

Decentralized Planning Experience in Kerala

Summary

Evaluation Issues, Findings & Suggestions

Background

In Kerala, decentralized planning that followed the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments and enabling enactments in the State in 1994 started off as the People's Plan Campaign and progressed with institutionalization at different levels. The important landmarks during the 9th Five Year Plan (since 1995) include:

- Transfer of powers, functions, institutions and staff to local governments (Annexure- 1) initiated in October 1995 and completed by July 2000; the transferred officials were given a dual responsibility and accountability to both the PRIs and the line Departments for execution of their respective plan programs;
- Adoption of a separate budget document exclusively for Local Self Governments (LSGs) {since February 1996} and the introduction of a formula for allocation of Plan funds(Grants in aid) among LSGs (Chapter I);
- Decision to devolve 35 to 40% of the plan funds to local governments announced in July 1996; around 90% of this was devolved with the condition that at least 30% should be spent on Productive sectors, not more than 30% should be invested on Infrastructure and at least 10% should be earmarked for Development programs for Women;
- Launching of the People's plan Campaign in August 1996 with multi-pronged socio-political mobilization and sensitization of people with effective participation of organizations like Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP); this was being associated with institution-building at different tiers and levels;

- Restructuring of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act and the Kerala Municipality Act in 1999, based on the recommendations of the Committee on Decentralization of Powers (known as Sen Committee) (Annexure-II);
- Submission of First and Second State Finance Commission Reports in February 1996 and January 2001 respectively, reviewing the financial position of Local Self Governments and making recommendations therein (major recommendations in Annexure -III).

Note: Chapter and Annexure numbers given in parentheses refer to those in the text.

Institutional Mechanism

Decentralized planning in the State operated mainly through the following institutions and instruments;

Grama Sabha (GS): People's participation in decentralization was sought to be ensured mainly through meetings of the GP ward level Grama Sabha, chaired by the ward member. Ten per cent of the voters of the ward constitute the quorum; The officials of GP and implementing departments are required to attend the GS meetings. The Block level Grama Sabha consisting of GP Presidents and Block Samiti members and the District level Grama Sabha consisting of GP presidents, BP Presidents and DP members were meant to vertically integrate plans.

Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs): Envisaged as a sub-system of GS, an NHG (Ayalkootam) would be formed as an association of 20-25 women members to identify women from among themselves to form Self Help Groups (SHGs) for carrying out the Women Component Plan (WCP).

Resource Persons: About 600 Key Resource Persons (KRPs) at the State level, about 10000 district Resource persons (DRPs) at the district level and about one lakh Local Resource Persons (LRPs) at the GP level were recruited both from the Government and outside, representing various disciplines. Resource Persons were to take lead in training programmes and to spearhead the Plan campaign. Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) co-ordinates the training activities of Local governments.

Development Seminar (DS): Based on GS recommendations, a one day DS would be held every year at the PRI level to which experts, elected members, representatives nominated by the GSs, to discuss the draft annual plan document of the PRIs,

suggest the broad priorities of development projects and select members of Task Forces (Working Groups).

Task Force; Presently known as 'Working Groups' (at GP, BP and DP levels) were to translate the demands and recommendations of GSs and DSs into viable, technically acceptable projects. For each local body, there were about 8 –12 Task Forces/working groups dealing with different sectors. Each WG would be headed by an elected Member and convened by specified government official.

Committee System; All GPs, BPs and ZPs would have Standing Committees (SCs); each assigned with certain subjects. The SCs were to be co-ordinated with a Steering Committee consisting of the President, Vice President of the Panchayat and the chairpersons of the SCs. Panchayats were free to constitute sub-committees to assist the aforesaid committees. There was also provision for Joint Committees between neighbouring Local Governments.

Expert Committees (ECs); There would be ECs (evolved from Voluntary Technical Corps) at block and district levels drawing expertise from and outside the Government. ECs would have a three-fold role; providing technical advice to PRIs, technically vetting projects of PRIs and giving technical sanction for works, wherever required.

District Planning Committee; All PRI plans in the district would be submitted to DPC, which would give formal approval to them. Neither DPC nor ECs would have the power to alter the priorities fixed by PRIs, but could only ensure that the Guidelines were followed.

State Level Coordinators; At the apex level, the SPB, co-ordinates with the Department of Local Self Government and takes the lead in decentralized planning at different tiers by issuing Guidelines and observing compliance and progress. There was a State Level Expert Committee too, to vet the District Panchayat plans.

State Election Commission: Apart from the conduct of Local body elections, the State Election Commission has been empowered to delimit the wards of PRIs for elections and to disqualify the defectors.

State Finance Commissions: The 1st SFC was constituted in 1994 and the 2nd in 1999. The 1st State Finance Commission (SFC) submitted its report in February 1996. However, the formula used for inter-se distribution of plan fund was not the one given by the SFC, but was evolved by the Working Group of State Planning Board in 1997.

Ombudsman: Ombudsman is a high-powered institution consisting of judicial dignitaries formed to check malfeasance in local governments in the discharge of developmental functions.

Objectives of the Evaluation Study

PEO took up the Evaluation Study on Decentralization Experience of Kerala during the Ninth Plan at the instance of the Government of Kerala with the objectives of:

- assessing the efficacy of the processes followed (vis-à-vis the guidelines) for demand articulation, plan formulation, implementation and monitoring;
- identifying the constraints and catalysts in effective decentralization of powers and smooth functioning of rural local bodies;
- analyzing the success stories of decentralization and identifying the factors contributing to success; and
- learning lessons from the Kerala model of decentralized planning.

Study Design

Both primary and secondary data were required to test the hypotheses implicit in the above mentioned objectives. A multi-stage, multi-site, stratified random sampling design was adopted to generate the required data for the study. The sampling process is briefly indicated below (details in Chapter II).

- The study was limited to rural PRIs. Further, detailed study eliciting household level responses and other primary information was limited to the GP level.
- Four districts-Kollam, Ernakulam, Malappuram and Wynad- and nine BPs and nine GPs therein were selected for detailed sample survey.
- To generate the required primary information 63 projects implemented by the selected GPs during the 9th Five Year Plan and 616 project beneficiaries therein, and, 15 departmental 'comparison' projects and 140 project beneficiaries were

selected. An independent sample of 460 heads of households belonging to the various socio-economic groups was selected to assess the details of their Grama Sabha participation.

- To understand the different processes involved in planning, a sample of 126 Working Group (Task Force) members, 75 Expert Committee members and 51 knowledgeable persons were selected from the selected PRIs.
- The reference period for the Study was the Ninth Five Year Plan, 1997-98 to 2001-02. However information was selectively gathered on pre and post- 9th Five Year Plan period to prepare the base for comparative analysis of the data collected for the reference period.

Findings of the Study

On Plan Formulation

The methodology for participatory plan formulation at the GP level envisaged that the needs articulated at the Grama Sabhas be recorded, processed, prioritized, projectized and harmonized into an integrated plan for the village.

That Grama Sabhas (**GSs**) **had emerged as a prominent body of need articulation** in the villages during the 9th Five Year Plan was evident from the facts that;

- About 66% of the project beneficiaries who had demanded the project benefit did so through GSs;
- About 82% of the project beneficiaries felt that their projects were taken up based on GS demands;
- About 92% of the Knowledgeable Persons opined that GSs could articulate key sectoral problems 'effectively' (63%) or 'somewhat effectively' (29%).
- Scrutiny of records by PEO revealed that most of the approved projects emanated from the needs articulated at GSs.

Discussions and diagnostic analysis reveal that while the institution of Gram Sabha ensured people's participation in need articulation, prioritization of projects/schemes and accommodating the needs of the vulnerable sections, yet the following weaknesses were noted:

- (a) Productive sector projects did not at all develop into a comprehensive plan and agricultural project planning was not focused, not outcome-oriented, and not information-based. The major constraints that inhibited effective productive sector plan formulation included;
- GS could not fully assimilate its envisaged role in plan formulation mainly because of;
 - Overwhelming pursuit of individual benefits by GS participants confirmed by 88.3% of the selected knowledgeable persons.
 - Presence of alternative, effective avenues of demand articulation; 34% of the selected individual project beneficiaries placed their demand for project assistance outside the GS, through GP members/leaders and officials.
 - About 36% of the selected heads of households never attended any GS since 1997-98, this ratio ranged between 74% and 16% among the sample GPs.
 - Inadequate capacity of the GP in agricultural plan formation. Generally, available resources were thinly spread across projects and individuals to satisfy the need of a large number of villages/villagers.
 - Only 25% of the Knowledgeable Persons felt that GPs used their available developmental database effectively in planning.
 - The functioning of **Sectoral Working Groups (WGs)** entrusted with the task of projectizing GS demands and block level and district level **Expert Committees (BLECs/DLECs)** entrusted with plan vetting **was constrained** by;
 - Pre-occupations of both official and non-official members and consequent depletion in effective membership; 33.3% of the departmental officials, who were to convene WG meetings, did not regularly attend such meetings.
 - Inadequate incentives or recognition to members; 88% of the selected BLEC members and cent percent DLEC members felt that the sitting fees (the only incentive) were thoroughly inadequate.
 - Lack of capacity to formulate innovative projects, analyzing specific local problems and matching GP resources; only 8% of the selected WG members felt that they could fully take into account local resources in projectization, while 26% felt that they did not at all do this.

- Lack of Co-ordination and Integration of the works of different sectoral Working Groups.
- Removal of the full-time coordinator for BLECs and DLECs.
- Frequent transfers of convening officials and partisan considerations pre-empted continuity of experience and expertise in WGs and ECs.

Only about 20% of the convening officials thought that their WGs functioned very well. During the field visits (June-August 2004), it was made out that Working Groups per se had become highly inactive in many places and many willing collaborators (administrative and clerical staff) were made use of in the preparation of projects in 2004-05. Projectization had turned into a totally mechanical exercise by then.

(b) Analysis of expenditure planning (done at the State level) revealed that;

- LSGI accounts were not at all integrated to the rest of the Plan accounts, with the result that arriving at the sectoral shares in plan expenditure was beset with many problems.
- The plan share (LSGI plus General) of productive sector declined from 8th Five Year Plan (37.61%) to the 9th Plan ((31.65%; (23.36% from General Plan & 34.78% from Local Government Plans)) and further during the initial years of the 10th Five Year Plan.

(c) Absence of effective vertical integration was a weak link in decentralized planning. Infrastructure and productive sector projects did not recognize their inter-linkages. The apparent signs of insufficient vertical integration in plans include;

- None of the selected GPs felt that their higher tiers created the necessary backward or forward linkages to their projects;
- Attendance in Block level GSs ranged from 40% to 94%, indicating that **many GPs went unrepresented** in this important instrument of block level integration of GP plans.
- The degree of compliance to the service sector projects mandated to Block panchayats (BPs) (by the Guidelines) varies from 56% to 80% among the sample BPs;

- Majority of Block level projects had **very small project allocation**, so no effective linkages could have been created by them. The proportion of productive and service sector projects with less than Rs. 1 lakh project allocation varied in the range of 78% to 50% among the sample BPs.
- The proportion of projects on individual housing in the service sector plan of the selected BPs varied from 50% to 44%.
- The District Plan did not set out a clear-cut, sectorally differentiated and vertically integrated development strategy; nor did it clarify the roles of different tiers in seeking developmental goals.

(d) Another problem observed was inadequate spatial balancing within GPs in their infrastructural planning. Analysis of the plan projects for roads and bridges revealed that;

Coefficient of variation of the ward-wise expenditure in the roads and bridges sector was large (41% to 179%); The correlation between backwardness (in connectivity) of GP wards and the allocation of expenditure under roads and bridges sector was weak and **in many cases higher allocation was given to better-connected wards.**

On Plan Implementation

The participatory planning processes brought about considerable changes in plan implementation in terms of people's participation in beneficiary selection and project execution. Yet, the quantum and impact of such changes remained much less than the envisaged.

- **Beneficiary selection: Grama Sabhas performed a significant role** in the selection of beneficiaries of plan projects during the 9th Five Year Plan. However, their meaningful and effective involvement was **constrained** by;
 - Low and fast-dwindling representative base of Grama Sabhas;
 - Conflicts within Grama Sabhas regarding prioritization of beneficiaries; 4 out of 9 selected GPs highlighted this issue.
 - GP members and officials sometimes showed favoritism in beneficiary selection; loss of representative character of Grama Sabhas reinforced this. Of an independent sample of households selected to verify GS participation, only

52% were satisfied with beneficiary selection (varied from 38% to 87% in sample GPs); 72% of the dissatisfied reasoned that undue preference was given to close circles of members.

Due to all the above, about 29% of the selected beneficiaries could receive individual benefits under GP projects without ever attending a GS. The incidence of this was higher among the APL beneficiaries (34.7%) than among the BPL beneficiaries (25.1%) and, among the General category beneficiaries (35.2%) than among the Scheduled Caste beneficiaries (20%).

- ***Co-ordination between GPs and deployed departmental officials:***

- About 85% of the implementing officials felt that they could co-ordinate well with the GP. However, about 21% of them felt that GP officials/members tried to impose their terms upon them. Also, about 24.5% felt that members tried to meddle with plan implementation, especially in terms of preferential allotment of benefits to their cronies.
- Grama Sabha attendance by some implementing officials was less regular than others. About 38% of the selected implementing officials themselves declared that they did not regularly attend Grama Sabhas during the 9th five Year Plan; 82% of them giving official pre-occupations as the reason.
- About 65% of the selected beneficiaries felt that the response of both GP and departmental officials towards people's needs improved after decentralization, while only about 10% felt that officials became less receptive.

- ***Beneficiary participation in project execution; was below the envisaged levels in Anganwadi projects and collective irrigation projects.*** Only about 24% of the beneficiaries of Anganwadi feeding got involved in local mobilization of resources, while only about 2% of the selected beneficiaries of collective irrigation projects contributed in some way to project implementation.

Though, a considerable proportion of the Knowledgeable Persons felt that speed (56.9%) and cost-effectiveness (53%) **of project execution improved with beneficiary committees (BCs)**, the following deficiencies were noted:

- Inability to secure forward and backward linkages to BCs;

- Lackadaisical, sometimes hostile, attitude of concerned officials towards them;
- Lack of technical guidance to BCs in cost estimation and governmental procedures;
- Creeping in of contractors or their benamis into BCs who exploited BCs' inexperience to their multiple advantages.
- **Inadequate follow-up and maintenance** have led to deterioration of the productivity of the assets/infrastructure created.
 - Collective assets created under the Plan were most often neglected after plan implementation. 67.3% of the beneficiaries of collective irrigation projects felt that no mechanism for maintenance of the assets has been put in place.
 - Many beneficiaries of agricultural projects felt that the post project follow-up was inadequate resulting in deterioration in asset quality and their output.

On Project level Impact

The analysis of the impact of sector-wise projects led to the following conclusions.

Sector	Set of Projects	Impact-GP Projects	Brief Explanation
Productive sector	Felling root-wilt affected coconut trees	Negligible	Only 11.5% respondents reported some impact.
	Agricultural input support	Negligible	About 84% respondent beneficiaries of input support (other than vegetable) reported negligible impact.
	Irrigation	Negligible/Nil	69.4% respondents could not at all irrigate from the facility - None irrigated sufficiently.
	Subsidized provision of animals	Negligible/seldom	Only 6.5% had considerable & sustained income effect- 2.2% acquired assets from income generated.
	Self-Employment	Negligible	Only 7.6% could effectively support their families from the income generated.
Service Sector	Subsidized provision of latrines	Considerable	80% respondents fully satisfied- 93% latrines being used - 77% Knowledgeable Persons reported considerable improvements upon decentralization.
	Subsidized provision of houses/repair	Considerable	85% satisfied - 81% houses are resided at- 62% Knowledgeable Persons felt considerable improvements; 33% indicated marginal improvements
	Feeding programme in Anganwadis	Considerable	68.2% (aware of GP role) beneficiaries felt considerable improvements in feeding upon decentralization.

	Drinking water	Considerable	67.2% respondents reported regular receipt of water-72.7% felt improved drinking water situation in the GP.
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For the stand-alone projects (which did not call for any horizontal or vertical integration) implemented by the GP in the service sector, considerable impact was felt by beneficiaries.

So far as the productive sectors are concerned, neither departmental projects nor GP projects showed much household level impact. In general, decentralized planning during the 9th Five Year Plan failed to stir the productive sector in the sample villages. Isolated successes were on account of the selection of the right crop for project support and the co-ordination between farmers and the Krishi Bhavan. In the agricultural sector, the basic problems that dampened the project impact include;

- Inadequate capacity of the PRIs to draw up production plans on a scientific basis. Attention was not paid to the forward and backward linkages, environmental impact, the market signals and State policies in the agriculture sector.
- Many agricultural projects received only nominal allocation in an attempt to maximize the number of projects and the number of beneficiaries. The propensity to equalize the flow of resources across wards of the GP was also observed.
- Inadequate stakeholder participation resulted in poor maintenance of the agricultural assets.

<i>Awareness & Participation</i>

- Awareness about conduct of GSs varied from 86% to 100% among the respondent heads of households in the selected GPs. Correspondingly, the proportion of those who attended at least one GS ever since 1997-98 varied from 36% to 84% in the sample GPs. About 36% of the selected heads of households never attended Grama Sabha since 1997-98.
- Vellamunda GP (Wynad district), which showed one of the highest participation rates and Thanur GP (Malappuram district) which showed the lowest participation rate were both among the most backward GPs selected.
- Awareness level about the conduct of GSs was noted to be high both among illiterates and literates (91.1% among illiterates vs. 100% among graduates). While the relation between level of education and GS attendance was not conclusive, the

GS attendance of the BPL and the socially backward was clearly greater than that of their better-off counterparts.

- Majority of the people attended GSs exclusively with an eye on individual benefits. 57.1% of the improved GS attendance and 45.3% of reduced attendance among the selected heads of households was attributed to the receipt/non-receipt of individual benefits. Nonetheless, a lesser, but visible proportion of GS attendance was based on the developmental agenda of the GSs;
- The degree of articulation of the disadvantaged sections (women and BPL) in GSs was in no way less than that of the better-off sections. 69.7% of women, 63.4% of BPL and 61.3% of the SC& ST respondents declared that they could articulate their needs in the GSs 'to a great extent'.
- Among the non/irregular GS attendees, 34.3% of Scheduled Caste respondents and 46.2% of the fishermen declared that regular information would ensure their regular GS attendance. 17.1% of non/irregular GS attendees asked for more convenient meeting timings.
- The reduction in GS attendance by the socially and economically better-off sections seems to be faster than that of their worse-off counterparts. While 34% of the heads of selected SC households attended GSs held during June-July 2004, the corresponding figure for the general category was only 14.7%. The figures were 17.6% and 29.7% respectively for APL and BPL.
- Enhanced awareness and participation has indeed brought about an improvement in the delivery and impact of the individual beneficiaries oriented service sector schemes. However, this failed to bring about a corresponding improvement in the agriculture sector projects because of inadequate capacity of PRI members to draw up production plans on a scientific basis.

Lessons learnt & suggestions therein

I. General:

1. Accounting and data retrievability at the PRI level are very weak. To rectify this,
 - a) LSGI accounts must be integrated with general plan accounts in their format,

content and timeliness and b) maintenance and flow of information (forward & backward) including reporting of financial and physical progress needs to be computerized forthwith.

2. Ensuring involvement of higher level local academia in database building (with surveys), planning and training of planners by linking their curriculum to reports on decentralization experience of their villages would provide an essential supplement to existing capacity for decentralized planning.

II. On Plan Formulation and Integration

1. The piecemeal approach to productive sector planning must give way to plans and projects fully integrated to a well-defined watershed based development strategy. The primary condition for this would be that GPs are capacitated with data-based, scientific inputs for planning giving the quantitative dimensions of;
 - a) Watersheds within the boundaries of the GP;
 - b) Sectoral problems with their quantitative dimensions (for example, cost of cultivation of specific crops and their profitability, making clear required intervention and support therein); and
 - c) Sectoral potentials and their prioritization, all integrated into watershed based development strategy and District Plan.
2. Under watershed-based planning, Grama Panchayat can be the unit of planning; but often, a group of GPs or Block Panchayat as a whole must be seen as an integral whole. Hence, joint projects of different GPs must be attempted in productive sector. BPs must integrate plans at their level by bringing in harmony between GP level priorities with appropriate collective projects.
3. Graduation of priorities and plans between tiers would require constant vertical communication of planning processes (through officials, academia and other willing collaborators) from GP to district level. Non-official expertise, essential for local planning, must be encouraged with reasonable sitting fees and adequate, non-partisan recognition. Continuity of experience and expertise further requires that official expertise, fine-tuned to local developmental problems, is not disturbed with frequent transfers.

4. Fieldwork reveals that watershed based planning has many limitations in coastal and urban areas. Hence, a different, well-defined strategy may be chalked out for such areas. Weightage given to fishermen in the formula for allocation of grants-in-aids may be re-examined considering their poor socio-economic position.
5. District Plan is the appropriate point for integration of lower level plans. An integrated district plan requires the following;
 - a. Constitutionally, there is hardly any scope for specific expertise in DPC as only one member is nominated by Government as expert and more than 4/5th of its members are elected LSG members. Hence, sectorally distinguished, professional, official and non-official, support mechanisms for DPC should be developed and empowered, with duties of district heads of departments clearly specified therein. They should analyze GP-wise problems and potentials, especially in the productive sector.
 - b. Approval of District Plan should precede projectization at lower levels and be discussed threadbare and ratified at a forum represented by all LSGs in the district.
 - c. District Plan must contain; a) GP-wise data on problems and potentials integrated to watershed based strategy, b) action plan for addressing each prioritized problem and potential and c) unambiguously defined roles of each tier in each action plan.
 - d. Plans of LSGs may be sectorally examined and those inconsistent with strategies agreed under District Plan should be revised before approval.
 - e. Time schedule for approving the plan of various tiers for achieving integration (providing sufficient time for each tier) should be clearly specified and strictly enforced. Decentralized plan cycle needs to be advanced (like in case of annual budgeting) so that plan formulation is complete by the beginning of every financial year and one full year is ensured for plan implementation and follow up.
6. Effective merger of DRDA with District Panchayat is a pre-condition for integration of developmental efforts under CSS, SSS and PRI schemes. Like-wise, at the block level, the dichotomy between the functioning of Block Development Officer and that of Block Panchayat Secretary must be removed; his designation should only be '**Secretary to Block Panchayat**' and his developmental functions should flow necessarily from this capacity.
7. Any effective integration of plans calls for drastic and systematic functional re-

allocation between different tiers. One guiding principle should be that the projects meant for individual beneficiaries must be taken up only at GP level (among the rural PRIs). The scheme guidelines- both central and State- that preclude this need to be got amended. Collective projects on water management, drinking water, etc, must be in tune with the watershed based development strategy and be conceived/discussed thoroughly at the Block level.

8. Strategies must be urgently devised and implemented to reverse the declining share of productive sector plan expenditure shown in the Study.

III. On Plan Implementation

1. One primary requirement for operationalizing an effective productive sector plan is to distinguish between the procedures for selection of beneficiaries for welfare schemes and productive sector schemes. Peasants, Animal Husbandry farmers, etc should be broadly defined for this purpose. Secondly, the tendency towards equal division of beneficiaries across GP wards must be arrested forthwith.
2. Concentration of flow of funds to LSGs (channelized through higher tiers) by the fag end of the financial year and not allowing enough time to spend those funds have together resulted in cumulative delays and manipulative accounting to show expenditure. To remedy this, funds may be directly transferred to the accounts of the concerned LSGs once their plan is approved.
3. The administrative control of local officials should be fully vested with the LSGs, which must have an integrated staff set-up not divided by artificial departmental barriers (Ref: Sen Committee). This would require the following:
 - a) Transferring salaries and other administrative responsibilities related to deployed departmental officials to local bodies at appropriate LSG levels.
 - b) Technical officials be relieved from administrative responsibilities and thereby freed fully for technical work and to provide scientific inputs required for local body level planning.
 - c) A specialized administrative/engineering cadre may be created for LSGs that can effectively handle hierarchies among different sets of officials.
4. The study found that need-driven creation of assets and stakeholder participation are prerequisites to ensuring maintenance and utilization of assets. Creation of

every collective asset should ensure that the project report itself contains a beneficiary-supported and commonly agreed mechanism for the maintenance of assets and an adequate financial provision for the same.

IV. On Grama Sabha participation

1. Decentralized planning will become effective only if it regains its mass movement character. Considering the size of GP wards in Kerala, sub-systems of Grama Sabhas of some form (like Neighbourhood Groups) consistent with watershed based development strategy must be developed and sustained.
2. In addition, channelizing beneficiary selection fully through Grama Sabhas or their sub-systems, and pre-empting alternative, stand-alone, channels for this would boost GS participation. This would not only help the growth of GSs but would prevent development of client-patron relationships also.
3. Efforts should also be made to improve the participation of educated youth (who felt that only politicians have a role in GSs) in the GSs.
4. The problems of information failure (aired mostly by scheduled tribes and fishermen) and clash of work timings with GS meetings (scheduled castes) must be urgently corrected. Grama Sabha meetings should be conducted on common work holidays in the village.
5. Micro-watershed strategy, wherever appropriate, may be employed as tool to change the growing perception that the richer section does not have anything to gain from GS attendance, by assigning appropriate roles for each.
