Decentralisation Participatory Planning and Development in Kerala

Decentralisation Participatory Planning and Development in Kerala

November 2014

Authors
P.P. Balan
Sunny George
T. Raghavan

Publisher

Kerala Institute of Local Administration, Thrissur.

Content

I Introduction

Kerala has made historical achievements by entering into a new phase in its democratic decentralisation by experimenting decentralised planning with people's participation. The Local Self-Government Institutions (LSGIs) have been strengthened by means of devolving powers and functions based on the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 [hereafter KPR Act], on the one hand, and introducing the People's Campaign for the Ninth Plan (hereafter, Campaign), on the other. The recommendations of the Committee on Decentralisation[1] have been accepted by the Government and on the basis of its Report the Kerala Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Act, 1999 [hereafter KPR (A) Act] has been introduced. Notable features of the KPR (A) Act are : 1) strengthening of Grama Sabha; 2) changes in the structure of panchayats both in terms of number of constituencies and in terms of committees; 3) emphasis on transparency; 4) new institutions such as Ombudsman and Appellate Tribunals; 5) new system of auditing; 6) more decision making powers to elected functionaries; and 7) provisions for wide peoples participation. The overall capacity building has been undertaken by various measures including training, seminars, discussions, workshops, etc. Since there exists no model elsewhere in the world, the entire process is based on 'learning by doing' approach. In fact, the cynicism that existed in the State regarding Government intervention in development activities has been disappeared and a new enthusiasm found expressed by the people. About 35-40 per cent of the Plan Grant has been earmarked for the LSGIs and they are now making all out effort to utilise the money. An important aspect of people's participation is resource mobilisation by them. In fact, the total development works by local bodies would be much higher than what has been anticipated because of people's contribution. However, the entire process has not been stabilised yet. The rules based on the KPR(A) Act have to be formulated and the planning process has to be standardised and institutionalised. The decentralisation process of Kerala has been widely acclaimed by people from all over the world. Indeed, a new methodology in decentralised planning has been coined. Other states in India, and even economies elsewhere in the world, may emulate the model of Kerala. However, while attempting to adopt

---

[1] Popularly known as Sen Committee since the Chairman of the Committee was late Shri. S.B. Sen.

this model, one has to bear in mind the background – geographical, social, cultural, political, development experiences – of the regional economy. In order to understand and digest the process, it is desirable to have a brief look at the historical background in which the experiment has been introduced. Such an evaluation would definitely help those who attempt for adoption of the methodology of Kerala elsewhere. The paper is divided into seven sections. Following this introduction section, in section II, a brief account of development history of Kerala is given. It gives an overview of the forces/developments that have moulded the background for the present experiment in participatory decentralised planning. The philosophy behind the process of decentralisation is given in section III. In section IV, the concept of decentralised planning is given. The overall expectation from the system also is included in this section. A detailed account of the Panchayati Raj System in Kerala, including the historical background, is given in section V. In section VI, the process of decentralised planning is discussed. Finally, in section VII a quick evaluation of the entire process is made.

II Kerala Economy

Kerala's achievements in development are legendary, particularly in quality of life measured in terms of human development index. The index of human development of Kerala is found to be comparable to that of the middle income countries in the world whereas its per capita income is as low as $100, which is lower than that of the average per capita income of the low income countries. Thus, the Kerala model[2] shows how an economy can achieve high quality of life with low per capita income. Many of the development trends/features in Kerala have been tending towards the capacity building of local level planning, and since independence these centrifugal forces have gained momentum and resulted in sustained improvement in the quality of life, despite very low per capita income. The following are, among others, important features of the regional economy, which have tended towards moulding a background for such an experiment in the Participative Decentralised Planning (PDP).

---

[2] There is disagreement among scholars regarding calling 'Kerala Model', because a model is meant to have possibility of replication/adoption. Some are of the opinion that the Kerala experience may not be replicable because of its unique features. Therefore, according to them, it is not appropriate to call the experience as a model.

a) Geography and Ecology

Kerala is the Southern-most State in India having geographical area of about 39,000 sq. km. with population of 33,387,677 as recorded by the 2011 Census. It is one of the densely populated states with population of 834 per sq.km. There are four major geographical zones in the State: the Highlands, the Middle zone, the Lowland plain, and the Coastal plain. Kerala is a region of relatively heavy monsoon rain. There are 44 streams/rivers in Kerala.[3] The even availability of water rendered possible an even settlement pattern, as distinct from the cluster villages in the rest of the sub-continent, and it helped reducing the chances of rapid spread of epidemics in the region.

b) Rural-Urban Continuum:

An idiosyncratic feature of the development trends in Kerala is the absence of rural-urban polarisation. The public policy has been so targeted that the disparity between the rural and urban area reduced to the minimum. These developments in Kerala – 'rural-urban continuum' – have resulted in the coinage of a new term 'rurban'[4]. Woodcock, during the late Sixties, described the situation very beautifully in the following way.

> *Kerala villages bear little resemblance to the tight, squalid settlements of North India which huddle along a single street or in a knot of houses for mutual protection. In spite of their unorganised appearance, the Malayali villages have quite elaborate social structures. Each will have at least one school and a public library; it will have a public health service, trade union branches and political party groups, places of worship (often a temple, a church and a mosque) and always a few tea shops which serve as meeting places for the various communities. Many Malayali intellectuals and officials return to their native villages in middle age and take an active part in local activities, so that there is a cultural sophistication about rural life in Kerala. In many respects, it is urban (Woodcock, 1967, pp.44-45).*

---

[3] For basic data on Kerala, see Gazetteer of India (1986,1989), and for socio-economic details see Govt. of Kerala (1999).

[4] A detailed account of trends in urbanisation is available in Sreekumar (1990).

c) Public Action

Kerala's accomplishments shows that the well-being of the people can be improved, and social, political and cultural conditions be transformed, even at low levels of income, if there is appropriate public action. In Kerala, the action of mass organisations and mass movements against social, political, and economic oppression and the policy actions of governments have been the most important constituencies of public action[5]. In these activities, people's participation has been quite considerable. In fact, these movements have been, one way or other, turned out to be citizens' education programmes. With this historical background Kerala had been able to 'take off', during the sixties and seventies, in terms of social infrastructure and quality of life.

d) Development of Social Infrastructure

The social activism of the people have been reflected in the political economy in terms of policy decisions in favour of mass literacy, Public Distribution System (PDS), and development of social infrastructure. A study of the Central Statistical Organisation, of 22 basic facilities in Indian villages, shows that Kerala ranks first in 17 out of 22 indicators. Most of the basic facilities are available in Kerala villages within 2 to 5 kilo meters (see Table 1).

e) Universal Education for Children and Total Literacy

Kerala is the only State in India having total literacy. Because of the dense and fairly even distribution of population, it is simply easier and more cost effective to provide health and educational services in Kerala than in other parts of India. Kerala's physical and geological characteristics help account, in part, for the State's unique ability to deliver public services.

f) Early Demographic Transition

Kerala has experienced one of the sharpest fertility declines in the South Asia region. With very low level of per capita income this Indian State has achieved results in controlling population growth comparable to those in the most successful middle-income countries. In 1987 itself the State had crossed the restating rate of birth. In 1996 Kerala observed a birth rate as low as 17.8 with a death rate of 6.3 and infant mortality rate 13. The comparable rates for India were 29.5 (birth),

---

[5] On details of public action and development in Kerala, see Ramachandran (1996).

9.8 (death) and 80 (infant mortality). And Kerala is the only state in India with a sex ratio favourable to women. In 2011, for every1000 men in the State there were 1086 women.

Table 1 Distribution of Social Infrastructure in Kerala and India

Features	Rank of Kerala among all IndianStates	% of villages covered (Kerala)	% of villages covered (All India)
Within 2 kilo meters			
All-weather roads	1	98	46
Bus stops	1	98	40
Post Offices	1	100	53
Primary Schools	1	100	90
Middle Schools	1	99	44
Secondary Schools	1	99	21
Fair Price (ration) shops	1	99	35
Health dispensaries	1	91	25
Health centres	1	47	12
Daily Market	1	56	15
Within 5 kilo meters			
Higher education facilities	1	97	21
Hospitals	1	78	35
Fertilizer Depots	1	93	44
Agricultural pump repair	1	65	19
shops	1	82	40
Veterinary Dispensaries	1	96	61
Credit Cooperatives	1	96	40
Banks	2	63	40
Seed Stores	4	34	21
Storage and Warehouses	8	23	18
Railway Station			
In the Village			
Drinking water	5	96	93
Electricity	3	97	33

Source: Based on First Economic Census, CSO, GOI, Monthly Abstract of Statistics, quoted from M A Oommen: *'Development Experience, Development Priorities and Fiscal Resources of Kerala',* in People & Development, Centre of Science and Technology for Rural Development, Thrissur.

g) Absence of Gender Discrimination

One of the peculiarities of the Kerala's development experience is that there is not much gender difference in social development unlike elsewhere in India. We have noted that the sex ratio in Kerala is in favour of women as against the all India picture. While this ratio has been increasing in Kerala, the same in India as a whole has been decreasing. Moreover, life expectancy of women is more than that of men, unlike in India. In some aspects of educational attainments, girls in Kerala are in fact ahead of boys. Though the girls enrolled in lower classes are fewer than boys, their number exceeds that of boys by the time they reach the tenth standard in schools. Teaching profession has come to be dominated by women who form 61.5 per cent of teachers in schools.

h) Land Reforms

Redistribution of wealth is considered to be one of the important prerequisites of development. Kerala is the foremost state in implementing land reforms effectively. Amin (1991) commends Kerala for its land reforms and the success attained in providing basic services to the people, "in itself a policy of redistribution of wealth and income".

i) Public Distribution System

Kerala has the best Public Distribution System in India. All households in Kerala possess ration cards. The scheme for supply of rice at concession rates to families below poverty line to the extent of 25 per cent of population, launched by Government of India had been extended to 42 per cent of the total population, in Kerala. There are 14262 ration retail shops in Kerala, of which 12325 are in rural areas. Apart from the PDS, the government promotes fair price shops for groceries and medicines.

j) Remittances from Abroad and its Impact

Malayalees (people of Kerala) are found all over the world. Looking for higher earning avenues, they go to elsewhere in the world, particularly to gulf countries. One of the unique features of Malayalees is that they are keeping their contact with their homeland, Kerala. Most of the migrants come back to the homeland after working 15-20 years abroad. Others support their relatives by sending money. The

economic aspect of this culture is that, Kerala has a good opportunity for loanable funds for development. It stands to reason that an international airport, the Nedumbassery Airport, has been financed mostly by Malayalees abroad.

III Decentralisation : The Philosophy

Decentralisation becomes meaningful only when there is democratic decentralisation, which is characterised by flow of power through the elected bodies and its members to the people. By power we mean the power to augment capabilities of the people by increasing production and reducing inequalities. Indeed, development is basically enlarging the choices of the people. And the choices of the people, in turn, depend upon the 'economic development and social justice'.

Principles of Decentralisation

The following are important principles, among others, that may govern transfer of power to LSGIs.

i. Autonomy

Autonomy does not mean sovereignty. Among the LSGIs, autonomy is guaranteed by limiting the supervision of the State Government to the obligatory and regulatory functions. It has got three dimensions: 1) financial autonomy; 2) Functional autonomy; and 3) Administrative autonomy. Autonomy implies that various levels of LSGIs should not be seen as hierarchically organised, with unit one controlling the others below it. However, there exists active 'cooperation, coordination, complementation, and integration'. Nevertheless, the State Government has a very pro-active role in formulating the state priorities within the framework of the national perspective. Thus a multi-level exercise of developmental functions implies, "the existence of a sphere of independent action, at each level, a sphere of cooperative and coordinated action, a sphere of delegated agency function, and a sphere of agency from above, in the descending order of magnitude" (Committee on Decentralisation, 1996).

ii. Subsidiarity

This principle governs the division of functions among different tiers of LSGIs. Subsidiarity implies what can be done best at a particular level shall be done at that level and only residual functions are given to the higher level. The process starts from below, transferring functions

and powers from the level of Grama Sabhas/Ward Committees and go up to the Union Government.

iii. Complementarity

Integration is perhaps the most important task in decentralised planning. The entire system has to work with unity of vision and diversity of means. While integrating the functions, there must not be any chance for overlapping and repetition. This means that the activities of higher levels should complement those of the lower levels and the programmes implemented by all agencies in a given local body will be consistent with local needs and priorities and will in turn, converge into an integrated local plan.

iv. Uniformity

The principle of uniformity stipulates that norms and criteria for selection of beneficiaries, identification of sites, prioritisation of activities and pattern of assistance within a given local body shall be the same for a particular programme irrespective of the agency sponsoring such programmes. This helps in formulating criteria for decision making, which may be made open to the people so that transparency can easily be ensured.

v. Participation of People

In decentralised governance, participation of the people is envisaged by empowering them to take their own decisions after they analyse their problems themselves. In fact, the local self- government provides an institutional framework for participatory democracy. People's participation is expected in all stages of a development programme including identification of needs, formation of scheme, its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The reservation of seats for women, Scheduled Castes and for Scheduled Tribes is one of the ways of ensuring participation of the vulnerable sections in the mainstream development activities. The institutions like Grama Sabhas/Ward Committees are meant for facilitating people's participation in terms of mobilisation of resources in cash, kind and of decision making. Participation also helps in ensuring transparency by examining the activities at various stages. Furthermore, the citizen's pro-active role is expected in augmenting harmony among various sections of the people, popularisation of literacy, improvement of public health, etc.

vi. Transparency and Accountability

Local Self-Government Institutions are primarily accountable to the people and this is guaranted by making transparency in its function. This calls for a social audit system for examining the performance of the local bodies. The social auditing is performed by the Grama Sabhas and Ward Committees by examining the activities of development programme in the respective area. Every decision taken has to be based on certain predetermined norms and criteria, which are evolved on the basis of social consensus and the rationale behind each decision has to be made public. For this purpose, the procedures and the language of administration have to be made people-friendly by simplifying it. In such a system the people have the right to know details of project documents, procedure of its execution, estimates, its monitoring, financial expenditures and evaluation. The people are also expected to play a facilitative role for smooth functioning of the developmental activities.

IV Decentralised Planning : The Concept

The concept of the ongoing experimental participative planning process in Kerala has been emerged, primarily, as a critique of centralised planning process. Development planning in India has, so far, been primarily planning for investments, required for building up essential economic overheads such as irrigation, power, transport, mining and heavy industry and social overheads such as in education, health and scientific research. In this centralised planning process, there has been very limited space for people's participation, despite some deliberate attempts in making the process participative[6]. However, there is no disagreement in defining planning in its broad sense, as an attempt by a society to consciously regulate the economic process through collective decisions so that sustainable and equitable growth is achieved. But the departure from centralised planning began when one consider: 1) ideal unit of planning, and 2) separation of sequential stages of planning. Discussions on local level planning have often been preoccupied with the identification of some unique ideal level of planning. This is really a false notion as rightly pointed out by the Report of the Working Group on Block Level Planning (Government

---

[6] The Community Development approach during the fifties had been envisaged to ensure people's participation. However, the attempts have not been successful.

of India, 1978). In fact, such an ideal unit of planning neither exists nor is it necessary. In the case of separation of different stages of planning one has to bear in mind that planning is an interactive process wherein the programme itself may undergo several modifications in setting up of organisational arrangements for the design, selection and implementation of projects.

Predetermined sequencing of stages of planning tend to loose sight of the inter-dependencies among different projects in the programme in terms of both technical relations and resource constraint. That is to say, the total money to be spent on different project during a given period of time is limited. Some have, therefore, to be chosen in preference over others. Furthermore, in formulating projects, the basic technical balance between different projects, belonging to different levels of planning needs to be maintained.

In the light of the two points raised above, the conventional procedure of moving from the formation of overall plans to individual projects needs to be reversed. Instead, one has to start from the end use, and end users, of different projects - which would itself indicate the most convenient level at which the particular projects should be implemented. This will, in turn, indicate the appropriate organisational framework/points at which different sets of projects should be implemented[7]. Therefore, in practice, what is required is a system of multi-level planning, where the lowest unit is allowed to plan and implement everything that may be performed most effectively at that level and only the residual is left to the higher levels.

The Concoct of an Experiment in Decentralised Planning

The thoughts on experimenting a decentralised Planning in Kerala State has been coined quite for a long period of time (CDS, 1980). In 1980s it was evaluated that Kerala has a relatively favourable social and political environment for efforts in this direction[8].

The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments and the ensuing Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 provided an institutional background for the

---

[7] It may also be noted that information theorists and specialists in organisational design have demonstrated that the delays in implementation as well as costs in terms of information handling, human and material resources are minimised when the organisational distance between the point of decision and the point of implementation is minimum.

[8] The legislation for setting up of District Administration Councils stands to this reason.

democratic decentralisation and participative decentralised planning in the State. A State Finance Commission was also constituted for making recommendations for sharing the resources of the State Govt. with Panchayats and for improving financial resources of Panchayats. Both the Finance Commission and the Committee on Decentralisation have submitted their reports and in the light of these the Kerala Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Act, 1999 has been enacted[9].

Complementing these developments the State Planning Board introduced a participative planning process, viz. 'The People's Campaign for the Ninth Plan' on an experimental basis. In fact, it is an attempt in the direction of planning from below. The hallmark of it is the massive involvement of people with a campaign mood (Govt. of Kerala, 1996).

In this approach all LSGIs are to formulate their schemes on the basis of their priorities. These schemes together with departmental proposals and other related funds will go to the District Planning Committee (DPC) which will prepare the plan for the district within the framework of the guidelines given by the State Planning Board. In addition to creating new assets, maintenance and renewals may be included in the schemes. If a DPC finds that some modifications in schemes of lower tiers are necessary, modifications may be made only after mutual discussions with the concerned LSGIs. Grama Panchayats will prepare their plans on the basis of suggestions of Grama Sabha. A project spreading beyond the limits of a Grama Panchayat area will go to the Block Panchayat and that going beyond the area of block will go to the District Panchayat. As noted earlier, the State Planning Board will take care of inter district schemes.

Expectation from the New System

From the emerging new decentralised governance, the expectations are threefold. First, it is envisaged that the system would break the rampant cynicism among the people regarding the very low rate of growth of the regional economy. It is also important that whatever momentum has been achieved so far has to be sustained in the future. It is envisaged that the participation of the people in the development process, right from the pre-planning stage to the evaluation, would

---

[9] We will discuss the salient features of this Amendment later in section V.

guarantee a significant improvement in productivity. Ultimately, it will tend to reflect further on the standard of living of the people with greater self-reliance.

Secondly, a considerable amount of resource mobilisation would become possible as a result of massive people's participation. The contribution from the people may be in the form of cash, kind, or service. Thirdly, the corruption would be reduced by vigilant supervisions of the works and schemes by Grama Sabhas/ Ward Committees, People's groups and socially active individuals and organisations.

V Panchayati Raj System in Kerala

Earlier System

Historically there were self-governing units at the village level organised on the basis of castes, in different parts of Kerala. These units were not democratic in modern sense. They did not have any voice in the over all governance of villages. However, it is important to note that despite the changes in Kings/rulers, these traditional panchayats survived as basic units of administration. The 'Gramams' of Brahmins, the 'Tharas' of Nairs, the 'Karas' of Ezhavas were examples of village level self-governing units. These units were further divided into sub-units having the nature of a Grama Sabha and they were known as 'kazhagoms' and 'koottams'. The 'koottam' was the base on which the structure of both civil and judicial administration at the local level was built (Ramachandran, 1995).

In Kerala, formal local bodies were first established during the period of the British under Lord Ripon. They were urban local bodies established in the form of municipal boards and sanitary boards initially, and later panchayats also were constituted in the similar pattern. By 1920 panchayats became legal entities in Kerala. When the Kerala State was formed in 1956, there were panchayats and urban local bodies in the three different regions of the state, viz. Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. In addition to these, there was a district board in the Malabar region, which was abolished soon after the formation of Kerala State.

The first elected government of Kerala in 1957 gave top priority to democratic decentralisation. However, the attempts were not successful with the failure to enact the Kerala Panchayat Bill and the District Council Bill as a result of the dismissal of the Government. The next government

passed the Kerala Panchayat Act 1960, the Kerala Municipalities Act, 1960, and the Kerala Municipal Corporations Act, 1961.

The executive and financial powers of the panchayats were very limited under the Kerala Panchayat Act of 1960 (hereafter KPA) and the local bodies were more nominal than real. For instance, the principal functioning of the panchayats included only items like maintenance and lighting of local roads; drainage, sanitation, garbage disposal and provision of public latrines; arrangements for petty irrigation, potable water, burial, and registration of births and deaths; and maintenance of village courts. For the major developmental activities like agriculture, animal husbandry etc., or even social services like education and health, the role of the panchayats were merely that of lending its cooperation to the concerned departments of the State Government.

Panchayat Raj in Kerala since 73rd and 74th Amendments of Constitution in 1992

Despite the historical developments in favour of decentralised governance in Kerala, it was the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India that gave a background for the effective initiatives. Within the framework of the Constitutional Amendments, the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 was passed with effect from 23rd April 1994. This KPR Act was, in fact, a turning point in strengthening the Panchayat Raj System in the State. However, as a result of the hectic legislation, the KPR Act contained a number of mistakes and omissions, and to rectify the same, the Kerala Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Act, 1995 and the Kerala Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Act, 1996 were passed with effect from 5th August 1995 and 26th March, 1996 respectively.

To incorporate the recommendations of the Committee on Decentralisation and the State Finance Commission, and the suggestions of the State Planning Board in the light of their experience in decentralised planning, a new legislation was necessitated and hence the Kerala Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Act, 1999. This may be considered as one of the best legislations in the State since the methodology adopted for the formulation of it was 'learning by doing'.

Kerala Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Act, 1999 (KPR (A) Act)

The KPR (A) Act has taken care of almost all aspects of the process of decentralisation ranging from environmental aspects to judicial matters. Notable features of the KPR (A) Act are : 1) strengthening of Grama Sabha; 2) changes in the structure of panchayats both in terms of number of constituencies and in terms of committees; 3) emphasis on transparency; 4) new institutions such as Ombudsman and Appellate Tribunals; 5) new system of auditing; 6) more decision making powers to elected functionaries; and 7) provisions for wide peoples participation.
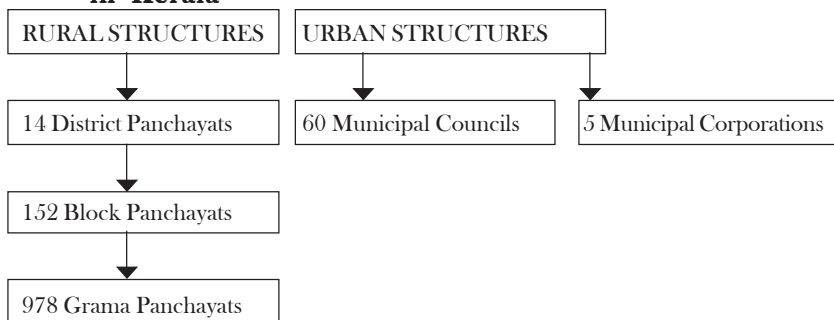
Present Panchayat Raj System

We attempt to provide an account of the present system of Panchayat Raj incorporating the recent legislation of KPR (A) Act. Therefore, while going through this section one has to bear in mind that certain provisions in the latest Kerala Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Act, 1999 has to be materialised by means of Rules and its implementation. Also important to note is the fact that many of the provisions in the KPR Act are related to other allied Acts.

Structure of Local Self Government Institutions (LSGIs)

In line with the Constitution (Seventy Third Amendment) Act, 1992, the Kerala Panchayat Raj System has a three-tier structure of panchayats by constituting Village, Block and District panchayats. There are 1209 Local Self- Government Institutions in Kerala. The distribution of LSGIs is given in Chart 1 and the Table 2 gives the district-wise distribution of Grama Panchayats, Block Panchayats and Municipalities with average area and population. The broad structure of Panchayat Raj System in Kerala is given in Chart 2.

Chart 1. Distribution of Local Self Government Institutions in Kerala

RURAL STRUCTURES	URBAN STRUCTURES

14 District Panchayats	60 Municipal Councils	5 Municipal Corporations

152 Block Panchayats

978 Grama Panchayats

The State Election Commission and the State Finance Commission are the two higher offices set up concerning the implementation of Panchayati Raj system in Kerala. In addition to these, the KPR (A) Act provides for an Ombudsman and an Appellate Tribunal. The Ombudsman is constituted for dealing the cases against the panchayats or the officials under the panchayats. The Tribunals, formed by Government for one district or for more than one district, are to make revisions of the appeals against the decisions of the panchayats.

Table 2 Distribution of Grama Panchayats, Block Panchayats and Municipalities by District

District	No. of GPs	Average Area (sq. km)	Average Population	No. of BPs	Average Area (sq. km)	Average Population	No. of Municipalities	Average Area (sq. km)	Average Population
Thiruvananthapuram	73	24.28	27032	11	169.93	189227	4	17.96	37979
Kollam	70	34.00	30655	11	186.66	168007	3	24.09	74439
Pathanamthitta	54	49.36	19739	8	293.05	118807	3	24.18	40710
Alappuzha	73	17.62	23406	12	104.24	138496	5	22.08	67863
Kottayam	73	29.25	22863	11	195.73	151727	4	13.43	39820
Idukki	53	99.38	20367	8	636.33	129839	1	35.43	40656
Ernakulam	84	24.76	22979	14	142.42	131809	11	18.31	34536
Thrissur	88	30.63	22479	16	170.68	145943	6	13.81	36582
Palakkad	91	48.02	23573	13	336.12	164859	4	26.69	59768
Malappuram	100	36.16	30181	15	242.80	202647	7	29.40	51855
Kozhikode	75	29.05	27235	12	185.77	177306	2	21.33	72434
Wyanad	25	87.15	27049	4	697.17	216393	1	34.14	22949
Kannur	81	35.65	23866	11	306.96	209380	6	29.34	52473
Kasaragod	38	51.49	26060	6	476.27	241054	3	28.11	53646
Total	978	37.83	25199	152	296.01	170392	60	24.16	48784

Note: GP- Grama Panchayat, BP- Block Panchayat

Grama (Village) Panchayat

In Kerala, Grama Panchayats are relatively larger in size when compared to those in other states. An average Grama Panchayat in Kerala is 37.83 sq. kms in area and has a population of 33,387,677 (2011 census). There exists wide variation in the population of village panchayats. The least populous panchayat of Idamalakkudi in Idukki district had a population of 4588 in 1991, while the most populous panchayat of Tanur in Malappuram district had a population of 78343. In terms of area, Valapattanam (2.04 sq. kms) in Kannur district is the smallest panchayat and Kumily (795.28 sq. kms) in Idukki district is the largest. It is to be noted that such variations seem to be against the spirit of Constitution. Further, the existence of revenue villages not coinciding with the village panchayats creates difficulties in administration. Grama Panchayats are often larger than the revenue villages. There are 1384 revenue villages, while there are 978 Grama Panchayats in the state of Kerala.

The number of members of a Grama Panchayat will be decided on the basis of population. The minimum and maximum number of members to the three tiers of panchayats has been increased by the recent amendment Act. The minimum and maximum number of wards (constituencies) as per the KPR Act and the KPR (A) Act are given in the Table 3.

Table 3

Level of Panchayat	Minimum No. of members	Maximum No. of members
Grama Panchayat	13	23
Block Panchayat	12	22
District Panchayat	16	32

The existing Grama panchayats have been constituted on the basis that Grama Panchayats with population not exceeding 10,000 are entitled to have 3 members and one additional member for every 4500 of the population subject to a maximum of 23 members. All panchayat members will be elected directly by the people. The President and Vice president of the Grama Panchayat will be elected indirectly from among the elected members of the panchayat.

The functions and powers regarding the subjects devolved as per the 11th Schedule of the Constitution, is clearly stated in the KPR (A) Act. The

latest Amendment Act has revamped the functions of all the tiers of panchayats. The Third schedule of the Act lists the functions of the Grama Panchayat. There are 27 mandatory functions, 14 general functions, and 29 sector-wise distribution of responsibilities (for details see Appendix - I). Every village panchayat in Kerala has major institutions like Primary Health Centre, Veterinary Hospital, Krishi Bhavan, High Schools, etc. At present the village panchayats have control over all local level institutions except High Schools.

In order to establish decentralisation within local governments, Standing Committees are established dividing the functions of local governments among the committees. Grama Panchayats have four standing committees they are : 1) Finance, 2) Development, 3) Welfare, 4) Health and Education.

The village panchayats have their own sources of income and get reasonable amount as grants and shared taxes. Moreover, they have been provided with the major share of plan funds. The following are important taxes assigned to Grama Panchayats:

1. Land tax (tax imposed on land and building in the concerned land)
2. Employment tax
3. Advertisement tax
4. Entertainment tax
5. Service tax
6. Tax on land title transfer (as a surcharge on tax imposed as per the Kerala Stamp Paper Act of 1959)
7. Tax on reclaimed land (or land converted from paddy fields and the like)

The Grama Panchayats have powers to collect fees, and to avail loans for financing development programmes. As per the KPR (A) Act, State Government Grants from basic tax, to Grama Panchayats are of two type - 1) grant, as far as possible, equal to 3/8 portion of the total basic tax collected last year from the area of the Grama Panchayat , and 2) based on population and area of Grama panchayat, as far as possible equal to 1/8 portion of the total basic tax collected from total panchayat area of the State shall be given to all Grama panchayats in the State.

Block Panchayat

An average Block Panchayat in Kerala is 296.01 sq. kms in area and has a population of 170392 (1991 census). There are 152 Block Panchayats in Kerala. The existing Block panchayats are constituted on the basis that Block Panchayats with a population not exceeding one lakh are entitled to have 12 members and one additional member for every 25000 population subject to a maximum of 22 members as directly elected members. Each Block panchayat consist of (a) members who are directly elected by the people, and (b) Presidents of the Grama panchayats, within Block panchayat area. The President and Vice-President of Block Panchayat will be elected from among the elected members of the concerned panchayat. The BDO is the secretary of the Block Panchayat. At present a Block panchayat is getting assistance from four Standing Committees: 1) Finance, 2) Development, 3) Welfare, 4) Health and Education.

The fourth schedule of the KPR (A) Act enlists the functions to be attended to by the Block Panchayats. Apart from the 24 sectoral functions, the Block Panchayats are entrusted to pool technical expertise both Government and Non-Government at the Block level, to provide technical services to village panchayat to avoid duplication and provide the backward and forward linkages.

Block panchayats have no powers to tax. However, they have powers to collect fees, and avail loan for financing development programmes. The State Government Grant to Block panchayat is such that, as far as possible equal to 3/10 portion of the total basic tax collected last year from a district panchayat area, as grant to all the Block Panchayats in that district. The plan fund is also shared with Block Panchayats.

District Panchayat

There are 14 district panchayats in Kerala. At present the District panchayats are constituted on the basis that District Panchayats having a population of 10 lakhs are entitled to have 16 members and one additional member for every one lakh population subject to the maximum of 22 members (directly elected by the people). The District panchayat consists of (a) members who are directly elected by the people, and (b) the presidents of Block panchayats, within the territorial limits of the District panchayat. The President and the Vice-President of the district panchayat will be elected

from among the elected members of the concerned panchayat. The District panchayat is at present being assisted by four Standing Committees. The Standing Committees are: 1) Finance, 2)Development, 3) Welfare, 4) Public works, and 5) Health and Education.

The fifth schedule of the KPR (A) Act enlists the functions to be attended to by District Panchayat. The district panchayats are entrusted with plan integration and mobilisation of technical expertise in addition to its other sectoral functions.

The District panchayats have no powers to tax. However, they have powers to collect fees, and avail loan for financing development programmes. The District panchayats can also issue revenue bonds and raise money for financing developmental works. The State Government Grant to a District panchayat is, as far as possible equal to 1/5 portion of the total basic tax collected last year from the district panchayat area. Furthermore, a portion of the State plan fund is distributed among the District Panchayats.

Standing Committees and Steering Committees

The existing structure of Standing Committees for three tiers of panchayats as per the KPR Act and the changes provided for in the KPR (A) Act are given in Table 4.

Table 4 Standing Committees in Panchayats

Levels of Panchayats	As per Kerala Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Act, 1999
Grama Panchayat	1) Finance 2) Development 3) Welfare 4) Health and Education
Block Panchayat	1) Finance 2) Development 3) Welfare 4) Health and Education
District Panchayat	1) Finance 2) Development 3) Welfare 4) Public Works 5) Health and Education

In order to co-ordinate the functioning of the Standing Committees and to avoid the possibility of conflicting decisions on related issues by different Standing Committees, there is a Steering Committee in each and every panchayat, headed by the President of the panchayat.

Full-time Role of Panchayat President

The president is the executive head of a panchayat. In view of the augmented responsibilities as a result of the transfer of massive resources, the president will be a fulltime functionary. He has administrative control over the officials of the panchayat and of the transferred institutions under the purview of it. Indeed, the president has the power even to suspend an officer, except the secretary and Gazetted officers, in order to take disciplinary actions. On the recommendations of the Panchayat Samithi, the president may request the government for a transfer of the secretary who is the pivotal officer in a panchayat.

Right of members

The members have the right to dissent, which is considered to be very essential for the democratic functioning of a panchayat. Every member who have voted against any resolution has the right to submit a note of dissent giving the reasons for doing so against a resolution. This note of dissent has to be given to the panchayat secretary within 48 hours of the conclusion of the meeting and the secretary has to forward it to the State government along with the minutes of the meeting.

Panchayat Fund

All the three levels of panchayats have Panchayat Fund: The Grama Panchayat Fund consists of all receipts of Grama Panchayat except the receipts made for Block panchayat, district panchayat or State government; the Block Panchayat Fund consists of all receipts of Block Panchayat except the receipts made for district panchayat or State government; and the District Panchayat Fund consists of all receipts of District Panchayat except the receipts made for State government.

Plan grant-in-aid

The 9th Plan has introduced a basic change in the financial situation of the local bodies of Kerala. About 35 per cent to 40 per cent of the total plan expenditure of the State has been given to the local bodies. The plan

fund to panchayats is in the form of grant-in-aid, which is an untied fund. The total fund included the amount for Sectoral plan for Scheduled castes and sub plan for Scheduled Tribes. The general category fund has been divided among the panchayats at a ratio of 70:15:15 for village, block and district panchayats respectively. The criteria for intra-tier distribution of plan grant-in-aid are given in Table 5.

Table 5. The Criteria for Intra-Tier Distribution of Plan Grant-in-Aid

Indicators	Weightage (percentage)			
	Grama Panch ayat	Block Panch ayat	District Panch ayat	Municipali ties/Corpo rations
1. Population (excluding SC/ST)	65	65	55	75
2. Geographical area excluding area under forests	5	10	15	5
3. Area under Paddy	5	-	-	-
4. Own Income of Grama Panchayat	10	-	-	-
5. Composite Index of Agricultural Labourers, Persons Engaged in Live Stock, Fisheries, etc. and Marginal Workers	15	25	20	-
6. Composite index of back wardness of houses without latrine and houses without electricity	-	-	10	20
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Govt. of Kerala (1999): Economic Review 1998, State Planning Board,Thiruvanathapuram, P.211.

Grama Sabha

Grama Sabha is the soul of the Panchayat Raj system in the State and its functions and responsibilities have been strengthened further by the KPR (A) Act. In fact, it has become one of the important institutions involved in decentralised planning in the State.

Grama Sabha consists of all persons included in the electoral roll of a ward (constituency) of a Grama Panchayat. The member of a Grama Panchayat representing the constituency is the Convenor of that Grama Sabha and the meetings of the Grama Sabha has to be presided over by the President of the Grama Panchayat.

It is compulsory to hold general meetings of the Sabha once in three months. The quorum is 10 per cent of the Grama Sabha, but if the Grama Sabha is convened for the second time for lack of quorum at the first convene, the second time needs quorum of only 50 persons. An important development in the recent legislation of KPR (A) Act with an element of direct democracy is the provision for Special meeting of Grama Sabha when not less than 10 per cent of members demand for such a meeting in writing.

The Village Panchayat shall place before the Grama Sabha reports relating to the developmental programmes of the constituency during the previous year and those that are proposed to be undertaken during the current year and the expenditure therefore, the annual statement of accounts and the administration of the preceding year. Grama Sabha can seek clarifications from the President or Members about the works undertaken by the village panchayat. The selection of individual beneficiaries of various schemes has to be approved by the Grama Sabha.

The Powers, functions and rights of Grama Sabha are given below:

(a) Help collection and compilation of details needed for formulating development plans for the panchayat.

(b) To generate proposals and indicate priorities for preparation of annual and Five Year Plans.

(c) To prepare the final list of eligible beneficiaries in the case of beneficiary oriented schemes by applying the selection criteria, according to priority, and give to Grama Panchayat.

(d) Rendering assistance in the effective implementation of developmental schemes by providing locally needed facilities.

(e) Mobilisation of voluntary labour and contributions in kind and cash needed for developmental schemes.

(f) To suggest the location of streetlights, water taps, public wells, public sanitation units, irrigation facilities, other public utilities, etc.

(g) Establish awareness generating programmes relating to matters of public interest like sanitation, environmental protection, pollution control, etc. and provide protection against social evils like corruption and false and artificial dealings.

(h) To promote harmony and unity among the various groups of people in the area of Grama Sabha and organise arts and sports *melas* to promote good mentality among people.

(i) To monitor and help the beneficiary committees conducting development activities in the area of the Grama Panchayat.

(j) To verify the eligibility of persons getting various kinds of welfare assistance of Government like pensions, subsidies, ration schemes, etc.

(k) To know the detailed estimates of the works proposed to be taken up in the area of the Grama Sabha.

(l) To ascertain from the officials the services they will render and the works they are to do in the succeeding three months.

(m) To know the rationale of every decision of the Panchayat concerning that area.

(n) To know the follow up action taken on the decision of the Grama Sabha and to know the detailed reasons if some of the decisions cannot be implemented.

(o) To co-operate with staff of Grama Panchayat in cleaning process and provide voluntary service to remove wastes.

(p) To find out the drawbacks in the distribution of pure water and street lighting in the area of Grama Sabha and to suggest remedies.

(q) To help the activities of Parent-Teacher Associations in the schools in the area of Grama Sabha.

(r) To help the public health activities in the area of Grama Sabha, particularly, immunisation and family welfare.

(s) Such other functions as may be prescribed from time to time.

Responsibilities of the Grama Sabha

i. Dissemination of information on development and welfare programmes.

ii. Canvassing participation in health, literacy and similar development campaigns.

iii. Collecting essential socio-economic data.

iv. Providing feedback on the performance of development programmes.

v. Resorting to moral suasion to pay taxes, repay loans, promote environmental cleanliness, maintain social harmony, etc.

vi. Mobilising local resources to augment panchayat resources.

vii. Supervising development works and volunteers teams.

viii. Creating arrangements to report quickly incidence of epidemics, natural calamities, etc.

Role of State Government

The role of State Government has been redefined in such a manner as to ensure the autonomy of LSGIs by limiting its activities to obligatory and regulatory functions. Indeed the Government is attempting to delegate even these functions to such institutions as Ombudsman and Appellate Tribunals. However, the necessary regulatory powers are existing with the Government. For example, if a panchayat president or secretary fails to discharge any official responsibilities entrusted to them by the government, the government can ask for explanation from them. (section 190 (1) (2)). The section 191 (1) empowers the government to cancel or withhold a resolution passed by the Panchayat Committee. Government need cancel resolutions only if there is imminent likelihood of breach of law and order, disturbance to communal harmony or danger to life and property. Section 192 states that the annual administration report of Village panchayat and Block panchayat should be submitted to the District panchayat. The District panchayat should submit their annual report to the State government to be placed before the legislature. Section 193 states that if a panchayat fails to approve budget for the financial year and experiences financial crisis due to the same, the State Government can dissolve such panchayat committee through a Gazette notification. The administration of the concerned panchayat can be put under the control of a Special Officer or an Administrative Committee.

Regarding economic development and social justice, the government has to play a pro-active role. The government has to frame guidelines for technical specifications, planning standards, cost and subsidy norms, environmental safeguards, special measures to protect the interests of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and financial systems and

administrative procedures. While forming these norms it has to take care of the national priorities.

Thus government has a guiding, advising and corrective role rather than a punitive or retributory role. That is to say it has a caring and nurturing attitude towards LSGIs.

Functional Autonomy of Panchayats

In order to make the panchayats 'institutions of local self-government' the powers, functions and responsibilities have been redefined in such that the sphere of activity of each local body is fairly clear. Thus, the third, fourth and the fifth schedules - powers, functions and responsibilities of Village, Block and District panchayats respectively - have been amended accordingly. By doing this, the scope of government interventions has been reduced, on the one hand, and prevent interference of upper tiers of panchayats in the matters of lower tiers, on the other.

The panchayats have absolute freedom in deciding their priorities within their functional domains. Generally, the powers of administrative approvals are limited only by their own budget. In the case of technical sanction, the powers have been delegated to the officers available at a particular level for that level of panchayat.

In Kerala, therefore, there has been a conscious decision to avoid a hierarchy among the three tiers of Panchayat Raj Institutions. Although coordination is envisaged, no formal control over the tiers below is warranted. In sum, the Panchayat Raj System in Kerala has three spheres rather than three tiers.

Accounts and Audits

In the context of massive devolution of funds, audit of local bodies assumes much importance. Audit is not viewed as an instrument of control by the State Government; it is seen as an important professional support system, working as an antenna of the public, keeping track whether the use of public fund is according to accepted laws, procedures and conventions (Committee on Decentralisation, 1997).

Under the present system, the elected functionaries have responsibility to keep the accounts of the Panchayats. It is the Panchayat Committee to maintain proper accounts of these institutions. Traditionally, the accounting and auditing system of panchayats has not been good. The conventional procedures have to be improved and a culture of keeping proper records has to be nurtured. For evolving a proper accounting and book keeping

procedure, Audit Manual, Accounts Manual, Budget Manual, etc. are being prepared.

The audit system comprises four types of auditing: 1) Local Fund Audit, 2) Accountant General Audit, 3) Performance Audit and 4) Social Audit.

1. Local Funds Audit

It is the conventional system of auditing for panchayats and this is a statutory audit by the State Government.

2. Accountant General Audit

Since the Central Government grants and aids also are given to panchayats, the accounts are audited by Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG).

3. Performance Audit

In view of the more delegation of powers and devolution of funds to LSGIs, a new set of financial procedures have been evolved. The LSGIs requires to be guided properly in maintaining records and following principles of financial procedures and propriety. In this context, a new audit system namely Performance Audit, has been introduced in the KPR (A) Act. It is a running audit system, which is more friendly, helpful and on-line corrective system, which would detect irregularities and deviations, almost simultaneously, allowing for easy rectification.

At the state level the Secretary, Local Administration Department is the Performance Audit Authority. The Authority will be supported by a State Performance Audit Officer, at the state level and by the Performance Audit Officers at the regional level. Under the Performance Audit Officers, Performance Audit Teams will be visiting each Panchayat once in three months for conducting the audit.

4. Social Audit System

Another new concept of auditing that has been gaining ground for acceptance is social auditing. Whereas the purpose of Performance Auditing is for concurrent observations and corrections, the social auditing is envisaged for better transparency. Under this system every citizen will have the right to have a look at the estimates, list of beneficiaries, assistance given in each scheme, muster rolls, bills, vouchers, accounts, etc. by providing photocopies of them on payment of actual cost. There may be stipulation that all applications for various licences, certificates, given to a LSGIs are given a queue number and this priority should not be violated.

Registers indicating date of application and date of clearance in each case should be available for reference by any applicant. A citizen may examine the tax assessment, granting of exemption, etc. Women's watchdog committees also may be set up at the level of Grama Panchayats and Municipalities.

In addition to these four types of audit, the panchayats may have Chartered Accountant's Audit for credit rating. The district panchayats are empowered to raise resources by means of issuing Revenue Bonds.

Transparency and Right to Information

Accountability to the people is best ensured through transparency. Transparent administration enables people to achieve an on-line monitoring of the administrative process. In fact, the citizens' right to information and the level of his access to it would constitute the best indicator of democratisation of a society. When there is democratic decentralisation, institutions for people - like Grama Sabha, Parent-Teacher Associations, Watershed Committees, Co-operatives, etc. - would emerge and flourish. In Kerala, these institutions have been gained ground and they have become integral part of the development process.

The public can attend the panchayat meetings. The public is also allowed to observe all procedures discussions and decision making of the panchayats, while meetings are convened. In case any member of Grama Sabha is interested in referring the decision of panchayat, there exists the freedom to do so.

A new chapter for transparency has been introduced in the KPR (A) Act (Chapter XXV A – Right to know). Accordingly, people have right to information that includes the right for taking extracts and obtaining certified copies of documents. It may be any material or information contained in a document relating to the administrative, developmental or regulatory functions of a Panchayat and includes any document or record relating to the affairs of the Panchayat.

Political Panchayats and Anti-defection

Kerala has recognised political panchayats with elections fought on the basis of political parties. However, panchayats are expected to be apolitical in their functioning, particularly in decisions making on developmental matters. By 'apolitical' we mean narrow divisible functioning on party considerations, but does not exclude larger ideological debates and

developmental dialogues. At the same time, party discipline is to be observed in special instances like election of a president or vice president or during no confidence motions. Thus, in Kerala, defection would lead to disqualification of member. Therefore, one cannot wish away the reality of political party identities in the name of freedom of expression of ideas and opinions.

In order to improve the credibility and capability of members new conditions have been introduced for disqualification. These conditions exclude the criminal, corrupt and immoral persons from getting into the panchayat governance.

Official - Non-official Interface

The traditional division of powers of the political executives and the official executives, with policy making being the function of one and the carrying them out, the function of the other, mingles at all levels of local bodies. For example, there is a policy element in laying down priorities, which requires professional support. Similarly, the elected members have a definite role in implementation. Therefore, a positive official - non-official interface is a pre-requisite for proper functioning of local bodies.

In Kerala, the new system provides an opportunity for professional satisfaction for officials by helping design appropriate projects for local level development and observing the process of implementation. The officials, therefore, would have to enrich their skills.

Compared to the District Panchayats and Block Panchayats, Village Panchayats are functioning effectively from the point of view of friction between officials and non-officials.

Devolution of Functions

In Kerala, all the important subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution have been transferred to the LSGIs by state legislation. Accordingly the Government has directed the 17 concerned departments to transfer institutions and posts to the respective LSGIs.

For the devolution of functions, the principle of subsidiarity has strictly been followed. Most of the welfare programmes of Central Government have been channelled through Block Panchayats. The functions of the three tiers of panchayats have been reorganised for the purpose of clarity in functions and responsibilities. Apart from the sectoral distribution of responsibility, the Block Panchayats and District Panchayats are entrusted

with pooling of technical expertise and integration of plan from the point of view of backward and forward linkages.

Representation of MPs/MLAs

Member of Parliament(MPs) and Member of Legislative Assembliey (MLAs) do not have any representation in panchayats. But they have to be invited for the Grama Sabhas in their respective constituency.

As per the KPR (A) Act, the MPs/MLAs cannot be members of panchayats simultaneously. In the light of the fact that the work of a panchayat member is almost fulltime, and that it will not be possible for MPs/MLAs to carry out the duties of a panchayat member in addition to their parliamentary responsibilities, it has been decided that the MPs/MLAs have to confine their membership either to Parliament/Legislative Assembly or to panchayat.

New Institutions

For realisation of the ultimate objective of decentralised governance, certain existing institutions, particularly Grama Sabha and State Election Commission have been strengthened and provisions for establishment of two new institutions have been made in the KPR (A) Act. The two important new institutions are: 1) Appellate Tribunals, and 2) Ombudsman. The Tribunal is meant for dispensing appeals very quickly while the Ombudsman looks into defective administration by the local bodies by employing an investigative approach.

Appellate Tribunals

In the context of the emerging scenario of decentralisation in the State, conflicts may arise and dependence on the existing Judiciary for appeals would cause much delay in getting verdict. Justice delayed is justice denied. Therefore, the KPR (A) Act provides for Appellate Tribunals at District level.

An Appellate Tribunal consists of one Judicial Officer, having the rank of District Judge, will be appointed by the Government in consultation with the High Court. The Tribunal will have the same powers as that of a civil court. The Tribunals are expected to be citizen-friendly by means of adopting simple procedures.

Ombudsman

At present there is no institution exclusively to investigate and attend to complaints regarding corruption and defects in the administration of LSGIs and/or the public servants under the LSGIs. Therefore, the

KPR (A) Act provides for constituting an Ombudsman which will investigate independently complaints from individuals, groups, and from Government relating to defective administration by local bodies. It is envisaged as a cost-free mechanism for a complaint and is essentially investigative in character. The Ombudsman goes beyond the judicial process, as after redressal of a grievance it can choose to monitor the behaviour of the local authority concerned and it can point out systematically the deficiencies and suggest improvements.

To be more specific, the Ombudsman will conduct investigations and inquiries on any complaint with regard to any action involving corruption, maladministration or irregularities in the administration by the LSGIs and for disposal of such complaints. The following are the members of the Ombudsman for LSGIs.

1) A High Court Judge, appointed by Government with the approval of the Chief Justice of High Court of Kerala, who shall be its chairman.

2) Two Judicial Officers of the rank of District Judge appointed by Government with the approval of the Chief Justice of High Court of Kerala

3) Two Officers of the Government not below the rank of Secretary to Government, appointed by Government.

4) Two public men of repute having known integrity, appointed by the Government in consultation with the Leader of Opposition of the Legislative Assembly of the State.

Elections

The State Election Commission is the authority responsible for conducting elections to local bodies. The decisions on the delimitation of constituencies, the reservation of constituencies and chairmanships are of the State Election Commission. The rotation of reserved seats and positions has to be determined by the Commission by means of drawing of lots. The decisions of the State Election Commission in this regard will be final and the decisions cannot be challenged in any court.

The elections to the three-tiers of panchayats have been conducted on the same date, in the State. The elections to the Nagarapalika institutions also were conducted simultaneously to the elections to PRIs. The elections to local bodies were conducted on two days (23rd & 25th September, 1995) during last election for the convenience of the election machinery.

Simultaneous elections in PRIs and Nagarapalikas will be advantageous because all the people of the State feel they are together in the matters of polity and their constituting the local administrative bodies together will foster such a feeling, and will reduce disparities of being in urban or rural areas at least in the matter of politics. Election procedures also can be made and felt uniform in both Nagarapalika Institutions and PRIs. The expenditure on elections also can be reduced considerably as it is conducted simultaneously for all local bodies.

Reservation

In order to achieve the objective of 'social justice', reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women have been ensured in Kerala. The KPR (A) Act has incorporated that the groups of Scheduled Tribe hamlets as Sub-committee of Grama Sabhas enjoying all the powers of Grama Sabha for the purpose of tribal development.

In Kerala 50% of seats have been reserved for women and proportional representation has been ensured by reserving seats and positions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. But there is no reservation for other backward classes. The same reservation pattern has been followed in all tiers of panchayats and municipalities.

The panchayat level development plan projects formulated for the IXth Five Year Plan have to earmark 10 per cent of the over all grant-in-aid shall be set apart for Women Component Plan. Only those projects, which directly benefit women, and which are organised or managed by women should be included in the Women Component Plan. Furthermore, in the Sub Committees constituted by Grama Sabha, fifty per cent of members shall be women.

The State Women's Commission and Women's Development Corporation are the two important agencies taking cases of gender issues and women's development. The Women's Commission take care of the atrocities against women, while the Women's Development Corporation takes initiative in the development activities for augmenting their economic status, employment, etc.

On an average, the women functionaries are found to have been performed effectively. However, there are exceptions also wherein women elected representatives are controlled from backside by their respective political parties and by other power blocks.

Although all the women contested were not politically enlightened, majority of them found to have a political will and wish. This has lead to active

participation of a large number of women of the State in election campaigns. The support of men of political parties have inspired and promoted the active participation of women in elections as well as in generating more interest in women in political affairs.

The initiative of women headed villages in development planning has been admirable. While scrutinising the developmental projects submitted for the action plan for the IX Five Year Plan for the State the State Planning Board has observed that the village panchayats, which have been headed by women, have submitted largest number of projects, which were relatively realistic as well as technically feasible and economically viable. Women in local administration are mainly new comers to the field. Therefore, they are able to work for the development of the panchayats without any prejudice. Their civic consciousness and responsibility have increased due to the reservation of seats in local bodies and they have taken it as an opportunity to do more efforts in attaining development of the panchayats. The informal discussions with the women representatives who have attended training at KILA also corroborate this view.

Political Economy of Official - Non-official Interface

In the recent amendments to the KPR Act, both the official and the elected functionaries have been given balancing powers and responsibilities. To be more specific, a panchayat president has the power to suspend an official (except the panchayat secretary and Gazetted Officers) when there is a case for a disciplinary action. The president has to ratify the decision in the next panchayat meeting. In the case of a secretary the president may request the Government to transfer him on the basis of a resolution for such effect by the Panchayat Samithi.

At the same time the secretary has the right to record his opinion, in writing, on all agenda of a panchayat meeting. If the secretary is not convinced (from the point of view of Acts, Rules, Government Orders and other financial proprieties) regarding the decision of the panchayat samithi, he has the right to recommend for reconsideration by the panchayat samithi. Even after the reconsideration, if the samithi again passes the same decision, the secretary may refer the matter to the Government. But the decisions have to be implemented when there is no reply from the Government within 15 days. In such case, both official and the elected representatives are given sufficient opportunities for raising issues relating to malfunctioning.

It is worth noting that the political parties have not, so far, been realised the importance of each tier of panchayats and the extent of responsibilities entrusted with it. In the emerging scenario, for example, a District Panchayat President may be having a status very near to that of a State Minister; but if we look into the status of candidates, in their respective political parties, the picture is not desirable. As a result of it, it is easy for the higher level political leaders and bureaucrats to influence the decisions of the panchayat functionaries. The indirect influence of the higher level politicians may come out in the form of a pressure for a change in the leadership in panchayats through the party politics or in the form of influencing a transfer of an administrator through the State Government. These type of frictions may be avoided if political parties understand and consider the level of operation of respective panchayats and provide candidature accordingly. In such a situation, an MLA or an MP may not be having any difficulty with Panchayati Raj Institutions since they will be working/interacting with leaders who are similar in positions with them. In such an augmented status of panchayat functionaries, some of the problems of bureaucrats will be solved just as they are comfortable to work with Ministers. In fact, the service and advice of senior level politicians are required for panchayats particularly in the case of integrated planning for sustainable development of panchayats.

Kerala has made an attempt in making the District Collector the Secretary and Chief Executive Officer of the District Panchayat. The much acclaimed Committee on Decentralisation has recommended that "the District Collector should be made the Secretary and Chief Executive Officer of the District Panchayat" (Committee on Decentralisation, 1996, p.21.). But the recommendation has not been accepted. Surprisingly enough, the Government has decided to appoint another bureaucrat as Secretary of the District Panchayat. In effect, the attempt in curtailing the burden of one bureaucrat has boomeranged and landed the District Panchayats in Kerala with that of two! The District Collector is the Chairman of the District Level Expert Committee (DLEC). The Collector will nominate the Chairman of the Block Level Expert Committee (BLEC) and the Chairman and Convenor of the Subject Committee, the Convenor of the Municipal Level Expert Committee (MLEC) and the Chairperson of the Corporation Level Expert Committee (CLEC). Through these expert committees, the District Collector is able to make his influence.

VI People's Campaign for the Ninth Plan

'People's Campaign for the Ninth Plan', the first attempt in the world in decentralised planning with people's participation, was formally inaugurated on 17 August, 1996. Decentralisation and people's participation are the hallmarks of this novel approach. In fact, it has inaugurated an era of planning from below. The background of the timeliness and importance may be traced to a number of factors[10].

The primary objective of the Campaign is to ensure that the local bodies prepare and prioritise a shelf of integrated projects in a scientific manner. Besides the schemes that are implemented by the line departments, due care has to be taken to incorporate suggestions made from below. It is envisaged that at least 35-40 per cent of the plan should consist of schemes formulated and implemented by the local bodies within their respective areas of responsibilities. Accordingly, out of the total plan outlay of Rs.16100 crores for the Ninth Five Year Plan for the State, Rs.6000 crores are earmarked for LSGIs. The total plan devolution to local bodies in 1997-98 was Rs.1025 Crores (36 per cent of the annual plan for 1997-98), and in 1998-99 it was raised to Rs.1178 crores (around 39 per cent of the annual plan for 1998-99). The amount allotted for LSGIs comprised of Rs.276 crores for State sponsored schemes and the remaining Rs.749 crores as plan grant-in-aid for the Annual Plan for 1997-98 and in 1998-99, the plan grant-in-aid component was enhanced to Rs.950 crores.

In view of the expected massive people's participation, preparation of such a background was found to have been a prerequisite. For this purpose, the planning process has been moulded in a Campaign mode. An idiosyncratic feature of this Campaign is the political consensus by all political parties in the State. The Campaign has been guided by a High Level Council of Guidance and a host of institutions are involved in the process. The organisational framework and institutions involved in the Campaign are given in Chart 3. The People's Campaign is

---

[10] Apart from the historical background other forces that resulted in the introduction of the Campaign are:

1) the prevailing critique of centralised planning and administration in the country;

2) failure of hitherto efforts at decentralisation and the intimidating long list of obstacles that new attempts at genuine decentralisation face; and

3) The contemporary development challenges of the State of Kerala which by consensus demand a decentralised approach to planning as also a revival of the participatory spirit to protect the widely acclaimed gains of the past.

markedly distinct from other experiments in decentralised planning attempts elsewhere in the world on the following five counts.

i. Mass Conscientisation

The planning process itself is perceived as an instrument of mass conscientisation. That is to say, the methodology of creating the shelf of projects/schemes itself is as important as the proposals themselves from the point of view of participation of the people. By doing this, it is expected to break the atmosphere of cynicism that exists among the people regarding the economic development of the State.

ii. Subsidiarity

Under Plan Campaign what is suggested is a system of multi-level planning, where the lowest unit is allowed to plan and implement everything that can be performed most effectively at that level and only the residual is left to the higher levels. Many advantages are claimed for such planning process from below: the plan programme thus would become more responsive to local needs and conditions, it would permit a more integrated development process as distinct from the present watertight departmental development interventions, mobilisation of local resources would become feasible, more importantly, by virtue of greater participation of the people it would make planning more transparent and implementation more efficient (Isaac and Harilal, 1997, p.53.).

iii. Empowering local bodies

The campaign is also an attempt to empower the panchayat bodies. There exists even today a large number of impediments in the way of the efficient functioning of the Panchayats: lack of finance, bureaucratic hurdles, absence of clear rules, out dated related Acts and so on. The Campaign smoothed the process of empowering local bodies. In fact, in Kerala, it is the experience/lessons that have had formed the planning process which helped in a greater extent in framing the Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Act 1999. Thus, it has facilitated a 'learning by doing' approach in democratic decentralisation in the State.

iv. Institutionalisation of the process

The Campaign is an attempt to conceptualise, operationalise and institutionalise a system of multi-level, people centred planning process suitable to the regional specificities of Kerala.

v. Integrated Approach

While optimum solutions for many problems are to be found at the local level, there are also issues which require to be addressed at higher levels. It is also important that development interventions are integrated both horizontally and vertically among various tiers of decision making so the complementaries are maximised and conflicts reduced to the minimum. What is being advocated in the context of the People's Campaign, therefore, is a system of multi-level planning, where the lowest unit is allowed to plan and implement everything that can be performed most effectively at that level and all the rest is left to the higher levels (Govt. of Kerala, State Planning Board, n.d.).

The People's Campaign is also an effort to consolidate and articulate public opinion in favour of decentralised planning and thereby help the government to translate its commitment to concrete actions. The process of planning from below would not have been possible without the series of measures taken by the State Government to facilitate the same. It should, however, be noted that these measures were not ready in place at the beginning, but have evolved in response to the popular demand from below and requirements of the Campaign as it progressed from one state to other (Govt. of Kerala, State Planning Board, n.d.) .

Training for the Plan Campaign

An important component of the Campaign has been the extensive training and orientation programme for a large number of resource persons, various functionaries and volunteers. In fact, each phase of the Campaign has been preceded by a training programme. In the first phase a three tier programme of state, district/block /local training, covering more than one lakh resource persons, was undertaken. For conducting the training programmes effectively and time-bound manner a cascade model strategy was adopted. It was difficult to train all the resource persons at one centralised place due to time constrains. Therefore, a three tier training programme had been envisaged: 1) a state level training programme for Key Resource Persons, 2) a district level training programme for District Resource persons, and 3) a Panchayat/Municipal level training for Local Resource persons. The State Level Key Resource Persons (KRP) trained District Level Resource Person (DRP), who in turn trained Local Level Resource Persons (LRP). The course content of each phase of training is given in Table 6.

Table 6 Course content of Different Rounds of Training

Modules	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Challenges of Development	-	+	+	*	*	+	*
Decentralisation Philosophy	-	+	+	*	*	+	*
Rules and statutes	-	+		*	-	*	-
Grama Sabhas	-						
PRA Techniques	*	-					
Secondary data	+	-					
Development Report	+	-					
Projects		*	-	-	*	*	+
Plan Documents				-	-	*	+
Appraisal				*		+	-
Sectoral Development Perspectives	+	-	-	+			
Implementation						+	-
Micro Development Models				-			
Integration	*	*	*		-		
SC/ST, Gender	+	+	+	*	*	+	+

+ Main Theme, - Sub Theme, * Minor Theme

Source: Govt. of Kerala (1999): Economic Review, 1998, State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram , p.203.

The second phase of training was to impart knowledge regarding the preparation of development reports at the village panchayat level. In the second phase, more persons were trained and the newly selected persons were selected by the respective District Planning Committees. Training was given on how to prepare development reports and to give importance to various sectors, classes were concentrated on primary sector, secondary sector, etc. Monitoring procedures of the existing programmes, role of financial institutions in local level development, etc. also have been dealt with in the training period. These state level resource persons trained at the second phase took classes for the district level training programme at the second phase. The training to the village panchayat level resource persons has then been followed.

The third phase of training concentrated on formulation of projects, programmes, etc. Project is the micro operational unit of development action. Combining similar project a programme is formulated. Schemes

are formulated at state level as integrated development activities. About one lakh projects have been formulated in the State under various panchayat raj institutions. According to the priority at local level and availability of fund, these projects will be implemented at various levels.

The fourth and fifth phases of training concentrated on the preparation and the content of Plan Document. Following this the village panchayat level and Block level Plan documents were prepared. The participants in the training at the fifth phase were the Block Panchayat Presidents and Vice Presidents, Block Development Officers (Secretaries of Block Panchayats) and the State level Resource persons. In continuation to the training for Block level resource persons, training was also given to the persons involved in the formulation of the District panchayat development plan. In the sixth and seventh round of the training programmes, issues relating to plan implementation were taken up. Table 8 gives the distribution of participants.

Table 7 Participation in Training/empowerment Programme

Phase	State	District	Block	Panchayat/ Municipality
I	375(5)	11716(3)		100000(1)
II	660(3)	11808(2)		100000(1)
III	300(4)	1146(3)		
IV	3014(3)		1500000(2)	
V	1186(3)		10000(2)	
	304(2)			
VI	150(2)	6000(2)		
	300(3)		6000(1)	
VII	2890(2)		6000(1)	
	3360(2)		25000(2)	

Note: 1) Number in parantheses represents number of days

2) Do not include one day conferences like 3 state level conferences of presidentsand chairpersons, numerous regional conferences of KRPs, VTCs, DLEC members, Block Panchayat Secretaries and District Conferences of DRPs, etc.

Source: Government of Kerala (1999): Economic Review, 1998, Stat Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram

The process of decentralised planning may be divided into six distinct phases as follows.

Phase I Grama Sabha/Ward Committees

In decentralised planning the first stage is the elaborate discussion on problems of development and identification of opportunities in the form of local level needs. In Kerala this has been achieved through Grama Sabhas (for Municipalities by ward conventions). As part of the Ninth Plan, Special Grama Sabhas were convened. Special effort was made for ensuring participation of the people on a wider scale. Special emphasis has been given for mobilising women. For popularising the activities, such propaganda measures as quiz, festival of development lamps, 'Vilambara jathas', etc. have been conducted by the panchayats and colourful posters, advertisements involving all branches of media were resorted to. In order to ensure maximum participation, the Grama Sabhas were convened on holidays.

In order to facilitate proper guidance for the Grama Sabhas adequate preparations were taken in the form of training the Resource Persons. Around 650 Key Resource Persons (KRPs) at the state level, 12000 Resource Persons at the district level and more than one lakh persons at the local level were given training to take active part in the conduct of Grama Sabhas and group discussions on development sector, and to facilitate structured discussions.

After a brief inaugural function, people were encouraged to air their development problems in their ward. Then the participants split themselves into various subject groups for discussions. In general, there were 12 subject groups, assigned to 12 areas of local development, as suggested by the State Organisers. The groups are: 1) agriculture and irrigation, 2) fisheries and animal husbandry, 3) education, 4) transport, energy and markets, 5) industry, 6) housing and social welfare, 7) public health and drinking water, 8) culture, 9) women's welfare, 10) co-operatives, 11) welfare of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, and 12) resource mobilisation.

The trained resource persons facilitated the semi-structured discussions. A model questionnaire for structuring the discussions, which was to be adopted by the resource persons to suit the local conditions, was also circulated. The aims of the group discussions were three-fold: first, certain qualitative, and to a very limited extent, quantitative information with respect to that particular development sector of the ward is elicited; secondly, development problems of the ward with reference to the sector

are listed and the group may prioritise the needs; and thirdly, the people were also guided to analyse the problems on the basis of their experience and, to the extent possible make suggestions of solutions. From each group one or two representatives were selected for participating in the development seminar that was to follow at the Panchayat/Municipal level. The deliberations of each of the group were summed up at the plenary session of the Grama Sabha.

Phase II : Development Seminars

During the second phase, a development seminar was conducted in all local bodies. The seminar was conducted to arrive at broad statement of solutions to various development problems. Apart from representatives selected by Grama Sabhas, the seminars were also attended by all the key officials of the area and invited experts from the locality and outside.

The discussion in the development seminars were based on a printed 'Panchayat Development Report', which provided necessary background information for sector-wise discussions based on socio-economic status of the Panchayat/Municipality. The reports were prepared on the basis of: 1) Consolidation of Grama Sabha reports, 2) Review of ongoing schemes, 3) Collection of secondary data, 4) Geographical study of the area, and 5) a brief survey of local history. These development reports may be considered as bench mark study on development of their respective regions. The preparation of the Panchayat Development Reports was to go on concurrently with the Grama Sabha meetings. All Panchayats (990) and Municipalities (55) produced their development reports. The reports run from 50 to 200 pages. Each has a chapter on each of the 12 task force topics mentioned earlier.

Panchayat Development Report (PDR)

Preparation of the Panchayat Development Report (PDR) is an important focal point of the People's Planning. Felt needs of the people and local problems identified at the Grama Sabhas would be dominated by the subjective aspirations of the local people. To formulate a plan that meets such subjective aspirations, an objective assessment of the problems identified in the Grama Sabhas is essential. Both material and human resources available also has to be made subject to objective assessment so as to understand the resource potential and constraints and to make rational choices. The traditional wisdom of the people together with the theory

and practice of modern science help the formulation of development activities. The PDR is envisaged to integrate and incorporate such information as noted above and to lay down a perspective for the comprehensive development of the panchayat.

The ultimate aim of the development reports was to initiate discussions to prepare the economic development projects. Therefore, each development sector has been analysed and the potential for development identified. Cultural, gender and organisational aspects of development have been incorporated in the analysis. The development report is to have two parts as follows:

Part I (with three chapters)

1. Introduction to the panchayat and People's Planning
2. Economic and Social History
3. Geo-Physical Conditions and Resources

Part II (with 15 chapters giving the present status, problems and development prospects of each sector).

1. Agriculture and irrigation
2. Animal husbandry
3. Fisheries
4. Forestry
5. Industry
6. Energy
7. Housing
8. Transport
9. Education
10. Health
11. Drinking water and sanitation
12. Women and Development
13. Welfare of SC/ST
14. Resource mobilisation
15. Culture.

Before writing the development report, the task force constituted by the panchayat has ensured that the Grama Sabha reports have been consolidated, ongoing schemes are reviewed, necessary secondary data have been collected, geographical study of the area has been conducted and local history has been documented.

Development Seminars took place in movie theatres, schools, co-operative society halls, Hindu marriage halls, private or public, devoted or rented.

In the seminar integrated solution for various problems, identified at Grama Sabhas/Ward conventions, were arrived at through discussions among people's representatives, officials and experts. The outcome of the second phase may be identified as: 1) Generation of an extensive local data base, 2) a comprehensive survey of all development sectors for all panchayats and municipalities, 3) a list of possible solutions to the development problems, and 4) formation of task forces to prepare development projects for each development sector. It has been estimated that around 3 lakh people, consisting of representatives from Grama Sabhas, elected representatives, local leaders of political parties, line department officials, local experts, etc. participated in the Development Seminars.

Phase III : Task Forces

In the third phase, the task forces constituted for all sectors expected to convert the solutions suggested in the Development Seminars into projects /schemes proposals in a format that would be included in the plan. The task of project preparation demanded participation of more officials and technically qualified people than the earlier phases. Accordingly, special efforts were made to ensure participation of officials and local level experts. While chairperson of the task force was an elected representative, an officer from the concerned department was supposed to be its convenor.

The task forces were to undertake detailed review of the suggestions made at the seminar and draw up the project/scheme proposals based upon them giving the necessary technical, cost, benefit, time frame and other details mandated by the State Planning Board. The handbook prepared for the purpose suggested a simple format for the projects to be prepared by the task force. It was suggested, to ensure uniformity, that the project reports should generally have the following components:

Introduction; explaining necessity and relevance of the project.

1. Objective; in well defined (as far as possible in quantitative/ measurable) terms.
2. Beneficiaries; criteria proposed to be followed in selecting beneficiaries or benefiting areas.
3. Activities; technical analysis and time-frame of all project activities.
4. Organisation; agencies and their role in implementing the project activities.
5. Financial analysis; investment needed for each activity and identification of source of funds.
6. Cost-benefit Analysis; preliminary analysis of all direct and indirect benefits and costs including a gender and environment impact assessment.
7. Monitoring; details of the proposed monitoring mechanism.

The State Planning Board had issued a set of guidelines for the preparation of SCP and TSP projects. Further, it was recommended to earmark 10 per cent of the plan assistance for projects meant for development of women.

The task forces prepared around one lakh projects for the consideration of panchayats. Around 12000 task forces functioned at the village level alone with a total participation of 1.2 lakh persons for the preparation of these projects.

Phase IV: Panchayat Plan

The fourth phase of the Campaign was to formulate the annual plan of local bodies. For finalising the plan, the panchayats were expected to: 1) Make a clear assessment of their capacity to mobilise resource from various sources to finance the plan; 2)Evolve a development strategy on the basis of problems identified and resource potential of the locality, prioritise and select projects to be implemented; and 3) Decide a monitoring mechanism for successful implementation of each project selected. An expert group constituted by the Grama Panchayat drew up a panchayat development plan for every village panchayats, on the basis of the reports of the task forces.

Broad guidelines were given to local bodies regarding the sectoral allocation of plan funds provided in the state budget, by the local bodies. While the

guidelines for allocation for rural local bodies emphasised productive sector, the urban local bodies have been guided to give emphasis on social service sector. The details are given in Table 9.

The plan document comprises eight chapters and four appendices. The Chapters are on:

1. Preface
2. Development Strategy
3. Resource mobilisation
4. Projects, Sector-wise
5. Integrated Development Programmes
6. Scheduled Caste-Scheduled Tribe Development Programme
7. Women's Development Programme
8. Monitoring system

Appendices:

1. Various Fora regarding the Plan
2. Project Documents
3. People's Plan Documents
4. Suggestions to higher levels.

Special Component Plan (SCP) & Tribal Sub Plan (TSP)

About 67 per cent of the Special Component Plan and Tribal Sub Plan have been devolved to the local bodies in 1997-98. A large number of schemes for the development of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes also have been devolved to the local bodies. The local bodies provided about Rs. 8 crores for the SCP & TSP from their own revenue and this has extended the source of fund for development programmes of the vulnerable sections of the society. The democratic decentralisation of SCP/TSP creates opportunity for the weaker sections to directly participate in planning for their own welfare.

Women Component Plan

The campaign gave due importance to gender issues also. Participation of women in the campaign was given emphasis. The training programmes for the campaign incorporated the theme of 'gender and development'.

Most important is the incorporation of a mandatory section of 'Gender impact statement' in the assessment of the development projects. And the local bodies were given the guideline to set apart 10 per cent of the plan funds be allotted to the projects directly benefiting women. Although almost all the local bodies prepared special projects for women, in no district the target of 10 per cent was met in 1997-98.

Phase V: Annual Plan of Higher Tiers

The fifth phase of the Campaign was the integration of the local plans and formulation of block and district plans. The block and district panchayats also have their own separate plan schemes. The sequential ordering of the process was made in order to ensure that the plans of the various tiers are integrated and the plans of the higher tiers were complementary to those of the lower tiers. Special emphasise has been given for ensuring backward and forward linkages in projects. The block and district panchayats also organised seminars to discuss their draft plans. They have to undertake a detailed analysis of local Development Reports, local Plan Documents and to give attention to the recommendations from below.

District Panchayat Development Plan

The plan proposals of Block panchayats and municipalities have been integrated at the District level. Broad strategy for district level development has been evolved by the task forces constituted by the District Planning Committee for the purpose. However, at present the laws and rules favours the implementation of planned activities by District Panchayats such that the development plan projects are formulated and implemented only for the panchayat areas of the district concerned. The Urban areas of the district shall have to be excluded for the purpose of formulating and implementing District Panchayat development plan.

The District Planning Committee forwards the integrated development plan for urban and rural areas of the district to the State. The State Planning Board is the state level co-ordinating agency and the framework for planning also has been set by the same state level agency.

As noted earlier, Kerala has a 'rurban' settlement pattern. The Constitutional stipulation of rural-urban distinction in the Panchayati Raj system creates the problem of integration at the district level. The District Panchayat's activities are limited to the rural areas. It is the

District Planning Committee, the agency which integrates the plans of District Panchayat and Municipalities in a district. At the implementation stage also there are problems in assigning district level officers to District Panchayats. Thus the rural urban linkage found to have been blurred under the present system. Of course, the rectification of this requires an amendment to the Constitution.

State Plan

The State plan has been formulated by the State Level Task Forces constituted by the State Planning Board. The line departments have been directly represented in the Task Forces. The Board ensured that the proposals made by the Panchayat Raj-Nagarapalika institutions through their District Planning Committee are duly incorporated in the State Plan.

Phase VI: Plan Appraisal

The sixth phase of the Plan Campaign was for the appraisal of technical feasibility and financial viability of the projects and plans. Since DPCs did not have sufficient technical expertise, Voluntary Technical Corps (VTCs) were formed requesting retired technical experts and professionals to enrol themselves as volunteer to appraise the projects and plans of local bodies in order to rectify the weaknesses in technical aspects and financial analysis.

Expert Committees

The projects and plan documents prepared by local bodies, and appraised by the local bodies and the District Planning Committees, has to be appraised for technical feasibility, financial viability and procedural acceptability. For this purpose Voluntary Technical Corps (VTC) were constituted at Block Panchayat , Municipality and Corporation level. **District Level Expert Committees (DLEC) were also constituted in all the districts for issuing technical sanctions to the projects.** However, due to delay in issuing technical sanction to all project by VTCs and DLECs, more Expert committees with official and non-official members have been constituted at Block, Municipality and Corporation levels, namely Block Level Expert Committees (BLEC), Municipal Level Expert Committees (MLEC) and Corporation Level Expert Committees (CLEC).   The composition of the DLEC has been revised. The officials in the Expert Committees have been made mandatory members. The DLEC consist of 64 mandatory members, including the District Collector and District Planning Officer.

BLEC, MLEC and CLEC have 15 subject committees each, while DLEC has 24 subject committees. The existing Voluntary Technical Corps/Plan Appraisal Teams at Block Panchayat, Municipality and Corporation levels have been deemed as Expert Committees in Block Panchayats, Municipalities and Corporations. The District Collectors have a prominent role in constituting the Expert Committees, as they have powers to nominate members to the Expert Committees. The non-official members of the DLEC are nominated by the State Planning Board. The District Collector is the Chairman of the DLEC. The District Planning officer is the convenor and the District Planning Office is the secretariat of DLEC.

The District Planning Committees (DPCs) approved the plan of local bodies on the recommendations of these expert committees. It is important to note that the expert committees have no right whatsoever to change the priorities set by the local bodies. Their tasks were clearly confined to technical and financial appraisal of the projects and to suggest such modifications as would make the proposed projects viable and feasible.

Implementation of Development Plan

The basis for the financial backing of the plan projects of the local bodies is the share (35-40% of total plan allotment) of State Plan expenditure for the 9th plan. However, the local bodies can also implement projects from funds raised on its own and from contributions, voluntary work and such other raised resources. The centrally sponsored welfare programmes are usually implemented through the Block Panchayat.

The actual implementation of the projects may be done in four ways depending upon the nature of the work. First, the beneficiaries may constitute a committee, viz. Beneficiary Committee, and the Committee may undertake the project. In these cases the projects will be benefiting a number of individual beneficiaries. When a particular project is meant for a specific area also, beneficiary committee may be constituted. Secondly, the Panchayat Samithi may execute the works directly. The third preference is given to certain authorised NGOs like CSTFORD and Nirmithi Kendra, which are accredited by the Government of Kerala for carrying out such works. Finally, there is the option for open tender. In all the cases, utmost care has been taken to avoid benami works so that maximum benefit is ensured with minimum cost.

VII On Evaluating the Progress

Although it is premature to evaluate the experimental decentralised planning, which is considered to be a pioneering attempt in the world, certain impressions may be gathered from the experience of last two-and-a-half years. The achievements made so far has been legendary in the sense that it has attracted world wide attention and acceptance as a new methodology in decentralised planning. According to World Bank, "The decentralised planning process is largest of its kind in the world".

Our attempts in the direction of evaluating the performance of the process, by means of a rapid appraisal, identifies elements of success on the following nine counts.

1. Qualitative change
2. Speed of the Programme
3. Nature of the schemes
4. Attitudinal change of the staff
5. Level of participation
6. Equitable prioritisation
7. Participation of women in development
8. General response of the people
9. Technical advice and its acceptability.

Justice Krishna Iyer, renowned social activist and thinker, observes the Campaign as follows: "The people's campaign marks the beginning of a social revolution in Kerala. The failure of democracy in India consists in the failure to share power with the people. In Kerala today political power is in the hands of the people" (Iyer, 1998).

References

Amin, Samir (1991): *"Four Comments on Kerala",* Monthly Review, New York, Jan. 1991.

Centre for Development Studies (CDS) (1980): **Some Notes on Possibilities of Decentralised Development in Kerala**, Working Paper No. 106, Thiruvananthapram.

Committee on Decentralisation (1996): Interim Report, Government of Kerala, Thiruvanathapuram.

Committee on Decentralisation (1997): Final Report, Volume 1, Part A & B, Government of Kerala, Thiruvanathapuram.

Gazetteer of India (1986): Kerala State Gazetteer, Volume I (by Adoor K.K. Ramachandran Nair), published by the State Editor, Kerala Gazetteers, Thiruvananthapuram.

Gazetteer of India (1989): Kerala State Gazetteer, Volume III Economic Affairs, published by the State Editor, Kerala Gazetteers, Thiruvananthapuram.

Government of India (1978): Report of the Working Group on Block Level Planning, Planning Commission, New Delhi.

Govt. of Kerala (nd.): The People's Campaign for Ninth Plan in Kerala: An Introduction, Kerala State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram.

Govt. of Kerala (nd.): Power to the People's Plan - Ninth Plan, State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram.

Govt. of Kerala (1996): People's Campaign for 9th Plan in Kerala: An Approach Paper, Kerala State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram.

Govt. of Kerala (1999): Economic Review 1998, State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram.

Isaac and Harilal (1997): "Planning for Empowerment: People's Campaign for Decentralised Planning in Kerala, Economic and Political Weekly, Jan.-4-11, p.53

Isaac, Thomas T.M. (1996): People's Campaign for 9th Plan: An Approach Paper, Kerala State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram.

Isaac, Thomas T.M. (1997): Janakiyasoothranam:Sidhanthavum Prayogavum (in Malayalam), Kerala State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram.

Isaac, Thomas T.M. (1999): People's Planning: Towards a Handbook, Kerala State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram.

Iyer, Krishna (1998): *'Beginning of Revolution'*, Mathrubhumi, 17 August 1998.

Oommen, M.A. (n.d.): *'Development Experience, Development Priorities and Fiscal Resources of Kerala'*, in People & Development, Centre of Science and Technology for Rural Development, Thrissur.

Ramachandran, V. (1995) : "*Kerala*", Status of Panchayats in the State of India, Institute of Social Sciences, Concept, New Delhi.

Ramachandran, V.K. (1996): *'On Kerala's Development Achievements'*, in Dreze, Jene and Sen, Amartya (1996) Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives, Oxford University Press, Delhi.

Sreekumar, T.T. (1990): *'Neither Rural Nor Urban: Spatial Formation and the Development Process'*, Economic and Political Weekly, 1-8 September.

Woodcock, George (1967): Kerala – A Portrait of the Malabar Coast, Faber and Faber, London.