

**A Minor Research Project**  
**On**  
***“DECENTRALIZED PLANNING PROCESS IN EDATHALA PANCHAYAT,  
ERNAKULUM DISTRICT OF KERALA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO  
WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION”.***

**Submitted by**  
**Mrs.KALA.N.**  
**Assistant Professor in Economics**  
**Al-Ameen College, Edathala**  
**Aluva – 683561**  
**Ernakulum, Kerala**  
**(MRP (H)-0655/12-13/KLMG070/UGC-SWRO dt.29-9-2013)**



**Submitted to**  
**The Deputy Secretary**  
**University Grants Commission**  
**South Western Regional Office**  
**Bangalore**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Planning in India is formulated to ensure economic growth in all spheres of the economy. The centralized planning has been adopted by the government of India from 1950 onwards. Still there are widespread regional disparities in development. This necessitated an alternate plan model for our nation. During the fourth plan itself, the government diverted its attention towards the district plan .it is thought that planning at the grassroots' level will be meaningful and more responsive to identify the local level problems and solving it by utilizing local resources and manpower. Thus, decentralized planning with people's participation is the only answer to solve the economic problems that is usually faced by the villages in India.

Kerala is the most politically and socially vibrant state in India with its high physical and social quality life indices. But it lacks the economic growth when compared to other states in India. This it made Kerala the fertile soil for the growth of decentralization. In addition to that people are highly politically conscious and are active participants in the election procedure in the state. Kerala has a high PQLI (physical quality of life index) when compared to other states in Kerala. The main reason behind this may be perceived as the high level of political participation and activism among the masses. This mass movement creates a good basic structure for launching this decentralized planning in Kerala.

As far as Kerala is concerned, the position of women is better when compared to even develop nations of the world. It also experiences highest women-men sex ratio, high life expectancy for women, high literacy, lower infant mortality, lower mother mortality rate etc in comparison to other states in India.

This social indicators itself shows the upper position held by women in Kerala. But their active involvement in politic is still limited. They are not involved whole heartedly in decentralized planning process.

In this context, the introduction of people's planning programme as a part of the ninth five year plan assumed significance. It was an attempt to include people in the planning process, giving due importance to the resources and needs of the particular area. Women were given importance at this stage. Special instructions were given to ensure greater participation of women in the GramaSabha meetings. Issues related to women are given due respect, even in the training programme for the resource persons. It was made mandatory to have a gender impact statement for projects. A 10% of the grant-in-aid under women component plan (WCP) is put apart for projects directly targeting women. In each development seminar, a report is needed on strategies, including the review on status of women in the locality and their political and economic and social status, their employability and last but not the least about the types of violence they face both at home and work place.

The significant reason for the above stated fact is the focus of even the common man apart from the policymakers, politicians and economists to the economic plight of women. They began to show a keen interest on the work of women and its related issues. Even though, women enjoy the distinct space in educational scenario, health aspects etc...., their role is limited in certain fields. It can be witnessed through their falling work participation rates, a conspicuous absence from leadership roles in trade unions and other mass movements. It is also true that it helped to create sufficient opportunities for women to be part of the planning process. In 1991, Kerala introduced 33 per cent reservation for women in elected local bodies. In the 1995 elections to local bodies, 4,153 women gram Panchayath members, 595 women block Panchayath members and 116 women

district Panchayath members were elected to the local self-government. It strives to increase the women's participation in the development process. Guidelines were issued to ensure greater participation of women at every stage of the planning process.

EdathalaGramapanchayath, the main topic of my study, is situated in the Ernakulum district of Kerala. Its area consists of 15.98 sq.km and it includes 21 wards. The total population of the Panchayath is 29948 with 15110 men and 14838 women. Women- men ratio is 982 per thousand and the literacy percentage is 85.79%. It is a very backward rural area and the employment generation is slow. The participation of women in all stages of planning needs to be analysed because the literacy percentage of women is near to 81%. In spite of all development efforts aimed at reducing poverty and inequality, the growth is still at its infancy in this panchayath. So, an in-depth economic analysis of planning measures are necessary and hence is adopted as a case study.

EdathalaPanchayath is one of the largest Panchayath in Ernakulum district in terms of area. It is one of the densely populated areas in this district. Most of the population is marginal farmers and daily wage workers. Although it is an agricultural economy, most of the people are reluctant to continue the agricultural activities due to the heavy losses they face in agriculture and related activities. So the area of barren land is continued to increase in this Panchayath.

### **Scope and significance of the study**

Decentralized planning has been implemented in Kerala in 1996 and the plan period is 5 years. So the last 5 years may be taken for study. The study assumes significance because 15 years is a reasonable period to analyze the impact of progress of participatory planning to the people. It also helps us to verify

whether it is an answer to the failed centralized planning. It also ascertain the strength of peoples plan to eradicate economic ills such as abject poverty, unemployment etc.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The main objectives of the study are

1. To analyze the projects implemented sector wise under the decentralized planning in EdathalaGramapanchayath and its impact on development.
2. To analyze the extend of women's participation in various stages of the project implementation at the ward level.
3. To compare the data of the EdathalaGramapanchayath with that of the state average to assess its performance.
4. To suggest an effective strategy regarding preparation and implementation of need based plan in the Panchayath.

Edathala Panchayath was successful to a certain extent in channelizing the funds to the needy and made the development initiatives to a safe haven. Poverty eradication programmes reached a substantial population below the below poverty line. Since the extent of the participation of women in the planning process has increased considerably in the Panchayath, the care and compassion to the needy enhanced. Infrastructure a concrete base to the development and growth of the Panchayath stands shining in the development efforts of the EdathalaPanchayath. Corruption declined comparable to other Panchayath, thanks to the enhanced awareness of public, right to information-the power of choice and social audit. Major silver lining from the analysis a positive impact of the decentralization process is the increased awareness and participation created by the plan process.

Apart from that now a day's around 50% of the households are the beneficiaries of the social welfare measures initiated by the EdathalaPanchayath.

## **FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS**

In spite of the commendable efforts of the Panchayath through its decentralized planning process, there are certain projects which are necessary for the growth of the EdathalaPanchayath. These identified areas are the following: as per the records available with Panchayath, the projects, they need to be implemented in the near future for sustained developments are -

- ✓ House maintenance for poor
- ✓ Plan for aged people ,medical camp to identify diseases and to provide ayurvedic medicines
- ✓ Women-office building for kudumbasree, skill development, fund for marriage, house maintenance, pipe connection
- ✓ Sc/st-creating exam talent centre ,collection of books for them and buying related furniture
- ✓ Building small scale production units for kudumbasree, vegetable kitchen garden, paddy and plantations farming, diary development
- ✓ Waste management proposals

It is true that there is a concrete commencement of computerization at all levels in the Panchayath. But the full computerization has not yet been achieved by the EdathalaPanchayath. It will become a reality in near future itself. Although 98 lakh are spent for safe drinking water facility, still it doesn't meet the requirements of the core population.

Although, the Indian constitution provided women the strength theoretically, it is not a practical reality. Apart from that the Nairobi conference of

1985 and 1988 equal rights of women penned in 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> para graph, 1975-women development decade declared by UN, Narasimhan Committee National Perspective Plan for Women, including the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment in 1990's put forward certain clauses towards women empowerment. But the real questions seems to be unanswerable even today such as how far the women have become really empowered, how far they are capable of exercising their power in political platform. Through interviews, it is found that a majority of women representatives are not selected on merit but on their affiliation, caste and class-decided mostly by male dominant party leadership.

But the mere presence of them did not show the true success of the process; it only added space for women and made them a part of the political and social group which solves the problems of society. Women's participation in Edathala has increased both in absolute terms and as a share of the total participants. But I think this has not been converted fully into their full indulgence in plan process. Being a highly politically sensitive and conscious society, it is quite natural that the political parties keep a restraint on the activities of their women representatives and prevent them working as a group towards a common issue of women in the Panchayath

There occurred a real transition in the role of the women in the GramaPanchayath level. The same is applicable in this Panchayath also such as reservation of one third of seats, mandatory allocation of ten percentage of plan funds, creation of large number of self-help groups, focus on women in anti-poverty programmes, enhancement of the number of women in the gram Sabha meetings etc.

It is also evident that although they are not highly educated, they are now free from the traditional shackles of the society. They are free from the traditional role of homemaker to a socially responsible woman. They are now increasingly involved in the activities of other interest groups. Women in the Panchayath are more comfortable with the women representatives and are free to share their pathos, grievances, and views on different problems and forward certain proposals through them and treat them as one with themselves. It is true when we analyze the activities of kudumbasree unit in this Panchayath. They are now more organized than before. It is evident from the entrepreneurial initiatives of different kudumbasree units in this Panchayath. The financial freedom they enjoy shows itself the development of the group.

From the data collected on beneficiaries of different welfare programmes, it is seen that the number of women beneficiaries are increasing. It is also a case of happiness that about 10 percent of annual plan funds are kept apart-mandatory for works directly benefitting women. Percentage of women works ie.39.9 percentage in Vazhakulam block alone is a matter of great applause.

Through women component plan, self-employment opportunities are extended through SHG and also through other group economic activities. Thus several poverty eradication programmes are introduced with timely help from banks, politicians, officials and beneficiaries.

It is sad to note that the waste management technique is extremely poor in this Edathala Panchayath. Most of the people in this EdathalaPanchayath literally throw out the liquid and solid wastes in to the streets and abandoned land. It is also distressful to note that the canals are also filled with solid waste.

It is also clear from talks with certain women representatives that they are under tremendous pressure both at the household level as well as in the Panchayath .They need to be freed from the domestic chores in order to participate in the duties assigned as the Panchayath member. In the Panchayath they should be given proper training and support to indulge in the societal issues. It is also recognized that women are less corrupted and are reluctant to accept material rewards for the benefits they have conferred to individuals in the society,

We hope that in near future we can tap the real potential of the women representatives.

Participation at each and every stage in the development initiatives of the EdathalaGramapanchayath is increasing day by day as per the records available in the Panchayath and it is a very encouraging and positive signal. Finally from the analysis, we can conclude that the timely and positive intervention of the planning initiatives of the EdathalaPanchayath improved the living conditions of the people of the EdathalaPanchayath.

Direct social accountability increases the welfare efforts of the EdathalaPanchayath through decentralized planning. Because it is through GramaSabha, the development projects are initiated as well as through them the real beneficiaries are identified. Social audit also improved the efficiency and the recognition of GramaPanchayath has increased three fold.

Another important factor to be mentioned is that stakeholder consultations particularly with Agricultural Officer, Veterinary Surgeon, Village Extension Officer, Assistant Engineer ,ISGD, ICDS Supervisor, Medical Officer, and Head of the Institution of a government school to inculcate their ideas on plan formulation elevated the quality of plan formulation and its implementation in this Panchayath.

They were treated as conveners of different working groups in this EdathalaPanchayath. Their service somewhat bridge the limited participation of the people of the Panchayath in the initial stages. Self help group, Neighborhood groups, kudumbasree etc improved the quality and quantity of development activities of the Panchayath.

As per the details collected and analysed, we can see that one of the significant contribution of the decentralized experiment in our EdathalaPanchayath is the evolution and growth of a group persons from the below poverty line. It is interesting to note that this evolved group is usually represented by the women, being a true and guided with leadership quality. This group of women in this panchayath is more productive and efficient than their male counterparts. They are the spirited guidance behind most of micro enterprises and innovative projects initiated in the Panchayath, women became liberated financially. All these gave them the opportunity for political choice as well as it gave them power of choice in selecting anti povertyprogrammes in the panchayath.This created social security for them to face challenges in the future.

People are aware of quality of decision makers and decision making. A good change in this Panchayath is the increased participation of Grama Sabha meetings and SDHG'S AND NHG'S by the women of the Panchayath as well as the weaker sections of the society. Now benefits improved and selection of beneficiaries became fairer. Physical and social infrastructure development along with other development initiatives and its implementation in Edathala Grama Panchayath through decentralized planning .although it enhanced the morale of the Panchayath, a good number of educated citizens are not involved in the process directly.

Transparency and accountability of major works in the Panchayat, the campaigns on right to information, social audit, public hearings etc. improved the momentum of the implementation of the project.

One of the other major findings is that the poor in the Panchayat was identified based on the below poverty line list prepared by the Grama Panchayath and the beneficiaries were selected from them. Thus poverty reduction programmes are introduced successfully to a certain extent. The repayment of loans provided to the needy, particularly through SHG 'S, kudumbasreeetc seems to be prompt. But the dismal fact is that still the role of contractors in the implementation phase of the project seems to be prominent. The women development projects which are mandatory involves only certain repeated projects .so a renewal is required in this sphere.

A major thing that should be taken into consideration is that all development efforts should be sensitive to the limits of local level participatory planning and governance. Non-participants may be given some minor penalty so as to force them to be the active participants in the plan process. Regular feed backs should be collected after convening the Grama Sabha so that suggestions of the people can be collected and officials and representatives can redress their complaints.

It is also necessary to evolve a common procedure to check whether the assistance received have had sustainable impact on the levels of living of these beneficiaries. Gender sensitisation programmes should be convened at regular intervals. It is lack of clarity on concepts, strategies and processes on gender empowerment that crate hurdles in it. Capacity building should be given proper importance. The development schemes of the Panchayath should be targeted to the needy. Training programmes to all participants should be made mandatory which also should be repeated ever year by providing them ideal platform to share ideas.

Here participants should assess the development initiatives of different panchayats. More funds should be allotted in future to them directly and make the process hassle free.

Panchayath can use external experts for entrepreneurship development training, but it is better to develop this expertise within the Panchayaths. It plays an important role in motivating and involving the entire community in local development. It can also be the prime mover in the planning, design and implementation of an enterprise promotion strategy for village people.

## CONCLUSION

Development through “**redistribution**” was identified as the development strategy of Kerala which was adopted through the decentralization process. Decentralisation process made the people aware of their power and the extent of their participation in the planning procedure, in spite of some limitations. It improves interaction of people in the society. They are now well aware of their right to know the information related to the plan procedure through their right to information, it also decreases the cases of absolute corruption. Decentralisation process create a people friendly atmosphere in the Panchayath.

Since majority of the households belong to the BPL category, specific initiatives are required at the Panchayath level to improve the socio-economic status of the majority of the population.

Women are recognized as a privileged group in this Panchayath, thanks to the activities of dominant kudumbasree as well as the fair representation of women in the Panchayath and the duty they does in the capacity of different positions they serve in the Panchayath. Whatever be its shortcomings, the

empowerment of women through kudumbasree and the fiscal decentralization are some of the positive result of decentralization.

It is true that the participation of people is an unavoidable task in the development initiatives of the Panchayath through the decentralized planning process.

Now time has come for us to strengthen the Grama Panchayath so as to make them efficient and developed to meet the challenges in the future.

Decentralized planning is a planning technique to promote growth. It can effectively mobilize the local resources and its proper utilization in accordance with local needs. It also actively involves people in all stages of planning process from identification of needs to the actual implementation stage. So, it is proper to have a plan for each Panchayath.

