with us”. In Kudayathur too they had done the same, but they faced difficulties to find experts in diverse sectors. A former KRP (during PPC phase) stated, “We prepared a list of experts and invited them. We encountered some difficulty to locate experts in all the fields from within the Panchayat”.

The other element observed in Vallikkunnu was the attempt of the panchayat to link the activities of the panchayats with the expert institutions in different sectors. They sought the assistance of the Integrated Rural Technology Centre (IRTC) Palakkad, Centre for Earth Sciences Studies (CESS), Thiruvantapuram, and Centre for Water Resource Development and Management (CWRDM), Calicut, to prepare resource maps of water flow within watersheds. They had also taken the help from the Zoology and Botany departments of Calicut University to prepare the biodiversity register in the Panchayat. They associated with the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) to experiment on the processing of green mussel \(^2\) that was produced in the panchayat. They sought to bring experts in various fields from different parts of the state, to make use of their expertise in framing projects for local development. This kind of an attempt to bring in external experts was missing in Kudayathur and Venkitangu Panchayats.

5.1.1. Replacement of Task forces and attempts to bring new experts

The replacement of Task forces every year by dropping out inactive members and including new members was also suggested to ensure the active involvement of the TF in the plan preparation process (State Institute of Languages, 2000). The president of the Kudayathur gram panchayat during the PPC phase commented, “We had the practice of scrutinizing the TF members list every year. We avoided members who were virtually inactive”. The same practice was found in Venkitangu and Vallikkunnu. Though the panchayats attempted to bring experts into the TFs the number of experts in task forces were limited, except in the case of Vallikkunnu. Experts in the SC and women TFs in Vallikkunnu were a small number. The Task force of Scheduled Castes (SC) was comparatively weak in the other two panchayats too\(^3\). The difficulty in bringing in educated, qualified experts from the SC community was a major reason highlighted by the respondents. Lack of experts from the SC community in the gram panchayat area was the major hurdle that they faced. Along
with this problem, the gram panchayats could not bring experts from other Task forces to provide support for the functioning of SC Task forces.

Vallikkunnu panchayat was able to maintain the momentum of bringing in experts and renewing the Task forces till the end of the PPC. This momentum had faded in the other two panchayats after the second or third year of the PPC. Changes took place in Vallikkunnu in the KDP phase. Due to the initial momentum they were able to retain many experts in the GP into the KDP phase, even though attempts to bring in new experts were lacking. A Key recourse person (KRP) from Vallikkunnu during the PPC phase stated, “The enthusiasm to bring new experts was missing in the second phase. The panchayat was only attempting to maintain the status quo. The attempts towards innovations eventually declined”. Gradually, the number of experts in the TFs was considerably reduced. Any attempt to bring experts from different streams and link the other expert institutions with the panchayat was lacking in Vallikkunnu in the KDP phase. A Resource person, who was also a member of the District level expert committee (DLEC) in Kudayathur during the PPC and KDP phases remarked, “Initially there were attempts to bring experts from various streams. These efforts were reduced. Later on, the number of political party representatives in the TFs increased instead of subject experts. Most of them were also not attending TF meetings regularly”. In Venkitangu, the former standing committee chairman during the KDP phase commented, “We were not excluding anybody from the list. Only once in a while did we update the list”. The above descriptions have brought out the fact that though there were attempts from the GPs to bring experts into the TFs in the initial stage of PPC, these efforts had declined in the later stages. Vallikkunnu GP could maintain the momentum till the early years of the KDP, while others could not sustain it. The lack of expertise among the TF members affected the professional capacity of the GPs to articulate local development needs in the technical language of planning. Another study had stated that the expert participation in the TFs, and planning process of local bodies was high (Harilal et al, 2004). Our study showed that expert participation in the TFs was high only in the initial phase of the PPC, and the GPs could not maintain that level except for Vallikkunnu.
5.1.2 Training for Task forces

The efforts to train the Task force members had not made much of an impact among the TF members in the study panchayats. Only the elected representatives who were Chairing the Task forces, officials who performed the role of Convener, and the experts who were Vice chairpersons of the TFs were trained in almost all stages of the PPC, while the ordinary members of the TF received any training only once during the entire PPC. Training for the members was very limited in the second phase (KDP), and it was restricted to officials and elected representatives. Some responses highlighted the limitations of the training too. A Resource person (RP) from Kudayathur during the PPC commented, “Normally the training under the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) covered 250-300 people in a batch. It was also in a lecture mode. It did not have any effect in the Panchayats”. A Resource person from Vallikkunnu during the PPC phase reflected, “In the closing stage of the PPC there was a programme to train the TF members by specialist institutions in each subject such as, Agriculture university, District Institute of Educational Training etc. This attempt lacked continuity after the PPC”. He continued, “In order to bring training to the grassroots level, we attempted to conduct participatory discussion mode training at the local level. Such experiments also lacked continuity”. Though there were some efforts at the end of the PPC to resume training for TF members and make them more professional and participatory, such efforts lacked the continuity into the KDP phase. Most of the officials were trained in the KDP phase, while the Resource persons were left out. The withdrawal of RPs who were the backbone of the process in various tiers may have affected the interventions at the local level. They were acting as a link between the ordinary TF members and the local bodies, that helped develop team work at the local level.

We could observe a gap in the training of TF members at the grass roots level even in the PPC phase, which was made worse in the KDP phase because of the withdrawal of Resource persons. Most of the Task force members were volunteers, and the representatives of political parties who had no prior experience of engaging with micro level planning. Thus, it was necessary to orient all of them thoroughly about the principles and practices of local planning. Likewise, though the expert members were experts in specific subjects, they too had only limited experience in
micro level planning. We observed that though there was some attempt to train the TF members, such attempts did not effectively reach the local level. The withdrawal of RPs in the KDP phase affected local level training possibilities of the TF members.

Resource persons or the Block coordinators of PPC used to explain the concept of planning, and the guidelines for planning in the Task force general bodies at the panchayat level. This was also a training for the local TF members. It helped the members to understand the basic ideas and guidelines of local planning. The Key resource person from Kudayathur during the PPC phase indicated, “We used to explain the conceptual details and guidelines in the general body meetings of the TFs, after the block level training. Most often it was like a class room. This was abolished in the KDP phase”. The Vice president of Vallikkunnu during 2000–2010 period commented, “In the KDP phase the role of RPs was transferred to officials, and they performed it like a ritual. The quantum of official training was also reduced. There was virtually no one to monitor the planning process after the abolition of the post of Block coordinator”. The comments underscored the perception that the removal of the Resource persons and the post of Block level coordinators has badly affected the network system, which had functioned as a link between the LSGs and Task force members.

The lacuna in the training process, and lack of training to the ordinary members of the Task forces hindered the dissemination of the ideas and concept of local planning to the stake holders. The basic intention of the PPC in bringing an attitudinal change among all stakeholders related to LSGs (Isaac & Franke, 2000), was not realised in practice. A mass capacity building from below was needed to make for such an attitudinal change among TF members. Irrespective of the campaign mode of training the effect of training reached only the office bearers of Task forces. The institutionalization of the training programme during the KDP phase by avoiding the network of the Resource persons (RPs) made the situation worse than earlier. Along with this, the training in planning had to be extended to include planning techniques or planning process, and philosophy of local planning. But the training organized for local planning in Kerala was a mere interpretation of Government orders with regard to mechanical steps grouped under planning as an activity (Tharakan, 2009).
The unenthusiastic approach of the political parties was also a hurdle in disseminating the concept of local planning to the stakeholders such as political activists and elected panchayat members. The respondents from political parties in the GPs admitted that they could not undertake specific orientation programmes on local planning to equip their activists. Most of the TF members in the GPs were from a political background. The political parties who were ruling parties of the GPs largely failed in recognising that local planning is a professional process. We only saw an attempt by political parties to equip their members on local planning in Vallikkunnu, and that was in the initial stage of the PPC.

5.2 Involvement of Task force members in the planning process

Task forces were the groups formed to prepare plans for the local bodies. Thus, the actual involvement of TF members at various levels is an important factor in assessing their functioning. The following section of the chapter discusses this aspect in detail. The level of involvement of TF members in the planning process of the panchayat is a decisive factor in the performance of the panchayats.

5.2.1 Team work in the Panchayats

Peoples Planning Campaign was an attempt to introduce a new method of participatory planning through the LSGs. It was a new process when it was introduced in 1995, and an innovative system was needed to implement it. Task forces were one among different institutions to practice the local planning methodology. Along with the Task forces a new set of Resource persons were also selected and trained in the panchayats as facilitators, for the whole period of the PPC. The RPs undertook key roles in the TFs as Vice chairpersons, Joint conveners or as members of Task forces. This support system created the opportunity for team work at the panchayat level. Along with this, several panchayats had developed their own institutional systems at the panchayat level. The Panchayat development committee and its subject wise sub committees at Vallikkunnu, and panchayat development committee at Kudayathur are examples of such innovations.

While we examine Kudayathur, Venkitangu and Vallikkunnu gram panchayats we can observe some variations in their levels of team work. The responses in Kudayathur showed that it had a team of District resource persons (DRPs) and Local
resource persons (LRPs), and elected representatives who were active in the process of planning. A Key Resource person (KRP) who was also a district committee member of the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishath (KSSP) was deeply involved in the activities during the PPC phase. Since the CPI (M) was the party in power during the PPC phase, some of their activists were also involved in the planning process. Initially, they were not involved, but later on they started to get involved because of the party’s decision. Some committed officials were also involved in this group activity in the panchayat. A former KRP who was active in the PPC phase mentioned, “We had the practice of meeting frequently as a team and discussing things. Some elected representatives, District resource persons and Local resource persons were part of that team.” The opposition parties were also co-operating in the process of preparing plans. In the case of Venkitangu, the number of Resource persons was low. Elected representatives initiated the process with the help of officials. Even the initial process of transit walk, secondary data collection, preparation of development reports etc. had been undertaken with the association of elected representatives rather than the volunteer team. The panchayat President during the PPC phase recollected, “We never had mass participation in these activities. There were a few people in the panchayat who had worked hard and accomplished those things.” The cooperation of opposition members and opposition parties such as Communist Party of India Marxist (CPI (M)) and Communist Party of India (CPI) was visible in the PPC phase in Venkitangu, though the UDF was in power.

The nature of team work in Vallikkunnu was different from the other two panchayats. They had a Panchayat development committee (PDC), sub-committees for PDC and a strong team of volunteers. Most of the Resource persons in Vallikkunnu came from the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishath background, which had a strong organizational base in the panchayat. A former President of the GP during the 1995-2000 period recollected, “We had a team of activists comprising elected representatives, subcommittee conveners, and office bearers of the Panchayat development committee, KRPs and DRPs. We frequently met during evenings to discuss and plan panchayat activities. We were able to undertake different collective efforts because of teamwork”. The team had been involved in leading the baseline survey, preparation of reports, writing and implementation of projects. They also
acted as facilitators of mass education. Various voluntary activities had been undertaken by organizing people at the grassroots level.

5.2.1.1. Changes that occurred in the teamwork

The practice of teamwork in the panchayats changed during the KDP phase. As we mentioned earlier, the removal of Resource persons from the process of local planning had an adverse impact on this team work. Along with this, the macro and micro political environment also contributed to changes in team work. The District resource person from Kudayathur during the PPC phase stated, “The official position of Resource persons was dropped in the KDP phase. Along with this the change in the ruling party in the panchayat also triggered the withdrawal of people with Leftist background. The macro level change in the state, in terms of ruling party (from LDF to UDF), change and transition from PPC to KDP also made an impact on our interventions”. Initially, the Leftist parties were co-operating in panchayat activities, but they withdrew from the process after the PPC.

The Leftist parties cooperated with local planning activities in Venkitangu too because the PPC was a programme that had been introduced by the Left government at the state level, and withdrew after the party rule changed and the transition from PPC to KDP took place. Team work between officials and the panchayat became very strong in the second phase, when the participation of the volunteers was reduced. The Secretary, who served the panchayat for a long time (both during PPC and KDP phases) commented, “We were working like a family. We spent many nights in the panchayat office itself”. Here, it could be observed that the elected panchayat attempted to compensate for the withdrawal of the Leftist activists with the support of officials. One District resource person from Venkitangu stated, “In the KDP phase the panchayat authorities learned how to get things done by the officials rather than through a collective action of volunteer activists. They believed that people’s participation was not necessary in the planning process, and more emphasis was given to the implementation of the activities”. Many of the Leftist activists complained that they were excluded from key posts in the KDP phase.

Matters were no different in Vallikkunnu even when the LDF was ruling the panchayat. Along with the official elimination of Resource persons as a state level
decision, local factors also contributed to the changes in the panchayat. The leadership
of the panchayat in the KDP phase was not able to coordinate various groups as was
the case earlier. The involvement of the CPI (M) activists in the planning was also
reduced. The conflict that emerged between the KSSP and the grampanchayatended
with the withdrawal of many KSSP activists from the mainstream engagement. A
former Key resource person during the PPC who is also a KSSP activist observed,
“The confrontation with the panchayat on different issues made it impossible for
cohesive group work. The grampanchayat was not interested in moving ahead with
people’s bodies like the Panchayat development committee, Ward development
committees and general Neighbourhood groups”. The group work and cohesiveness
among the team had disappeared in Vallikkunnu by the middle years of the KDP.

The teamwork in Vallikkunnu during the PPC phase made the GP capable of
undertaking several activities with good mass participation. Teamwork during the
PPC was visible in Kudayathur as well. The nature of teamwork in Venkitangu was
different. Venkitangu grampanchayat was not able to mobilize a large number of
activists into the process even in the initial stage of the PPC. Irrespective of collective
activities, a few activists had done the hard work and accomplished the targets. The
institutions such as Panchayat development committees (PDC) and subject
committees at Vallikkunnu, and Panchayat development committees at Kudayathur,
had provided the required teamwork in these panchayats. A good network of
Resource persons was also a contributing factor in both panchayats, while it was
missing in Venkitangu. This teamwork later on disappeared in Kudayathur because of
the voluntary withdrawal and also exclusion of LDF activists from the team. The
apathy of the CPI (M) activists, and confrontation between Kerala Sasthra Sahithya
Parishath (KSSP) and the gram panchayat representatives adversely affected teamwork
in Vallikkunnu. A common factor that affected the teamwork in the three
panchayats was the official decision during the KDP phase to remove the positions of
Resource persons at various levels, who had been coordinating the volunteers.
Excessive dependence on officials was visible in Venkitangu, through which they
tried to compensate for the withdrawal of Leftist activists. The changes in the state
government and the shift from the PPC to KDP encouraged the Left activists to
withdraw from the planning process in the KDP stage.
A tendency found in the KDP phase in the gram panchayats was the greater emphasis to include officials, rather than making the joint effort of volunteer Task force members and Resource persons. Venkitangu gram panchayat depended largely on officials rather than including various streams of people. In Kudayathur too the decision making was limited to a few people and officials. The people’s organizations such as Panchayat development committee and subject wise subcommittees had been inactive in Vallikkunnu in the KDP phase. Instead of teams of elected representatives, volunteers, officials and experts, planning became a process largely concentrated with the elected representatives and officials. The role of KSSP volunteers in Vallikkunnu was important in making the team work. More than the state level changes that took place in the KDP phase, the conflict between the Leftist led grampanchayat and the KSSP, particularly on issues related to environment protection, hampered teamwork in the GP. An observation that this leads to is that state–civil society relations are not always collaborative in nature.

5.2.2 Responsibilities of the Task forces and the planning process

There were various responsibilities that were expected to be undertaken by the Task forces. The state government had informed local bodies about their grant-in-aid every year. The meetings of the grampanchayat were associated with the allocation of the total grant-in-aid to the different sectors, within the broad guidelines from the state government. The grampanchayat had to convene the first meeting of all Task forces members after preparing the statement of allocations. The panchayat had to present a brief report about project implementation in the past year, and the statement of allocations and the recommendations for the next year. In this first meeting, LSGs were encouraged to renew the Task forces by presenting a list of members. They were expected to drop inactive members and to include new members at this stage. Each TF was to meet independently after the first general meeting. They were instructed to prepare an evaluation report of the projects implemented in the past year in their respective sector, and to prepare the recommendations of projects for the next year and the expected allocations for each project(KSPB, 1999; GOK, 2002).

Grampanchayats had to present a draft plan document in the gram sabhas of the panchayat. The gram sabhas were expected to meet as subject wise groups after the plenary sessions, to discuss the evaluation reports and suggestions for the next
year. The TF members were expected to lead the group discussions in the GS and to facilitate the democratic process. The gram sabhas had to consolidate the discussions and suggestions that arose out of the group discussions in the final plenary sessions. The second general meeting of the Task forces had to be conducted after the gram sabha. They had to reformulate their own recommendations according to the suggestions that had come from gram sabhas, and to prepare and approve the amended document. This draft plan document was to be presented before the development seminar of the panchayats. The participants of the development seminar included two elected members from each subject group of all the gram sabhas in the panchayat, TF members, elected representatives, political party representatives, experts and other activists. The same process of discussions as in gram sabhas were to take place in the Development seminar of the panchayat. The representatives of the grampanchayat have to present the evaluation report and the suggestions for the next year, including the alterations that came from gram sabhas. Group discussions were also included in the Development seminar, based on different subjects. The TF members were expected to lead the discussions in each group here as well. The suggestions have to be presented in the plenary sessions of the Development seminars (KSPB, 1999; GOK, 2002).

The panchayats have to convene the third general meeting of the Task force members after the development seminar. At this meeting, the grampanchayat has to present the final project proposal approved by the committee by including the suggestions of the development seminars. Each TF has to work independently towards preparing the project proposal for each project that was suggested by their group after the plenary sessions. They also have the responsibility to conduct a baseline study, feasibility studies for preparing projects, prepare the estimates of the technical works etc. They can get the assistance of technical staff at the panchayats for preparing technical estimates. Finally, the grampanchayat has to prepare a final plan document for the year by consolidating the detailed project reports for each project (KSPB, 1999). Each panchayat was asked to prepare a long term five year plan, and year-wise plans out of the Five Year Plan in the initial phase of the 9th Plan, i.e. the initial phase of the PPC. The same suggestions were repeated in the guidelines for the 10th Five year Plan in the KDP phase too (KSPB, 1999; GOK, 2002).
In spite of preparing individual projects, panchayats were also asked to prepare a detailed evaluation report after every five years, and to prepare a list of programmes based on the requirements raised from gram sabhas and Development seminar discussions. Each panchayat prepared a detailed development report in 1996, by stating the status of each development sector. This report was to be renewed in 2002, after the 9th Plan, by including the achievements and limitations of the 9th Plan in each sector. Panchayats were to prepare integrated programmes with a long term development approach, rather than the programmes with short term objectives. Task forces were expected to prepare documents comprising Development reports and integrated programmes (KSPB, 1999; GOK, 2002). From the above description we can discern that a rigorous process from below was framed to prepare local plans in Kerala. Task forces were expected to take a leading role in them. The TF member has to facilitate the subject wise group discussions in gram sabhas and Development seminars. They have the main responsibility of conducting baseline studies for preparing the projects, and to prepare detailed project reports for each project. Evidently Task forces were envisaged as groups with considerable responsibilities. It is important to mention that not much change occurred in the planning procedures when the PPC became KDP (KGO, 2002, 2004).

5.2.2.1 Attendance of Task force members in meetings

We now examine the involvement of TF members in the planning process of the panchayats. This section of the chapter focuses on the initiation of the Task force members in project formulation and implementation. A general feature observed in the panchayats is the better attendance of the TF members in the first meetings, with the level of attendance being reduced over time. The attendance was high in the early years of the PPC, while it started to decline towards the end of the PPC, except in Vallikkunnu. The Vice President of the Venkitangu gram panchayat during the KDP phase commented, “Initially the attendance of Task force meetings was very high. Gradually it declined, but the number is not low even in the year 2009-10. We could maintain higher attendance because of the increased attendance of Kudumbashree activists and Anganwadi workers in the Task forces”. He also agreed that the high attendance at the first meetings has not been maintained in the later meetings and activities of Task forces.
The President of Kudayathur gram panchayat during the KDP phase said, “The attendance in the first meetings was good. People have not bothered about the later meetings and activities.” He indicated that the attendance in the initial years was high in all the sessions of the TFs. The responses from Kudayathur also indicate that they were able to maintain the minimum attendance in meetings because of the Kudumbashree and Anganwadi workers. The trend of Kudumbashree participation started in the early years of the KDP. Vallikkunnu panchayat had been able to maintain good attendance till the first year of the KDP. The attendance started to decline after the first meeting of TFs during the KDP. Here also, the presence of Anganwadi workers, Literacy activists and Kudumbashree workers increased after the first two years of the KDP. It could be observed that though the attendance in number was not low even in the KDP phase, the composition of people who attended had substantially changed. The number of experts and other volunteers had been reduced, while the presence of the semi official participants like Kudumbashree, Anganwadi and adult literacy workers increased. This has really affected the heterogeneity and the innovative capacity of the Task forces.

The responses showed that TFs had become groups of people with less expertise and commitment. Grampanchayats found Kudumbashree members, Anganwadi workers and Literacy activists as instruments to meet the numerical quorum of the meetings. The numbers in the initial meetings of TFs in every year were reasonable because of their attendance. Notwithstanding this number, the TF members who were really engaged in the planning process was substantially reduced. This has adversely affected the very concept of TFs itself. A study by the Planning Commission, Government of India, also observed that the depletion of effective membership affected the quality of Task forces/working groups (Planning Commission, 2006). While explaining the context of the PPC, C.P. Chandrasekhar observed, “The capacity of planning begins to be acquired at different levels, when different sections of the people begin to acquire the vision and skill to make similar decisions” (Chandrasekhar, 2001:52). From the experiences of the study it was found that such a gradual capacity building did not happen in the grampanchayats.
5.2.2.2 Participation of members in project formulation

The TF members had the responsibility of attending the appropriate groups in the gram sabhas and to lead the group discussions. The involvement of members in the processes of planning is more important than their nominal attendance. The participation of TF members in group discussions of gram sabhas was very low except in Vallikkunnnu. A Task force member of Kudayathur who was active during the PPC and the KDP phases mentioned, “Initially we were assigning Task force members to attend the gram sabha group sessions. Later on the practice changed. Only a few of us were attending gram sabhas”. One member of the women’s task force who was active during the PPC and the KDP phases in Venkitangu commented, “Some of us were attending gram sabhas in our area. There was no practice of officially assigning people to lead the GS discussions”. The system in Vallikkunnnu was more organized from the earlier days. The Convener of the Panchayat development committee during the 1997-2001 period recollected, “We were assigning each TF member to attend a specific gram sabha. The preparatory process was very systematic within the Task force”. This system, however, collapsed in Vallikkunnnu in the third year of the KDP. The involvement of TF members as facilitators of GS discussions was not effective in the panchayats, except the initial experience of Vallikkunnnu.

The participation of Task force members in discussions and preparation of projects was different in the three panchayats. In Venkitangu, from the early years (PPC) onwards, projects were prepared mostly by the team of officials and a few elected representatives, rather than by the Task force members. The responses showed that the TF members were participating in the discussions and were giving their suggestions and ideas for projects, while a small team was preparing the projects. The former President of the gram panchayat during the PPC phase stated, “Most of the projects had been prepared by the officials and a few elected representatives. Generally, the TF members were involved only in discussions”. However, responses showed that this process had moved towards the concentration of this function in the hands of officials during the KDP phase. A grampanchayat member during the KDP phase commented, “The preparation of projects became the responsibility of the officials in the KDP phase. The elected representatives who were chairing the Task
forces had been assisting them”. Though the involvement of TF members in project preparation was quite low, there were a few people who were continuously involved in the local planning process for the past fifteen years in one form or the other. Representatives of the Padda sekhara samithi were also involved in the agricultural Task forces discussions. The discussions in the SC group were quite low. They, themselves, mentioned their incapability of involving themselves in the process because of their low education. Women Task force members in Venkitanglu were also quite inactive, and the TF was dominated by officials and elected representatives.

The experience of Kudayathur was different. There was a small team of Resource persons and elected representatives who were actually leading the planning process in the PPC stage in the panchayat. The participation of Task force members was, however, limited to the discussion of ideas and giving suggestions. The project writing became the responsibility of the small team that was leading the process. A former Key resource person of the panchayat during the PPC phase commented, “Most of the TF members had been providing their suggestions. The projects were prepared by a small group. Some Task force members were unable to understand the whole process”. This situation changed in the second phase. Most of the Leftist activists who were involved in the Task forces withdrew from them in the second phase. Thus, even the team work of a few people was absent in the KDP phase. The person who was leading the whole process during the KDP phase responded, “Most of the projects were prepared only by me. There were two-three people assisting me”. Almost all the respondents from Kudayathur agreed that the project preparation became concentrated with just 2-3 people during the KDP phase. Unlike Venkitanglu, the official participation in project preparation was also quite low here. Except for the agriculture officer and Ayurvedic doctor, none of the other officials were involved in the planning process. The agricultural Task force was active during the PPC and KDP phases here. There were some members in the agricultural TF who were attending all the meetings. The women TF was active, while the Women development committee in the Panchayat was functioning. They could not maintain the teamwork when it was converted to Kudambashree. The lack of education and knowledge became a hurdle in the active involvement of the scheduled caste TF members in their Task Force activities.
The Task forces in Vallikkunnu demonstrated more vigour than the other two panchayats. There was team work among the Task force members. The role of Task force members was ensured in the planning and the implementation of the projects. Many TF members acted as office bearers of the Beneficiary Committee to implement the projects during the PPC phase. The Task forces were assigned the duty of preparing beneficiary lists and convening meetings of individual beneficiaries, and explained the terms and conditions to implement the project. They also had the role in monitoring the projects. They had the practice of independently meeting the Task forces and working as a team. The presence of subject wise sub-committees of the Panchayat development committee also made an impact on the team work of TFs. Most of the subcommittee members were also members of Task forces. This was a stimulating factor behind the better performance of the Task forces. A former Key resource person of the Panchayat during the PPC period recollected, “We had nearly ten members in each Task force and most of them were regularly attending the meetings. Each of the Task force was working as a team.” They had the practice of meeting and working independently. The Panchayat development committee became inactive during the middle phase of the KDP, and the rift between the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishath (KSSP) and the elected representatives of the panchayat also resulted in the withdrawal of many KSSP activists from the active involvement in Task forces. Though these setbacks had an impact on the functioning of the Task forces, they are still functioning in a comparatively better way than in the other panchayats. A member from the agricultural Task force who has been active since the PPC mentioned, “Here the TFs are still involved in the preparation of beneficiary lists, convening meetings of beneficiaries, and monitoring the projects. Most of the TFs are still active because of their multiple roles in project formulation and implementation”. A small group of farmers is actively involved in the agriculture Task force. The women TF was very active while the Women development committee was functioning, while it has become inactive in the KDP stage. The SC and fisheries TFs were also inactive. The lack of educated and knowledgeable people and the non availability of experts were said to be the major hurdles in their functioning.

The task of preparing projects was performed through a group of Resource persons, elected representatives, and concerned officials in Kudayathur and
Venkitangu from the inception of the PPC itself. The role of other TF members was restricted to discussions of project proposals in TF meetings and submitting suggestions to the panchayat. This team work was also limited in both the gram panchayats in the KDP phase. The preparation of projects became the duty of elected representatives and one or two persons connected with the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF) in Kudayathur, while it became the activity of officials and elected representatives in Venkitangu. Venkitangu GP largely made the project preparation as a bureaucratic exercise in the KDP phase. The withdrawal of the Resource persons from the process triggered this tendency. Vallikkunnu GP was able to include TF members both in the discussions and the project preparation and implementation. This actually made their process a different one. The TF members in Vallikkunnu are still involved in project formulation and implementation, even though their number has been reduced. The attempts by the state government during the KDP phase to bureaucratise the process of project formulation and implementation, along with the panchayat’s lethargy in rejuvenating the TFs made the process more mechanical than in the PPC phase. Vallikkunnu was able to maintain the TF member’s participation in project formulation because of their conscious attempt to bring in the TF members’ participation in all steps of planning and implementation.

5.3 Unique experiences

The Vallikkunnu panchayat demonstrated its own ways in the functioning of Task Forces. Statutorily, the Government of Kerala had suggested only one Task force for the subjects of education, culture and sports together. This panchayat had developed several activities in each of these fields with their experiments. They constituted three separate TFs for Sports, Culture and Education. This could be noted as an example of local creativity and also underscores the possibility that Local Self governments (LSGs) can demonstrate creativity if they have such a favourable atmosphere for local action. The performance of the panchayat education committee in Kudayathur during the 2005-2010 phase is also an illuminating example of how LSGs can exhibit their creativity, if they can pool in real expertise into the Task forces. In this phase a retired District Education officer (DEO) joined the Task force team as a Vice chairperson of the education Task force, and they were able to bring the involvement of retired teachers, experts and interested groups. This changed the functioning of the Task
force itself. They organized the panchayat education committee by including representatives of all government and aided schools, educational activists, and the elected representatives in the gram panchayat area. This committee has made a common school calendar and there is a common understanding about the activities in all the schools. The Panchayat education committee (PEC) proposed a project to provide special tuition to SC/ST children studying in SSLC, after the regular school time, and it made tremendous changes in the results of two high schools within two years. Likewise, the Ayurvedic doctor was also interested in introducing innovative projects. She presented a project to identify and treat Breast Cancer and Cancer of the Uterus by organizing camps for women in different areas of the panchayat. Thus, if expertise is combined with a committed group, innovations are possible at the local level.

5.4 Changes in project implementation

Public works under the projects were to be undertaken by Beneficiary Committees formed at the local level in the People’s Planning Campaign. This was proposed as a measure to avoid leakage of money through the contract system and to ensure people’s participation in project implementation. Details of materials and labour used for the work were also to be exhibited at the work site. This was an attempt to demonstrate transparency in local development activities. The system of Beneficiary Committees became defunct in the KDP phase because of the government order that instructed that any work that cost more than 25000/- should be given to contractors through a tendering process (GOK, 2002).

The experiences of Beneficiary Committees from the three panchayats varied from each other. Most of the work had been undertaken by the Beneficiary Committees in Kudayathur, while a few were re-allotted to the contractors by the Beneficiary Committees themselves. A panchayat member during the PPC phase recollected, “Most of the works had been undertaken by the Beneficiary Committees. Some Committees allotted their works to contractors. This happened mostly in the case of technical works such as tarring of roads.” He added that they got the participation of people in tribal areas into the phase of project implementation, through the Beneficiary Committees. The number of works undertaken by the Beneficiary Committees in Venkitangu was nominal. Two elements were responsible
for this outcome. In many cases the Beneficiary Committees had taken the works from the panchayat and then re-allotted them to contractors. The panchayat was also more interested in promoting the contractors. This was a factor that restricted mass participation in the activities of the panchayat.

The practice in Vallikkunnu was different from the other two panchayats. Almost all the works of this panchayat were done through the Beneficiary Committees. The former coordinator of the panchayat who was active during PPC and KDP phases stated, “We could be assured that all the works in the panchayat had been undertaken by the Beneficiary Committees. The Neighbourhood groups played an important role in this process. They provided large scale voluntary workers in their areas”. We have already mentioned that the Task forces had been coordinating the implementation of the projects in Vallikkunnu. The Beneficiary Committees were instrumental in supporting the panchayat in the implementation of activities. The later withdrawal of Beneficiary Committees from the field reduced the mass participation in the KDP phase, which was a unique feature of the PPC phase.

In the functioning of Task forces the coordination system at the local level is crucial. Vallikkunnu GP had a paid coordinator right from the beginning of the PPC itself. This provided a full time worker to co-ordinate the project formulation and implementation at the local level. Along with this the Resource persons during the PPC phase had also spent much effort to coordinate the activity. Vallikkunnu and Kudayathur also had the system of Panchayat development committees and their conveners to coordinate the overall planning activities. This people’s forum did not function in the KDP stage, thereby affecting the coordination of the planning process. In Venkitangu this role had been taken over by the Secretary of the gram panchayat. The former President of the GP during the KDP phase commented, “We had the practice of convening meetings of all transferred office heads in the panchayat, and evaluating the progress once in every one or two months”. Though this was not a system for coordinating the Task forces, this had helped them in project implementation. Any other kind of coordination was absent in Venkitangu. The position of coordinator is still working in Vallikkunnu, though the Resource persons and Panchayat development committee have become inactive. The Panchayat development Committee in Kuduyathur also became inactive after the 2000 panchayat
elections. The system for coordinating the activities of the Task forces and the planning process has made a difference in the performance of the panchayats.

5.5 Rigor of the planning process

Planning is a scientific process that needs rigor in all steps. The collection, tabulation and analysis of the basic data in each sector are preliminary requirements for scientific planning. The development report was prepared based on data collected from different offices related to the GPs, when the People’s Planning Campaign was launched. The data were collected from the offices such as Agricultural office, Primary health centres, Schools, Veterinary hospitals, Electricity board, Village offices, Minor irrigation office, Libraries etc. The household level data on the development status of families had not initially been collected because of the lack of time (KSPB, 1999). Transit walk across the various watersheds of the panchayats, and field visits had been conducted to understand the geographical specificities of each region, and to comprehend what were the immediate works that needed to be undertaken. These actions had been done by forming various squads for each sector. Each panchayat should have updated its development report after the 9th plan by including the development achieved in each sector during the 9th plan, and also to describe the new challenges to be addressed in the tenth plan (GOK, 2002). Detailed data on the development status were needed for this process.

Responses from the GPs indicated, however, that these attempts to prepare scientific data base in the panchayats were insufficient even after fifteen years of participatory planning. There is no household database in the panchayats about the development status and the impact of the interventions of the Panchayats. Vallikkunnu GP had conducted several surveys in the initial phase of PPC, such as socio-economic survey on household basis, resource mapping and bio-diversity survey. However, they could not consolidate the database of the household survey and prepare a report, even after spending much effort in the field for these surveys. The former Key resource person and KSSP activist who was very active till the middle of the KDP stated, “The data of socio-economic survey had not been tabulated, and we could not prepare a report. The concept of a long term approach was missing throughout the planning process”. They had done some manual sorting, and tabulated the data related to the basic needs such as housing, latrines and drinking water, while
they could not prepare and update a systematic report. Even the attempt to prepare such a detailed database was missing in Venkitangu and Kudayathur. Panchayats also had the practice of conducting separate surveys for each purpose. I met two survey teams in Vallikkunnu GP, who were conducting parallel surveys, one of old age people and the other on the electrification status of the houses in the GP. Collecting information from some people during my field study was adversely affected because of the overwhelming effect of these continuous surveys.

Panchayats had used software developed by Information Kerala Mission (IKM) for various purposes, though they could not prepare a scientific database at the panchayat level by using information technology. There is no accurately tabulated information in the panchayats about their achievements of the last fifteen years. These lacunae hindered long term visions and comprehensive long term plans for the panchayats. The Kerala State Land uses Board ((KSLB) has prepared detailed resource maps for each GP. Vallikkunnu GP prepared different resource maps and biodiversity registers even before the PPC. Nevertheless, this had not been used for the watershed based planning in the agricultural sector.

It has been argued that centralized authorities do not have unlimited ability to collect information, or to monitor citizens and the nation’s resources (Singh & Mehta, 2007). Local residents are better informed about the resources in the area. However, the GPs did not collect, process and apply the micro level information for planning in the course of this study. The attempts made by the Vallikkunnu GP had been left midway. The GPs were not even able to use the consolidated information gathered by other agencies. Lack of a proper data base for planning acted as an obstacle for better and efficient use of local resources, which was highlighted as a peculiarity of decentralized planning by writers on public administration (Aziz, 2002).

5.6 Local planning and micro level changes

We have analyzed the functioning of Task forces in terms of the combination of members, teamwork, attendance at meetings, and involvement in project planning and project implementation. The next section of this chapter examines the changes that have occurred at the micro level development, as part of the local planning process. We can immediately admit that the local planning process gained momentum only
after the PPC began, and the increased allocation of funds to the institutions of Local Self Government. The President of Venkitangu gram panchayat during the PPC phase recollected the situation before the PPC and stated, “We came to power in 1995. The experience of one year before the PPC was really different from the period of the PPC. We had only a nominal income before the budget allocation of PPC. The non tax income of the GP was initially 2-3 lakhs, which was allotted as untied funds by the government. We had nothing to do in the absence of sufficient income”. The experience of Kudayathur and Vallikkunnu was not noticeably different, while Vallikkunnu tried to mobilize some schemes from various departments. The income of gram panchayats as Plan Grant-in-aid has been multiplied several times after the allocation of funds from the State government with the initiation of the PPC. The table in Appendix (see appendix 5.1and 5.2) shows the allotment and expenditure of the selected GPs during the 9th and 10th five year plans. From the table, the grant-in-aid for the first year of the PPC was Rs. 22, 95,600, Rs 51, 90,000, and Rs 55,42,000 to Kudayathur, Venkitangu and Vallikkunnu respectively. This was several times more than their non tax income before PPC, which was only 2 -3 lakhs. The substantial increase in the income of GPs has made enormous changes in their capacity to intervene, and to effect more of local development. The total grant-in-aid allotted to Kudayathur, Venkitangu and Vallikkunnu during the 9th plan was Rs 16,406,076, Rs 25,089,632,and Rs 31,130,250 respectively. The allotment during the 10th plan again increased considerably (see appendix table no 5.2). It is to be noted that there were special component plans for SCs, STs and women. A specific amount was allotted to Local Self Government as special component plan to these sectors. This also made it possible for the panchayats to give special emphasis for the empowerment of such groups.

5.6.1 General outcomes of local planning

While we examine the general outcomes of local planning in the selected panchayats we can see that it had made noticeable changes in the local development process. Development of household and public infrastructure such as roads, street electrification, construction of individual latrines, increased drinking water connectivity, and the infrastructure development of transferred institutions are important among them. These achievements were visible during both the PPC and the
KDP phases. Along with these, changes occurred in construction and maintenance of houses for poor households. Vallikkunnu GP had a 86.02 km. road network in 1996, out of which only 26.57 km was of tarred roads. After the 9th plan in 2002 the road network had increased to 107.02 km and 60 km respectively. The number of roads had also increased from 90 to 150. The panchayat spent three crore rupees for local development in the first eight years after the initiation of PPC. The GP had given assistance to construct 341 homes during the 9th plan; it had also constructed 679 household latrines all over the panchayat during this time. This was a substantial increase in output while compared to earlier plans. Only 150 houses had been constructed in the GP area under various government schemes during the period 1984-96, while they were able to construct twice the number of houses within the five years of the 9th plan. Considerable changes had also occurred in the basic infrastructure facilities of SC households in the panchayat (Vallikkunnu GP, 2002; KSSP, 2005).

Similar achievements were documented in Venkitangu and Kudayathur GPs as well. Venkitangu GP constructed 8.5 km additional tar roads, 8.2 km metal roads, and 8.12 km new mud roads during the ten years of the 9th and 10th plans. They constructed 167 houses in the 9th plan. They were able to construct 185 latrines and 85 houses in the 10th plan. The panchayat built eight minor drinking water supply schemes in the water scarce areas of the GP during the 9th and 10th plan (Venkitangu GP, 2002, 2008). Kudayathur GP constructed 135 homes, 221 latrines during the 9th plan, and it was able to construct 115 latrines and 78 homes in the 10th five year plan. It has constructed four tarred and twelve new roads during the 9th and 10th five year plans respectively (Kudayathur GP, 2004, 2006). The panchayat has undertaken three drinking water supply schemes in the GP area during the 9th and the 10th plan. Vallikkunnu GP was able to implement nine minor drinking water supply schemes by collecting contributions from the local people. One important element noted in the local planning is that most of the poor people in the panchayats, particularly the SCs and STs, got several individual benefits that enabled them to acquire such facilities as latrines, houses, assistance for maintenance of houses etc. They also made changes in developing the public infrastructure such as roads, electrification of streets, expanding sources of drinking water, and connectivity to the different regions of the panchayats.
The basic infrastructure of the transferred institutions also improved during the 9th and 10th plan in the Panchayats. Kudayathur panchayat constructed a new Agricultural office, and an Ayurveda hospital building during this time and renovated the panchayat office buildings (Kudayathur GP, 2002, 2007). The GP expanded both the PHC buildings in Vallikkunnu, and started an inpatient section in Vallikkunnu Primary Health Centre (PHC). The panchayat also spent a considerable amount of money to improve the facilities of schools (Vallikkunnu GP 2002, 2007). Venkitangu GP has been able to bring together most of the transferred institutions to the panchayat office compound. The Agriculture office, Veterinary hospital, Ayurveda hospital, Village extension office were brought to the panchayat compound and new buildings were constructed for all the offices. This made the coordination between the transferred offices and officials much easier (Venkitangu GP, 2002, 2007). An extension was built to the PHC building and an inpatient section was attached to the PHC.

The outcomes in Vallikkunnu seem to be somewhat distinct from the other two panchayats. The local planning process was initiated even before the PPC, and the panchayat was able to conduct several activities with mass participation. The institutional forums such as Neighbourhood groups, Ward development committees, Panchayat development committee and its various subject wise subcommittees, contributed considerably in mobilizing people. The renovation of irrigation canals, construction of roads, construction of a sea wall and boat landing centre, removal of African fungus from the paddy land and converting it into bio fertilizers, etc, were the works undertaken by them with mass participation during the PPC phase. They installed 1700 smokeless chulhas in houses all over the GP through a household campaign. Common electric bulbs were replaced with compact fluorescent lamps (CFL) in almost all houses through another campaign and gained the award for energy management from the state government. A panchayat level association of clubs called CACA (Clubs Association for Cultural Action) was formed and coordinated the activities of youth clubs. A central library and women’s mobile library were introduced in Vallikkunnu and became a guiding spirit to many libraries. They also opened an Art School for training students in the performing arts, which are functioning even after a decade. The most notable factor in Vallikkunnu is that they were able to continue the projects of volleyball, football training camps, art training
schools and women’s library for more than a decade. They were able to develop their own institutional management system for these activities. They were able to cover almost all households in the panchayat through different campaigns. Vallikkunnu GP constructed soak pits or garbage pits in almost all the houses of the panchayat through the project under Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC). These were actually a different mode of mass education which disseminated the concept of local planning to families in the GP area (Vallikkunnu GP, 2002, 2007; KSSP, 2005).

The experience of Vallikkunnu GP in the PPC phase showed that the basic assumption of the PPC that planning can be an instrument for mobilizing people (Isaac & Franke, 2000) had been realized to a larger extent. They were able to bring in the participation of hundreds of people in various voluntary works undertaken by the panchayat under the PPC. Diverse people’s organizations such as NHGs, WDC, PDC, and CACA had a critical role in such mobilization. They could not, however, maintain such a mass mobilization in the KDP phase. The Venkitangu and Kudayathur GPs could not undertake such activities through mass mobilization.

5.7 Lacunae in the planning experiments

We have already described that the local planning experiment during the two phases of PPC and KDP had made substantial changes in the local development process. While we compare the achievements of PPC and KDP with the objectives of these programmes, we could see many gaps that need to be highlighted. The rejuvenation of the productive sector and the empowerment of marginalized groups were the two main objectives of the PPC. The PPC also intended to bring a new democratic and development culture that favoured participatory democracy and planning (KSPB, 1999; Isaac & Franke, 2000). More emphasis was to be given to the integrated long term programmes with the objective of sustainable development rather than rely on isolated tiny projects (KSPB, 1997; GOK, 2002).

The lack of a long term vision and approach is the most noticeable element in the planning process of the GPs. Panchayats were asked to prepare their five year plan documents in order to implement the 9th and 10th five year plans at the inception of both the PPC and the KDP phases (KSPB, 1999; GOK, 2002). The panchayats prepared the 9th plan documents through a systematic process. They were told to
prepare a comprehensive evaluation document after the ninth plan and were instructed to update the development reports prepared in 1996, after evaluating the five year experience of the ninth plan in 2001. The State planning board instructed the panchayats to follow the five year plan document while they were preparing the annual plans. The development vision and strategy of the panchayats were to be included in this document as separate chapters. Responses on actual practices in the GPs indicated that they were actually following a year based ad hoc approach every year, rather than an approach based on long term vision about development. The President of Venkitangu panchayat during the KDP commented, “We had been preparing new plans each year. In fact we prepared a five year plan document which had remained unused”. One of the Key resource persons from Vallikkunnu during the PPC who was also active in the KDP stage responded, “We followed the five year plan document prepared for the ninth plan though we had to make some compromises for popular political interests. Later on in the KDP phase, such a document became an exhibition material on the shelf. There was no long term vision for the projects. No effort was made to do a scientific input-output analysis.” The responses from Kudayathur also reinforced this observation. The standing committee chairperson of Kudayathur GP during the KDP phase commented, “We actually followed the practice of year wise planning. We were preparing the five year plan document for official purposes, which was never used in practice”.

While explaining the principles of the PPC, C.P. Chandrasekhar observed that the PPC intended to strengthen the planned economy and the planning at central and state level. He explained that preferences can be shown for a planned economy over a completely market oriented economy. More than the mere capacity to participate productively in local planning, capacity could be built to assess alternative trajectories of investment and consumption (Chandrasekhar, 2001). While we examine the experience of the GPs we cannot see that such theoretical postulates have been realized. In order to strengthen the state and central planning through local level planning, the rigor of the local level planning should have been maintained. The perspective plans for a long term period and year wise plans based on these plans were the basic instruments for such a systematic planning. The GPs failed to follow such a systematic planning process through linking the five year plans and annual plans. Such short term planning cannot address long term development issues, and
therefore, cannot uphold the alternative vision of development against the market economy. Though the panchayats have been able to address the immediate popular needs such as constructing houses, latrines, roads, water supply schemes etc, they could not bring about much change in the productive sector, and in improving the quality of the service sector, which were key objectives of the PPC\textsuperscript{8}.

Gradually, more emphasis was given to populist short term projects rather than the long term planning process. An evaluation report prepared by KSSP in 2005 about Vallikkunnu commented as follows, “The important roads in the panchayat did not get enough attention because of the tendency to divide the funds on a ward basis”. (KSSP, 2005:44). There was even a court verdict that objected to the panchayat’s practice to divide the funds on the basis of wards to please the elected representatives from each ward. Based on the court verdict the Government of Kerala (GOK) passed an order to prevent this practice (GOK, 1999). In this order the GOK explicitly declared that funds should not be divided on a ward by ward basis, and projects should be prepared by viewing the panchayat as a single unit. The list of beneficiaries of projects should be prepared on a panchayat-wise basis and the benefits should be allotted based on that list. This instruction has not been followed in practice. A member of the Kudayathur panchayat during the KDP phase commented, “We had been dividing the benefits equally between wards. The same pattern was followed in the case of roads too”. Both Vallikkunnu and Venkitangu also reinforced this practice. The number of roads had been increased without considering the quality and sustainability of maintenance. An Agricultural officer in Venkitangu, who has been working in the GP since the KDP phase commented, “Most of the water flow channels in the GP were filled and used as roads. This has really affected the availability of water for inland paddy fields, and coconut growing areas. It made for a lopsided development at the cost of agriculture.” Though the water flow map had been prepared in Vallikkunnu it was not used for spatial planning.

It is pertinent to mention that the populist and clientelist approach of political parties seem to be a major hurdle in having a long term vision and development planning. Except in the initial phase of PPC in Vallikkunnu, the election manifesto of major political parties had not been prepared through a collective process. The major parties were not willing to go against the practice of dividing benefits and funds based
on wards, rather than viewing the entire panchayat as a development unit. This has resulted in a situation where the number of projects increased and the funds became fragmented rather than focusing on the real output. The lack of long term vision was particularly visible in the special component plan for women and SCs.

Prabhat Patnaik explained that Kerala’s concept of decentralized planning is a part of an ongoing struggle between two economic policy trajectories. One emphasizes self reliance and broadening of the domestic mass market, and the other is associated with the neo liberal programme (Patnaik, 2001). He considers decentralization in Kerala as a step to strengthen the domestic mass market which would turn as a struggle against neo liberalism. This kind of broad political vision was actually replaced by the populist and clientelist practices of political parties. They targeted the voter base rather than focusing on the political vision of development. In other words, the PPC could not succeed in disseminating the political vision of local planning in Kerala down to the grassroots.

5.7.1 Monitoring and follow up of activities

Concurrent monitoring and evaluation, and detailed evaluation after the completion of the projects are requirements of any planning process. A rigorous monitoring process was suggested by the planning board to ensure the quality of projects during the PPC. It was suggested that panchayats should form subject wise monitoring committees to check on project implementation in each sector. Elected representatives, official members of Task forces and external experts were to be the members of such committees (KSPB, 1999). The amount for the implementation of projects could be withdrawn from the account of the implementing officers of each project only after submission of the clearance report by the monitoring committee, during the different phases of work. The final instalment could be issued only after the clearance of the final monitoring report by the committee. The monitoring committees were told to visit the work sites and to make sure the project target is met (KSPB, 1999). A separate chapter on monitoring had to be enclosed along with each project document for the technical approval of the projects by the expert committees. The same method of monitoring was suggested for individual beneficiary schemes and general projects.
Monitoring has been the weakest element of project implementation and the least considered element in the functioning of Task forces. Monitoring the projects by visiting the work sites as a team, preparing the monitoring report through joint discussions and suggesting corrective actions to compensate for gaps and shortcomings were the major responsibilities of the monitoring teams. The monitoring report was to be discussed in the Task force meetings, and they were to prepare an overall evaluation report of the projects.

The practice of conducting field visits was initially observed in the panchayats. A former panchayat member who was also a coordinator of the planning activities in Vallikkunnu GP during the KDP phase commented, “We had the practice of visiting the worksites as a team by arranging vehicles. This practice later vanished, and it remained as a duty of the implementing officers”. The Agriculture officer from Vallikkunnu said, “Monitoring committees have been there only in the document. It was our duty to visit the field and monitor projects. It is ironical that the same person who designed and implemented the projects has to monitor and evaluate them and also to release the money.” The panchayat President from Venkitangu during the KDP phase who was also a standing committee chairperson in the PPC phase reflected, “We had a team for monitoring the projects. External experts and panchayat members and officials were included in it. We had been visiting the field earlier. This practice has changed, and it became the sole responsibility of officials who also had the responsibility of implementing the projects”. It could be observed that team work for field evaluation was very limited in the panchayats after the initial three years of the PPC. The officials, who were giving the money to the beneficiaries, or Beneficiary Committees, or contractors, became the sole agency of monitoring as well. In fact this has greatly increased the possibilities for malpractice and corruption, while the intention had actually been to curb corruption.

Though one officer was examining the project sites, the monitoring reports were signed by other members too. This has actually made the monitoring process a useless ritual. One former Resource person from Venkitangu who was active during both the PPC and the KDP phases recollected, “Earlier, I was the convener of one monitoring committee. We prepared a factual report. There was lots of pressure from the panchayat members to hide it. Finally, it was abandoned, and the money was
allotted to the people without considering the concerns of the monitoring committee. Later on, it became an adjustment between the officials and panchayat members.” Vallikkunnu was better in team work, field visits and in preparing reports after discussions. They had such a team activity going on till the middle of the KDP, i.e. 2002-2003.

Monitoring reports were never discussed in the Task forces at the end of every year, when they were meeting for project evaluation. A Task force member from Venkitangu who was active both in the PPC and the KDP phases mentioned, “The monitoring reports had been abandoned after allotting money to the concerned parties. There had not been any further discussions on that report in the Task force meeting.” The monitoring reports had not been used as a basic document for preparing the project review presented in the gram sabha after every financial year. As we had mentioned earlier, there is no serious input-output comparison and evaluation after the completion of the projects. A Task force member from Vallikkunnu during the KDP phase commented, “You know there was a huge waste of money in various activities. Many of the projects became utter failures. The machines of the industries remained unused; three boats purchased for tourism were ruined. The critical reports of the monitoring committees were not placed before the Task forces or gram sabhas for open discussions.” The lacunae in the monitoring actually reduced the possibility for bringing better outcomes from the projects. This encouraged malpractices and leakage of public money.

The elected representative/official nexus in carrying out malpractices are more evident from the comments. The evidence of clientelist and populist political practices were also visible. Political parties were more interested in securing and sustaining their vote base by neglecting malpractices of the individual beneficiaries, Beneficiary committees and contractors. They do not want to conduct the monitoring exercise in a rigorous way, and discuss the committee reports in public forums such as panchayat meetings, gram sabhas and Task forces. The apathetic approach of the civil society organizations (CSOs) is also evident here. Though Kerala Panchayati Raj Act (KPR Act) provided space for right to information in the 1999 KPR Amendment Act, much earlier than the Indian Right to Information Act, none of the CSOs in the
studied panchayats used this provision to release the monitoring committee reports or any document related to planning, and to bring them into a public discussion.

**5.7.2 Hurdles to local planning**

The local development process was initiated in Kerala by reallocating money that was earlier spent by the various departments of the State government in the institutions of Local self government. It was also expected that the replication of the same activities that could be done at the local level should not happen at a higher level. One of the basic principles highlighted in the Sathya Brith Sencommittee report, appointed by the Government of Kerala in 1996, to recommend measures to strengthen the democratic decentralization process was the principle of subsidiarity (Parameswaran, 1999). This committee had recommended that the control of the department schemes in the areas which were already allotted to the Local self governments should be devolved to them and new schemes have to be avoided. The integration of various Central and State government schemes with the local plans was also an indispensable element to realize this approach. Such an attempt to integrate the central schemes with the LSG plans was seen during the PPC.

Panchayats faced several hurdles when they proceeded with the local planning process. We could categorize the hurdles into four types. The first one is the flow of parallel schemes and the lack of integration of central and state government programmes with panchayat plans. The second one included the technical complexities that the GP had to confront during the local planning process, including the contradictions in government orders. The third one is the structural changes taking place in the economy and society and their impact on local planning. The last one includes historical hurdles that GPs had to face while dealing with the problems of empowering marginalized groups.

There are technical complexities that GPs have to confront during the process of local planning. Even after fifteen years of planning experience, from the time of the PPC, the local planning process has not yet been regularised. Every year the government has issued new guidelines for local planning, and many of them had been frequently changing (Oommen et al, 2009). The Vice president of Venkitangal GP during the KDP phase commented, “The year wise guidelines really challenges the
autonomy of GPs and creates hurdles in the planning process. We were forced to undertake the centrally designed instructions.” A former Key resource person from Vallikkunnu who was active in the PPC period stated, “There should be long term guidelines for local planning. The autonomy of the local bodies in decision making should be ensured”. The respondents also indicated that the year wise guidelines have been delaying the local plan preparation and approval process, because GPs had to wait every year for fresh guidelines to earmark funds.

The structural changes in the economy and society, particularly in the land use pattern also created hurdles in the interventions of the GPs. This has mostly been reflected in the interventions of the agricultural sector. Respondents from the panchayats unanimously agreed that the number of people relying on agriculture as a primary source of income has substantially declined during the last two decades. This has brought in limitations to the interventions in the agricultural sector. The historical backwardness of SCs and fishermen in terms of lower education and land ownership continued to hinder their social mobility.

5.8 Local level planning and reflections in the productive sector

Overcoming stagnation in the productive sector, particularly in agriculture and small scale industrial sector was one of the key objectives of PPC (Isaac & Franke, 2000). A collective effort of various groups of society such as farmers, small scale entrepreneurs, officials, experts, and agricultural workers was expected in the local planning process, which was viewed as a way to rejuvenate the productive sector. The general experience from the three panchayats showed that agricultural Task forces were more active compared to the other Task forces. We can perceive that different factors contributed to this phenomenon. The active participation and bargaining of Pada sekhara samithi (organisation of paddy farmers), was visible in Venkitangu, while a few farmers who were interested in agricultural activities have been attending the meeting of the TF both in Vallikkunnu and Kudayathur. The agricultural Task force in Vallikkunnu initiated several projects with the participation of farmers and agricultural workers at the PPC phase. Moreover, we observed that the participation of the farmers who relied on agriculture as a primary source of income was a key factor in the comparatively better performance of agricultural Task forces in these panchayats. The involvement of professionals such as Agricultural officers and
Veterinary surgeons in the activities of Task forces also made a positive difference in the functioning of agriculture Task force.

The collective bargaining of farmers through the forum of Padasekhara Samithis was reflected in the agricultural Task force’s functioning in Venkitangu. Unlike with the scheduled caste group, farmers who owned land were able to use their membership in the farmers association to enable them to take active part in public forums such as gram sabhas and Task forces. The Task force members in Vallikkunnu participated in preparing the projects and also in the activities of project implementation. The TF members of Kudayathur regularly attended meetings and gave their suggestions, though preparation of projects was an activity vested with the agricultural officer and other officials. The Padasekhara Samithis members actively participated in Venkitangu in the discussions for project formulation and they were also bargaining for more funds for paddy cultivation. The industrial sector Task force in Vallikkunnu was quite active in the PPC phase, but later became inactive because of the continued failure of small scale industrial projects. The industrial Tasks forces were not functioning in Venkitangu and Kudayathur. In Vallikkunnu, experts from the industry department were attending meetings and engaging in the activities of Task forces.

5.8.1 Projects in the productive sector

While we compare the actual nature and outcomes of the projects in the productive sector in the GPs, we cannot say that they have really followed the vision of the Peoples Planning Campaign, i.e. the revitalization of the productive sector. A detailed list comprising the names of the productive sector projects and the amount spent on each project has been given as an Annexure of the thesis (See. Appendix.5.3.1, 5.3.2, and 5.3.3)

From an examination of this list we can recognize that the GPs had given more prominence to individual based projects such as the distribution of seeds and fertilizers to the farmers, distribution of seedlings, assistance for vegetable cultivation, distribution of goats, poultry, cattle, assistance for cattle shed construction etc. in the agricultural and allied sectors. Though the agricultural Task forces were active, the members were more interested in ensuring personal beneficiary schemes to the
farmers than formulating plans for the holistic development of the agricultural sector. The agriculture officer from Venkitangu who has been working in the panchayat since the KDP phase commented, “Padasekhara samiti representatives were actively attending the Task force meetings. They were not ready to think about any innovative schemes to improve paddy production and to protect the soil. However, they were interested in getting more subsidies from the panchayat in the form of fertilizers, seedlings or cash incentives”. The panchayats were also interested in pleasing the farmers by implementing populist programmes rather than implementing comprehensive plans for the revitalization of the agricultural sector. A Key resource person from Vallikkunnu who was active in the PPC phase stated, “We prepared several resource maps with mass participation. It is unfortunate that there was no effort from the panchayat to utilize them for making a comprehensive watershed plan”. The Kerala State Land Use Board (KSLUB) prepared land use maps in Venkitangu and Kudayathur. The GPs could not make use of them while formulating agricultural plans. The absence of long term vision and comprehensive approach was visible in the agricultural plans of the GPs.

One of the initiators of the PPC, Thomas Isaac explained that the Left saw decentralization as an important strategic initiative to overcome the stagnation in the productive sector, through mass mobilization of the people (Isaac & Franke, 2000). E.M. Sankaran Namboodiripad (EMS) who had a key role in formulating the philosophy of PPC also explained, “Keralites do not have the understanding that the heart of development is tied with the increase in production. Quite often we assume that education, health and transportation are the only sectors for development. This understanding needs to be changed. We should be able to link the developments we achieved in the health and the education sectors, with the development in productive sector” (Namboodiripad in Isaac and Sreedharan (eds), 2002: 60). From the above narrations we can see that much emphasis was given to the revitalization of the productive sector through the PPC. The experience of the GPs suggested that such a comprehensive and long term vision was lacking in the productive sector plans of the GPs. Macro level data of the state also show that the area under cultivation and the quantity of produce of the three major crops of Kerala, i.e. rice, tapioca, and coconut had substantially declined in the period between 1997-98 to 2006-2007 (Kerala Development Report, 2008; Oommen et. al, 2009).
5.8.2 Lack of sustained efforts

Vallikkunnu GP had made some effort during the PPC phase to implement several programmes with mass participation in the agricultural sector, such as cleaning and renovation of the irrigation canal, removal of African fungi from paddy land and convert it to bio fertilizer. Other than the enthusiasm of mass mobilization the panchayat could not make continuous efforts to ensure that such efforts reaped the expected gains. The convener of the agricultural Task force indicated, “Most of the activities that were organized in the PPC could not be maintained and continued into the KDP phase. Moreover, strict adherence to the ultimate objective of the projects was not maintained and most of them dropped out midway, without reaching the target.” Though a mass effort had been in existence for renovating irrigation canals, there was no effort to expand agricultural activity in the areas near the renovated irrigation canals.

There was a sustained intervention in the Venkitangu GP area, which had a phenomenal impact on the expansion of paddy cultivation. Thrissur District panchayat had initiated a project to establish a water drainage system in an area prone to water logging, which was useful for paddy cultivation. They were able to expand paddy cultivation in an area called Thannerkayal spread over 300 hectares, in the GP area. This kind of intervention to expand the area that was producing paddy was not seen in all GPs. A member of the agriculture Task force of Vallikkunnu GP who was active during both the PPC and the KDP periods stated, “During the last 15-20 years the area of land producing paddy has been considerably reduced. There was no attempt from the GP to expand the paddy cultivation in the fallow fields”. In Venkitangu, even the panchayat had purchased a paddy field, filled it, and used the land as a playground and for a crematorium. An important reason for the reduction of paddy fields both in Venkitangu and Vallikkunnu was the expansion of the road network, without considering the spatial and geographical peculiarities of the land. An Agricultural officer in Venkitangu commented, “Almost all the water flow channels and canals in the panchayat became roads after PPC. There was no spatial planning while constructing roads. Later on, paddy fields were filled and used for non agricultural purposes. The price of land had also substantially increased because of road connectivity. Filling of paddy lands became a common phenomenon. There was no
initiative from the GP to prevent the unauthorized filling of paddy fields”. The same observation was also made in Vallikkunnu. The expansion of the road network without scientific, spatial and geographical planning had an adverse impact on paddy cultivation and agriculture. The state level data also show that the area of paddy cultivation in Kerala has declined from 387122 hectares in 1997-98 to 263524 hectares in 2006-07 (Oommen, et al 2009). The lack of long term planning and spatial planning is a major cause behind such a setback.

Though the GPs have spent money to distribute fertilizers and seedlings, there were not enough measures for the collecting and processing of agricultural products. The farmers are compelled to sell agricultural produce to intermediaries because of the dearth of collection and processing systems at the local level. The Task force member from Vallikkunnu commented, “We still give our paddy to the intermediary traders. There is only one government collecting centre in the entire district. We are compelled to sell the products at a comparatively lower price”. The paddy farmers in Venkitangu are in a better position because most of the paddy fields in the panchayat are part of coal land where the state government had introduced a procurement system. The three tier panchayats could not devise suitable measures to procure and process agricultural products in their localities.

5.8.3 Attempts for innovation

Limited availability of agricultural labourers is a challenge faced by Kerala’s agricultural sector (Oommen et al, 2009). Mechanization of agriculture was the only solution to such a problem. Responses showed that some initiatives have been taken by the GPs to address this problem. All the activities related to paddy production have been mechanized in the coal land region of Venkitangu. The Agricultural officer from Venkitangu commented, “We succeeded in implementing mechanization at all stages of paddy production, starting from planting to harvesting”. This was an initiative taken by the Padasekhara Samiti and the agricultural office rather than directly by the GP. Vallikkunnu GP could not make much progress in this direction. Their mechanization was limited to the use of a tiller and tractor, for ploughing the land, and they were not able to expand it to other activities. Though the GP registered an agricultural cooperative society for this purpose, they could not make much change in further mechanization of agricultural activities.
Lack of innovation is visible in the agricultural projects of the GPs\textsuperscript{11}. Most of them became the replication of the department’s schemes such as distribution of fertilizers, seedlings, pump sets, and assistance to replace diseased coconut trees etc. A few initiatives were taken by the panchayats. The biogas plant in Venkitangu and the experiment of vermicompost units in Kudayathur are examples of these initiatives. The activity of Vallikkunnu GP to renovate the irrigation canal is another example. Such instances were limited in number. In fact the GPs could not make much of an improvement in the agricultural production in their localities. Though the Task forces were active, they could not carry out much of innovative experiments in the field. They were more likely to devise projects that were directly providing individual benefits to the farmers in the form of subsidies. Further, the agricultural labourers and farmer’s organizations, led by political parties were silent about local agricultural issues. Their representatives provided a view that they had no practice of discussing local agricultural issues in their forums. This was an additional impediment to reinvigorating the agricultural sector.

\textbf{5.8.4 Influence of structural factors in agriculture sector performance}

Along with the lapses in the planning process there were also structural factors that affected the performance of panchayats in the agricultural sector. A noticeable fact was that the actual owners of the land in the GP areas were withdrawing from the agriculture because it had turned into a secondary source of income to them. The Agricultural officer from Venkitangu indicated, “Seventy per cent of the paddy farmers in the coal lands are not the actual owners of the land. They have taken the land on lease, and are growing paddy”. The Task force members from Vallikkunnu also confirmed the same practice. The phenomenal increase in land price in the GP area also made land into a commodity rather than an instrument for food production and agricultural activity. A study by the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishath (KSSP) concluded that land transactions and the concentration of land with richer groups had been increasing since 1990. It also showed that poorer groups were losing land because they were forced to sell their land to meet capital requirements such as marriage, health treatment expenditure, and to repay debts (KSSP, 2006).

One member from Vallikkunnu gram panchayat during 2000–2010 period commented, “Almost all the paddy fields got road connectivity after PPC. Such land
became filled and sold at exorbitant prices. The land value has multiplied several times during the last ten years. Now the land price in the major centres of the panchayat is more than two lakhs for each cent of land, which was 20-30 thousand rupees ten years ago”. The mushrooming of the real estate business in rural areas has severely and adversely affected agricultural activity. During field work in Vallikkunnu I witnessed people protest against the move of an oil company to acquire 100 acres of paddy fields in Ariyallur village. Thus, the external pressure over land as a commodity and as a source for investment really made an impact, reducing its possibility as an instrument for agricultural production12. This has shown that larger issues of political economy also affected the planning process of the GPs, particularly in the production sector where land is a crucial element of production. The commodification of land has vitally affected its productive function. Those who own the land shifted their primary source of income from agriculture to other sectors. These changes affected the formation and strengthening of production based associations of the farmers who actually own the land (KSSP, 2006). The cooperation among the de facto farmers in collective farming, which was an expectation of PPC (Tornquist 2001), has not been widely practiced in the GPs.

The changing labour structure in Kerala’s agriculture made it an unattractive sector to the labourers. Comparatively lower income and the lack of permanent employment discourages them from remaining in this sector. The younger generation are not willing to get involved in agricultural labour (Kannan, 2010). In the last two decades there was a phenomenal increase in the number of construction workers in the GP areas. The leaders of agricultural labourers and construction worker’s organizations unanimously agreed to this assessment. The village secretary of the construction workers Union in Venkitangu, who has been holding this position for the last ten years, commented, “Our membership has multiplied four times during the last 10-15 years. Many of the agricultural labourers have migrated to construction work”. The village secretary of agricultural labourers from Vallikkunnu said, “We cannot force the agricultural labourers to remain in this sector. An agricultural labourer will get only 250-300 rupees per day while a construction worker will get 400-450. This is really an attraction to the people”. Further, the agriculture labour cost in Kerala is quite high compared to other states, which is an effect of the strong trade union activism among agricultural workers in the state. This is also an impediment to the
expansion of agricultural activity (Tharamangalam, 2006). The structural change in the economy contributed less to the primary sector which was due to the growing contribution of sectors like construction and service sectors in the local economies (Kerala Development Report, 2008). Kannan (2010) observed that a structural transformation took place in the state economy, from one dominated by agriculture in both income and employment to an non-agrarian one dominated by non-agricultural activity. The share of agriculture as a source of employment has been declining in Kerala for the past two decades. The organizational and institutional arrangements in Kerala’s agriculture have been stagnating since the 1990s (Kannan, 2010). The experience of our study also indicates that there was no initiative by the GPs to introduce new kinds of organizational and institutional mechanismsto overcome the stagnation in the productive sector. The GPs could not bring in reforms to overcome the issues of scarcity of labour and the underutilization of land for agriculture.

5.8.5 Experience in the small scale industrial sector

The small scale industrial sector was an area that was under the productive sector, and where GPs had a role. Vallikkunnu gram panchayat had done some work in this area during the PPC period. They set up units to make hollow bricks and paper bags by utilizing the funds of the Special Component Plan for the SC community. They also started food processing units, ready-made garments units, and electronics choke making units as small scale units of women Neighbourhood groups. They started training programmes for prospective entrepreneurs and various employment training programmes for women. Kudayathur GP started book binding units, tailoring units and soap making units for women during the 9th plan. They set up a bag making unit and employment training programmes during the 10th plan. Venkitangu GP started a women’s canteen and food processing centre in the 10th plan.

The general tendency found in the industrial projects of the GPs is the lack of sustainability. When the Vallikkunnu GP started the brick making, and paper works units for Scheduled Caste women, the panchayat had purchased land and machinery for both the units. They worked only for two years. The food processing unit lasted for six years. The women’s canteen worked for four years, and then closed. The same outcome was seen in the case of the soap making unit. The only sustained activity is a group activity of women SHGs, in the cultivation of green mussels in the riverside
areas. Kudayathur GP also began many schemes including women’s tailoring units, bag making unit, and vermicompost units. In Venkitangu, they limited themselves to a women’s canteen. This was started as a group effort and later on turned into the responsibility of two people. Though the GP had earmarked a substantial amount of money for a fruit processing centre, they could not open it even after 7-8 years. The bio-gas plant in Venkitangu GP run by a Kudumbashree unit is a model project replicated in many other places. Venkitangu GP recently started an agricultural co-operative society of SCs, in which they gave machinery and training to SC youths, to work as a team of skilled labourers in the agriculture sector. This could be developed to solve the problems of shortage of skilled agricultural labourers. Except for some of these experiments, the other programmes had been dropped mid-way.

5.9 Summary

The People’s Planning Campaign laid great emphasize on the rejuvenation of the productive sector and the empowerment of marginalized groups. Task forces were the institutions formed in Local Self Governments to formulate plans at the local level. Participatory institutions such as Beneficiary Committees were formed to bring in the participation of people in project implementation as well. TFs were expected to function as a local planning board comprising experts from various sectors. The experience from the GPs indicates that they were eager to bring experts from various walks of life in the initial phase of PPC, while such attempts were lacking from the latter half of PPC onwards. The subject wise subcommittee system of PPC in Vallikkunnu gram panchayat helped them to bring in expertise, while the other two GPs did not carry out any such exercise. Kudayathur GP faced difficulties in finding experts from various disciplines. Lack of experts in TFs affected their capacity to bring professionalism in functioning.

Though the elected representatives and officials received training, the ordinary TF members were hardly trained in plan formulation. The TFs’ training did not reach down to the grassroots level. The training during the PPC and KDP phases largely failed in transmitting the philosophy of local planning to the grassroots. Training was an exercise of mechanically explaining the guidelines and government orders. The lacuna in training acted as a hurdle in bringing attitudinal changes among all actors related to local planning, as expected by the PPC.
Team work of Resource persons (RPs), elected representatives, officials and political activists was visible in plan formulation in the GPs in the early stage of PPC. The institutional systems such as Panchayat development committee in Vallikkunnu formed the part of KSSP assisted Panchayat Level Development Programme, and Panchayat development committee in Kudayathur, and the support of RPs during the PPC phase stimulated team work. The official withdrawal of RPs during the United Democratic Front (UDF) led KDP phase hampered team work. The conflict between the CPI (M) led gram panchayat and the KSSP created obstacles to team work in Vallikkunnu, though the CPI (M) was the ruling party in the panchayat during the KDP phase. A general trend noted in the GPs during the KDP phase was the greater involvement of officials in the planning process rather than continuing it in a democratic form, i.e. participation of local people.

The Task force members themselves were formulating project ideas and writing the project reports in Vallikkunnu, while the role of TF members was limited to discussing and suggesting project ideas in Venkitangu and Kudayathur during the PPC phase. The task of writing the project reports was confined to two–three people in Kudayathur, while it has become an exercise of officials in Venkitangu. Vallikkunnu GP was able to bring in the involvement of TFs in all steps of project formulation and implementation. This enabled them to maintain the participation of TF members in its activities. The number of members actively working in TFs was very small in Kudayathur and Venkitangu after the initial three years of the PPC. TFs became a group of members with low expertise and commitment. This affected their capacity to make effective plans. The expectations of PPC about the gradual capacity building at the local level and to acquire the skill and vision of local development were not realised.

Local planning had a tremendous impact on the infrastructure facilities such as roads, street lights and water supply schemes. It also made improvements in the conditions of the poor through providing houses, latrines, and assistance for electrification of houses. This has also brought about changes in the living standards of the disadvantaged groups such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. However, the basic objective of the PPC, to overcome stagnation in the productive sector was not realized in practice. Panchayats could not follow perspective plans or
five year plans while preparing annual plans. They followed yearly based *ad hoc* planning and neglected a long term vision. The year wise planning system largely failed to address the long term development concerns, and was inadequate to develop an alternative vision of development by strengthening local planning, which the PPC was intended to do. Though the GPs were able to address the immediate needs of the people they could not address the long term development requirements in a comprehensive way. The practice of dividing funds between the wards, and giving more emphasis to individual oriented programmes has superseded the concerns for long term development. Broad and alternative visions of development had been replaced by populist and clientelist practices of the political parties, by targeting their voter base.

A lack of comprehensive and sustainable approach was reflected in the productive sector plans of the GPs. The macro level data of the state also showed that the area of cultivation and the cultivation of major crops in Kerala have been declining in the past two decades. Instead of searching for long term development goals, the productive sector projects of the LSGs largely focused on individual and isolated projects. Most of the projects of LSGs in the productive sectors were the replications of departmental schemes. The GPs could not develop institutional and organizational structures to organize the farmers to make changes in the productive sector. The larger issue of political economy related to the commodification of land also affected the productive sector plans of the LSGs. Because of the expansion of the land market, land has become a commodity rather than a factor of production in the state. The transition of the economy from an agrarian one to a non-agrarian one in terms of the percentage of income and employment of the state also restricted GPs in the productive sector.

1. The name of the TFs was changed to Working Groups (WG) during the KDP phase (2001 – 2006), and again changed to Task Forces (TFs) after KDP. Here, in the text we use the term Taskforces for convenience.
2. Green mussel is a particular kind of shell that has flesh content inside which is used for preparing various dishes.
3. Evaluation report of the decentralization planning in Kerala also observed that the working groups (TFs) of the GPs comprised more non-expert members than expert members, See. M.A. Oommen et al (2009): *Evaluation report of decentralized planning in Kerala*.
4. An evaluation study of Capacity Development for Decentralization in Kerala (CapDeck), (a programme formulated to support the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) for conducting training for elected representatives, officials and volunteers in matters related to local governments) made an observation that eight key respondents out of twenty five in the study indicated that KILA’s...
initiatives for institutionalizing training rather than continuing the campaign mode like PPC was the factor that slowed down the momentum of the campaign process (See Tharakan, P.K.M (2009): *Report of the project on documenting the experiences of SDC CapDeck programme*).

5 In the evaluation study of CapDeck Michael Tharakan observed that the tendency to bureaucratise the process of planning and lack of emphasis on social audit were the two major lacunae during the UDF rule, and KDP phase. See Tharakan, P.K.M (2009).

6 The state level data also showed that 4614 crore rupees had been allotted to LSGs during the 9th plan period (PPC phase), and 6789 crores had been allotted during the 10th plan (2002 – 2007) phase. (See Oommen et al (2009).

7 The macro level data of the state also support this observation. Tremendous changes were recorded in the case of village roads, drinking water connectivity, street lights, housing and latrines for the poor, and in the infrastructure facilities of the public institutions transferred to GPs. See economic reviews (2003, 2007, 2008).

8 In the study Jos Chathukulam and K. Gireesan also emphasized that panchayats had no perspective plan while they were intervening in local development, See. Chathukulam and Gireesan (2007): ‘Concurrent monitoring as a means to identify the structural and procedural gaps in planning’.


10 Two other studies in South India also indicated that the performance of the LSGs in productive sector was comparatively poor, while they succeeded in providing basic amenities to the people. See. Abdul Aziz (2002): ‘A comparative analysis of governance and planning’, p.281-319; Raphael, C. Jose (2000): *Decentralized planning in India.*


12 Lack of control over the market economy by the LSGs seriously affected the project planned under the productive sector, See. Chathukulam and Gireesan (2007).