CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction
1.2 Information Support for Planning
1.3 Local Self Government Institutions in Kerala
1.4 Significance of Information
1.5 Users of Information
1.6 User Studies
1.7 Decentralised Planning in Kerala
1.8 Significance of the Study
1.9 Statement of the Problem
1.10 Definition of Key Terms
1.11 Scope and Limitations of the Study
1.12 Organisation of the Report
1.13 Conclusion
1.1. Introduction

Kerala’s decentralisation experiment since mid-1990’s has attracted the attention of scholars and policymakers interested in democracy and development the world over. The success and sustainability of decentralised planning depend as much on political will of the state government as on the responses by the elected representatives and people. The concept of popular participation in decision-making has become central within the recent literature of political development and is now considered one of the main objectives of development work. Participatory decentralisation requires more informed representatives and citizens for decision making at the local level.

1.2. Information Support for Planning

In participatory planning and development, informed participation makes the participation meaningful. Therefore dissemination of information, access to information by the beneficiaries and ensuring people’s right to information are very important for participatory development. People’s true participation is essential for effective planning. When the planning is at the local levels people’s involvement is necessary at all stages of planning, implementation and supervision. In local level planning all citizens have the right to participate in their governing, preparation of plans, implementation, evaluation and monitoring. This asserts the citizen’s right to inform and to be informed.

The programmes seem to be participatory and decentralised may not be so in reality as the clever keep the participants ignorant of the facts about the matters in which they have to involve. Sometimes the participants are given distorted version of
things, or cleverly keep away the informed and knowledgeable one. Therefore participation in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation can be ensured only if efficient information systems for the people exist to disseminate information and protect people’s right to information.

The established media and government’s information systems are likely to be incapable of providing information support to the poor villagers and the disadvantaged in local level planning. Kerala has 6000 and odd public libraries that kindle the light of knowledge. They played a very significant role in the Total Literacy Campaign of 1990 in Kerala. These libraries that came up through people’s initiative existed and they extended library services to remote corners of the state. As these libraries do not have coordination and cooperation they are not in a position provide information support to decentralised planning.

The information infrastructure of a society has a direct relationship with its nature of socio-economic progress. The economic system that supports every society is in real sense an information system. Effective and efficient development planning and implementation of plans require easy flow of and exchange of information: ³

a) Among those responsible for development policy and planning,

b) Among individuals and groups in the community i.e. beneficiaries and participants in development planning, and

c) Between the planners and beneficiaries.

The planner needs information on all present aspects of the society and also on the recent past, which has created the conditions for the development.

Information and data support needed for development planning are the following: ⁴
• Socio economic information,
• Geographical information,
• Special purpose information,
• Special programme-wise information, and
• Sector-wise information.

The sector-wise information consists of:

• District level information,
• Sub district level information,
• Village level information, and
• Household level information.

There are three distinct but inter-related aspects to be noticed in considering information support to grassroots level development. They are the following:

1. There should be provision for and communication of pertinent data and information to support rural people’s efforts for their own development in agriculture, literacy, health, housing, employment, natural resources conservation and environment matters.

2. The fund of valuable native knowledge related with food, health and medicine, plants and animals, social and cultural value systems, ethno music and arts etc. are to be recorded, processed, disseminated and utilised on a much wider scale. A good part of such information may not be in written or printed form but transmitted orally.

3. Information required for preparing development plans at the local levels, data on demographic aspects, development sectors, social welfare schemes etc. are to be provided to the planners, plan implementers and supporting agencies.
At the state level, State Planning Board is having a large library and information support system that can be used by the top officers of planning. They have also access to other information system at the State Capital. It has been agreed that planning and development should be decentralised. Powers have been delegated to grassroots level, resources have been devolved to Local Self Government Institutions (LSGIs); but knowledge and skill pertaining to local level planning has not been imparted to the Panchayat functionaries and activists. The facilities to provide quality library and information systems that can support LSGIs have not been thought of seriously. No District Panchayat, Block Panchayat or Grama Panchayat has a good library and information system that can provide information support to local level planning. There should be a very efficient library and information infrastructure at every Panchayat which can fulfill the information requirements of the people of the region.6

Now it is possible to extend information services of quality and relevance even to remote rural areas with the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). A villager who is in need of any data from any where in the world at any time he/she requires can access the same. Such an information system can be maintained in our rural libraries. It will be made less costly if the information infrastructure is well planned. Therefore, the rural libraries may be uplifted to Community Information Centres (CICs) by providing the necessary information infrastructure facilities. These centres have to become live spheres of social activity which make the decentralised planning and development real with informed participation. The CICs should act as service outlets of state information infrastructure with the application of ICT. The District Informatics Centre now functioning in the District head quarters may be further expanded and linked to CICs. These centres should look after all the information requirement of the community. It should provide services similar to all that library and information services provided by State Planning
Board at state capital. Development and information support is not for planners and bureaucrats only but for the general public also. This concept is in conformity with UNESCO’s vision of knowledge society where everyone has access to information that is relevant to them and where everyone has the opportunity and skills to use their information in meeting their needs and aspirations.  

1.2.1. Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA)

Another institution for capacity building of LSGIs is Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA). It is an autonomous one under the Department of Local Self Government, Government of Kerala which acts as the nodal agency of training, research and consultancy in the areas of local governance. KILA organises seminars, workshop and discussions on various issues of local governance and development. Apart from training the officials the elected representatives in Kerala, its activities include various programmes for participants from other states in India and abroad. The Ministry of Panchayat Raj, Government of India has initiated steps to declare KILA as SAARC Centre for Local Governance and development. In addition to the conventional training programmes, other activities include sensitisation of political party leaders, media person, national and international courses in decentralised poverty eradication, action research programme etc. KILA has trained a pool of 550 district level trainers to function as extension faculty members in all the districts of Kerala. In order to meet the training needs of the functionaries from other Indian States; courses are offered in regional languages as well. KILA has translated several documents on Kerala’s decentralisation in to English and other regional languages like Hindi, Tamil, Kannada and Bengali.

During 2005-06 KILA has trained 15168 newly elected members of Grama Panchayats and 780 Presidents of Grama Panchayats decentralised planning. It has
trained 235 implementing officers from LSGIs. Training was imparted to 350 performance auditors and 201 local fund auditors. Trainer’s training was given to 90 stakeholders. In addition to this, specialised training in certificate course to fifty-eight elected representatives of rural local bodies has been conducted. International course in decentralised governance and poverty eradication has also been conducted. KILA is functioning as a link between Panchayat Raj Institutions and the government.

1.2.2. Information Kerala Mission (IKM)

The Information Kerala Mission (IKM) established in June 1999 for computerising the local bodies in the state had been pursuing one among the most ambitious e-governance programmes in the country. The object of the mission was to computerise all local governments in the state, which now counts to 1223. This holistic and human centered Information Communication Technology (ICT) Project aimed at strengthening decentralised planning and local democracy through good governance, improved service delivery sharing of best practices and building up community knowledge bases for decentralised planning and local area development. IKM provides the much required database support for better decision making in development projects and imparts necessary skills to the community to use ICT. It also supports the development initiatives such as ‘Akshaya’ and ‘Kudumbashree’ started in the context of decentralised planning. The project strives for strengthening citizen charters prepared by the local governments and helps them implement the citizen charters for fairness and equal opportunity cutting across the barriers of religion, class, caste, creed and gender.

‘Akshaya’ is a programme for bridging the digital divide, promoting digital literacy, connecting communities, providing access points in an effort to establish a knowledge society in Kerala. The project intended to set up around three thousand Community Technology Centres across the state. The project has been implemented in
eight district in the state, first being Malappuram District. Around 3.5 lakh people have completed the e-literacy programme and about 1300 Akshaya centres have been set up in the eight districts. This programme is going on in the remaining six district of Kerala. It is intended to set up about 3000 multipurpose Community Technology Centres across the state. Akshaya centres are run by private entrepreneurs within 2 to 3 kilometers of every household to cater to the information, communication and education needs of around one thousand families. Akshaya is envisaged as a social and economic catalyst focusing on the various facets of e-learning, information dissemination and communication facilities to laymen.¹⁴

In spite of the above mentioned information infrastructure the local level planning in Kerala was handicapped with sufficient information support. The awareness of information of the elected representatives and activists has to be developed. Planning activity consists of a series of interactive steps. Establishment of the objectives, identification of activities to be performed, description of the resources, definition and duration of each activity and determination of the sequence of activities – all these phases require different types of information for decision making in different levels of planning. Inadequate, delayed or wrong information can introduce uncertainty and rigidity in the above phases and sometimes leads to failure. It means that if an economic system is to operate well, it must also have an information system that is highly efficient and the planners must be aware about the importance of information.

It was in this context, the investigator proposed to conduct a study of the information requirements and information use pattern of the members of Grama Panchayats in Kerala. The experiences of the investigator in the Total Literacy Programme of 1990 and People’s Planning Campaign of 1996-97 provided much enthusiasm in selecting the problem which involves social commitment. At the beginning of the study, it was decided to investigate the information requirements of
the planners in the Peoples’ Planning Campaign in Kerala. Since the planners include all the elected representatives, activists, experts, voluntary workers and resources persons, the selection of sample would be cumbersome. Therefore the elected members of the Grama Panchayats, which is the lowest tier of democracy, were selected for the study after discussions with the supervising teacher. The members of Grama Panchayat are elected from among the local people who may or may not be educated, professional and knowledgeable but with better experiences in socio-political activities.

1.3. Local Self Government Institutions (LSGIs) in Kerala

The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 envisages the establishment of a three-tier Panchayat Raj system in the state in line with the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 for securing a great measure of participation of the people in planned development and in local governmental affairs in constituting Village, Block and District Panchayats. This Act endows such Panchayats with such powers and authority to enable to function as LSGIs. The Act entrusts the Panchayats the preparation of plans and implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice in relation to the matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. It extends to the whole of the State of Kerala except the areas which are within the limits of the Cantonments, Nagar Panchayats, Municipal Councils, Municipal Corporations and the industrial areas of the state.

There are 1223 LSGIs in Kerala consisting of 14 District Panchayats, 152 Block Panchayats 999 Grama Panchayats, 5 Corporations and 53 Municipalities as shown in Table 1.1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Name of Districts</th>
<th>No. of BP</th>
<th>No. of GP</th>
<th>No. of Corporations</th>
<th>No. of Municipalities</th>
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</table>

BP-Block Panchayat; GP-Grama Panchayat

1.4. Significance of Information

Information is an essential component of each and every human activity in the world. It is a vital resource to mankind. As the building block of knowledge, information is power and it plays a very important role in the development and progress of a country. Information is a social right and social function. It helps the people to understand the economic and political dimensions of the problem on both national and international planes. Information enables the people to participate in the decision making process.

Various types of human activities, events or incidents generate information. Activities are carried out by individuals or organisations to achieve specific goals.
Events are things that happen, occur or take place. Research and development activities generate new information, which in turn is used as a basis for bringing forth more information. The State itself generates vast amount of information with its organs of executive, judiciary, legislature, business and industry. The over abundance of information and its exponential growth necessitates the organisation and control over in some way or other. In the midst of this exponential growth, retrieval of appropriate and accurate information is a job by itself which calls for the assistance of information workers. Techniques are to be developed for selection, collection, analysis, organization, synthesis, transfer, storage, ordered presentation and communication of information. Traditionally, libraries and information centres played key role in the information transfer and exchange. Ready access to information irrespective of its carriers is vital for individuals as well as for national development. The right information when it is needed and the form in which it is needed is essential to improve the ability of person concerned.\(^{17}\)

Control over information is necessary for the development of a nation. All government policies and decisions are based on the information available with them. In this context, information has been the focus of policy planners and administrators all over the world. The distinction between a developed and a less developed country lies in the control over information and development of strong information infrastructure.\(^{18}\) The information resources are going to play a vital role in social, cultural and political progress as well as in productive and sustainable development. Any organisation needs these resources in order to ensure effectiveness and efficiency and also to respond and adapt to the actions, attitudes and desires of external agencies such as government, competitors and social groups.\(^{19}\)

It is the responsibility of the state to provide information to the people by establishing an efficient and cost-effective information system. Although the cost of
using information and communication technologies to build national information infrastructure are high, the cost of not doing so are likely to be much higher. Knowledge or information has a revolutionary characteristic. It can be used by the wealthy and poor as well. Knowledge can be shared without any loss unlike wealth. The donor and the recipient become equal without any loss and both get equal capacity to acquire more resources. Hence information is the most democratic source of power. The power holder controls the quality, quantity and distribution of information and knowledge within their domain. But in an equalitarian society, the poor and the marginalised class of people should have access to information. Therefore knowledge should be popularised. Libraries have played significant role in disseminating information to the common people and sometimes kindles revolutions that achieved freedom and established democratic setups. Now Information Technology (IT) has enabled provision of equal access to knowledge and information to every one. In the Five Laws of Library Science, Dr.Ranganathan has established the responsibility of providing information to the users. Each and everyone, irrespective of one’s position or status in the society, rich or poor, scholar or illiterate, urban or rural dweller, ill or healthy, must be provided with the information he/she needs.\textsuperscript{20}

Information is essential for effective decentralised governance. The flow of information in public affairs and services management has become an element of good governance. Access to information in decentralised process ensures effective planning and implementation. It helps invoking knowledge, promoting ideas and strengthening the society which in turn results in the development of social capital. It controls misuse and leakages of funds and brings efficiency in the development process. Transparency can be achieved with the right to know and the right to be informed. External transparency helps in knowing locality, local needs, profile of the poor, and the prospective beneficiaries. Internal transparency provides information about the scheme
and budget to the people. When both the information is available, then, there is less chance of corruption, wastages and leakages.\footnote{21}

\textbf{1.5. Users of information}

Users are the important factor without which an information system loses its whole purpose. A user of the system puts the system to its purpose. The user had been a much neglected element in the whole information business. It is only recently that emphasis on the user has been laid through the various user studies conducted. The important group of users of information can be distinguished according to the kind of activity in which they are engaged.

Prasad has identified the following types of users of information.\footnote{22}

1. Researchers in the basic and applied sciences.

2. Practitioners and technicians engaged in developmental and/or operational activities in the various fields of technology and industry: agriculture, medicine, industrial production, communication etc.

3. Managers, planners and other decision makers who are engaged in developmental activities in both private and public sector.

However user groups can be identified according to many other characteristics like age, professional position, occupation etc. The above mentioned users need information with specific content for realising specific functions. Such information needs of users have to be satisfied by providing objective information. Thus information need is a condition in which certain information contributes to the achievement of a genuine or legitimate information purpose. Tague has presented the following types of information needs.\footnote{23}
1. Social or pragmatic information needs: Information required coping with day to day life;

2. Recreational information needs: Information satisfying the recreational and cultural interests of an individual:

3. Professional information needs: Information required to operate competently within a professional or business environment; and

4. Educational information needs: Information required to satisfy academic requirements of an institution.

1.6. User Studies

Although information need is a part of user studies, actual emphasis was laid on study of information needs and seeking behaviour during post 1950s era. The Royal Society Scientific Information Conference (1948) undertook several important surveys on user’s information seeking behaviour. During 1960’s, the works of M.B.Line, Michale Brittain, Menzel, Paisley through their various articles published in Annual Review of Information where the study on Information Requirement of Social Scientists, popularly known as INFROSS was conducted. Several models for the improvement of the existing state of information user studies have been devised later. An analysis of the literature on information needs and uses suggests that all these studies belong to two categories:

i) Studies that focus on user study with a shift on emphasis to information seeking behaviour during 1950s: In such studies attempts were made to depict the characteristics of the users as a sociological group explaining information needs and how to satisfy them.
Studies that focus on the information retrieval and information system design; the investigations mainly contributed in designing information retrieval strategies that might assist the users in representing their needs.

The information systems were developed and refined to meet the information requirements of the users in a better way. The concept of information needs is the outcome of the combination of two terms ‘information’ and ‘needs’. In a restricted sense, the term information denotes a sensible statement, opinion, fact, concept or idea or an association of statements or ideas. It is instrumental and is usually communicated in an organised or formalised pattern, mainly because, such formalisation increases potential utility. Every one remains engaged in some assignments or other that are significant for him/her. These activities are usually designed to achieve the target, whether someone is a farmer, teacher, physician, or an activist. Each one is so heavily engaged in his/her respective areas of activities which might necessitate the help of some other elements that bring success to their work. It is termed as ‘need’ or ‘requirement’. In this connection, it can be assumed that, these professional more or less depend upon information to update their knowledge or to answer their queries of some kind or other. To be full fledged or self sufficient on one’s view there is a great necessity of adequate and appropriate information at the right time. The lack of self-sufficiency in one’s part therefore constitutes one’s information needs. The information needs represent gaps in one’s correct knowledge that makes him/her quite satisfied with a given situation of work environment.

1.7 Decentralised Planning in Kerala

There were many efforts in the past towards democratic decentralisation in India; Village Panchayats were central to the ideological framework of the national movement for political freedom. Mahatma Gandhi categorically described his vision of Village Panchayats in a 1942 issue of the ‘Harijan’. 
“My idea of village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic independent of its neighbour for its own vital wants and yet independent for many others in which dependence is a necessity…… The Government of the village will be conducted by the panchayat. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required.”

The recommendations of the Team for the study of Community Projects and National Extension Service, headed by Balwantrai G. Mehta (1958) and the report of Ashok Mehta Committee (1977) were the milestones in the history of Panchayat Raj in India. The failure of earlier efforts was mainly due to the resistance offered by vested interests, lack of pressure from below, paucity of expertise and preparedness at the local level. However states like Rajasthan, Karnataka and West Bengal have provided valuable insights for future attempts towards decentralised planning.

The history of local self-government in Kerala has not been different from the rest of India. It was only in 1990 that the State came to have elected bodies at the district level for the first time. But the amendment made by the new government that took office in 1991 restricted the powers of District Councils.

The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments became a landmark in democratic decentralisation in the country giving PRIs the required constituent legitimacy. The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 and Kerala Municipality Act, 1994 prescribed a uniform three-tier LSGIs: the district, taluk/block and village levels in the rural areas and town panchayats in smaller urban centres besides the traditional municipalities and corporations in the larger urban centres. The LSGs were to have a uniform five-year term and in the event of dissolution, elections were to be held within six months. Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe representation proportionate to the population and one-third reservation for women were introduced at all levels. A state finance commission was to be appointed by every state government to decide on revenue sharing with the LSGIS. District Planning Committees (DPC) in every district were to
be constituted. Thus the constitutional amendments were the landmark in the evolution of LSGIs in India and especially the peoples campaign for decentralised planning in Kerala.

The participation of people’s representatives was only ensured in the earlier experiments of decentralisation in India. The Panchayat Raj/Nagarapalika bill envisages maximum participation of people in planning. The Grama Sabhas (GS) act as the most important units in which the felt needs of the people are represented and formulated as plans. Even though the above bill came to existence, the rules and regulations were not formed in this regard. Devolution of staff and institutions were not taken place. The elected representatives were also newcomers and they lacked previous experience in participatory governance. The non-availability of data and information required for the integrated planning was another drawback. In spite of these drawbacks and weaknesses, it was decided to go head by participating the people and voluntary organisations behind the people’s representatives. Thus a public campaign approach was accepted.

The decision to devolve 35-40 percent of the state plan funds to the local bodies was taken by the Government. The meeting of State Planning Board held in July 1996 decided to recognize ninth plan as people’s plan and it was accepted by the Government of Kerala. The government announced that local places would be prepared in all the LSGIS in Kerala. Thus the people’s campaign for decentralised planning was introduced in Kerala on 17th August 1996 through the launching of ‘Janakeeyasoothram’ in a campaign model.

The People’s Planning Campaign (PPC) reversed the traditional sequence by first developing the resources and powers and then attempting to clear the obstacles to implementation as they arose the state level, there was a High level Guidance Council (HLCG) composed of all the members of Kerala Legislative Assembly, all the 20
parliament members from Kerala, Senior State Government Officials, leaders of mass organisations, artists, literary figures and cultural leaders. The HLGC was headed by late E.M.S Namboodirippad, the first Chief Minister of Kerala and a panel of Vice-Chairpersons consisting of all living former Chief Ministers of Kerala and other dignitaries like K.N.Raj, V.R.Krishna Iyer and Sukumar Azhikode. The Local Administration Minister was the convener of the Council, which was an advisory body of elders to advice the State Planning Board in the conduct of the campaign.\textsuperscript{31}

It should be realised that all the preparations and pre-planning could not have been created at the time when the campaign was unfolded. They were possible because many of the planning techniques, appropriate technologies and organisational forms had been developed experimentally in numerous micro development projects spread over earlier decades. The experiments organised by Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) the People’s Science Movements in Kerala were the excellent ones.\textsuperscript{32} Governmental and Non-Governmental agencies, co-operatives and local bodies were also involved in designing and experimenting various projects. Some of the most important micro-level development experiments are listed below: \textsuperscript{33}

1. Group Approach for Locally Adapted and Sustainable Agriculture (GALASA)
2. The people’s Vegetable Cultivation Programme, Kanhikuzhy
3. Water conservation: Kunnothparamba
5. People’s Artificial Fishing Reefs
6. Industry: Kerala Dinesh Beedi
7. Health: The Tanalur People’s Health Programme.
8. Drinking water: The Olavanna Model
9. Sanitation: Thrikunnapuzha ‘Wat San’
10. COSTFORD and Least Waste Building technology
11. Poverty alleviation: The CDS Project, Alapuzha
12. Education: The KSSP experiments
13. The Total Literacy Campaign
14. The People’s Resource Mapping Programme (PMRP)
15. Energy efficiency: Smokeless Chulhas
16. Small Scale Electricity Production, Meenvallam
17. A Local Planning Model: Kalliaassery.

All the above micro level development experiment contributed much either by the personal involvement of the key organisers or because they were used as models for emulation in campaign propaganda. It also indicates the vibrant local level initiatives that characterised Kerala even before the campaign was launched. The International Congress on Kerala Studies organised in August 1994 by the A.K.G. Centre for Research and Studies, Thiruvananthapuram gave a new thrust to the new thinking and helped to build a general consensus on the development agenda of Kerala.34

Execution of decentralised planning commenced under the auspices of 1215 LSGIs then existed in Kerala. People interacted with these programmes with great enthusiasm. Decentralised planning added momentum to the development of Kerala. The programme could rally the mass aiming at development concept beyond about drastic changes in the development sectors through the co-ordination of the public, people’s representatives, technical experts and government servants. Decentralised participatory planning in Kerala has proved to be a role model to the whole India.35

The campaign basically aimed to solve the strong antagonistic trends in the field of local development. There were short-term and long-term objectives. The major short-term objectives were:
1) To improve the production sector through revitalising the various sub sectors including agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing and small scale industries.

2) To improve quality of service sector.

The major long-term objectives were:

1) To create comprehensive changes in the approach to the overall development of the state.

2) To promote a development culture for local development irrespective of socio-political diversity.

Under the State Planning Board acting as the apex body, the campaign was conducted in seven phases starting from conducting of Grama Sabhas in 1996 to Plan integration in 1997. Since it is of utmost importance to provide sufficient institutional capacity building, at the outset itself, extensive training were given to the elected representatives and officials working centre campaign as well as the planning process. Direct participation of people in the planning process was ensured at the Grama Sabhas.

In order to make an objective assessment of the natural and human resources, a series of participatory studies including secondary data collection, study of local geography and natural resources through transect walks and consolidation of Grama Sabha report were conducted. Based on that, a Development Report (Vikasana Rekha) was made for each local body with an overall development perspective. These were presented before a Development Seminar and from there onwards, annual plans were prepared at the Grama Sabha level for each local body.

Project formulation and consolidation were done by task forces (Karma Samitis) for various development sectors. There were 12 development sectors in the 9th
plan and sector for welfare of weaker sections was subsequently included in the 10th plan. The 13 development sectors are given in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2. Development Sectors in decentralised planning

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<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Animal Husbandry and Fisheries</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Health</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>Industry</td>
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<td>Energy and Housing</td>
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<td>Transport</td>
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<td>Drinking water and Sanitation</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Women and Development</td>
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<td>Welfare of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes</td>
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<td>Welfare of Weaker Sections</td>
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<td>Resource Mobilisation</td>
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Training was also given to task force members in order to formulate the project proposals. About twelve thousand task forces were constituted at the village level alone with a total participation of about 1.2 lakh members. Technical input was given to the projects by Expert Committees at various levels. Thus a system of planning process was implemented beginning with annual plan preparation at the Grama Sabha, which were approved by the DPCs and finally implemented and monitored at the local body level.

The United Democratic Front (UDF) Government that came to power in 2001 took steps to institutionalise the PRIs in the State. In 2002-2003, under the tenth Plan,
the decentralisation programme was renamed as Kerala Development Plan. The three main thrusts of the Kerala Development Plan were:

i) Institutionalisation and building sustainable capacity in PRIs;

ii) Catalysing economic development through PRIs; and

iii) Improving the quality of services, particularly in health and education.

In the 10th plan, five year plans were prepared by the PRIs that allow them greater room for long term planning with an emphasis on development. The concept of Anti Poverty Sub Plan was introduced and as a part of this initiative, specific projects for destitute were prepared (Ashraya Project) by the LSGIs.

In addition to the twelve development sectors of the ninth plan, tenth plan insisted that the LSG’s should earmark five percent of the plan allocation for the benefit of children, disabled and aged under the development sector-welfare of the weaker sections. The task forces and Expert Committees of ninth plan have been replaced by Working Groups and Technical Advisory Committee respectively.

Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) are formed in all LSGIs. Even though they are not statutory bodies, they are functioning as a grassroots forum for direct citizen participation in governance. The NHGs are carrying out all the functions of Grama Sabhas such as discussion of local plan, review of plan implementation as well as selection of beneficiaries. They are not functioning as a substitute but as a supplement to the Grama Sabha. The representatives of NHGs often constitute the ward committee, which in most case acts as an executive committee of Grama Sabha. NHGs have helped to improve the functioning of Grama Sabhas in Panchayats.

Kudumbashree is a women oriented poverty eradication programme with women’s empowerment as one of its major goals. It was begun in 1998 by the government of Kerala with the aim of eliminating poverty within ten years, by 2008.
The present structure of this initiative consists of a three-tiered system. The NHG’s composed of women from BPL (Below Poverty Line) households forms the lowest level. These NHG’s are federated into Area Development Societies (ADS) at the ward level. The Area Development Societies were in turn federated into a Community Development Society (CDS) at the Panchayath/Municipal level. The success of the CDS model in Urban Alapuzha and in rural Malappuram led the government of Kerala to scale up the strategy to the whole of the state in 1998 under the name Kudumbashree, with the State Poverty Eradication Mission taking the responsibility of implementation through the Department of Local Self-Government. The Kudumbashree has since followed a multifaceted strategy. It includes convergence of various government programmer and resources at the community-based organization. Efforts were made to involve the CDS structure in local level anti-poverty planning and development of women’s micro enterprises and thrift and credit societies.

The decentralized planning process in Kerala could attain a few physical achievements. But there exists a number of drawbacks too. Detailed study about the development issues and potentials of the planning area is necessary before formulating development projects. In-depth study and analysis of such aspects are lacking in the process. Location of economic activities should have been decided on the basis of scientific criteria. Here, local interest mostly gets the upper hand. Functional character of an area is determined by the aggregate functions of all sectors of economy concentrated therein. Development of an area therefore requires a deliberate integration of at least a few key sectors. Here, various working groups representing different development sectors prepare the annual projects, which are rather compartmentalised and never integrated.

At Grama/Ward Sabha level, individual benefits get predominance over ward level or city level projects which are a clear indication of lack of approach to overall
local development. At local level, development projects and formulated without considering the overall development needs of the district showing lack of vision in regional context. Since this is only allocative and sectoral in nature, the spatial investments are not considered, which restrains planned development. In other words this is a piece meal approach to development. Project identification and formulation is done in a short time span. In the absence of a development vision derived from extensive study and analysis, this often leads to the formulation of trivial and unviable projects resulting in wastage of financial resources.

In a nutshell, it may be viewed that all these drawbacks point towards the need for a guidelines for the preparation of most suitable projects for a local body with a holistic approach to plan formulation. An uninterrupted flow of development information vertically and horizontally among the planners, elected representatives, activists and government staff is essential for the holistic approach. The awareness of information and the capability of the members of Grama Panchayats in Kerala should be viewed very seriously so as to ensure the social capital and the overall development of our state.

1.8. Significance of the Study

Informed participation of people is supposed to be the key to effective decentralized planning. Planning is an endeavor oriented towards future. It has to rely on knowledge of attributes of the various components of the society, the plan covers. This implies that planning is a way of dealing with information. In multilevel and multi objective planning, there will be several groups of information users at different levels with different information requirements. As decentralized planning is area specific and people specific, information should be provided on the cultural and behaviour patterns, assets ownership system and the capacities of the institutions of the locality. Hence it is highly essential to understand the information requirements of the
group of people who play vital role in local level planning. It is the principal objective of the study and the members of the GPs in Kerala constitute the population.

At the outset of People’s Planning Campaign (PPC), the LSGIs were not equipped with expertise, infrastructure or the information base to take up the task of making development plans. Local knowledge on development problems is of great importance. Thus it was decided to establish a system at the village level in which the villagers themselves harness such scattered information and knowledge to be used in future development plans. Therefore, a better understanding and use of indigenous knowledge in local experience and knowledge need to be blended with information on modern technological alternatives for maximum outputs. Effort has been made to understand the awareness of the members of GPs regarding local knowledge.

The information sources used by the group under investigation have to be identified for the proper organisation of an information support system. The study proposes to examine the different types of information sources used by them and the preferences in use. In the decentralized planning, there should be an efficient information support system at the local levels that makes available the right information at the right time. Unfortunately, most of the rural libraries in Kerala are not in a position to provide such type of information required by the policy makers or the general public in their day-to-day activities. The elected representatives are supposed to have a general awareness about different development sectors and the sources of information about them. Therefore, it has been tried to assess the information literacy of members of GPs in general and particularly awareness regarding development information. It has also been proposed to examine whether an information support system is necessary for decentralised planning and development at the local levels.
The investigator has reviewed a vast amount of related literature. Studies have been conducted to understand the information requirements, information seeking behaviour and information use pattern of different category of people and professionals. A good number of researchers have studied different aspects of PRIs and decentralised governance in India. There are also some international studies on decentralization. After the launching of PPC in Kerala, Social Scientists have conducted micro and macro level studies in respect of socio-economic and political factors of participatory planning and development. Some studies focused about people’s participation, disadvantaged groups, transparency, accountability etc. It is rare to find a study which deals with information requirements of the members of LSGIs in general. There is hardly a study dealing with information seeking behaviour of the members of GPs in any of the states of India. To sum up, there is no comprehensive study available which deals with the information requirements and information use pattern of the members of GPs in Kerala.

The participatory local level planning in Kerala is unique when compared to other Indian States. It has also attracted global attention. The findings of the study may be useful in strengthening the information base of local level planning and governance. The information needs of the elected representatives of GPs, the availability of information, the communication channels the satisfaction of users with regards to the needs of information etc. are very serious to an information professional. In this context, there is an imperative need for an in-depth study focusing on these areas.

1.9. Statement of the Problem

The investigation is entitled as “Study of the Information Requirements and Information Use Pattern of the Members of Grama Panchayats in Kerala”.


1.10. Definition of Key Terms

The key terms in the title of the study are defined and given in the following subsections.

1.10.1. Study

The word ‘study’ means a careful examination or analysis of a phenomenon, development or question. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines study ‘as the activity of learning or gaining knowledge, either from books or by examining things in the world’. 43

1.10.2. Information Requirements

In general parlance ‘information’ means something which gives knowledge in the form of facts and ‘requirements’ mean something that is needed or wanted in order to do something else. Ane’s Encyclopedic Dictionary of Library and Information Science defines information requirements ‘as a gap in a person’s knowledge which when experienced at the conscious level as a question, gives rise to a search for an answer’. 44 In the context of the present study, information requirements refers to the information needed by the Grama Panchayat Members to actively participate in the decentralised planning and local governance in Kerala.

1.10.3. Use Pattern

Chambers 20th Century Dictionary45 defines use as ‘to put to some purpose’ and pattern as ‘a regular way of acting or doing’. In the context of the present study, use pattern refers to the method of acquiring or using the information sources and services available for the Grama Panchayat Members.

1.10.4. Members of Grama Panchayat
Members of the Grama Panchayat are the representatives elected by the voters of the ward according to the rules and regulations of the Election Commission. The Grama Panchayats are the lowermost tier of Local Self Government Institutions responsible for grassroots level planning and local governance.

1.10.5. Kerala

The southern most state in India formed in November 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1956 with the joining of Travancore – Cochin State and Malabar. The State of Kerala has been conventionally divided into 3 regions such as Southern, Central and Northern Kerala. Its area of 15,000 Sq.miles comprises just one per cent of the total land area of India though its 30 million population accounts for 3.3 per cent of Indian population.

1.11. Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study proposed here is to examine the information requirements and to understand the information use pattern of the members of Grama Panchayats in Kerala in the context of decentralized planning. The elected representatives of Grama Panchayat constitute a very important group of the local level planners and they are supposed to be the decision makers in executing the plans and projects in the Grama Panchayats. Therefore their awareness of information plays a key role in the performance of Grama Panchayats.

There are 16139 elected representatives in 999 GPs in Kerala. The study of all the population is not possible as it is time consuming and expensive. A sample of 40 GPs with 647 members has been selected for the study and the members from 32 Grama Panchayats responded. The entire districts except Idukki have been represented in the sample. All the GPs of Kerala are functioning under the same rules and procedures. Therefore the study of 32 GPs of 32 BPs in three regions of Kerala with
four hundred and thirty five members of GPs will be a representative sample. This limitation may not distort the findings in any way because all categories of members capturing generic features of the Panchayts of Kerala were represented in the sample. The present study deals only the information infrastructure available to support the local level planning in Kerala. The economic background of the members has not been taken into account as there is less chance of getting the accurate data. In many cases, the respondents used to romanticise the answers so as to dominate themselves. However the pattern of questionnaire helped to reduce the ambiguities.

The selection of Grama Panchayat members only excluding the elected members of other LSGIs such as District Panchayat, Municipalities, Corporations and Block Panchayats is a limitation of the study. The omission was deliberate on the assumption that the members of the above LSGIs have comparatively better access to information.

1.12. Organisation of the Report

The thesis has five Chapters. Different aspects in each chapter are arranged in the following pattern.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction
1.2. Information Support for Planning
1.3. Local Self Government Institutions in Kerala
1.4. Significance of Information:
1.5. Users of information
1.6. User Studies
1.7. Decentralised Planning in Kerala
1.8. Significance of the Study
1.9. Statement of the Problem
1.10. Definition of Key Terms
1.11. Scope and Limitations of the Study
1.12. Organisation of the Report
1.13. Conclusion

CHAPTER 2: Review of Related Studies
2.1 Introduction
2.2 Studies Conducted Abroad
2.3. Studies Conducted in India
2.4. Studies Conducted in Kerala
2.5. Conclusion

CHAPTER 3: Methodology
3.1. Introduction
3.2. Research Objectives
3.3. Hypotheses
3.4. Research Design
3.5. Summary of Methodology

CHAPTER 4: Analysis of the Study
4.1 Introduction
4.2. General Information about Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala
4.3. Information Needs of Grama Panchayat Members
4.4. Information Sources of Grama Panchayat Members
4.5. Communication Channels of the Grama Panchayat Members
4.6. Local Knowledge in Decentralised Planning
4.7. Awareness of Digital Information by the Grama Panchayath Members
4.8. Information Support to Decentralised Planning in Kerala
4.9. Capability Building among the Grama Panchayat Members in Kerala
4.10. Conclusion

CHAPTER 5: Summary of Findings, Tenability of the Hypotheses and Suggestions
5.1. Introduction
5.2. Major Findings
5.3. Tenability of Hypotheses
5.4. Suggestions for Improvement
5.5. Suggestion for Further Research
5.6. Conclusion

1.13. Conclusion

The study has provided details of the execution of decentralised planning in Kerala. The Grama Panchayat Members need various information in performing their duties in local planning and governance. After the commencement of decentralised planning, the powers and responsibilities of the panchayat staff and the members have increased. Certain Grama Panchayats of Kerala could not complete the projects prepared by them without proper study. The viability of the projects was not studied in detail. The number of spill over projects in many Grama panchayats also indicates the lack of awareness on the part of the members. They undertook projects for the sake of getting benefits to their wards by their political influence. All these show the lack of data about the land and people, natural resources, human resources and other primary data required for local planning. The lack of awareness of the members about the different aspects of local level planning affects the performance of Grama Panchayats. The State Government, Department of Panchayats and voluntary organisations through their committed efforts can overcome this unfortunate situation by setting up robust information infrastructure for decentralised planning in Kerala.
References


4. Ibid., 13


25. Ibid, p. 373


33. Thomas Isaac T. M. op.cit, pp. 53-77.


40. Ibid, p. 36


