



## Assessment of Youth Participation in Grass Root Planning in Kerala

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### ABSTRACT

*Every Indian state has made state specific conformity Panchayat Raj Acts and have attempted with structures for the participation of entire population especially the youth in the local governance. For example the local governance system of Kerala guarantees adequate space for the involvement of youth in Gram Sabha, working groups, beneficiary committees etc. How far these systems are functional and capable of including the youth need to be understood for furthering youth-PRI interface. This study has brought to light the present level of youth participation in Gram Sabha, Panchayat Election, and in Village Development planning.*

**KEYWORDS :** Youth, Panchayat, Participatory Planning, Grass root Planning, People's Campaign

### Introduction:

Youth have been in the fore front of progress and social change in India since time immemorial. Thrust for freedom, idealism, passion for innovation, impatience for quicker pace of progress and an intense feeling for creativity have been certain features of youth. Demographically, youth constitute a significant segment of population in the country. They are the most vibrant and dynamic segment of Indian society and also the most valuable human resource of the nation. Their active involvement in governance is imperative for the country to march ahead with dynamism and youth fullness ( M.Sarumathy, K. Gireesan& PH Kalesh, 2012)

It is imperative that youth assume an important role in the systems, institutions and practices of local governance. The programmes initiated and implemented by the local Governments should take care of the specific needs, concerns, interests and priorities of youth from the geographical area. In addition, the local governments could utilize the competencies, dynamism, energy and skills of youth in planning, implementing and monitoring of programmes/projects. To make this happen, more and more youth should participate themselves in the activities of the local Governments. Youth organizations, both political and nonpolitical, could play a crucial role of recruiting able youth to the development politics of local governance system. In addition to extending support to the local Governments in its functioning, youth can also become the 'change agents' aimed at bringing good governance at the grassroots.

Panchayats have the backbone of Indian villages. Gandhi's dream of every village being a republic has been translated in to reality with the introduction of three tier Panchayati Raj system to enlist people's in rural reconstruction. Passing the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) was a defining moment in the history of decentralization of political power in India. Devolution of powers and responsibilities enabled the Local Self Government institutions to formulate plans aiming at local economic development and social justice. These Amendments have resulted in changing the dynamics and equations of power significantly in the country at the cutting edge levels. They have enabled the local governments at different parts of the country with the power and authority to function as 'units of self-government', though with varying levels of initiative, drive, interest and capacity (IASIA 2014)

There is a conscious effort on the part of the governments for the involvement of youth in all aspects of local governance, right from plan formulation to implementation. During the people's Campaign for 9<sup>th</sup> plan there was an overwhelming response from youth. In the Special Gram Sabhas (1987) 53% of the people were from age group between 18 and 35. Side by side some of the Universities had intro-

duced the compulsory social service, ensuring students participation in all the local government activities. Wherever the local governments have taken keen interest for their involvement, one can see their active participation especially in Gram Sabha, beneficiary committees, working group etc. some of the best practices of the PRIs in Kerala are made possible by the contribution of the youth and student community. There are panchayat that could tap the spirit of volunteerism of the student community and benefited by additional resource mobilization. Some panchayat are operating panchayat resource centres run by youth. There are examples to show the interest taken by youth in streamlining the Gram Sabha. Opportunities are also given to young professionals to serve as apprentice in local governments as civil, agricultural engineering and IT professionals; most of the panchayat ensured their support giving assistance to youth clubs and sports clubs in their annual plan. While discussing about the grass root level planning in Kerala it is necessary to have a look into the innovative experiment done by them in promoting participatory planning viz; People's Campaign (UNPAN 2006).

### People's Plan Campaign

People's Plan Campaign was meant to facilitate the preparation of scientific, participatory and time bound local plans for the Ninth Five Year Plan. It brought together officials, retired officials, experts, volunteers and mass of people under the elected representatives. The Campaign facilitated the empowerment of local bodies thus aiding in genuine grass roots planning. A series of steps were formulated along with large scale capacity building initiatives and mobilization so as to enable the local governments to prepare local plans

### Stages in Local Planning

A yearlong campaign spanning six stages marked the planning process leading to the formation of the first annual plan (1997 – 98) of the Ninth five year plan (1997 – 2002). The state Planning Board played an active role in helping the local self-governments to formulate the plan with people's participation.

#### Stage I : Ward Sabha/Ward Committee

The decentralized planning begins with a special Grama Sabha for understanding the felt needs of the peoples and also for identifying the potential areas of intervention. In Kerala voters in an electoral constituency (ward) of a Panchayat/Municipality constitute a Grama Sabha/Ward Sabha. After a brief introductory session, group discussions are conducted and in the plenary sessions points are reported. All the suggestions of the Sabha are forwarded to the local body.

#### Stage II: Development Seminar

The second stage in the decentralized planning is a Development

Seminar at the local body level. In Grama Sabha people raise their felt needs and problems and identify some opportunities for initiatives. This has to be subjected to analysis within the given resources, men and material. Such an exercise will result in the publication of a *Panchayat/Municipality Development Report*. A draft of this report is the background material for the *Development Seminar*.

**Stage III: Preparation of Projects**

At this stage the development strategy will be transformed in the form of Projects. This will be done Task Forces formulated for the purpose which comprises of elected representative, officials and experts from the people. Working Groups are constituted for important sectors

**Stage IV: Preparation of Plan Document**

This is the stage at which the local bodies finalize their plan document. It is not just a compilation of the projects prepared at the ward level. The projects prepared by Working Groups are to be prioritized within resource limit and long term Perspective of the people for the local level development.

**Stage V: Plan Approval by District Planning Committee**

Every Local Government's Plan has to be approved by District Planning Committee (DPC). The DPC will examine each project of a local body with the assistance of a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) constituted at the Block (Intermediate level) level and district level. If there exists any technical imperfections in a project, the local body has to make changes; but the TAC neither rejects nor changes the priority of the project.

**Stage VI: Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation**

Each project will be implemented under the supervision and control of local bodies. Projects can be implemented by beneficiary committee, the local body, transferred institutions, accredited agencies, and by contracting. There will be a Monitoring Committee for concurrent monitoring of the progress of the work. Grama Sabha has the right to examine the progress and other details of a project.

**Objectives**

The following objectives are framed by the investigators of the study.

1. To study the participation of youth in Gram Sabha activities
2. To Study the participation of youth in Election process
3. To study the interest of the youth in political parties
4. To study the involvement of youth in Village Development planning

**The Method:**

**Method of study**

The study is descriptive in nature; it tried to describe the issues pertaining to youth participation in grassroots level socio-political activities.

**Sample plan**

Athavanad panchayat is consisting 22 wards. Representative sampling was adopted to get a more or less representative sample from all the wards. For ensuring respondent from all the ward we had selected three respondents from each ward by using proportionate stratified random sampling.

**Sample Size**

In Athavanad Gram panchayat population is more than 30000 out of that approximately 10000 are youth, average youth population size of each ward is 400- 500. The whole panchayat was selected for study. A total of 66 Respondents were selected for the study.

**Schedules used for data collection**

Interview and observation method were used to collect primary data from respondents. The secondary data collected from books, journals and other periodicals

**Construction of Schedules**

The interview schedule framed for the study was constructed by researchers and also referred books, various publication and reports for preparing the interview schedule.

**Administration of Schedule:**

To make the interview session uninterrupted most of the time researchers tried to inform respondents prior hand and met them for interaction. Due to constraint researcher has asked questions and noted down the response. Apart from the schedule the researcher also conducted some focused group discussion with youth.

**Data analysis**

Collected data were analysed by using stipulated statistical tools. Data were systematically processed, logically sequenced, tabulated and analysed by the researchers.

**Limitation of the Study:**

Co- operation from the beneficiaries regarding their income and other personal details were less, beside time allotted to the investigator to conduct field study was also inadequate. It is a micro study so the result of the study could not be generalized.

**Framework**

Kerala has 978 Village Panchayats (Grama panchayats), 152 Block Panchayats and 14 District Panchayats; in the urban areas it has 60 Municipalities and 5 Corporations, a total of 1209 Local Self Government Institutions.

**Table 1. Frame work of PRI**

Sl No	Type of local government	Total numbers
1	Grama Panchayat	978
2	Block Panchayat	152
3	District Panchayat	14
4	Municipality	60
5	Corporation	5
	Total in the State	1209

**Primacy to Grama Sabha**

Kerala has created a fourth tier in the form of GramaSabhas equated with the electoral constituency of a Village Panchayat all the registered voters of the ward are members of the Grama Sabha. It is an attempt to create a new set up for direct democracy- involving the people of the ward. Gram Sabha is the only body where each and every voter can raise his/her voice. The GramaSabhas have been given clear rights and responsibilities with absolute powers for identification of beneficiaries, strong advisory powers for prioritizing developmental needs and wide powers of social audit.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

**Table:2. Gram sabha attendance wise distribution of respondents**

Number of Gram Sabha	Frequency	%
Not attended	44	66.67
1 Gram Sabha	7	10.61
2 Gram Sabhas	8	12.12
3 Gram Sabhas	5	7.58
4 Gram Sabhas	2	3.03
Total	66	100

Source: Primary Data

Article 243(B) of the Constitution defines the Gram Sabha as a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of the Panchayat at the village level. With regard to its powers and authority, Article 243 (A) of the Constitution says that the Gram Sabha may exercise such powers and perform such functions of the village level as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide. It is in the light of this that State legislatures

have endowed certain powers to this corporate body relating to the development of the village( Press Information Bureau, 2000).

In this context we analysed the extent of youth participation in Gram Sabha and the table -2 shows that 66.67% of youth have never attend the Gram sabha in past. While 12.12 % were twice attend the gram sabha remaining 10.44% once attended in gram sabha 7.58 % thrice attended an only a few (3.03%) respondents regularly attending the Gram Sabha. While analysing the same question deeply it was observed that youth doesn't have much interest in the proceedings happening in the Gram Sabha, they feel that youth related issues are less discussed in the Gram Sabha meeting and similarly they felt it's the duty of elders in the family and they didn't get any information to attend the meeting.

**Table: 3. Election participation wise distribution of respondents**

Last election participation	Frequency	%
Yes	41	62.12
No	25	37.88
Total	66	100

Source: Primary Data

Above table shows that 62.12% respondents voted in the last election and rest of them have not participated in the election process. Most of the respondents who enrolled their name in the voters list are voted in the past elections, they actively participating in the election process. Remaining are the new generation voters they have entered their name in voter's list in post-election period they also shown keen interest to participate in elections.

**Table :4. political affiliation wise distribution of respondents**

Political affiliation	Frequency	%
IUML	19	28.79
CPI(M)	10	15.15
INC	3	4.54
BJP	-	-
Others	2	3.03
No affiliation	32	48.48
Total	66	100

Source: Primary Data

Above table showing that the just less than half( 47.76%) of the respondents have no political affiliation. 28.79% belonging to Indian Union Muslim League(IUML)15.15 % respondents are Communist Party of India (Marxist) followers remaining 4.54 % Indian National Congress and 3.03 % other political parties

Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) is the most prominent political party in the study area. They have a youth wing, which is more active with social service activities among the people. New liberal thoughts among the Kerala Muslims are visible by noticing the growth of Communist Party of India Marxist among the youth. However, nearly half of the respondents especially females, conveyed that they have no

political affiliation, but they are interested in the political happenings around them.

**Table 5. Participation Village Development Planning (VDP)**

Participation in village development planning	Frequency	%
Yes	13	59.09
No	9	40.91
Total	22	100

Source: Primary Data

Among the 66 respondents only 22 have participating in the Gram Sabha. Researchers asked these youth whether they have participated in the village development planning meeting of Gram Sabha, and it was found that more than half of the respondents attended VDP. And notable among the discussion was that, youth are unaware of the significance of VDP meeting as a first step to the development of the village community.

#### Findings:

1. In the study area 66.67 percent of the respondents have never attended the Gram Sabha
2. Similarly 12.12 Percent of the respondents twice attended the Gram Sabha
3. Among the respondents 10.61 percent and 7.58 percent attended the Gram Sabha once and thrice respectively.
4. Only a few (3.03%) respondents have attended all the four Gram Sabhas in year.
5. 62.12% respondents voted in the last election. 37.31 %are not participated in the voting process.
6. Less than half( 47.76%) of the respondents have no political affiliation. 30% belonging to IUML 14.92 % respondents are CPIM followers remaining 4.47 % INC and 2.98 % other political parties.
7. Among the respondents who attends Gram Sabha(22), 59.09 percent were actively participating in the village development planning meeting

#### Discussion and Recommendation:

The study shows that youth participation in decision making process, especially in the institutions like Gram Sabha is seems to be average. Highly literate state like Kerala, this phenomenon is caused by various factors such as the belief that Gram Sabha and other participatory institutions are for the beneficiaries only. For example in most of the Gram Sabha women participation is higher because of the Self Help Group factor.

Moreover in the election process female participation is found to be less in the Malappuram District. Socio-cultural factors hinder women from directly participate in the political process, that is dominated by their counter parts.

In a highly politicised state like Kerala nearly half of the youth showing no affiliation in political parties in which majority of them were female youth. They conveyed that, societies not allowing them to show their political affiliation in public space and they cast their vote according to the wishes of dominant male members of the family.

While discussing about the participation in village development by the youth it was observed that more than half of the respondents never attended Gram Sabha meeting happened in their village. Even though youth are awakened through the political movements happening in the society, they are not interested to directly be a part of the political process.

#### Recommendations

Young people need to be give more inputs in the areas like service delivery system of GP, finance of Panchayati Raj Institutions and Gram Sabha. This will enable them to make necessary interventions and will make equip them to contribute towards strengthening of the system.

If youth are to be actively involved in local government planning, they must feel comfortable with the set-up. Youth must be able to participate in ways and places that are right for them.

Different methods of participation will suit different projects, or different stages of the same project. Working with young people will help find the participation methods which best suit them, your organisation, and the particular community you are working in.

The intervention of youth is very much necessary for improving the quality of local governance in Kerala. So policies should be framed to enhance the youth participation.

In order for the youth to effectively participate in decision making process, it is essential that they are better equipped with requisite knowledge, skills and capabilities

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