

## Effective Leadership and People Participation towards Achieving all round Development - A Case of Odanthurai Gram Panchayat in Tamilnadu



### Social Science

**KEYWORDS :** Democratic Decentralization, Participatory Development and Planning at Grassroot Level, pollution-free environment, Non-Conventional Energy, 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment

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### ABSTRACT

*Democratic Decentralization, Participatory Development and Planning at Grassroots Level are the vital areas of concerns of the present approach of poverty reduction and sustainable development in India. This case study documented some best practices of participatory planning and implementation at gram panchayat level. Odanthurai village panchayat of Karamadai block in Coimbatore district in Tamilnadu has been given in this article as a case of success in achieving all round development, based on its success in fulfilling basic needs, education development, provision of housing, technology transfer, production of electricity and coverage of beneficiaries under government development and welfare programmes for its people. It is a worth learning experience for understanding grass roots planning, people participation, effective leadership and transparent local administration.*

### I. Background of the Case

Democratic Decentralization, Participatory Development and Planning at Grassroot Level are the vital areas of concerns of the present approach of poverty reduction and sustainable development in India. Tremendous efforts have been put in through various policies, programmes and constitutional amendments towards achieving development in specific to the people of rural areas. The 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment in India has given more powers and responsibilities, allotting 29 subjects to PRIs covering all the aspects of rural lives pertaining to development. Despite several years of these developments, PRIs have not been able to take full advantage of the provisions and participatory planning and implementation have not taken roots. There are, however, a few cases of successful efforts at Gram Panchayat level which have proved to be a strategy for self-reliance and poverty reduction with people participation. Hence documentation of such best practices of replicable models for wider dissemination may induce the development process. It is therefore, this case study documented some best practices of participatory planning and implementation at gram panchayat level. Odanthurai village panchayat of Karamadai block in Coimbatore district in Tamilnadu has selected as a case of success in achieving all round development based on its success in fulfilling basic needs, education development, provision of housing, technology transfer, production of electricity and coverage of beneficiaries under government development and welfare programmes for its people.

### II. Location of the Village Panchayat

Panchayat is situated on northern bank of the river Bhavani, opposite to Mettupalayam on the southern bank. It lies on the Coimbatore-Ooty highway. Odanthurai is a Village Panchayat of modest size of Karamadai Panchayat Union of Coimbatore District. There are nine members in the Village Panchayat Council. Woman president leads and governs the panchayat. The Village Panchayat is a heterogeneity demography having multi community and multi religion comprising of Backward, Most Backward, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes and religion of Hindus, Muslims and Christians. There are totally 1050 dwelling units in the Village Panchayat of Odanthurai. The initial condition of development in the village worsened and people lived in extreme poverty without even a place to live, particularly the living condition of SCs and STs was miserable lived as bonded labourers facing all kind of vulnerability. Almost all the families lived in huts, struggled in hand to mouth existence, lack of employment, lack of basic amenities like drinking water, health and sanitation, non-availability of school building and electricity. Keeping the above thoughts in mind, the president of Odanthurai village panchayat determined to serve the people by providing good administration without corruption, and executing the government schemes with people's participation and maintain transparency and accountability. At present, after the intervention strong

leadership by Mr. Shanmugam, President of the village panchayat, there are two primary schools, one middle school, two matriculation schools functioning with all adequate facilities.

### III. Evolution of Leadership

The vision of the Village Panchayat President under the new Panchayat Raj System changed the destiny of the people of Odanthurai. Within eight years, Mr. Shanmugam, the former President of Village Panchayat, made the Panchayat the best among 389 Village Panchayats in Coimbatore District and the first in the entire country in the implementation of various innovative programmes to improve the socio-economic life of the villagers. Mr. Shanmugam, basically, is a farmer, owns a large extent of coconut groves and banana plantations. He was groomed by his father in Panchayat activities. He was elected for two consecutive terms. Presently, his wife take lead as president due to the panchayat became reserved for women constituency.

### IV. Efforts of the leadership towards village self-sufficiency

#### a. Self-Sufficiency in Water

It became the first Village Panchayat in the entire country to implement the RGNDWM scheme. Government of India inaugurated the scheme from this village with national and state ministers. Odanthurai became a place for learning. Elected representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions and government officials from all over the country visit the village. Shanmugam understood that only by improving the financial position of the Panchayat, the immediate felt needs of the villagers could be fulfilled. He identified that the most important felt need of the villagers was the provision of drinking water and housing for the poor. With a proposal to dig a bore well for drinking water, he started augmenting the Panchayat income through house tax and the same was revised in the year 1997 from Rs.23,000 to One lakh rupees. Adding the matching grants received from the government and other sources of income, one bore well was dug in each of the nine hamlets.

An internal audit on water requirement was conducted and found the village needs made on the water supply system in the village. It was found that, at the rate of 50 litres per head the required quantity of water is 2,75,000 litres for its 5,500 population. The water supply was fulfilled by supplementing 2.30 lakh litres by newly erected bore well with already existing water supply system for human being as well as cattles. The filtered water is supplied only through public taps every day, for two hours. Drinking water problem was solved through proper maintenance of power pumps. Hence, the annual maintenance cost is around rupees thirty six thousand only. For effective maintenance water supply, the people created a water deposit fund of Rs.2,25,000 and put as fixed deposit in the bank, which yield an amount Rs.10,247 per annum as interest. It also collects water tax of Rs.80,040/- per annum which is used for paying of elec-

tricity.

### b. Housing Scheme

The panchayat constructed around 1400 houses under the housing scheme. There were just about 250 houses during the year 1996. Today, there are over 1,650 houses. No wonder, when elsewhere people migrate to cities and town it is the other way around at Odanthurai. Good and copious water, pucca roads and houses, and a pollution-free environment seem to draw people to move to the villages.

### c. Technological Intervention by the Panchayat

The then president is a progressive farmer. His interest to learn new things was useful to the Panchayat Administration. His consciousness of the income and the expenditure of the Village Panchayat drove him to consult professionals in various sectors of development. When solar light technology was popularized by private entrepreneurs he approached them and arranged for the installation of 25 solar lights. There was a subsidy but the subsidy amount was given to the commercial firm at that time. The president calculated the profit in this regard and directly approached the authorities of the Non-Conventional Energy Development Board and succeeded in availing of the subsidy directly by the Village Panchayat. Further, instead of agreeing to the price of solar lights that prevailed in the market, he directly contacted a few companies and negotiated for a lesser price. Totally there are sixty five solar lights, which save an expenditure of about fifty thousand rupees annually to the Village Panchayat.

### d. Community Enterprising on Production and Supply of Energy

The first step in creating an energy self-sufficient future for Odanthurai was taken on the erection of solar streetlights in all the villages. To reduce the electricity charges, a bio mass gasifier plant has been erected. The gas produced from the plant is utilized to run a generator and in turn the power pump. Hence, the cost of electricity charges is reduced considerably, i.e., from Rs.84,000/- to Rs.30,000/- now. When thousands of Village Panchayats are not able to come out from their debt to the TNEB, Odanthurai is one of the few village panchayats not only paid its old dew but also having saving. Hence, the SFC grant of Rs.1.20 lakhs received from the government is available for development in Odanthurai.

The next step in his programme was the use of windmills to generate energy. In a country where villages are still struggling with inadequate power supply and expect the government to fix the problem, this panchayat has set an example in producing its own environmentally friendly power. Solar and wind power become a cornerstone of reform. It makes sense to develop solar energy systems both for large-scale application in cities and for small, decentralised rural requirements. Harnessing the wind and biomass will also be crucial. One virtue of solar and wind energy is their amenability to decentralised rural application.

Having seen the government helping many private companies acquire village land in Coimbatore district at subsidized prices for setting up wind power projects, the enterprising president thought: 'Why not a wind power project under Panchayat ownership? After all a village community, through its Panchayat, is the most legitimate owner of land and wind, the two natural resources that directly go into wind power generation.'

The cost required for establishment of a small wind mill is Rs 2.3 crore, the panchayat could generate Rs 35 lakh as margin money for bank loan. After government financial assistance, the panchayat would need a bank loan of Rs 1.15 crore. The Gram Sabha approved the proposal and it was submitted to the district administration and district fall in surprise that, how a Panchayat could act as an entrepreneur like other enterprises. How can a

Panchayat set up a wind farm; No precedents and guidelines for setting up such a project under Panchayat ownership. As the project was disallowed, Odanthurai Gram Panchayat succeeded through court of law and commissioned the project in 2006, the project became the first such project undertaken by a local body in India. The Panchayat uses only around 50 per cent of the power generated by the windmill. The windmill was set up at Malwadi- Sulthanpettai near Palladam in Coimbatore. The wind farm generates 8 lakh units of electricity annually. While the panchayat's need is only 4.5 lakh units, the remainder is sold to Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB). This gives the panchayat an annual income of Rs. 23 lakh.

"After repaying the bank loan of Rs. 1.15 crore, over seven years, the cost of generating electricity will be virtually zero," beams Shanmugam. The success story of Odanthurai has inspired many panchayat leaders to plan projects aimed at harnessing renewable energy.

### V. Achievements of Odanthurai Gram Swaraj

Odanthurai panchayat, attained 85% growth in ten years. The landmark of the Panchayat are listed here.

#### Drinking Water

- Dug bore wells and constructed overhead tanks in seven villages for adequate and regular supply of drinking water to all households.
- Initiated RAJIV GANDHI NATIONAL (PEOPLE CONTRIBUTION) DRINKING WATER SCHEME, with people contribution of 48 lakhs for installing of water purification from Bhavani river and supply to habitants.
- Laid Bore Well & Overhead Tank for the new village with people's contribution.

#### Housing

- Constructed 173 houses for houseless Adi Dravidas
- Constructed 115 kutcha houses for Tribal people & 15houses for Tribal, 32 houses for BC families' people under IAY Scheme.
- Converted 9 km mud road into black top pucca road.
- Constructed 290 cluster HOUSES with 40 SOLAR STREET LAMPS
- Bio-Gas plant linked latrines in Vinobaji Nagar.
- Constructed 775 houses and became Panchayat HUT FREE.

#### Road

- Conversion 4 km mud road in to black top road.
- Construction of 2 kms internal roads with panchayat fund.
- Laid 2 Kms metal road in Naripallam Road
- Constructed concrete road in the new village under AGAMT & NAMAKKU NAME schemes of state government.
- Constructed small bridge and laid approach roads to the farmers under Infrastructure scheme.

#### Education

- Elementary School is upgraded as Middle School in Oomapalayam village.
- Constructed elementary school in Gandhi Nagar.
- Oomapalayam Middle School was upgraded as high school
- Constructed building for High School through SSA.
- Constructed new Building for Anganwadi in Oomapalayam.
- Constructed new library for School Students and Public.
- Constructed play ground with provisions for all games for High School Students.

#### Electricity

- Free electrification to all houses of cluster. Constructed television room, provision shop to tribal hamlet.
- Provided free electricity connection to all houses Agasthiar-nagar & SAMA THUVAPURAM.

**Livelihoods**

- Facilitated to avail land titles to 254 Tribal families.
- Constructed Bio-Mass Gasifier unit to Women Self Help Group
- Facilitated to get cattles 200 households and imparted Skill training under VAZHNTU KATTUVOM state scheme.
- Facilitated access of benefits Under VAZHNTU KATTUVOM scheme for below poverty line families.
- 100% coverage of senior citizens under Old Age Pension Scheme.
- Renovation and upgradation of Pnchayat office

**Production and Saving of Energy**

- First time in India Installed Wind Mill with the capacity of 350Kw at the cost of 1.55 crore.
- Installation of 119 solar street lights.

**Others**

- Constructed Rain water harvesting structures in the village.
- Created irrigation canals connecting individual lands through NREGES.
- Made COMMUNITY HALL.
- Provided Burial Ground for Tribal community.

**VI. Conclusion**

Village Panchayat whether it is financially sound or poor, by a calculated vision building exercise of the village Panchayat Council and the enabling guidance and encouragement of the concerned government officials, could plan the phases of development in major sectors like education, health, poverty alleviation and rural housing. He emphasized that the Panchayat Presidents should dream to make the Village Panchayat a self-sufficient entity and should be a honest and committed leader so that he or she could gain support and assistance from every corner. Panchayat Administration should be a coordinated effort of all concerned.

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