

## **Introduction**

Kerala, which lagged behind most other states in decentralisation of political power, came to the centre of attention when it decided in 1996 to devolve 35 to 40 percent of the state's plan funds to be used by local bodies for projects selected through a participatory planning process organised in a campaign mode known as People's Plan Campaign (PPC). It was an attempt to provide a functional role to the local bodies and strengthen them through the instrumentality of planning. One of the special features of the plan campaign was to incorporate gender issues in the campaign. Gender was a component in all the five stages of the training provided, a chapter in the development reports prepared by the Panchayats, and a section in the Panchayat plans and individual projects identified by them. In addition, women's participation was encouraged at all stages of the planning process. But the most important feature was the creation of a separate Women Component Plan(WCP) and the allocation of ten percent of the plan funds exclusively for projects meant for women, a feature that was made mandatory from 1998-99 onwards. This study seeks to make an assessment of gender mainstreaming in local level development and governance with particular reference to the record of the WCP during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> plan periods (1997-2007). The study is based on 5 Gram Panchayats, a Block Panchayat and the District Panchayat of Kottayam.

## **Significance**

There have not been serious studies on the Women Component Plan with a reasonably long time frame so far. With the proliferation of SHGs and the linking of them with the Panchayat system under the state-run women anti-poverty mission known as *Kudumbasree*, many studies of *Kudumbasree* have been undertaken. However, while SHG formation has facilitated the channelling of funds to SHG women from the WCP, it is not synonymous with the SHG. No other state in India has introduced a Women Component Plan at the level of the local bodies. Kerala's experience has significance in

understanding the issues connected with the process of extending gender budgeting procedures to the local level in the country.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study seeks to:

1. describe the context of the evolution of Women's Component Plan as a key component of participatory planning and delineate its main features
2. identify the pattern of fund allocation and expenditure with respect to WCP in all the three tiers of the Panchayat set up during the Ninth and Tenth Five Year Plans
3. compare the WCP projects selected with the general and Special Component Plan(SCP) projects for Scheduled Castes in terms of allocation and expenditure to determine their relative performance.
4. assess the views of Panchayat members and officials on the usefulness of WCP projects and the hurdles to their effective implementation
5. estimate the extent to which women have been able to grasp and exercise control over the process of planning and local governance in equal measure as men and understand the barriers to effective mainstreaming of gender

### **Hypotheses**

There is an increasing tendency to turn WCP projects into construction-related projects with successive years.

There is no difference between male members and female members as far as their support to effective formulation and implementation of WCP projects is concerned.

There is considerable gap between the allocation and expenditure of WCP projects compared to general and SCP projects

There is not much incentive structure for elected members to focus their attention on WCP projects in terms of accountability/ visibility and opportunities for rent-seeking behaviour.

## **Methodology**

The study is in one sense exploratory as there are no doctoral level studies on the theme available. The study has adopted a descriptive and analytical approach. The methods employed are mixed in character, adopting a quantitative method for analysing details of outlay and expenditure collected from individual Panchayats through field work and a mix of both quantitative and qualitative for analysing data collected with the help of a survey.

## **Sampling**

A combination of sampling techniques was used in the study. Five Gram Panchayats were selected on the basis of stratified random sampling- the stratification being based on the revenue division (Taluk). The Block Panchayat was selected on the basis of simple random sampling from the 11 Blocks in the District using the lottery method. Since it was found that the quantum of funds received by the District Panchayat was significantly higher than the other tiers, the Kottayam District Panchayat also was included in the study, to enable inter-tier comparisons.

## **Progression of the Study**

The study progressed in the following manner. When the study was initiated, there was hardly any data to rely upon for studying WCP in any of the three tiers of the Panchayat system( all requests for data relating to the 9<sup>th</sup> plan period under right to information receive the standard answer that they are unavailable). The absence of a record-keeping system in the Panchayat and the frequent transfer of the staff are responsible for the

unavailability of data. Data relating to the first five years was not available in a ready form in any of the Panchayats. In most Panchayats this had to be collected from the files tucked away in some corner of the Panchayat office for final disposal since they had already passed through the stage of auditing. Searching poorly arranged bundles of such documents, some of them partially eaten by termites, was found time-consuming. In one Gram Panchayat, almost all the figures relating to 1997-2002 had to be collected from the personal diary of an elected member as the Panchayat itself was dependent on him for such figures. The reason why he had kept the diary was because he was the Chairman of the Finance Standing Committee of the Panchayat. Data relating to the first four years of the 9<sup>th</sup> Plan of a Block Panchayat was provided by a Block Development Officer who was a key resource person during the early stages of participatory planning. In some cases the amount envisaged during annual plans under WCP was available and the amount spent had to be gauged from the cheque payment register. With respect to the period from 2002 to 2007 also the same method was adopted because centralised data set was unavailable until 2009. However, the Information Kerala Mission (IKM) collected Panchayat plan expenditure for the 10<sup>th</sup> Plan period and made it available in the public domain. The researcher used the IKM dataset for the period 2002-7 to fill certain gaps in the data collected from the field. Where discrepancies were found (especially with respect to District Panchayat data), they were rationalised through triangulation and other procedures. After the data for individual Panchayats were tabulated, a survey of 50 male and 50 female elected members of the selected Gram Panchayats was undertaken at random, thereby making a total of 100 respondents. Five male and female representatives each from the Block and District Panchayats were also selected randomly and interviewed, and the results are presented in a narrative form. Data relating to the Panchayat of the respondents were used as the background for the survey in order to enable respondents to recollect things and respond to questions. The opinion of Panchayat secretary and staff were also collected.

The data collected were tabulated and analysed by using primarily simple tools such as decomposed tables, percentages, line diagrams, pie diagram, bar charts and so on with the

help of MS Excel. Some results from the survey of a qualitative nature are presented in a narrative style.

## **Findings**

A total of Rs. 147151921 was envisaged for the seven Panchayats under study of which 39198156 (26.6%) was the total share of the five Panchayats and the remaining 107953765 was the share of the Block and District Panchayats. District Panchayat accounted for an amount of 97967350 or 66.6% of the total leaving only 6.8% to the Block Panchayat.

As many as 478 projects were slated for implementation during the ten-year period in all the 7 Panchayats with the District Panchayat's share being 110 projects. Out of these projects 196 projects were not implemented with the District Panchayat leading on this front- 65 projects (59.09%).

An amount of Rs. 67762515 was spent by all the Panchayats, which works out as 46.05% of the total envisaged amount under WCP during the ten-year period leaving the remaining 53.95 percent unspent. Gram Panchayats spent an aggregate percent of 45.6% of their envisaged amount and the corresponding figures for District and Block Panchayats are 44.02% and 67.65% respectively. In other words, the Block Panchayat showed a higher level of spending compared to the Gram Panchayats and the District Panchayat.

The expenditure as a proportion of the WCP outlay also showed that the record was poor in all the Panchayats not only relative to general projects, but also SCP projects meant for the Scheduled Caste community. In most cases the percentile difference of WCP vis a vis both these categories of projects is significant, leading us to conclude that the WCP is like an orphaned child with no incentive for greater expenditure and no disincentive for poor expenditure. Although the Block Panchayat has a better record in expenditure, it is still way behind the expenditure of SCP projects (79.4%) and lower than the general projects. This applies to the District Panchayat also. However, this difference is most pronounced in Gram Panchayats where the general projects had an expenditure equal to 81.9% of the plan fund and the SCP projects 79.6% compared to 45.6% for WCP. These figures show that WCP was the lowest priority of all the three tiers of the Panchayats included in the study in general and the Gram Panchayats in particular.

It has been found that 80.8% of the total expenditure of the District Panchayat and 53.9% of that of the Gram Panchayats was in the production sector. In contrast the Block Panchayat had the service sector accounting for 52.9%. Agriculture and allied sectors did not receive the attention of the District Panchayat at all, and the Block had only two small projects that were implemented. This was not the case of the Gram Panchayats where agriculture and allied sectors accounted for 11.7% of the expenditure.

There has been an increasing trend of going for projects having a construction component as years go by. There has been a significant increase in such projects during the 10<sup>th</sup> Plan in all the three tiers, particularly in Grama Panchayats.

General awareness about the WCP was found to be low even among elected representatives with only 49% reporting the correct mandatory minimum percentage that needs to be set apart by each Panchayat. Eighty two percent of the female members either did not know the share of the WCP in the total plan fund or came up with wrong figures ranging between five and 40. This contrasts with correct responses from 80 % of the male members.

Majority of women members saw WCP as synonymous with *Kudumbasree* in contrast to majority of males who did not think so. Majority of males (58%) and the largest segment of female members(32%) say WCP projects have registered poor spending levels due to their unrealistic nature and poor design.

Only fifty four percent of the women surveyed were in favour of the current level of reservation of 50% at the Panchayat level including all executive positions and chairpersons of committees for women. Fifty eight percent of male representatives were against the enhancement of reservation from 33% to 50%.

Majority of female and male members (56%) said that skill training projects are good because by this women will acquire new skills that could potentially lead to income generation. However, if we look at the way in which the WCP projects were utilized, the

thrust was more in the direction of redistribution, primarily in the form of financial assistance. Skill training and awareness building constituted only a small component.

Regarding women's rent seeking behaviour also male and female representatives differed. Fifty four percent of the male representatives said that women do take commissions, a view endorsed by 36% of the female representatives as well. Informal interviews have shown that women are not as good as men in bargaining with the contractors. But they are unlikely to refuse a "share" given by the contractors and such payments are seen as not corruption.

Most members (95%) said that there is no conflict between male and female members over WCP projects and there is overall consensus. Women were found to participate less in budgetary and financial processes. Ten percent of funds are usually set apart first and projects are then identified that can somehow fit within this ten percent. The main consideration is to ensure that the plan document of the Panchayat gets its approval from the District Planning Committee in time and is not held up due to the WCP factor.

Both male and female members (96%) agree almost unanimously that a separate component plan like WCP is necessary for women empowerment. Sixty two percent of male members say that women do not show any special interest in getting WCP allocations in place. And 72% of male members say that women do not come together over WCP projects overlooking party considerations. Majority of the male members as well as female members admitted that they had not intervened to salvage WCP projects at any stage.

WCP projects showed the least amount of interest among Panchayat members, male or female. One reason for this is due to the fact that women, like men, represent the constituency as a whole and not the sectional interests of women of the ward or Panchayat concerned. In the Gram Sabha, no one raises questions relating to the spending on WCP. Hence the general projects especially infrastructural ones are the ones around which visibility and accountability are structured.

There is also a general impression that the 10 percent is sufficient to take care of women empowerment and no further allocation needs to be made in other projects in the general sector. The ten percent was envisaged as the minimum and it seen that the 10 percent is in effect becoming the maximum.

Forty six percent of the female members said they get support from their party in carrying out their day-to-day activities while thirty eight percent said they get support from their family, primarily from their husbands. Project implementation was considered by majority of women to be the most uncomfortable task.

To sum up, women as a constituency have not been mobilized to stake their rightful share of the WCP through innovative projects. No support structure has been provided to the elected women by the different women's organisations, some of which were active during the early stages of the people's planning process, to come up with innovative projects. Like men, focus of women representatives was more on projects like road, drinking water facility and so on – projects over which queries would be raised in the Gram Sabha. With the burden of salvaging the WCP projects placed primarily on the shoulders of the Kudumbasree leadership, it is only natural that projects of a redistributive nature are likely to dominate, and that too to benefit members of SHGs. Most of the small enterprises started by women have stopped functioning. Those that survived are run by a few individuals. In the absence of well-thought out projects, the increasing tendency is to go for projects having a construction element which also tend to improve the WCP expenditure level. But many buildings meant for women are used for other purposes with some of them serving as offices. The WCP did not have any visible impact on women's income generation also, not to speak of strategic gender needs.

Although hundreds of orders and directions were issued by the Local Self Government Department, the WCP was largely neglected, and state-wide data relating to WCP expenditure was never collected by any of the state agencies – a clear case of official neglect.



All the four hypotheses of the study have been validated

### **Chapterisation**

The first chapter details the methodology and the organisation of the thesis

The second chapter discusses the theoretical part and reviews the literature

The third chapter describes participatory planning process and the WCP guidelines

The fourth chapter takes up WCP project implementation in five Gram Panchayats

The fifth looks at WCP projects in Block and District Panchayats

The sixth compares all the seven Panchayats based on the consolidated data of the three tiers.

The seventh is based on the results of survey to elicit opinion of the members of the Panchayat on the WCP

This will be followed by a concluding chapter summing up the findings and putting forward a number of suggestions.

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