



## Impact of Grassroots Initiatives on Participatory Planning, Implementation and Monitoring of Rural Development – A Case Study from Tamilnadu

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### ABSTRACT

*Local governing institutions are granted constitutional legality as Local Government bodies responsible for socio-economic development in the rural areas. There are 29 subjects for which the panchayat is responsible with the help of Standing Committees to cover all subjects. The Gram Sabha acts as a community level accountability mechanism to ensure the functions of the PRI respond to people's needs. Good numbers of Gram Panchayats in the country have been making good attempts and also attain success in implementation of development programmes and achieved expected results. Study of such good practices, strategies, approaches and factors of people participation in the process of planning will be very important in order to analyze for replication in other places. Therefore, the present case study was conducted in a successful Nalukkottai Gram Panchayat, in Tamilnadu. The study critically reviewed the approaches and modalities of Grassroots Planning Process and institutional mechanism created to mobilize people participation in implementation of development works.*

**KEYWORDS :** Grassroots Planning, People Participation, Local Government, Gram Panchayat, Gram Sabha, Standing Committees, Constitutional Amendment, Transparency

### 1. Background of the Study

In India, the process of decentralization resulted in creation of people's institutions, local self-governments known as *Panchayat*. Local governing institutions are granted constitutional legality as Local Government bodies responsible for socio-economic development in the rural areas. There are 29 subjects for which the *panchayat* is responsible with the help of Standing Committees to cover all subjects. Each standing committee has the responsibility for the financial and executive administration of the schemes and programmes within the budgetary provisions of the *panchayat*. The budget includes both resources mobilized locally and funds devolved by the State Government. Through the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) are strengthened with clear areas of jurisdiction, authority and funds. PRIs have been assigned several development activities including health and population stabilization. The Gram Sabha acts as a community level accountability mechanism to ensure the functions of the PRI respond to people's needs. While fiscal devolution is a significant issue, lack of institutional modalities and clear guidelines on PRI participation and variable capacity among PRI are key lacunae.

Even though participatory planning implementation and monitoring of rural development projects is mandatory for all PRI institutions, majority of the institutions have not put full-fledged effort for mobilizing people for participation and involve them in the development process. But, a good number of Gram Panchayaths in the country have been making good attempts and also attain success in implementation of development programmes and achieved expected results in the field of provision of basic needs, health and sanitation, strengthening of livelihoods, natural resource management and village self sufficiency through people participation. Available literatures show participatory planning and implementation yields good results in terms of material benefits to the stakeholders and evolve better transparency and accountability. Study of such good practices, strategies, approaches and factors of people participation in the process of planning will be very important in order to analyze for replication in other places. Studying such cases also act as motivation others to evolve similar strategic planning process and methodologies to attain targeted development. Therefore, the present case study was conducted in a successful Gram Panchayat, selected from Tamilnadu. The study critically reviewed the approaches and modalities of Grassroots Planning Process and institutional mechanism created to mobilize people participation in implementation of development works. The study also focused to collect people's perceptions on functioning of panchayat on fulfillment of people needs.

### 2. Objectives

1. To study the status and process of participatory planning, imple-

mentation and monitoring of rural development schemes.

2. To examine the problems of people participation in planning and implementation.
3. To identify the factors contributed for successful planning and implementation at the grass-root level .
4. To understand the impact of participatory planning on the livelihoods of rural poor.

**3. Methodology & Sampling :** Nalukkottai Village Panchayat, Sivaganga district in Tamil Nadu was selected for the detailed case of study, based on its better performance and practice of Grassroot Planning in the panchayat, after preliminary review through available media sources, discussion with the state Panchayat Raj department and the district administration. To understand the impact, 30% of sample households in each hamlet were contacted and collected data on the village planning, people participation, functional delivery of the Panchayat and participatory planning in delivery of basic needs. Stratified random sampling was used to form different group based on their social status like SC, OBC, OC and women. Based on the proportion of the population available in different groups, in total 163 households were selected through systematic random sampling. Two FDGs were conducted to understand the overall development of the village and their impact on the individual's livelihoods.

Suitable semi-structured interview schedule was administered covering all the aspects like awareness level, social, economic and political participation. Level of development attained and deprived also studied. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and observation technique were used to collect data from selected respondents to understand the overall performance and responsibility of the GP and also identifies the functional difficulties. A check list was used to collect details from the gram panchayat functionaries as well as elected representatives about the process of planning and implementation of various schemes with people's participation.

### 4. Unique features of Nalukkottai Gram Panchayat

Nalukkottai Village, situated about 7 K.M. from the town of Sivagangai-district headquarter. It has four hamlets namely *Nalukottai*, *Thirunarayanapuram*, *Indira Nagar* and *Ramanathan Nagar*. The total population of the panchayat is 1775 comprises 877 males and 898 females. Though it is a small Village Panchayat, it is well-known for its unique leader Mr. NOV S Ramanathan who had put in strenuous efforts in making history in his life time with his selfless and untiring sacrifice to make Nalukottai a "Model Village" in the district and state. He was the Panchayat President from the year 1965 continuously for more than 4 decades and he was selected unopposed many times. After the death of this efficient leader, his daughter in-law Mrs. Rajeswari, presently following his footsteps as Panchayat President. This village

is an incredible model village not only in Tamilnadu, but also around the country as expected by the great soul of Mahatma. Thanks to spontaneous participation by villagers, it has evolved into an exceptional village panchayat of rare accomplishments. This village has all the basic facilities like drinking water, sanitation, road, education, etc.

Adjudged a "Model Panchayat" for 2000-2001 by the Tamil Nadu Government, the village sports a healthy look with trendy cement street and drainage facilities. All the dwelling units have been converted into either tiled or concrete roofed structures. This panchayat has got the **Nirmal Gram Puraskar Award in 2004-2005** from the Union government for ensuring the construction of toilets to all the houses, planting trees in every street, constructing drainage channel. Not surprisingly, Nalukkottai has got the Tamil Nadu Government's "**Uthamar Gandhi**" award for the first time in the state which carries a cash award of Rupees Five Lakhs for developmental works in its local body. The panchayat already has the distinction of having bagged many awards from the state and the Union Government for its wonderful achievement. The village has enough provisions for drinking water facilities. It has 10 open Wells, 17 Hand Pumps, 3 OHTs, 120 House Tap Connections, 45 Public Fountains and 10 drinking water ponds. It assured supply of 100 litres of water per head. The road connectivity is essential for development, it has cement street roads measuring 3100 mts connected with main road. There are 5 public toilets with assured water supply. Women public toilet has biomass Gasifier to generate electricity for power pumps.

Nalukkottai shows much concern in providing facilities and services regarding sanitation. It has provisions for safe disposal of ladies sanitary napkins plastics. Out of 546 houses, 510 houses have attached toilet. Almost all people use the toilets at home or in public toilets. Health Sub-Centre (HSC) is functioning effectively in the village. It has one bed facility to admit child delivery cases. The Health Sub-Centre is attached with the Primary Health Centre located in Idayamelur which provides vaccination, polio free measures, no incidence of Cholera, Malaria and panchayath efforts for supply of Iron tablets. The Health Sub-Centre has registered Nalukkottai village as "Contaminated Diseases free Village". More than 50% of families undergone family planning and controlled the birth rate. This village has one Primary School run by a local NGO and another Government Middle School. All children in the age group of 6 to 14 are attending school regularly and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is completely successful in the village. Students have awareness on plastic threats, saving practice also inculcated through "Classroom Savings Scheme". The schools are provided with drinking water and separate toilets for boys and girls. Community participation is very high; people attend the Gram Sabha meetings regularly and participate in grassroot planning process for their development.

As per provision laid down in section 3(2) of the Tamil Nadu Panchayats Act, 1994, Grama Sabha Meetings are conducted in Nalukkottai Village Panchayat on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1<sup>st</sup> May, 15<sup>th</sup> August and 2<sup>nd</sup> October every year. Additional Gramasabha meetings are also conducted as and when required. The Panchayat Administration is transparent and accountable to the village people by maintaining proper records and documents. Income and expenditures are displayed periodically and conducted social audit without fail. The president is highly responsible to make the public to be aware the Government Welfare Schemes.

Nalukkottai have a 'Samathuva Mayanam' (common graveyard for all castes), a rarity in this part of the state. Rainwater harvesting is being popularized and established to all the houses. Almost all houses are electrified. There is no manual scavenging. At every street corner are provided with dustbins, workers clear once a week. The villagers strictly avoid plastics. Two PDS Centres are functioning properly without any complaints. Only standard measures are used at the shop, managed by women members of a self-help group and the prices of commodities never go beyond the stipulated levels. The village never faces funds shortage, rich or poor pay taxes without fail. There is total prohibition in the village.

### 5. Field Observations and Findings

This section presents the findings based on the opinions of sample population on different parameters related to effectiveness of delivery of basic needs of the people through grassroots participatory

planning in the study region. The study collected required data and supporting information from 30% (total households 546) samples resulting to 163 households.

#### 5.1 Personal particulars of the sample population

Majority sample populations are in the age group of 31-50 years. Around 24% samples covered youths, 64% are males and remaining are females. Regarding educational attainment, this village has 94% literates. Communal classification of the study reported, 64% belongs to Most Backward Class (MBC) and 36% Scheduled Caste (SC).

#### 5.2 Opinion related to Functioning of the Gram Panchayat

A few questions regarding, functional effectiveness of the panchayat were asked with the sample population and responses are recorded. Sixty seven per cent responded positively, panchayat is much useful as a primary unit of democracy, where people freely express their views and demand rights. In connection with the status of implementation of women reservation in the panchayat, 90% responded positively and 89% demanded devolution of full powers to panchayat as mentioned in the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment of PRI Act.

Regarding, level of utility of Minimum Basic Services, the majority respondents ranked the panchayat very good in delivery of services like Drinking Water (83%), Street Light (92%), Electricity (27%), Maintenance of Roads (83%), Housing for all (90%), Provision and Maintenance of Drainage (92%), Functioning of Anganwadi (100%), Functioning of Health Centre (80%), Existence and status of distribution of PDS (100%), Availability of Markets (100%) and Availability of Burial Ground for All Communities (100%).

#### 5.3 Responses Related to Participatory process of Grassroots Planning

The village people are allowed to freely express and interact with the elected representatives and encouraged to take participatory decisions with consensus of all the stakeholders related to delivery of basic services and selection of beneficiaries under various Centre and State Government Schemes. All the respondents agreed that they have given due respect for invitation to attend Gram Sabha and other panchayat related meetings with information well in advance. Seventy seven per cent of sample population reported that they are voluntary to participate in planning and implementation process of panchayat and 64% reported that they fully involve in the decision making process. There are 90%, 86% and 13% participate effectively in the process of planning, implementation and monitoring respectively in the panchayat. It is reported that, 24% are being part of panchayat committees like Standing Committee, Vigilance Committee, Water Committee and Health Committee. The panchayat gives importance to involve women in planning and implementation of different programmes through SHGs.

The responses related to effectiveness of participatory process in influencing functioning of gram panchayat reported positively by 97% respondents and areas of effectiveness as - Better Transparency (97%), Effective Transformation of Information (73%), Participatory Implementation (65%), Participatory Monitoring (68%), Grievance Redressal (97%), Receiving Adequate Funds and Utilization (97%), Voluntary People's Contribution (50%), Commitment of Elected Representatives (97%) and Corruption less Administration (72%). It reflects that people's participation in planning and implementation of development programmes contributed immensely in achieving all the elements of better administration and effective delivery of basic services.

#### 5.4 Opinion on Functional Efficiency of the Gram Panchayat

The overall efficiency of the panchayat was rated as 'Very Good' reported by 41% and 51% 'Excellent'. It is reported that, people enjoy the services provided by panchayat, in turn it encouraged for further participation and voluntary contribution in exposing creditability of the panchayat.

#### 5.5 Impact on Awareness through Participatory Initiatives of the GP

The study also focused to understand the impact of participatory grassroot planning on awareness of people on various factors related to functioning of village panchayat, the responses are ranked into

three categories i.e 'Fully Aware' 'Partially Aware' and 'Not Aware'. The responses show a positive trend in creating awareness among people due to the voluntary participation in democratic decentralized process of planning, implementation and monitoring of the schemes. As per responses given by the sample population, it is understood that, majority of the people 'Fully Aware' the purpose and process of GP meetings like social audit and other special meetings. It is reported that, 78% of the people are having better understanding on the process, purpose and benefits of participatory village planning.

### 5.6 Economic Impact through Participatory Initiatives of the GP

Interaction related to economic impact of the participatory initiatives resulted positive reflections due to benefits received by the people through various development and social security programmes. It is reported that 97 % received wage employment under MGNREGS as per the provisions of the scheme. All sample households have received their right share of public amenities and 98 % received benefit under Public Distribution System (PDS). Twenty six percent households are receiving Old Age Pension.

### 5.7 People's Empowerment through Participatory Initiatives of the GP

Opinions on attainment of socio-economic, political and educational empowerment of the people through panchayat intervention were collected with the options of 'Little Empowerment', 'Better Empowerment' and 'Very Good Empowerment'. It is reported that 32% house-

holds attained better economic empowerment by benefiting through different schemes. Similarly, 68% achieved better social empowerment.

### 6. Conclusion

The study panchayat Nalukkottai in Tamilnadu effectively implements participatory grassroot planning by encouraging and accommodating all the stakeholders of the village with special attention to include Scheduled Caste population, women and also children in the process, and also addressing issues pertaining to village development as well as livelihoods of poor families in the village. Being a model village panchayat, it properly implementing the provisions of Panchayat Raj Act and powers devolved to it. This participatory democratic decentralization process of planning, implementation and monitoring of various schemes created very good impact on the delivery of basic services and success in implementation of beneficiary oriented schemes and also helping the poor to avail social security schemes. Apart from implementing mandated functions, the panchayat also puts extra efforts in guiding the village people to understand the environment and factors affecting and supporting their lives to plan and act in better.

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