CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, TENABILITY OF
THE HYPOTHESES AND SUGGESTIONS

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5.1. Introduction

The present study is intended to investigate the information requirements and information use pattern of Grama Panchayat Members of Kerala in the context of decentralised planning. In order to fulfill this aim, seven specific objectives are identified. It is tried to understand the information needs of Grama Panchayath Members, the channels of communication among them, and the preferences in the use of information sources by them. Effort is also made to compare the information use pattern of Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala and to study the use of indigenous knowledge by them. The information base of local level planning and governance in Kerala is examined. The suggestions for improving the information base of local governance and for developing an information system to support Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala are made on the basis of the study.

The information requirements and use of information by the Members of Grama Panchayats in Kerala has to be studied by the information professional as it do not come under the purview of economists or experts in decentralised planning. The present investigation has achieved its objective in identifying the information needs and use of information by the members. The findings of the study would be useful for the experts who design an information system for decentralised planning in Kerala.

A summary of major findings, tenability of hypotheses and suggestions are provided in this chapter.

5.2. Major Findings

The major findings of the study are given below.
5.2.1. General Information

The following are the findings regarding the personal profile of the Grama Panchayat Members:

5.2.1.1. Status of the Members

1. Majority of the respondents (75 per cent) is ordinary Panchayat Members and the members in all other positions such as Presidents, Vice-Presidents and Standing Committee Chairmen are represented in the sample.

5.2.1.2. Sectors engaged Earlier

2. Majority of the Grama Panchayat Members (69 per cent) has political background and the political parties do make use of the services provided by the members to the people of the locality and thus achieve rapport with people. Political affiliation of the members is higher (73 per cent) in the northern region.

5.2.1.3. Age Range of the Members

3. The large majority of the members (72 per cent) of Grama Panchayats in Kerala are young, within the age group 30 – 49. The age wise distribution of the respondents showed that many (40 per cent) of them is below the age of 40. The reduced age profile signals the increasing participation of youth in decentralised governance. It is a positive development and an indicator of greater empowerment.

5.2.1.4. Gender of the Members

4. Majority (61 per cent) of the Grama Panchayat Members are men. It is found that the percentage of women elected representatives is more (39 per cent) than that of the one-third (33.33 per cent) seats reserved for women. The distribution of male members decreases from south (63.55 per cent) to north (58.24 per cent) while the
distribution of women elected representatives shows a regular increase from southern region (36 per cent) through central region (38 per cent) to northern region (42 per cent). The participation of women in local governance is higher in northern Kerala.

5.2.1.5. Marital status of the Members

5. The large majority (90 per cent) of the Grama Panchayat Members is married and late marriage among unemployed male youth may be one of the reasons for the presence of 10 per cent of unmarried members. The unmarried members are found to be more (12 per cent) in the southern region.

5.2.1.6 The Category of the Members

6. Majority of the members (59 per cent) belongs to general category and the remaining 41 per cent include reservation categories. The members belonging to SC reservation in the universe (7.34 per cent) and sample (7.36 per cent) selected are almost the same. All other categories except ST women reservation with a slight variation show the same trends. The similar features of the universe and sample justifies that the sample selected is a highly representative one.

5.2.1.7. Educational qualification of the Members

7. Majority (79 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala have secondary education and above and 20 per cent of them have graduation and higher qualifications. Members with higher secondary education (20 per cent) and with professional degrees (5 per cent) are more in the central region; members with graduation are more in southern region and members having postgraduate degree are more in the northern region.
5.2.1.8. Affiliation of the Members to Different Organisations

8. A large majority of Grama Panchayat Members (92 per cent) in Kerala has affiliation with political organisations. In the case of number of members who were political activists there is an increase as we move from south to north with 62.62 per cent in southern region, 69.86 per cent in central region and 73.08 per cent in the northern region. They are also associated with voluntary organisations and trade unions. The involvement of members in religious organisations is high in southern region (17 per cent) and the members of northern region (22 per cent) are more associated with voluntary organisations. The affiliation to trade unions is uniform in all regions.

5.2.1.9. Social Activities of the Members

9. About half of the Grama Panchayat Members (50.11 per cent) in Kerala have previous experience in social activities. It is revealed that some of the present Grama Panchayat Members had served in different capacities in the Total Literacy Campaign of 1990 and it shows the involvement of the members in social activities. On the other hand majority of the members (69 per cent) are not associating with the presently continuing Kerala State Literacy Mission programme.

5.2.1.10. Tenure of the Members

10. Majority (64 per cent) of the Members of Grama Panchayat in Kerala has been elected for the first time and some (29 per cent) of the members for the second term. A few (8 per cent) of them have been members for the last three terms.
5.2.1.11. Political affiliation of the Members

11. A good number (45.29 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala belong to Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Left Democratic Front led by CPI (M), which has political dominance in majority of the Grama Panchayats of Kerala.

5.2.2. Information Needs of Grama Panchayat Members

12. A large majority (97 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala indicated that they require information in planning activities and the need for information is more among the members of central region (98 per cent).

13. A large majority (97 per cent) of the members of Grama Panchayats agreed that they were contacted by the people of the locality to get information and more members of northern region (99 per cent) have reported this.

14. Majority (79 per cent) of the Grama Panchayat Members expressed that they are able to provide information required by the people of the locality and the performance of the members of northern region (82 per cent) in this regard is better.

15. The information requirements at different phases of decentralised planning are not met properly as indicated by the majority (57 per cent) of the Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala and more members of central region (59 per cent) are of this opinion.

16. Majority (64 per cent) of the Grama Panchayat Members experience uncertainty in decision making due to lack of relevant information in local level planning. More members (65 per cent) from central region feel the lack of information. The
uncertainty in decision-making would naturally lead to failure in achieving the
goals.

17. Majority (54 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members indicated their requirement
for information mainly to keep up-to-date in their daily activities of local level
planning and governance. The preference of the members showed that majority of
them required information not for meeting their personal needs but for some other
important purposes. The members from northern region give less importance to
information to satisfy personal needs.

18. Majority of the members indicated that they need information to keep up-to-date in
daily activities of local governance and it justifies the high mean index (3.30)
computed for this option. More members (60 per cent) of southern Kerala require
information to keep up-to-date in daily activities. Majority of the Grama Panchayat
Members consider the requirement of information for other purposes as least
important and in northern region no member needs information for other purposes
than the mentioned.

19. A good number (49 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members agreed that they need
information mainly for planning activities and the requirement is highest (50 per
cent) among the members of northern region. The analysis of preferences to the
information sources showed that majority of the Grama Panchayat Members need
information for purposes other than political and educational activities. However,
some of them need information for educational purposes and comparatively the
requirement is high among the members of northern Kerala.

20. The information requirement for occupational activities is not the primary need of
the majority of the Grama Panchayat Members and more members of southern
region need information related to occupation. Majority of the members consider
the information needs for ‘other purposes’ as least important. They require information for other purposes only after satisfying their needs mainly for planning activities and then for educational, political, occupational activities.

21. Majority (52 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala prefers to use information for the ‘preparation of development report’ and the use of information for this purpose is more among the members of central region (63 per cent) and a good number (31.49 per cent) of the respondents prefer information requirement for ‘plan formulation’ as their first preference. It is found to be the second preference to a good number (46 per cent) of the respondents. The requirements of information in the different phases of planning are found to be higher for the ‘preparation of the development report’ and for ‘plan formulation’. They require less information in the phases of ‘plan evaluation’, ‘plan implementation’, and ‘monitoring and evaluation’.

5.2.3. Information Sources of Grama Panchayat Members

22. Majority (61 per cent) of the Members of Grama Panchayat in Kerala is awareness of the information sources relevant to the decentralised planning and the members of northern region (64 per cent) are more conscious of the information sources.

23. Majority (69 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members of Kerala consider that the training programme/workshop are relevant in providing required information for decentralised planning and more members of northern region (74 per cent) are of this opinion.

24. Majority (57 per cent) of the members agreed that the handbooks/manuals distributed in training programme/workshop are relevant. More members (61 per cent) from southern Kerala have this opinion.
25. Government Orders and Circulars are found to be relevant in providing information for majority (61 per cent) of the members. More members from southern Kerala consider these sources relevant.

26. Majority (79 per cent) of the Grama Panchayat Members collect information from other relevant sources as well to meet the information requirements in different phases of decentralised planning and the members of northern Kerala (84 per cent) are much ahead in collecting information from other sources.

27. A good number (39 per cent) of members depend telephone as their first option to get required information. Many (32 per cent) of the members depend on colleagues for getting information. Telephonic enquiries and clarifications from colleagues cater to the information needs to Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala. Both of them involve human elements and hence interpersonal communication among members is found to be very important. It is also found that internet is less used by the members.

28. Training programme/workshop is the most preferred source by the majority (62 per cent) of the members followed by handbooks/manuals, colleagues, mass media, and staff of Government Departments. Being the prime information source the training programme/workshop has to be made more effective. More members of northern region (68 per cent) consider training programme/workshop as their first option for getting information.

29. Large majority of the members rated training programme as ‘useful’ or ‘very useful’ Hence, in order to make it very useful for the majority of the members, the training programme has to be strengthened and made more effective by conducting at District or Block levels.

30. The printed materials supplied in the training programme are found to be ‘useful’ for majority (57 per cent) of the members Many (40 per cent) rated them as ‘very
useful’ too. It indicates the necessity of improving the content of printed materials in order to make it more useful to the majority of Grama Panchayat Members. The rating of the printed materials by the members is irrespective of regions.

31. Majority (60 per cent) of the members consider the handbooks/manuals supplied to them in the training programme as ‘useful’ and a sizable number (38 per cent) of them are of the opinion that these are ‘very useful’. Therefore it should be revised and made more useful to all the Grama Panchayat Members.

32. Government orders and circulars are ‘useful’ for the majority (57 per cent) of members and a considerable number of them (38 per cent) rate it as ‘very useful’.

33. It is found that the information sources are uniformly useful to the Grama Panchayat Members of Kerala irrespective of regions.

34. The Grama Panchayat Members belonging to the age group of below 30 and above 60 are found to be more benefited with the information sources. The members below the age of 30 are new comers elected for the first time and they are more dedicated to the activities of local level planning and governance. The members above the age of 60 are more experienced than the others. Their experiences in the socio-political activities and local governance are very helpful and they likely to use more information sources.

35. There is significant difference in the usefulness of information sources among the members of different status. The Panchayat Presidents use more information sources than the members as they are supposed to be in need of more information in their official capacity.

36. There is no difference in the use of information sources among the male and female members of Grama Panchayats in Kerala.
5.2.4. Communication Channels of Grama Panchayat Members

37. The skills of decentralised planning in Kerala have not been effectively imparted to local level as opined by the majority (56 per cent) of the members and more members of southern region have this view.

38. Majority (64 per cent) of the Panchayat Members in Kerala does not experience any difficulty in communicating with the resource persons and the beneficiaries of the locality and it is found that the members of southern and northern regions are alike in this aspect of communication. However, more than one-third of the members experience difficulties in communicating with the trainers as well as the beneficiaries.

39. About half of the members of Grama Panchayats in Kerala are aware of the presence of barriers in communication in decentralised planning which adversely affects their performance. The presence of barriers in communication is more perceived by the members of the central and northern regions of Kerala.

40. Majority (66 per cent) of the Panchayat Members are aware of the differences in the communication processes in ‘People’s Planning’ and ‘Kerala Development Programme’. The awareness of differences in communication is more visible among the members of northern region. However, a considerable number (34 per cent) of members are not aware of the differences.

41. ‘Print media’ and ‘resource persons’ are the main channels of communication through which the skills and expertise of decentralised planning are imparted to local level. The ‘print media’ is preferred by many (30.34 per cent) of the members and equal number (29.66 per cent) preferred ‘resource persons’ followed by ‘digital media’ and ‘Government publications’ (13 per cent each). The Grama Panchayat Members utilise communication channels irrespective of regions.
42. *Panchayath Raj* is found to be the one of the most popular Government publications used by large majority of Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala and the acceptance of this periodical is uniform in Kerala irrespective of regions. A large majority of the members (95 per cent) use this publication to develop their skills.

43. *Janapadham*, another Government publication is less popular among the Grama Panchayat Members of Kerala as there are negative responses from a good number (47 per cent) of the members. However, a few of the members prefer this periodical as the second one and the unawareness of the members about this source of information is a general phenomenon.

44. *Kerala Calling* is the least popular Government publication among the Panchayat Members of Kerala. However, the members of central region are found to be comparatively more familiar to the periodical. The ignorance about this periodical is also the part of unawareness of the Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala about the information sources.

45. *Gramabhoomi*, a Government periodical which covers articles on rural development and related matters that are very useful to the Panchayat Members is found to be less popular among the Panchayat Members of Kerala. It is preferred as the second publication by 18 per cent of the members. The members of central region show familiarity to this publication to certain extend. However, it is not known to the majority of the members. This also indicates their unawareness of information sources.

46. Majority of the Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala does not refer other Government publications as well to improve their skills in local governance. In fact they are unaware of the information sources in the field of planning and local
governance irrespective of regions. It is strange that they have not heard the names of publications such as Yojana, Kurukshetra, The Journal of Rural Development and The Journal of Local Governance.

47. ‘Complexity of technical terms used’ in the deliberations and ‘lack of language fluency’ are the major barriers in communication among the Grama Panchayat Members of Kerala and these barriers are common to the members irrespective of the regions. The barriers in communication among the members lead to lack of talent and confidence in local planning and governance.

48. Majority (87 per cent) of the Grama Panchayat Members of Kerala use newspapers ‘always’ to get the required information related to local level planning and the use of newspapers by the members is more in the southern and northern regions (90 per cent each) than the central region.

49. Majority of the Members of Grama Panchayats is not the regular users of Government orders emanated from the Departments of Government of Kerala. However, some of them (39 per cent) use Government orders ‘always’ depending upon the status. The members who use Government orders ‘always’ are found to be more in the central region (46 per cent).

50. Majority (62 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala makes use of radio ‘sometimes’ to get information useful for decentralised planning and the overall use of radio is found to be more among the members of southern region, 44 per cent of them use radio ‘always’ and 59 per cent use radio ‘sometimes’.

51. Majority (53 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala use television occasionally for getting information related to decentralised planning and this pattern of use are shown by majority (62 per cent) of members of northern region.
Good number of the members uses television very often and this tendency is found to be more among the members of southern region (61 per cent) of Kerala.

52. The use of digital information/internet is very less among the Grama Panchayat Members of Kerala. Majority (52 per cent) of them never use digital information/internet to get useful information for decentralised planning due to their unawareness of digital media and the lack of skills in using computers. Some of the members (45 per cent) utilise digital information at times and majority of the members of the central region (51 per cent) shows this tendency.

53. Majority (53 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members of Kerala do not use books as a source of information regularly for developing their skills and expertise in decentralised planning. A good number of them (44 per cent) use books ‘always’ and the use is higher in the central region (48 per cent). The use of books at times is higher among the members of northern region (56 per cent).

54. The Grama Panchayat Members who depend research organisations ‘always’ to get expert opinion for the different phases of decentralised planning are very less (6 per cent). However, majority (59 per cent) of them depend research organisations at times. The members of southern (65 per cent) and central regions (62 per cent) show tendency to depend more on research organisations occasionally in getting expert opinion. More than one-third of them (35 per cent) never depend on such organisations to get expert opinion.

55. A good number (46 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala depend on persons with local knowledge ‘always’ to get their opinion and it is more in the southern region (63 per cent). The occasional dependence on persons with local knowledge is higher among the members of central and northern regions.
56. Majority of the Grama Panchayat Members of Kerala contacts experts to get their opinion. Some of them (36 per cent) depend on experts very often to get their valuable suggestions in different phases of planning. The tendency to contact experts often decreases gradually from southern region to northern region.

5.2.5. Local Knowledge in Decentralised Planning

57. Large majority (97 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members considers local knowledge as an important source of information in decentralised planning and the opinion of the members is uniform in Kerala irrespective of regions.

58. Large majority (96 per cent) of the members of Grama Panchayats in Kerala require local knowledge to be collected and used for planning activities in certain development sectors, as the local knowledge is significant. With respect to this opinion there is a regular increase in the number of members from southern region (94 per cent) to northern region (97 per cent) of Kerala.

59. A large majority of the members (89 per cent) is of the view that a database of local knowledge is useful in decentralised planning, as the local knowledge once collected can be used in future, if a database is created. It is noticed that the members of northern region expressed very much for the need of a database and there is a regular increase in the number of respondents from southern (83 per cent) to northern region (93 per cent).

60. Local knowledge is of great importance in decentralised planning as opined by large majority (96 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members. It is found to be ‘very useful’ for majority (62 per cent) and ‘useful’ for a good number (34 per cent) of members. There is a regular increase of this view from southern region to northern region.
61. Local knowledge is extensively used by the Grama Panchayat Members in majority of the development sectors of decentralised planning in Kerala. The mean index computed to local knowledge showed that it is of much importance in the sectors of Agriculture and Irrigation, Animal husbandry and Fisheries, Drinking water and Sanitation, Culture, and Health. It is also revealed that the use of local knowledge in Agriculture and Irrigation, Education, Industry, Energy and Housing and Resource Mobilisation increases from southern to northern region.

5.2.6. Awareness of Digital information among Grama Panchayat Members

62. Majority (63 per cent) of the Grama Panchayat Members are not computer literates. However, more than one third (37 per cent) are computer literates and among them more members (43 per cent) are in northern region. As large volume of information is available in the web and the use of digital information is very essential in decentralised planning. The lack of skills in using computer and internet is likely to affect the performance of the members.

63. Very few of the Grama Panchayat Members (0.23 per cent to 2.53 per cent) indicated the use of digital information in different development sectors and comparatively the members of the northern region use internet/digital information more than the other two regions. In many of the development sectors useful information is available in the internet and large majority of the members are unable to make use of the required information. Hence they solely depend on training classes, very limited print media and interpersonal communication.

64. The use of digital information is found to be higher among the members having postgraduate degree and professional degree. The use of digital information depends on the educational qualification of the Grama Panchayat Members. Majority of them do not use digital information due to lack of proper education.
65. Majority (55 per cent) of the Grama Panchayat Members agreed that they do not use digital information. There is no association between the use of digital information and the status of the Grama Panchayat Members. The election of Panchayat Presidents, Vice-Presidents and Standing Committee Chairmen from among the members is not based on any other criteria than the political one; much difference in the capacity of the members of different status cannot be expected.

66. There is also no association between the use of digital information and gender of the Grama Panchayat Members.

67. A large majority (94 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members favours the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in local planning and governance as the existing information support is inadequate. The opinion of the members about the application of the ICT in local governance is independent of the three regions of Kerala.

68. A large majority (90 per cent) of the Panchayat Members indicated that a Digital Local Government Information Centre is necessary for the local bodies in Kerala. A gradual decrease in the opinion is noticed from south to north. This shows that even though the members are not computer literates, they possess positive attitude towards the application of ICT in local governance.

69. Majority (51 per cent) of the members indicated their preference to establish Digital Local Government Information Centre at KILA and the acceptance of KILA to act as the nodal centre decreases from south (59 per cent) to north (47 per cent).

70. Large majority (87 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members expressed that online information service should be provided through the computerisation and networking of local bodies in Kerala in order to overcome the existing
inadequacies of information support to decentralised planning. It is also found that the members of central region of Kerala were particularly for the computerisation and networking of local bodies.

5.2.7. Information support to Decentralised Planning in Kerala

71. A large majority (93 per cent) of the Grama Panchayat Members indicated that knowledge of decentralised planning has to be devolved to local level along with devolution of powers and more members of the northern region (95 per cent) favour this opinion.

72. The knowledge of decentralised planning has not been fully imparted to local level as opined by majority (57 per cent) of the Panchayat Members. The skills and expertise of local level planning imparted to the members are not satisfactory due to the presence of communication barriers and inadequacy of capability building programmes. A regular increase in the number of members with this view is noticed from southern region (50 per cent) to northern region (62 per cent).

73. The libraries of the locality are found to be not useful in imparting knowledge of decentralised planning as indicated by majority (54 per cent) of the members. It means that the local libraries are not fully equipped with resources for providing information support to the Grama Panchayat Members in the different phases of local planning and the role of local libraries in imparting knowledge of decentralised planning to the local level is not significant. A regular increase in the number of members with this opinion is noticed from south (43 per cent) to north (62 per cent).

74. A large majority (94 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members indicated the need of Community Information Centres in the villages to provide development information to the Panchayat Members as well as the people of the locality. It is
found that almost all the members of the central region (98 percent) support this view.

75. Nearly 70 per cent of the Panchayat Members need the CICs to be started in the local library. More members from northern region (77 per cent) expressed this view. However a sizable number of members (30.11 per cent) are not in favour of establishing CICs in the local libraries. It is found that majority of Grama Panchayat Members favour of starting CICs in local libraries and more of them are from the northern region.

76. There is an urge to establish Community Information Centres in the Grama Panchayats of Kerala as suggested by majority (62 per cent) of the members to provide information services to the public. More members from southern region are of this opinion.

77. There is a need to strengthen the training programmes for the members of Grama Panchayats in Kerala as indicated by majority (56 per cent) of the members. However a sizable number of members (39 per cent) indicated the networking of Panchayat Raj Institutions. The members of the northern region are more (63 per cent) with the view of strengthening training programme and more of them from central region prefer networking of Panchayat Raj Institutions.

78. A strong information base is essential in Kerala for local planning and governance as opined by the large majority (90 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members and there is an increase in the number of the members who put across this view from south (88 per cent) to north (91 per cent).
79. The information base of Kerala is not capable of supporting decentralised planning as indicated by majority (52 per cent) of Grama Panchayat Members and more members from the central region (51 per cent) are of this view.

80. The information base of decentralised planning in Kerala is really weak. A good number of members (47 per cent) indicated that the information base of decentralised planning is very weak and equal number of them (47 per cent) considers it as strong. Majority (53 per cent) of the members of central region consider it as very weak and majority (54 per cent) of the members of northern region consider the information base as strong.

5.2.8. Capability Building among the Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala

81. The experience of the members in participatory planning has developed their capability as indicated by large majority (94 per cent) of the Panchayat Members and more members from central region (96 per cent) are of this view.

82. The capability of Grama Panchayat Members is related with the formal education as opined by large majority (94 per cent) of the members and more members of the central region (80 per cent) favour of this view.

83. Majority (53 per cent) of the members agreed that the academic qualifications and the capability of Grama Panchayat Members are related. It is found that more members of the central region (64 per cent) have this opinion.

84. A large majority (96) of the members agreed that the knowledge acquired through formal education is useful. More members from northern region favour this opinion.

85. There is high association between use pattern of government orders and the status of the respondents. It is found that Grama Panchayat Members in higher status use
Government orders regularly in order to develop their capability and the members are not using these orders regularly.

86. The use of Government orders is significantly higher among the male members than the female members. A good number (42 per cent) of male Panchayat Members use Government orders very often and the use by the female members is comparatively low (34 per cent).

87. The capability of Panchayat Members in using Government orders has no relation with their educational qualifications.

88. The members need local level training programmes including training in the use of computers. They also expressed the need for Community Information Centre in each village, computerisation and networking of Grama Panchayats and an Information System for decentralised planning in Kerala. The members also suggested ensuring the participation of middle class especially the educated and employed people in the Grama Sabhas so as to have lively and effective discussions related to the development of the locality.

5.3. Tenability of Hypotheses

On the light of significant findings drawn out from the study, the tenability of hypotheses framed for the study is tested.

5.3.1. Hypothesis 1

The Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala do need various types of information in local level planning and their information needs are not properly met.

It is revealed through the findings 12 and 17 to 21 that most of the members require information in local level planning in order to keep up-to-date in the daily
activities of planning and local governance. They require information mainly for the preparation of development report and plan for formulation. The findings 13 and 14 show that majority of members are contacted by the people to get information and they satisfy the people by providing information with constraints. The information required for decentralised planning is not imparted to local level. The people experience uncertainty in decision making as the information requirements of planning are not properly met. This is proved by the finding 15 and 16.

A large majority of the members are of the opinion that knowledge has to be devolved to local level and there should be provision for online information service through the computerisation and networking of Grama Panchayats. This is proved by the findings 70 and 71.

The training is one of the major capacity building programmes for the members. Majority of them wanted to strengthen the training programme to make them more capable. As the information base of local level planning is weak, it is not capable in supporting decentralised planning. Some of the members believe that the networking of Grama Panchayat would facilitate the easy flow of information. This is established by the findings 77 to 80 and 88.

Hence the first hypothesis is substantiated.

5.3.2. Hypothesis 2

Interpersonal communication is the main source of information of Grama Panchayat Members and they are not fully satisfied with the existing information sources.

Majority of the Grama Panchayat Members are aware of the present information sources in decentralised planning. The training programme/workshop,
handbooks/manuals, and Government orders/circulars are found to be relevant and they collect information mainly through telephone enquiries. Colleagues are also found to be a major source. The training programme/workshop are the main source of information in terms of satisfaction. The telephone, colleagues and training programme/workshop engages of human involvement and hence the main source of information is the interpersonal communication. **This is proved by the findings 27 and 28.** The Grama Panchayat Members rated handbook/manuals, other printed materials and Government orders/circulars as useful only, **as per the findings 29 to 32.**

The members do not experience any difficulty in communication with the resource persons of the training programme and the beneficiaries of their locality. The members are aware of the barriers of communication and the difference in the communication of development information in People Planning and Kerala Development Programme. The significant barriers in the communication among the members are complexity of technical terms used in the deliberations and the lack of language fluency. **The findings 38, 39 and 40 prove this.** Majority of the members are elected for the first time and they lack previous experience. Most of them have secondary education level. **This is proved by the findings 7, 10 and 47.**

The members mainly depend on the resource persons and printed media to get the required information. Out of the print media, Government publications are preferred by majority of the members. *Panchayat* Raj is the most popular periodical preferred by the members in the area of local planning and governance. The other publications such as *Janapadham*, *Kerala Calling*, and *Gramabhoomi* are not popular among the members. They are unaware of the other publications that provide information in local governance and rural development. **This is proved by the findings 41 to 46.**

The usefulness of information sources by the Panchayat Members depends on the region, age, status and gender. **The findings 33 and 36** revealed that there is no
difference in the use of information sources among the members of different regions and among male and female Panchayat members. The members below the age 30 and above 60 are more benefited by the information sources. There is also significant difference in the use of information sources by members of different status, as per the findings 34 and 35.

According to the findings 48 to 51 and 53 the Grama Panchayat Members utilise different sources and media to get the required information. The newspapers, television and persons with local knowledge are used very often to get information on decentralised planning. Radio and research organisations are rarely utilised. The use of books, Government orders and local experts are moderate. Majority of the Grama Panchayat Members is not computer literates and they also do not show interest to use digital information available in the internet. This is evidenced by the findings 52 and 62.

This hypothesis is substantiated.

5.3.3. Hypothesis 3

The information use pattern of Grama Panchayat Members of the three regions is similar. The Members are active, participative and dynamic in local governance irrespective of the regions.

The study established that information use pattern of Grama Panchayat Members of the entire three regions is not identical. The findings 2 and 5 show that the members have more political affiliation and the participation of women in local governance is higher in northern region. As per the finding 7 and 8, members with post graduation as well as political affiliation are more in northern region and most of the members in the north are associated with voluntary organisations also.
As per the findings 13, 14 and 17 to 19 the members of northern region are more contacted by the people to get information and they are more able to provide information to them. They use information primarily for planning activities. And as per the findings 22, 23, 26 and 27 the members of northern region are more aware of the information sources and they collect information from several sources. And they are more satisfied with the training programme.

They are more aware of the differences in the communication of two plan periods and they depends more on persons with local knowledge to get information, as indicated by the findings 40 and 56. The importance of local knowledge is better understood by the members of the northern region and they rate local knowledge as very useful in decentralised planning and favour the creation of a database of local knowledge. They use local knowledge more in different development sectors than the two other regions, according to the findings 58 to 61.

The computer literacy of the members is more among those of northern region of Kerala and they make use of digital information. The findings 62 and 63 confirm this. They believe that knowledge of decentralised planning has not been devolved to local level. The findings 71 to 73 prove this. They are of the opinion that the Community Information Centres should be established in the local library and the information base has to be strengthened by training programme, as specified by the findings 77 to 80.

As such the Grama Panchayat Members of the northern Kerala are more active, participative and dynamic in local governance than the members of other regions.

Hence the third hypothesis is not proved.
5.3.4. Hypothesis 4

The local knowledge has been used extensively in decentralised planning and these have to be collected and properly organised.

Majority of the Grama Panchayat Members has agreed that local knowledge is very important and hence it has to be collected and organized as per the findings 57 and 58. The local knowledge is useful in the different phases of decentralised planning and the collected local knowledge has to be organised properly. The creation of a database of local knowledge is very helpful in local planning. The finding 59 establishes this. The local knowledge is found to be very useful to the Members of Grama Panchayat in Kerala. The majority of members prefer to use local knowledge in different development sectors. Agriculture and Irrigation, Animal husbandry and Fisheries, Drinking water and Sanitation, health, culture, etc., are the sectors in which the members prefer to use local knowledge. This is confirmed by the findings 60 and 61.

This hypothesis is validated.

5.3.5. Hypothesis 5

The lack of awareness of digital information hinders the performance of Grama Panchayat Members and their capability to use web resources has to be strengthened.

The majority of the Grama Panchayat Members are not computer literates and they have no skills in using computer. Their use of digital information is very less or they never use it. This is confirmed by the findings 52 and 62. The use of digital information in different development sectors of decentralised planning is very less.
But, they prefer to use digital information in some selected areas of development. This is proved by the findings 63.

The use of digital information and the educational qualification of the member are closely related. The members having higher educational qualification are using more digital information. However, there is no association between the use of digital information and the status of Panchayat Members. There is also no difference in the use of digital information by the male and female members. This is indicated by the findings 64 to 66. Even though the members do not have computer literacy, they have positive attitude towards the computerisation and networking of Grama Panchayats. The members irrespective of regions favour the application of ICT in local governance, as per the finding 67.

A Digital Local Government Information Centre is advocated by the majority of Grama Panchayat Members for the online support in local level planning and governance. This digital information centre can be established at KILA which is a pioneer institution for capacity building of elected representative of local bodies. This is authenticated by findings 68 and 69.

The experience of the members in socio political activities and local governance increase their capability. The knowledge acquired through formal education and their academic qualification is also the factors that determine the capability. The previous experience of the members in local governance has brought qualitative changes in them. This is proved by the findings 81 to 84.

The Government orders and circulars are very useful in developing the capacity of the members. On the other hand minimum capacity is essential to understand and implement these orders and circulars. There is high association between the use pattern of the Government orders and the status and gender of the members. The members
have suggested the starting continuing education programmes in local governance, organising training programmes in the local level and strengthening Grama Sabhas which will develop the capacity of the members. **This is proved by the findings 84 to 88.**

**This hypothesis is substantiated.**

5.3.6. Hypothesis 6

There is a need of an information system to support local governance as information base of decentralised planning in Kerala is weak and inadequate.

The knowledge related to decentralised planning is not fully imparted to local level and therefore the information base of local planning and governance is weak. The knowledge has to be devolved to the grassroots level through various channels. The existing information base is not capable of supporting decentralised planning in Kerala. **This is established by the findings 71, 72 and 79, 80.**

The libraries as such are reported to be not useful for imparting skills and expertise of decentralised planning. The Community information Centres are to be started in the villages and local library is found to be the ideal place. **This is confirmed by the findings 73 to 76.** In order to strengthen the information base, training programmes has to be organised at local level. The computerisation and networking of Grama Panchayats, establishment of Digital Local Government Centre at KILA and starting of Community Information Centres in Grama Panchayats are necessary to develop an information system for decentralised planning in Kerala. **This is proved by the findings 68, 69, 74, 78, 79 and 88.**

**This hypothesis is validated.**
5.4 Suggestions for Improvement

Information is considered as the strategic resource for sustainable development and growth of individuals, groups, community and the country. The information needs, its use, the demand for information, feedback and the delivery of information are the different facets of information industry and knowledge management. The changed formats and information resources have led the information professionals to assess the information requirements at intervals. The e-culture is tremendously emerging in the society and it is time to think new methods to identify the changing needs of the users. The availability of information when it is needed, where it is needed and the form in which it is needed improves the ability of individuals, and various organisations. In this context the investigator felt it necessary to examine the information requirements of Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala and the issues there in. The views and comments received from the members enabled the investigator to offer some feasible suggestion for the improvement of the infrastructure at the Grama Panchayat level. It is found that serious efforts are required to raise the knowledge level of the Panchayat Members to participate effectively in the local level planning and governance and to achieve maximum output. The following suggestions are offered to develop the use of information in decentralised planning in Kerala.

5.4.1. Information Requirements

Lack of time is the generally known factor that evades the people in meeting their information needs. Lack of resources, poor access to information sources, information over load and the lack of capability of users are the factors which hinder the satisfaction of user. The information resources and the information system are the pre- requisites for the fulfillment of the information needs. The cost for the collection of information sources and the development of an information system are the inevitable
elements. The mushrooming of information in hard and digital version also necessitates the search for information.

The elected representatives of Grama Panchayat in Kerala require information in both print and non-print format to enable them to effectively participate in the process of development. In the context of decentralised planning the information need denotes information regarding local elements. The investigator made an attempt to identify the information needs of Panchayat Members. The data collected through structured and semi-structured questionnaires or interview may not be fully reliable as there are chances for glorifying or suppressing their opinions.

The cross checking of responses using separate profiles such as community profile, the information providers profile and the information needs profile is essential. Some investigation has to be undertaken to collect information for these profiles. Therefore collection of primary data from the households is most essential to satisfy the information needs of Grama Panchayat Members.

5.4.2 Information sources

The major sources of information of the Grama Panchayat Members are found to be the resource persons of the training programme, colleagues and staff of the Government Departments. The local knowledge, print media, audio visual media are also found to cater to the information needs. Panchayat Raj is the only Government publication known to them. Therefore more print sources may be made available to the members either through the library of the locality or an information centre may be started in the Grama Panchayat with all essential print sources of information. The Grama Panchayat having its own library in the vicinity may take decisions to function it as an information centre also. In the other cases one of the major libraries of the panchayat or Akshaya-e-Centre may act as the information centre.
The government of Kerala may take a decision to start information centres in each Grama Panchayats for the dissemination of development information. Broad band internet connectivity is also essential in the CICs to provide web based information services. When the information system for decentralised planning becomes a reality, all the CICs would be connected with Digital Local Government Information centre at the central hub preferably at KILA. The CICs should be staffed with an information professional having proficiency in information technology. The Grama Panchayats have to be computerised and brought in the network. Thus the access to digital information sources by the Panchayat Members, staff and the general public of the locality would be a boon to the digitally divided majority of Kerala.

5.4.3. Capacity Building of Grama panchayat Members

The training programme organised by KILA is found to be useful for the members. They have also pointed out some suggestion to improve the training. The training programmes have to be organised at District or Block level in order to achieve better participation. The training in the use of computer may also be provided. The Panchayat Members are not highly educated but they have a positive approach towards the modernisation of Local Governments with the application of ICT. Short term courses in decentralised planning and local governance would enhance the capability of the members. Classes by experts and professionals at regular intervals, monthly seminars and discussions on special topics and the regular use of Government orders and circulars will make the members more competent to take part in developmental activities. Wide publicity has to be given among the educated and employed middle class people of the locality to participate in the Grama Sabhas. Healthy discussion on the different aspects of local level planning would definitely enhance the capability of the members.
5.4.5. Digital Local Government Information Centre.

The joint efforts of KILA, Information Kerala Mission, Akshaya Project and Kerala State Library Council are required to streamline the digital information for local governance. KILA may be identified as the central hub of the digital information system. The digital information centre can be accessed by a large number of users, geographically distributed. This centre would be very relevant in any environment where people have to spend more time to reach the library than to access and acquire the information. The main objective of the digital information centre is to act as a computerised information storage or data bank facility maintained for the purpose of providing various types of information on local self-governance and planning, to all of them connected with it. The specific objectives of the centre consist of collecting all primary and secondary information, data, documents required for local planning and governance in electronic form. The collected data or information must be organised for its easy access and retrieval by local functionaries, the use of information through computer networks and to disseminate appropriate information and data on its demand and in anticipation.

This Centre should create a comprehensive electronic database of already existing and emerging body of knowledge, idea and information on all aspects of local governance. Easy access to the database by the policy makers, researchers, trainees, functionaries of local bodies and the general public through online or other digital means. Local governance and planning are interdisciplinary and complex activities; which require knowledge and information from various disciplines and sources. A huge body of development information emerges from the research institutions in Kerala. The local development functionaries have no access to the required information as they are not available in a digestible and comprehensive manner at any centre. Such information and knowledge need to be collected and made available to the elected members in a
manner easily usable by them. The Centre should act as a facilitator, which bridge the gap between the available body of information and its users.

5.4.5 Information System for Decentralised Planning and Local Governance

Decentralisation had created a unique paradox in the matter of expertise. It was at the grassroots level that the largest portion of plan resources was made available for planning. However the staff in the civil service available at this level was the juniors who lacked the experience of planning and development administration. Therefore building up Expert Support System and Decision Support System is essential for tackling the lack of talent in the local level. The latest possibilities of ICT have to be exploited for the establishment of an efficient, effective and accessible Local Self Governments.

5.4.6. Computerisation and Networking of Grama Panchayats

A very few of the Grama Panchayats of Kerala has completed computerisation and some of them are in the initial stage. A time bound action plan is necessary to complete automation in all the Grama Panchayats. The networking of the entire Local Self Government Institutions such as District Panchayat, Corporations, Municipalities, Block Panchayats and Grama Panchayats has to be undertaken by a competent agency.

5.5. Suggestion for Further Research

On the basis of the findings of the present study the investigator would like to suggest the following areas for further research.

a. The present study can be replicated for the members of Block Panchayats, District Panchayats or the Councilors of Municipalities and Municipal corporations.
b. The information requirements of the users in other sectors of governance can be undertaken.

c. The information literacy of the elected representatives can also be studied.

5.6. Conclusion

The elected members of Grama Panchayat in Kerala need various types of information in their daily activities of local level planning and governance. The lack of awareness of the majority of the members about the information sources and the scattering of information sources make it difficult to get the relevant information at the right time. An efficient information system is necessary to support any development activity in the society.

The decentralised planning started in Kerala more than ten years back still lack an efficient information system. In spite of several capacity building programmes for the members, the skills and expertise required for decentralised planning is not fully imparted to local level. Majority of the members elected through political considerations only are not competent enough to participate in local governance. The lack of availability of development information under one roof is found to be another reason for the weak information base of decentralised planning. Some of the Grama Panchayats have achieved more development with the contributions made by either local expert, panchayat staff, Panchayat President or all of them. Majority of the members is of the opinion that the information infrastructure of the decentralised planning in Kerala is not satisfactory. They need the information sources, better training and awareness in the use of digital information to develop their capability. They also propose to establish an information system that support decentralised planning in Kerala. In order to bridge the digital divide that is apparent in the Kerala society. The study concludes that the information and knowledge base of decentralised
planning in Kerala has to be made strong by imparting the relevant knowledge to the members of Grama Panchayats. They may be given proper training to develop the theoretical base of local planning and governance and also to make use of the conventional and digital resources.