

**Mandatory and Civic Functions, Social Welfare Schemes and Maintenance of Assets in Local Governments : Findings of a Study in Fifty Grama Panchayats in Kerala**

**B.A.Prakash**

(Summary of a Study Conducted for the Third State Finance Commission, Kerala )

**July 2005**

- With the enactment of Kerala Panchayat Raj Act 1994, a number of functions were given to the Grama Panchayats.
- The important functions were the plan formulation and implementation, transfer of new administrative and development functions, transfer of welfare and pension schemes and maintenance of assets of government institutions
- This study examines the mandatory and civic functions, social welfare schemes and maintenance of assets in local governments in Kerala
- The study is based on a sample of Fifty Grama Panchayats belonging to 13 districts of Kerala

# Hypothesis

“Entrusting a large number of new functions without strengthening the administrative set up, changes in rules and regulations, fiscal decentralization and providing adequate staff have created very serious constraints in the proper functioning of Grama Panchayats.”

## **I. Decentralization and Transfer of Functions**

- The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional amendments were considered as the most important milestones in the local self governance in India
- Based on the above, the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act 1994 and Kerala Municipality Act 1994 were passed.
- The Acts envisaged the transfer of powers and functions of various departments of the State Government to the three tiers of Panchayats, Municipal Councils and Corporations.
- Though a number of institutions were transferred to the Grama Panchayats, they were assigned only a few functions.

- These institutions continued to be under the administrative control of the parent Department.
- The Grama Panchayats were assigned the responsibility of constructing, repairing and maintaining building and other items of assets, equipment etc.
- The government also entrusted the responsibility of implementing a number of major welfare schemes and pension schemes to the Grama Panchayats.
- The plan formulation and implementation functions were also entrusted to the Grama Panchayats.

## **II. Profile of Sample Grama Panchayats**

- The majority of the Panchayats had primary occupation as the major activity and had high incidence of migration to the Gulf Countries and other parts of India.
- The high incidence of BPL households in the Panchayats.

### **III.Mandatory and Civic Services**

- The Grama Panchayats have been performing mainly three types of functions viz., mandatory, civic and provision of basic infrastructure.
- Mandatory functions are issue of various certificates, register the birth and death, giving permissions for building construction and issue of licenses or permits for other purposes.
- The study showed that on an average, the Grama Panchayats were getting 134 applications for birth and death certificates in three months.
- The average days required for issuing the birth, death and marriage certificates were 3 to 4 days.

- Renewal of building permits required about 20 days on an average.
- The average number of days required for issue of the permits for building construction and ownership certificates ranged between 10 to 12 days.
- The number of days required to issue license for starting shops was 6 days and for starting a factory or workshop was 7 days on an average.
- It was revealed that majority of the Grama Panchayats were protecting the water resources such as wells and ponds, collecting and disposing solid waste, taking measures to prevent communicable diseases, and providing street lighting.

- The study found that majority of the Grama Panchayats were not doing anything to provide vital civic services like disposal of waste water, cleaning markets, preventing the sale of unsuitable and damaged food articles, inspecting the hotels and other establishments selling food articles, protecting cemeteries, providing public parking places for vehicles, building waiting sheds, public toilets, killing street dogs and implementing relief measures in natural calamities.
- 48 per cent of the Grama Panchayats do not consider the disposal of solid waste as an important civic function of the Panchayats.
- 78 per cent have not taken any steps to dispose liquid waste and waste water by improving the system of drainage.
- The study found that the Panchayats were not adopting a balanced approach with regard to the development of various items of infrastructure.

## **IV. Welfare and Pension Schemes**

- Among the welfare and pension schemes transferred to the Panchayats, the five schemes which had affected the working of them are, Agricultural Workers Pension, Unemployment Assistance, National Old Age Pension, Destitute Pension and Pension for the Disabled and Mentally Retarded Persons.
- Though, the responsibility of pension distribution was transferred to Grama Panchayats, adequate staff was not transferred from other departments or provided the required additional staff.
- The results of the study suggest that the implementation of Unemployment Assistance Scheme had adversely affected the overall functioning of the Panchayats.

- Of the fifty Grama Panchayats covered in the study, 26 reported that the Old Age Pension Scheme had adversely affected the activities of the Panchayats.
- Of the fifty Grama Panchayats covered in the study, 26 reported that the Destitute Pension Scheme had adversely affected other activities and 7 reported that it affected their overall functioning very much.
- Of the fifty Grama Panchayats covered in the study, 25 reported that the Pension for the Disabled and Mentally Retarded Persons had adversely affected other activities and 8 reported that it affected their functioning very much.
- The study found that heavy administrative work involved in the distribution of pension had adversely affected the mandatory, civic functions and plan activities.

## **V. Maintenance of Assets of the Institutions transferred**

- Between 1995 and 2001 a number of institutions such as Veterinary Sub-center, Veterinary Dispensaries, Anganwadis, Primary Health Centres, Government Dispensaries and Government Lower Primary Schools etc. were transferred to Panchayats.
- The Panchayats were entrusted with the responsibility to maintain the assets of the above institutions.
- The major problems faced by the hospitals are lack of medicines, lack of electricity, lack of drinking water, lack of building, lack of proper facilities like shed etc. for treatment, poor office facility, lack of stationary and lack of proper maintenance of building and other assets.
- The study found that in spite of decentralization there was not much change in the basic physical facilities available in the Veterinary Hospitals.

- It is pointed out that the transfer of power and functions had not improved the state of affairs of the Primary Health Centers. Lacks of adequate staff, medicines, physical facilities etc. are the major problems faced by the PHCs at present.
- Lack of space for class rooms, play ground, drinking water. Toilets, library, equipments, compound wall and old building of schools are the major problems faced by the schools at present.
- In spite of the transfer of the responsibility of maintenance to the Panchayats there had not been much change in the nature of maintenance and improvement in physical facilities.

- Inadequate space for buildings, lack of facilities such as electricity, water, toilet, playground, compound wall; lack of adequate staff, very low wages, heavy work load; lack of furniture, toys and other play equipments etc. are the basic problems faced by Anganwadis.
- From the review of the expenditure of Grama Panchayats incurred on the institutions, the following conclusions can be drawn.
- The Grama Panchayats were incurring expenditure for the construction and maintenance of assets of the institutions transferred to them without any priority or criterion.

- High priority was given for the construction, maintenance and other items of expenditure of Anganwadis.
- The dual role of the government departments and Grama Panchayats on the activities of Veterinary Hospitals, Public Health Centers and LP Schools had created confusion relating to the duties and financial responsibilities of the Panchayats.
- Though in most of the Panchayats, the work load increased to 2-3 times, there was no corresponding change in administrative set ups for increase in the number of staff.
- The study concludes that one of the basic causes for the deterioration in the mandatory, civic and developmental activities of the Panchayats is the lack of adequate staff.

## **VI. Plan Performance**

- The delay in formulation and getting administrative sanctions of projects, lack of time schedule for implementation, the low priority given to plan projects etc. have resulted in poor performance of the majority of the Grama Panchayats.
- Due to the implementation of the plan projects at late phase of the financial year, most of the Grama Panchayats were forced to postpone many projects as spill over projects for next year which affected the smooth implementation of the new projects.
- Majority of the Grama Panchayats are not doing many vital civic functions like collection and disposal of waste, disposal waste from markets and other public places. Maintain public toilet facilities, parking facilities, waiting sheds and cemeteries.

- Though a number of functions were transferred to Grama Panchayats, there was no corresponding change in the administrative set up or increase in the number of staffs which adversely affected the plan performance.
- Since the pension schemes were transferred without providing much additional staff, the Panchayats gave top priority for pension distribution and accorded only a low priority for plan activities.
- The frequent restrictions imposed on the treasury transactions had affected the payments of bills of Grama Panchayats which caused poor plan performance.
- The delay in the execution of plan projects by contractors and Beneficiary Committees and payment of the beneficiary contribution of the public.

- The delay of Kerala State Electricity Board in the execution of electricity projects sponsored by the Grama Panchayat is another reason for the delay in implementing electricity projects.
- The disputed and differences of opinion of the members of the Grama Panchayat Committees and allegation of corruption have also affected plan implementation in five Grama Panchayats.
- The tendency to distribute plan funds in the name of beneficiary projects is widespread in the Panchayats.
- There is very little discussion about the development issues of the Panchayats in the Grama Sabhas.
- The participation of public in the execution of projects by supplying voluntary labour is also very nominal.

## **Suggestions**

- Make changes in the administrative set up and increase the number of staff.
- Instead of doing a number of functions and activities, the Grama Panchayats should give priority to mandatory and civic functions, formulation and implementation of plan projects meant for local level development, and social welfare and maintenance of assets.
- The priority should be given to development projects especially infrastructure projects needed for the growth of productive sectors like agriculture and industry, training manpower for employment generation schemes and social welfare schemes meant for poor sections.

- The tendency to spend a good part of the plan funds for personal beneficiary oriented schemes should be discouraged and priority should be given for infrastructure oriented schemes.
- For implementing the plan projects efficiently and in a time bound manner, the administrative and technical sanction of the projects should be obtained during the preceding financial year.
- The Kerala State Electricity Board, Water Authority and other public agencies should be given priority for the implementation of the projects of Grama Panchayats.

**Table 1**  
**District wise Distribution of Sample Grama Panchayats**

<b>Sl.No</b>	<b>Name of Districts</b>	<b>Blocks where the sample located</b>	<b>Number of sample Grama Panchayats</b>
1	Thiruvananthapuram	7	10
2	Kollam	5	5
3	Pathanamthitta	1	1
4	Alappuzha	4	4
5	Kottayam	5	6
6	Idukki	2	2
7	Ernakulam	5	7
8	Thrissur	1	1
9	Palakkad	4	4
10	Malappuram	3	4
11	Kozhikode	1	2
12	Kannur	2	2
13	Kazargod	2	2
	Total	42	50

## Table 2

### Basic Information on the 50 Sample Grama Panchayats

1	Number of Panchayats having an area below 15 Sq.km	14
2	Number of Panchayats having an area of 15-30 Sq.km	26
3	Number of Panchayats having an area above 30 Sq.km	9
4	Average population per Panchayat (Number of persons)	30771
5	Average percentage of SC/ST population	13
6	Average literacy rate	85
7	Average number of wards	14
8	Average number of wards reserved for women	5
9	Average number of wards reserved for SC/ST	2
10	Number of Panchayats having urban area as its boundary	32
11	Panchayats having primary activities as major occupation	40
12	Number of Panchayats having migration to Gulf Countries	32
13	Number of Panchayats having migration to the other parts of India	22
14	Percentage of BPL families in the Panchayats	43
15	Number of Panchayats ruled by Left Democratic Front (LDF)	31
16	Number of Panchayats ruled by United Democratic Front (UDF)	17
17	Number of Panchayats ruled by others	2

## Table 3

### Institutions and Posts transferred to Grama Panchayats

Name of Departments	Transferred Posts and Institutions
1. Agriculture	Krishi Bhavans of the respective places
2. Animal Husbandry	Veterinary sub-centre, Veterinary Dispensary / Hospitals of respective places
3. Dairy Development	One Dairy Extension Officer and Auxiliary posts
4. Fisheries	One fisheries Sub Inspector
5. Rural Development	Two village Extension Officer posts
6. Social Welfare	Day Care Centres and Anganwadis of the respective places
7. SC Development	Balawadies, Balawady cum feeding centre, seasonal day care centre and dormitories of the respective places
8. Tribal Development	Balawadis, Medical Unit, Nursery Schools, Midwifery centres and Ayurvedic dispensaries of the respective places
9. Health Services (Allopathy)	Primary Health Centres and Government Dispensaries
10. Health Department (I.S.M)	Government Ayurvedic Dispensaries and Hospitals of the respective places
11. Health Department (Homoeo)	Government Homoeo Dispensaries and Hospitals of the respective places
12. General Education	Government Lower Primary Schools of the respective places
13. Public Works	One Public Works Overseer post

**Table 4****Institutions and Posts transferred to Block Panchayats**

<b>Name of Departments</b>	<b>Transferred Posts and Institutions</b>
1. Agriculture	One post of the Assistant Director and Auxiliary posts
2. Industry	One post of Industries Extension Officer
3. Rural Development	The post of the Block Development Officer and posts
4. Social Welfare	Care Homes, Old age Homes and similar respective places
5. SC Development	Prematric Hostels of the respective places and the post of Block Extension Officer
6. ST Development	Tribal Extension Officer
7. Health Services (Allopathy)	Block level Primary Health Centre / Community Health Centre, Taluk Hospitals / Government Hospitals
8. Health Department (I.S.M)	Taluk Hospitals of the respective places
9. Health Department (Homoeo)	Taluk Hospitals of the respective places

## Table 5

### Institutions and Posts transferred to District Panchayats

Name of Departments	Transferred Posts and Institutions
1. Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Two posts of Deputy Director and auxiliary posts</li> <li>ii. The post of District Soil Conservation Officer and auxiliary posts</li> <li>iii. One Assistant Executive Engineer and connected post</li> <li>iv. Soil Testing Laboratory</li> <li>v. Mobile Soil Testing Laboratory</li> <li>vi. District Agriculture Farm / Coconut nursery</li> </ul>
2. Animal Husbandry	<p>Veterinary Polyclinic, ICDP area office, Mobile Veterinary Dispensary, Mobile farm unit, Clinical Laboratories not attached to District Veterinary Centres</p>
3. Fisheries	<p>The fisheries schools of respective places</p>
4. Minor Irrigation	<p>One section consisting of one Assistant Engineer and connected staff</p>
5. Industries	<p>From the District Industries Centre, one manager post and connected staff</p>
6. Rural Development	<p>One post of Assistant Development Commissioner and the District Women's Welfare Officer and Auxiliary staff</p>
7. General Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. The upper Primary Schools and High Schools of the respective places</li> </ul>
8. Technical Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ii. One Section from the Deputy Director's Office</li> </ul>
9. Co-operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Tailoring and Garment making Training Centre of the respective places</li> </ul>
10. Public Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ii. Tailoring Trade Centres of the respective places</li> </ul>
	<p>One post of Assistant Registrar and one post of Clerk</p>
	<p>One division consisting of Executive Engineer and auxiliary staff.</p>

**Table 6****Institutions and Posts transferred to Municipal Councils /  
Municipal Corporations**

<b>Name of Departments</b>	<b>Transferred Posts and Institutions</b>
1. Agriculture	i. Kishi Bhavans of respective places ii. One post of Deputy Director of Agriculture
2. Animal Husbandry	The veterinary Polyclinic, sub-centre, Dispensary of the respective places
3. Fisheries	One post of the fisheries Sub Inspector
4. Industries Department	One post of Industrial Extension Officer
5. Health Services (Allopathy)	Community Health Centres, Government Hospitals, Taluk Hospitals of the respective places
6. Health Department (I.SM)	Taluk Hospitals of the respective places
7. Health Department (Homoeo)	Taluk Hospitals of the respective places
8. General Education Department	Government Primary Schools and High Schools of the respective places
9. Co-operative Department	One post of Senior Co-operative Inspector

## Table 7

### Number of Pension and Welfare Schemes implemented by the LSGIs

1. Agricultural worker's pension (Rs.120 per month)
2. Unemployment allowance (Rs.120 per month)
3. National old Age Pension (Rs.110 per month)
4. Destitute Pension (Rs.110 per month)
5. Pension for physically and mentally handicapped (Rs.110 per month)
6. Pension to unmarried women (Above 50 years) (Rs.110 per month)
7. National Mother Help Programme (Rs.500)
8. Balika Samrudhi Yojana
9. Financial Assistance to widows for the marriage of their daughters
10. Financial Assistance for marriage of scheduled caste women.
11. Travelling Allowance for scheduled caste candidates

**Thank You**