

**Public Participation and sustainability of Community Assets  
Created under the People's Planning Programme  
in Kerala: Selected case studies**

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**Kerala Research Programme on Local Level Development  
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Thiruvananthapuram**

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## **Contents**

1	Introduction	5
2	Evaluation of sample projects	11
3	Assessment of participation	36
4	Summary and conclusions	39
	References	42



# **Public Participation and sustainability of Community Assets Created under the People's Planning Programme in Kerala: Selected case studies**

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## **1. Introduction**

Many community development projects taken up under the centralised planning system as part of the past Five-Year Plans in Kerala and many other States of the country have failed due to neglect, disuse or abandonment causing substantial wastages of public fund. Media reports and scattered evaluation studies have documented these events. Lack of involvement of the beneficiaries of these projects or the local people is identified as one of the main causes of failure of these projects. These projects were conceived, formulated, and implemented by the officials of government departments. Local people, including the direct beneficiaries of the projects, were neither involved in, nor associated with, the works of these projects.

The democratic decentralisation of economic planning by the Government of Kerala in the first year of the Ninth Five-Year Plan, 1997-'98, has reversed the situation and removed a major hurdle in the sustainability of the community development projects implemented at the local level. Participative development has been the proclaimed core implementation strategy of People's Planning. The most appealing slogan of the campaign for People's Planning has been 'development from below' with the active participation of the people at the local levels. Choices of local development projects are left to the local people. Projects are to be conceived, formulated, implemented, and maintained by the local self governments (*Panchayat Raj* Institutions-PRIs) empowered under the *Panchayat Raj* Act. The role of the State government in local level development has been reduced to that of a facilitator providing funds and guidance.

In participative development, projects are selected, executed, and maintained by the

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beneficiaries of the project or the local people who have some stake in them. Those who build the project are expected, naturally, to develop a sense of ownership over the project and, in their own self-interest, a commitment to maintain and upkeep the project. As participative development is the main strategy of People's Planning, community or social development projects taken up under this programme are expected to bring down the failure rate of such projects and improve their sustainability. The present study is taken up to test this hypothesis empirically by conducting a sample survey of the social development projects already implemented by the local self-government institutions in Thiruvananthapuram district in the first three years of People's Planning Programme.

Initially, we intended to make a comparative study of the non-participative, departmentally implemented projects in the pre-People's Plan period under various rural development programmes and the participative People's Plan projects. This would have revealed how far participation is a decisive element in the sustainability of social development projects. But the field realities forced us to drop this objective. First, most of such comparable earlier projects, mainly roads, lift irrigation tanks and channels, which had become non-functional or gone into disuse have since been renovated utilising the plan funds in the initial years of the People's Plan. Second, no data to track the history of these projects, executed by various departmental agencies, were traceable in the Block or *Grama Panchayat* offices.

There are no known evaluation studies available on the sustainability of participative development projects in Kerala. There are quite a few studies on some well-publicised participative projects like Sukhomaji of Hariyana, *Pani Panchayat* of Maharashtra, Appiko of Karnataka, and Sardar Sarovar of Gujarat. But, the settings of these projects, sponsored or executed by Non-Governmental Organisations, are basically different from that of state-sponsored People's Plan projects of Kerala. Experiences of participative projects in other countries are extensively documented in a number of study reports.

## **Objectives**

- (i) To assess the sustainability of the assets and institutions created under the community projects taken up under People's Plan Programme. Depending on the nature of such projects they are assessed in given normal conditions to check whether they received continued financial assistance from the plan fund or not.
- (ii) To assess the role of people's participation as a critical factor in the success of these projects.
- (iii) To identify and analyse the reasons for failure in the cases of projects that failed.
- (iv) To examine how far People's Planning has helped the community projects taken up under the programme by improving the level of people's participation, quality, cost effectiveness, and benefit delivery system.

## **Definition of concepts**

- (i) Social or Community projects are defined as those designed to provide services or resources to persons, households or community and are distinct from physical

engineering projects that are designed to alter the physical and technical infrastructure of a society. In People's Planning, we have to make a clear distinction between the community projects and the individual beneficiary projects (which, incidentally, consumed a major share of the outlays of the first three years' annual plans of most of the *panchayats* covered by this study). For the purpose of this study we have defined community projects as projects meant for the benefit of the community or a group of people and the assets of which are collectively owned by the community represented by, in the context of decentralised planning, the concerned Beneficiaries' Committee or local self-government institution. So this is distinctly different from individual beneficiary projects in which benefits accrue to individuals and the assets created are also owned by them. Although we have used this definition as a rule of thumb, the distinction is not sharp. There are projects under which outright grants have been given to co-operative societies. Assets created under these projects are owned by the societies, which are often closed shops. Unlike in the case of functional societies or groups created under People's Planning, the *panchayat* has no control over them. However, taking these societies as collective bodies and not as individuals, we have considered these projects as community projects and included them also in this study.

- (ii) Sustainability of a project, in its usual sense, means its capacity to endure for its estimated lifetime, yielding the benefits or fulfilling its objectives envisaged in the original project document. This study has a reference period much shorter than the expected life of many community projects implemented under People's Planning Programme. So, for this study, depending on the nature of the project, sustainability is defined as short-term sustainability of more than the first one year of the life of the project with or without continued aid or subsidy from the *panchayat*.
- (iii) Measuring the level of participation in participative development poses conceptual as well as practical problems. The term participation eludes any universally acceptable definition. Participation in a project activity could be interpreted as any action ranging from mere association or passive physical attendance in the initial deliberative session to taking the helm of project activities. For the purpose of this study we have used the term 'participation' both in its broad sense as mere association and in its real sense as 'active' participation. We have taken participation as active if the participant has raised any issues, made any suggestion or criticism in the meetings, which deliberated on the project or served as a member of any committee or group associated with the activities of the project, eg. Task Force, Ward Development Council, Implementation Committee, and Monitoring Committee. With a view to getting a realistic picture of the levels of participation, we have excluded the Chairpersons and Conveners of Implementation Committees of the projects and Ward Members from our sample frame, which in most cases is very small. By and large we have gone by the words of the respondents in assessing their participation level.

## Methodology

### *Selection of samples*

The study was conducted on a sample survey basis and confined to Thiruvananthapuram

district. The number of community projects implemented by the *Panchayat Raj* Institutions of the district runs into many hundreds. A large number of them were projects for construction of roads, bridges, culverts and buildings for schools, offices, hospitals, shopping complexes, and auditoria, which have comparatively longer life spans. Sustainability of these kinds of permanent projects even without any active pressure by the people is presumed. So these types of projects were first eliminated from the sampling frame. Then there were a large number of low-investment projects, which, if included in the sampling frame, would make it unwieldy. So we eliminated all community projects costing below Rs 2 lakh in *Grama Panchayats*, Rs 3 lakh in Block *Panchayat* and Municipalities and Rs 5 lakh in Thiruvananthapuram District *Panchayat*. From the annual plan documents of the *Panchayat Raj* Institutions of the district available with the State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram, a list of projects involving outlays from plan fund above these cut off levels was compiled for the first three years of People's Planning – 1997-'98 to 1999-2000. This list gave us the number of projects *prima facie* found eligible to be included in the sampling frame. Total number of such projects was 163.

The first round of field survey was done in March-May 2001 to ascertain the present status of these projects, and to collect the project reports and other relevant documents relating to these projects from the concerned *panchayat* officials. Out of the 163 projects, many were abandoned and some were not started. Exact status of many projects could not be ascertained because neither the new *Panchayat* Committees nor the new *panchayat* staffs had knowledge about the projects implemented earlier. Out of the 163 in the sample frame, number of completed or partially completed projects about which we could gather information was only around 45. These projects were classified into five categories and samples were selected from each of these categories as given in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1 Scheme-wise Classification of Projects**

No.	Category	No. of projects Completed/partially completed	No. of samples selected
1	Agriculture production	2	2
2	Irrigation	14	5
3	Industrial production	14	6
4	Supply of drinking water	6	3
5	Welfare projects	9	4
	Total	45	20

Number of sample projects that were selected from each category is not strictly in proportion to the total number of projects in that category.

We followed the criterion that not more than one project should be selected from any one *panchayat*. No project could be selected from any of the four Municipalities of the district as none of them satisfied our criterion. None of the nine projects taken up by Thiruvananthapuram District *Panchayat* was selected as all of them, still incomplete, are implemented departmentally without any public participation. Projects taken up by *panchayats*, which have since been merged with City Corporation are not included in the sample. List of



sample projects selected for detailed study according to our criteria is given in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.2 Panchayat Projects Undertaken in Areas since Merged with City Corporation**

No.	Purpose	Sl.No	Project	
1	<i>Agriculture production</i>			
		1	Mushroom cultivation	A
		2	paddy cultivation	K
2	<i>Irrigation</i>			
		3	Vaikkottukonamkulam	K
		4	Chavarcode Ela	N
		5	Chooryode lift irrigation	P.
		6	Kavukulam lift irrigation	P.
		7	Kadaikkulam	V
3	<i>Industrial production</i>			
		8	Coir society	C
		9	Readymade garments	K
		10	Mini-industrial estate	K
		11	Electronic choke units	K
		12	Handloom society	P.
		13	Reed- based industries	V
4	<i>Supply of drinking water</i>			
		14	Pezhumkamukal	V
		15	Chevalakkonam	P.

These 20 projects were studied in detail by conducting repeated rounds of field surveys in June-October 2001. Bulk of the information was collected through discussions with the Presidents and members of the Block/*Grama Panchayat* Committees, *Panchayat* officials, concerned implementation officers of agriculture and industries departments, Conveners, Chairpersons and members of Implementation Committees, beneficiaries of the projects, local people and other key informants selected at random. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect information on participation and assessment of the projects by the sample beneficiaries.

Results and findings of the study are presented in Section 3 and the summary and conclusions in Section 4.

## 2. Evaluation of Sample Projects

### **Mushroom Cultivation (Athiyannur Block *Panchayat*)**

This is a project for setting up of an industrial production unit for the cultivation of mushroom and spawn taken up by Athiyannur Block *Panchayat* in its annual plan for 1997-'98. The project with an aggregate outlay of Rs 14.08 lakh was to be implemented in three years. Thirty young unemployed Scheduled Caste women in the age group of 18-35 with an educational qualification of SSLC and above, living within the Block area were to be selected as the beneficiaries of the project. The project was approved by the District Planning Committee (DPC) in June 1998. According to the approved project report, the unit in its full stream would annually produce 32000 packets of spawn valued at Rs 4.8 lakh and 14200 kg of mushroom valued at Rs 5.68 lakh and expected to earn a net profit of Rs 5.48 lakh, excluding the profit to be earned from the food produces proposed to be produced. All these estimates have turned out to be unrealistic and highly exaggerated.

A building was constructed in the Block Office compound to locate the unit. The Block *Panchayat* provided necessary machinery and equipment like air conditioner, inoculation chamber rocks, autoclave, LPG connection, furniture, and vessels. Total amount spent on this project from the Block *Panchayat*'s plan fund is about Rs 13 lakh (including the working capital of Rs 3.14 lakh). The Block *Panchayat*, through open recruitment, directly selected the beneficiaries. Thirty beneficiaries were selected and given training in mushroom cultivation and spawn production by the experts from Kerala Agriculture University. A monthly stipend of Rs 400 was given to the trainees during the two months' training period, which started in January 1999. A society was registered with the 30 beneficiaries who had completed the training as members, each one contributing Rs 500 towards the share capital of the society. The Block *Panchayat* allotted Rs 3.14 lakh from the plan fund for meeting the operating expenses of the unit. For the first three months of functioning of the unit, the participants were given a monthly stipend of Rs 500 each.

Soon after the start of production, some construction defects were detected in the building. There are allegations of corruption in the construction of the building. Rs 40000 had to be spent to rectify the defects. By the time the repair work was carried out, rats had entered the building and destroyed some of the vital installations and equipment causing an estimated loss of Rs 9000. This had to be made good from the funds allotted by the Block. Actual production of mushroom during the trial period was minimal as there was no arrangement for marketing the products. Members of the society, however, used to attend the unit so long as they were given stipend. Once the stipend was stopped, many of them ceased to attend and 13 of them withdrew from the society leaving only 17 as members. In the mean time, there was a theft in the unit. Some essential equipment like gas stove, vessels, pressure cooker, frying pans, and tumblers were stolen. This stalled the production completely. The unit became non-functional and all but two – the President and the Secretary – of the remaining 17 members also withdrew from the activities of the unit. Electric supply was disconnected because of the non-payment of bills. Efforts made by the President, Syamala, and Secretary,

Jalaja, to revive the unit did not succeed because none of the other members was interested and did not even turn up to attend the general body meetings convened.

Efforts are now on to revive the unit at the initiative of the Districts Industries Officer. Seven of the existing members of the society expressed their unwillingness to participate in the activities of the unit unless they are assured of some regular income. It has been decided to curtail the membership to 11 and to diversify the activities of the unit to the manufacturing of food products like pickles, squash, and jam and even to tailoring and embroidery.

The main reasons for the failure of the project are:

- (i) The production line and the project report are seen to have been mechanically adapted from the model projects included in the publications of the State Planning Board. The project idea had not come up from the people who were genuinely interested in the project but was decided at the Block *Panchayat* level without any feasibility studies.
- (ii) The Block Level Implementation Committee (BLIC) did not seem to have properly appraised the project report. Production targets were too ambitious to realise and the actual production in the initial trial period did not touch even a significant fraction of the targets. Marketing aspects, vital to any commercial production programme, were completely ignored.
- (iii) Majority of the participating members dissociated themselves from the projects, because they were not getting any income from the project after the withdrawal of the monthly stipend of Rs 500 paid in the initial three months. They were neither committed to the project nor properly motivated to participate.
- (iv) The mode of selection of beneficiaries itself was not conducive to the success of a participatory project. Their participation was not voluntary in the sense that it was out of any genuine interest in the project. They were 'recruited' giving the wrong impression that they were getting a remunerative job in a government project. Once their hopes were belied, naturally they lost interest in the project. They could earn more income by working as agriculture labourers or construction workers elsewhere.

The ongoing efforts to rehabilitate the project by product diversification may change the characteristic of the original project. If it succeeds it can achieve, to some extent, the basic objective of providing some self-employment opportunities to SC women. But for manufacturing pickles and jams (the market for which is already highly competitive) the air-conditioner, machinery and equipment already installed for mushroom production on which substantial investments have been made from plan fund would be rendered superfluous.

### **Paddy Cultivation (Kollayil Grama Panchayat)**

Kollayil Grama Panchayat took up a project for group farming in the entire clusters of paddy fields (*Elas*) in its annual plan for 2000-2001 as part of a comprehensive programme for the development of paddy cultivation. This project is an example of how an old departmental programme, which could not produce the desired results due to flaws in implementation and leakages of assistance, could be made more effective and purposeful through participative

action by the beneficiaries and departmental agencies. Agriculture Department had been distributing subsidies to paddy cultivators for the purchase of seeds, chemical fertilisers and pesticides under the group farming programmes for quite sometime now. Many farmers in Kollayil *Panchayat* whom we interviewed conceded that in the absence of an effective mechanism to monitor the use, subsidies distributed under the programme were widely misused defeating the very purpose of the programme. It is in this context that Kollayil *Panchayat* formulated a project for the promotion of paddy cultivation by streamlining the existing group farming programme to the collective action mode of People's Planning. A beginning had been made in the annual plan for 1999-2000 by introducing the programme for the second crop of paddy in selected clusters of paddy fields (*padasekharam*). Rs 90,000 was allocated from the plan fund for that programme. The objective of the larger project was to bring all the clusters of paddy fields in the *panchayat* under the ambit of the programme. It was taken up in the annual plan for 2000-'01 by allocating Rs 3.6 lakh from the Plan fund.

The first step towards the implementation of the project was the constitution of Group Farm Committees for each cluster of paddy fields elected by the members of the cluster. The *panchayat* member representing the ward is the Convener of the committee. It has a representative of the agriculture department and a local voluntary worker nominated by the *panchayat*. To guide and co-ordinate the working of these committees at the *panchayat* level, there is an apex committee with the President of the *panchayat* as Chairperson and the Agriculture Officer as Convener. The representative nature of the Group Farm Committees increases their acceptability among the member farmers especially when these committees exercise the rather unpalatable job of physical checking of the utilisation of subsidies.

With a view to preserving the fertility of the soil, the project insisted that each member farmer should apply a minimum prescribed quantity of bio-fertiliser (cattle dung) to his paddy field. Cattle dung, in separate basket lots in proportion to the area, should be spread in the field and the Group Farm Committee would physically count and verify these lots at an appointed time and satisfy itself that the farmer had applied bio-fertiliser on the prescribed scale. For each basket of cattle-dung (nominally valued at Rs 15 per basket) applied, the farmer got a subsidy of Rs 7.50. Chemical fertilisers were distributed pro-rata to the size of holding, at subsidized prices through permits issued by the Agriculture Officer. These permits were delivered to the farmers at the farm gate. Purchases were to be made from the primary co-operative society of the *panchayat* by paying 50 percent of the normal price. The subsidy portion, i.e., 50 percent of the value, was reimbursed to the society by the Agriculture Department, which was the nodal agency for implementing the project. A subsidy of 50 percent was given on pesticides also and was routed through the committee, which collectively arranged its application in the fields.

According to the project report, the programme in 2000-'01 was supposed to cover 22 hectares in the first crop and 42 hectares in the second crop. Estimated outlay of the project was Rs 6.69 lakh-Rs 3.65 lakh from plan fund, Rs 0.13 lakh from the *panchayat's* own fund, and Rs 2.91 lakh as beneficiaries' contribution. This outlay included Rs 0.77 lakh for subsidised distribution of seeds, which was dropped later as it was not permitted under state government guidelines, and Rs 50000 as subsidy for the purchase of a tractor for Kalatharakkal

Group Farming society. According to Agriculture Department's data on actual distribution of subsidy, area covered by the project in 2000-2001 was only 13.7 hectares in the first crop and 16.0 hectares in the second crop. Total amount of subsidy distributed through the Agriculture Department was Rs 1.1 lakh, which meant that subsidy was about Rs 3718 per hectare or Rs 14.64 per one cent. However, as the actual distribution of subsidy had spilled over to the next financial year, the actual area covered might be more. According to the Convener of the Implementation Committee, the project covered an area of 48 hectares in 2000-'01.

The project report claimed that as a result of a similar programme implemented on a limited scale for the second crop of paddy in 1999-2000 in Kalatharakkal *Ela*, yield rate per one cent of area had gone up from 7.5-10 kg to 20-25 kg, i.e. by about 150 percent. This appears to be an exaggeration. No reliable estimate of additional production is available. Many of the participant farmers of the project interviewed by the survey team told that there was, on an average, about 50 percent increase in yield - from about 10 kg to 15 kg per one cent of area. We could not do a detailed survey for a cost-benefit analysis of the programme for want of time and resources.

None of the sample beneficiaries of the project had any serious complaints against this programme and all of them want this project to continue. Only one farmer complained that the transporting charges of the fertiliser from the co-operative society to the farm more or less neutralised the subsidy amount.

As regard the sustainability of the project, the issue is not a localised one but covers a much wider area. It is a matter of state policy to decide whether paddy production in the State should continue to be propped up for ever by doling out subsidies. Given the present cost-price imbalances, once the subsidy is withdrawn, the cultivation practices and therefore the yield rate may drift back to the earlier uneconomic levels forcing the farmers to quit paddy cultivation. Many of the participating farmers have pointed out that the major component of the cost of cultivation of paddy is labour charges and subsidies on seeds and fertilisers give only a marginal relief to them. According to some local farmers, the trend of filling up and converting paddy fields as house plots or diverting paddy fields for other crops has come to a halt in areas covered by this scheme.

Even if the subsidy continues, yield rate that has almost reached a plateau cannot increase further to neutralise any future escalations in the overall production cost. Moreover, the project is not local-specific and whatever local initiatives and farmers' participation is there it cannot sustain in isolation from the effects of similar projects implemented all over the State.

### **Vaikkottukonam Lift Irrigation (Kadakkavoor Grama Panchayat)**

Vaikkottukonamkulam is an ancient natural pond in Kadakkavoor *Panchayat*. Rain and surface water collected and stored in the pond was let out in Vaikkottukonam canal and used for irrigating a second crop of paddy or pulses and vegetables in Melattingal cluster of paddy fields (*Ela*) some 500 meters away. In course of time, due to lack of proper maintenance,

silting and sliding of the sides, availability of water in the pond for irrigation purpose has depleted. A project was formulated by the Kadakkavoor *Panchayat* for renovating the pond and the feeder canal to Melattingal *Ela* and installing a pump set so that the farmers of Melattingal paddy field could raise a third crop of paddy or pulses and vegetables. The project was included in the annual plan of the *panchayat* for 1997-'98. Total outlay of the project was estimated at Rs 7.25 lakh – Rs 7 lakh from plan fund and Rs 25000 as contribution of voluntary services by the beneficiaries. Work on the project was taken up in 1997-'98, but could not be completed in the year. Out of the plan allocation of Rs 4.74 lakh for the project in 1997-'98, Rs 4.68 lakh was spent. The project spilled over to 1998-'99 when Rs 1.73 lakh more was spent on it. A pump set was installed but the vital lift irrigation part of the project is yet to become operational for want of electricity connection for which necessary deposit has already been made with the State Electricity Board. Rs 26000 targeted to be collected, as beneficiaries' contribution could not be mobilised, as the project has not delivered the promised benefit so far.

A local Beneficiaries Committee executed the project works. The pond has been renovated and protected by sidewalls. The 550-metre canal, which runs through a sloping terrain, has also been renovated and protected by sidewalls. The Block *Panchayat* gave funds for the renovation and side walling of 300 out of 550 meters of the canal length. Left boundary of the canal is so elevated that the masonry work of the sidewall on that side is some 3 to 5 metres high at many segments. The right side bund of the canal provides a convenient footpath from the pond to the paddy field. But the quality of the masonry work of this bund seems to be rather poor. In many places the top plastering and the masonry work are already damaged, making passage over it difficult. Dumping of domestic waste by people living on the left side of the canal together with silting and weed growth have partially blocked the flow of water through the canal. According to local people, it would be cleansed when water is needed for irrigation. Between the two, it was not clear who would bear the cost of cleansing, the beneficiaries or the *Panchayat*. Land on the right side of the canal from the pond is at an elevation of 1-2 feet from the bottom level of the canal. At present these areas do not get water from the canal. Had the bottom of the canal been raised by a foot or two feet, irrigation of these areas also would have been possible. Some farmers owning land at the tail end of the *ela* apprehend that even if the canal is cleansed and the lift irrigation system is commissioned, sufficient water may not reach their fields because of heavy seepage all along the canal. A possible solution, according to them, is to concrete the bottom of the canal. But concreting the bottom, according to some farmers, may affect the availability of ground water in the land all along the sides of the canal. It appears that neither the people who prepared the project report nor the experts of the Block Level Execution Committee, who appraised the project and gave technical approval, considered these issues when assessing the feasibility of the project.

Commissioning of the project is held up for want of electricity connection. Contrary to what was visualised in People's Planning, there was no proper co-ordination among different departmental agencies at local level in the formulation and execution of this project.

All sample beneficiaries have contributed voluntary labour. Seven out of the eight sample beneficiaries at some stage have participated in the project activities and three of them actively.

At present the project has no recurring cost except the cost of the periodical maintenance of the canal, which the beneficiary farmers are likely to bear. But once the lift irrigation system is commissioned disputes may arise as to who should bear the operation cost, the *panchayat* or the beneficiaries. Sustainability of the project depends on a mutually agreeable decision on this issue.

### **Chavarcode *Ela* Lift Irrigation (Navaikkulam Grama Panchayat)**

This is a project taken up by Navaikkulam *Panchayat* as a model lift irrigation project. It has failed to deliver the expected benefits because of faulty implementation.

The project included in the annual plan of the *panchayat* for 1998-'99 was meant to irrigate about 20 hectares of traditionally rain-fed single-crop clusters of paddy fields in Chavarcode *Ela* to enable the farmers of the *Ela* to raise a second crop of paddy and a third crop of pulses and vegetables. The project was to lift water from the tank at the head of the *Ela* and supply to the paddy fields through lead channels. Total estimated outlay of the project was Rs 5.15 lakh-Rs 4.75 lakh from the plan fund and Rs 0.40 lakh worth of contribution of voluntary services from the beneficiaries and local people. Rs 5 lakh was allotted to the project from the Plan fund of the *Panchayat* in 1998-'99. Execution of the project was entrusted to an Implementation Committee constituted of beneficiaries and local people. The project was completed in February 1999 well within the scheduled time.

A pump house was constructed near the tank and a pump set installed. A two-feet wide lead channel was laid to the tail end of the *Ela* some 500 meters away from the tank. The beneficiary farmers contributed land for the channel. The bottom of the channel was lined with stones to reduce seepage and the sides were protected by masonry sidewalls. The project was commissioned in March 1999 and water was supplied for a few months. Gradually, the availability of water at the tail end dropped because of water loss due to seepage through the cracks, which developed in the stones laid at the bottom of the channel. Another defect of the system noticed during the time of its operation was that the bottom level of the channel at the upper segment of the channel was below the level of the adjacent paddy fields on both sides. During summer the availability of water in the tank came down. As a result, the level of water pumped into the channel receded. This caused a reverse flow of water from the paddy fields to the channel instead of from the channel to the paddy fields. Finding that the project was not serving the purpose for which it was meant, its operation was suspended within a few months of its commissioning.

There was good participation by the local people and the beneficiaries in the execution of the project. All the seven sample beneficiaries have reported some participation, mainly by offering voluntary labour. Three of them were active participants. According to some of the local farmers, the defects of the channel were pointed out to the Convener and members of the Implementation Committee at the construction stage itself, but they were ignored. Some local young men confessed that even though they were aware of these defects at the construction stage, they did not dare to raise these issues before the senior local leader who was in the overall supervision of the project because they were afraid to attract his displeasure. Anyway the project is not functioning now. *Panchayat* continues to pay the electricity bills



lest the electric supply should be disconnected. According to the local farmers the only solution available now to revive the project is to concrete and raise the bottom level of the channel. But the new *Panchayat* Committee, after the change of political control from LDF to UDF, is not inclined to take up this work partly because of the paucity of funds and partly, may be, because of partisan considerations. As of now, the project is as good as abandoned causing wastage of assets worth Rs 5 lakh and the continued payment of electricity charges for the non-operating pump set.

### **Chooryode Lift Irrigation (Parassala Block *Panchayat*)**

Chooryode *Ela* in Kottakkakam ward of Kulathur *Grama Panchayat* had been facing frequent crop failures in summer due to the lack of irrigation facilities. There are 22 farm households in this area covering about 2 hectares (less than five acres). All of them are small farmers holding 10 cents to 1 acre of land. The main crops of the area are paddy, coconut, plantain, and vegetables. Neyyar River flows along side the Chooryode *Ela*. The *Grama Sabha* approved the project and it was included in the 1998-'99 annual plan of Parassala Block *Panchayat*. The total outlay of the project was estimated at Rs 2.15 lakh-Rs 2.00 lakh from Plan fund and Rs 15000 was the value of voluntary services to be contributed by the beneficiaries. A tank was constructed and a pump set installed on the bank of Neyyar River at Mavilakkadavu. Water is pumped into the tank and distributed through pipeline to the *Ela*, which is about 300m away. There was a delay of two months in getting sanction from Irrigation Department and another six months for getting electricity connection. A Beneficiary Committee elected from among the farmers of the *Ela* carried out all the works of the project. Actual expenditure of the project, Rs 2.5 lakh, was in excess of the plan allocation and the Beneficiaries Committee through monetary contributions and voluntary services contributed the excess expenditure.

Unlike many other irrigation projects we studied in the district, Chooryode project is functioning well. It is one of the very few success stories of participative development in the district under Peoples' Plan. Water is supplied only for six months during the summer months facilitating the raising of a second crop of paddy or vegetables. The members of the committee, mostly by the Convener, voluntarily operate the system. Electricity charges come to about Rs 900 bi-monthly, which the Beneficiary Committee was paying initially for a few months by collecting a monthly subscription of Rs 20 from members. Now the Block *Panchayat* pays it.

All the 10 sample beneficiaries participated in the project activities at some stage, mostly by contributing voluntary labour. Only three of them were active participants

None of the 10 beneficiaries of the project interviewed by us did have any complaint about the functioning of the project. Some of them, however, expressed the desire to upgrade the project either by increasing the capacity of the pump-set or by constructing a channel to replace the present pipeline so that more farmers could be brought under the ambit of the project and the water could be used for drinking purpose also.

We could identify three important factors contributing to the successful functioning of the project. They are:

- (i) The beneficiaries have a direct stake in the project in the sense that they get water for raising additional crops in their land and earn some additional income.
- (ii) They get water free of cost now as the *panchayat* is paying the electricity bill.
- (iii) Genuine and active participation of the beneficiaries and the earnest and sincere efforts of the Implementation Committee, particularly its convener, Sasi, an agriculture labourer, is the key to the successful functioning of the project.

In order to assess the sustainability of the project, the study addressed itself to two questions: first, Can the *Panchayat* afford to pay the electricity charges i.e., continue with the subsidised distribution of irrigation water, for all the years to come? and second, what will happen if the *panchayat*, in future, stops the subsidy? Then, the farmers will have to pay the electricity bill and meet the expenses of repair, maintenance, and operation charges. Our experience with some other projects including very essential projects like drinking water projects is that they do not function because the beneficiaries are not willing to contribute towards operational expenses. Members of the Beneficiaries' Committee of this project assert that even in such an unlikely event, they will run the project by collecting subscription from the beneficiaries. Most of the beneficiaries of the project, however, are poor farmers who may not have the means to pay for the water. Sustainability of the project of this kind is conditional on the continuing subsidy from the government, i.e., the Block or *Grama Panchayat*.

#### **Kavukulam Lift Irrigation (Parassala Grama Panchayat)**

Cheruvarakkonam-Ramayyanvila area of Parassala *Grama Panchayat* is an elevated area inhabited by about 70 families. Coconut, tapioca, and plantain are the main crops of this area. Due to lack of irrigation facility, yields of these crops have remained very low. Waterbed is far too low in the area to be tapped by an individual farmer economically by digging well and installing pump set. A community irrigation system has been a long-felt need of the people of this area. With the launching of People's Planning, the farmers of this area approached the *panchayat* with a proposal to set up a lift irrigation system in Kavukulam, an ancient pond adjacent to the area. A project was formulated and included in the annual plan of the *panchayat* for 1998-'99. But it could not be completed in the year. A plot of land for constructing a pump house was purchased near Kavukulam. The project spilled over to next year's annual plan. The project was taken up in 1999-2000 as spillover project with an estimated outlay Rs 3.3 lakh – Rs 3 lakh from the Plan fund and Rs 30000 as the value of voluntary services to be contributed by the beneficiaries.

The project envisaged lifting water from Kavukulam by digging a well inside the pond and distributing it through pipelines laid across the area. The work of the project was entrusted to a Beneficiary Committee. A well, 10m x 8m x 3m, was dug inside Kavukulam pond. A pump set with a 7 HP motor was installed. Distribution pipelines were laid all over the project area. Work of the project was completed in January 2000 but it could not be commissioned so far (September 2001) for want of electricity connection. Application for electricity connection together with the required deposit was given to the KSEB soon after the completion of work. Electricity connection is delayed; it is learnt because it involves drawing of three-phase line to the area, which takes time. An investment of Rs 3.3 lakh has been lying idle for

nearly two years now and in spite of collective efforts, the aspirations of the people of the area still remain a dream. This is yet another case showing lack of co-ordination among the plan implementing agencies at local level.

#### **Kadaikkulam *Ela* Channel (Vizhinjam Grama Panchayat)**

Kadaikkulam *ela* in Vizhinjam Panchayat had no irrigation facility. There was an old channel reaching the *ela* from Thendurkonam tank, an ancient pond, some 600m away. The channel was in a dilapidated condition due to sliding of the side bunds and silting. A project for renovating the channel by deepening it and protecting it by sidewalls was taken up by the Vizhinjam Panchayat in 1997-'98. Total outlay of the project was Rs 3.2 lakh – Rs 3 lakh from Plan fund and Rs 20000 as value of voluntary services from the beneficiaries. Declared objective of the project was to irrigate one hectare of land in Kadaikkulam *ela*.

Rs 2.85 lakh was allocated for the project from the plan fund in 1997-'98. But the project could not be completed in the year and it spilled over to 1998-'99. The channel from Thendurkonam pond (which was already renovated and protected by side walls earlier) was deepened and masonry work, sidewall, and a two-feet bund on the left bank were constructed. At the entry point of water through the sluice from the pond at the head of the channel, a cement platform with high sidewalls was also constructed. The project was completed at a total cost of Rs 2.56 lakh. The voluntary service envisaged in the project report was not at all realised. There was no significant participation by the local people in the execution of the project. According to the local people, a *benami* contractor in the name of Implementation Committee executed the entire work.

The primary objective of the project, i.e., irrigating one hectare of land in the *Ela*, could not be realised because the thin flow of water in the channel in the summer months is almost lost in seepage and is not sufficient to reach the *ela* located at the tail end. Land on either side all along the channel are on a higher elevation in relation to the bottom line of the channel and do not benefit from the channel. However, the project has realized two undeclared side benefits: first, it provided a convenient bathing place in the platform at the head of the channel; and second, it provided a convenient pedestrian footpath along the reconstructed left bund of the channel between the tank and Vizhinjam beach. According to the local people, hundreds of people even from places as distant as Vizhinjam town come to this pond daily for taking bath and washing clothes. As the project failed to achieve its declared objective, i.e., irrigation, it has no direct beneficiaries. A permanent construction with no recurring cost involved, the project will sustain of its own.

#### **Coir Mats and Matting Society (Chirayinkeezhu Block Panchayat)**

The project was included in the annual plan of Chirayinkeezhu Block Panchayat for 1998-'99. An outright grant of Rs 5 lakh for the purchase of three mechanised coir looms was given to the newly-started Chirayinkeezhu-Anchuthengu Coir Mats and Matting Society at Muttappalam in Azhoor Grama Panchayat.

Chirayinkeezhu Taluk, particularly areas like Anchuthengu, Chirayinkeezhu, Azhoor, and

Murukkumpuzha, has a concentration of coir workers. There are about 15 coir factories in this area but all of them produce only coir yarn and coir ropes. Setting up a factory for manufacturing value-added products like coir mats and matting in this area was a long-felt need. The Mat and Matting society at Muttappalam was set up by a group of promoters to fill this gap. Work on this project started in June 2000 and the factory was formally inaugurated in January 2001.

The Society has a total investment of about Rs 87 lakh in land, buildings, machinery and working capital. It is financed by the share capital (Rs 4.1 lakh) contributed by the promoters and members, government subsidy (Rs 24.6 lakh), NCDC loan (Rs 53.3 lakh), grants from Azhoor Grama Panchayat (Rs 2.5 lakh), and the present grant from Chirayinkeezhu Block Panchayat (Rs 5 lakh). At present the society has 180 members. All of them, except five percent sympathiser members, are traditional coir workers. Value of one share is Rs 1000. All the 60 workers presently working in the factory are members of the society. There are 3 mechanised looms (purchased with Block Panchayat Grant) and 40 handlooms installed in the factory with necessary accessories required for making coir ropes and dyeing. The factory is working much below its installed capacity for want of adequate market for its products. According to the management of the factory, so far it has not faced any payment crisis.

Block Panchayat's contribution of Rs 5 lakh from its plan fund to the society forms only about 5.5 percent of the society's total investment and does not have any significant influence on the functioning of the society. Moreover, the Block Panchayat has neither any stake nor any control over the society. Nevertheless, the asset created by the project may be treated, as a community asset assuming that membership of the society is open to any coir worker within the Block panchayat. Sustainability of the project is dependent on the sustainability of the society.

### **Readymade Garment Units (Karumkulam Grama Panchayat)**

This project, included in the annual plan of Karumkulam Panchayat for 1998-'99 was to set up 10 readymade garment units by women, each with 10 members. Each unit was to be supplied with ten sewing machines, one inter-locking machine, other accessories and furniture required for a tailoring unit. Estimated outlay of the project was Rs 4.59 lakh – Rs 3.09 lakh from Plan fund and Rs 1.5 lakh as beneficiaries' contributions. According to the annual plan document of the panchayat, the project was not implemented in the year because of some technical problems, which nobody in the new Panchayat Committee or office could explain. Our enquiries with some former members of the panchayat and local people reveal that there were not many takers for the project who could afford to pay the beneficiaries' contribution of Rs 1500. In the first year of People's Plan, 1997-'98, the Panchayat had already distributed sewing machines to 281 families spending Rs 6.18 lakh from the Plan fund. The government in 1998-'99 banned distribution of sewing machines under individual beneficiaries' programmes. The project for setting up of garment units in the society mode was perhaps intended to circumvent this ban.

The project was implemented in 1999-2000 but at a reduced scale. The number of units was

cut to two and both were entrusted to two of the existing women self-help groups; one at Nambiadi and the other at Pallam. Estimated outlay of the project was Rs 1.25 lakh, but only Rs 81000 was spent for the project according to the annual plan documents of the *panchayat*. Each unit was supplied with ten sewing machines, one interlocking machine, and other accessories as envisaged in the original project report. Of the two, only the unit at Nambiadi is now functioning although erratically. The unit does not make any readymade garments for the market, but imparts training in tailoring to a few girls. The trainees themselves share remuneration of the trainer. The only other purpose the unit now serves is that it allows the members to stitch their own garments or to perform tailoring work they get sporadically from some known customers. The income earned by the unit is not sufficient even to pay the rent of the one-room shop where it is functioning. Members pay the rent from their own pockets. None of the members of the unit is optimistic about the future of the unit, as they cannot sell their produce in the market where competition from cheaper factory-made garments is very stiff. The unit is almost on the brink of closure.

The other unit at Pallam, which functioned for a few weeks, is defunct now. Members of the unit have taken the machines to their homes, as they could not afford to pay the rent of the room because of poor earnings.

The project failed because it was formulated and implemented without even a preliminary feasibility study. *Panchayat*, it appears, has taken up this project as a 'project of convenience', as an easy avenue to spend the plan fund within the '10 percent for women' condition stipulated by the government. This was the motive behind the selection of this project immediately after distributing 281 sewing machines to individual beneficiaries in the previous year.

### **Mini Industrial Estate (Kazhakkootam Block *Panchayat*)**

This project for setting up a mini industrial estate was taken up by Kazhakkootam Block *Panchayat* in the annual plan for 1998-'99. The project was to be completed in three years, i.e., by the end of 2000-'01. According to the project report, 10 industrial sheds each with a covered area of 600 sq.ft were to be constructed in a one-acre plot to be located in a suitable area within the Block *Panchayat*. Total cost of the project was estimated at Rs 45.5 lakh (including 15 percent interest for one year on the total investment of Rs 39.6 lakh) and cost of each shed at Rs 4.55 lakh. These sheds were to be allotted to the prospective small-scale entrepreneurs on hire-purchase basis at Rs 4.55 lakh each, to be repaid in 40 quarterly instalments of Rs 11385. Expected annual earnings of the Block *Panchayat* by way of these repayments would be Rs 4.55 lakh. This amount would be utilised to provide interest-free loans to the allottees for the development of their industries. These estimates appear to be mere window dressing rather than any realistic assessment based on standard project appraisal norms.

Rs 8 lakh of Plan fund was allocated to the project in the annual plan for 1998-'99 for the purchase of land. One acre of land at Mundakkal in Mangalapuram *Grama Panchayat* area, three km from Mangalapuram junction in the national highway, was purchased. In 1999-2000, plan allocation made for the project was Rs 4.5 lakh, which was spent for the construction of a compound wall around the plot of land. Construction of the sheds started

in 2000-'01 utilising the plan grant of Rs 5 lakh allocated for the project in the year. Halfway through the construction, original design of the sheds had to be altered and some reconstruction works were done to enclose the sheds. At the time of our field visits in August-September 2001, four sheds were complete and the construction of the remaining sheds was held up for want of funds. Rs 4 lakh have been earmarked for the project in the Block's annual plan for 2001-'02 but the fund was yet to be made available. No provision has been made for water supply and electricity connection, which together will cost about Rs 6 lakh as per the approved estimate. The project taken up with a vision, which would have emerged as a growth centre for the development of a remote, rural area of the Block, notwithstanding the not-so-encouraging experience of mini industrial estates already set up in the State in the past, is held up now. The only benefit of the project to the local people is a three km bituminised road from Mangalapuram junction to the industrial estate.

The selection or execution of the project never involved any kind of participatory efforts. The Block *Panchayat* with the Secretary as the implementing officer is executing it through a contractor.

Among many such projects included in the plan documents of *panchayats* of the district and included in the sampling frame, this is the only mini-industrial estate project being implemented.

#### **Manufacturing of Electronic Chokes (Kilimanur Block *Panchayat*)**

A project for setting of an industrial production unit for the manufacture of electronic chokes was originally included in Kilimanur Block *Panchayat*'s annual plan for 1997-'98. Four such units, each with five women members as beneficiaries were proposed to be set up, one each in four selected *Grama Panchayats* of the Block at Pazhayakunnummel, Pallickal, Nagarur, and Madavoor. The selected participant beneficiaries were to be given stipendiary training for the manufacture of electronic chokes. The stipend amount proposed was Rs 300 p.m. A trainer would be engaged at a monthly honorarium of Rs 3000. The Block *Panchayat* would supply necessary tools to each unit. An allocation of Rs 100000, – Rs 25000 for each unit – was set apart for the project. But approval was given to the project by the BLEC/DPC only after cutting the provision for stipend and honorarium. Therefore the project could not be implemented in that year although the *Panchayat* had selected the beneficiaries for all the four units and the units were registered as societies. The amount of Rs 1 lakh allotted for the project from the plan fund was drawn and deposited in the bank accounts of the four societies at the rate of Rs 25000 per unit.

The project was again included in the annual plan proposals of the Block *Panchayat* for the year 1998-'99 with provision for stipend and honorarium and got approved by the BLEC and DPC. Total outlay of the project was Rs 3.38 lakh - Rs 2.73 lakh from the Plan fund (including the unspent balance of Rs 1 lakh carried forward from the previous year) and Rs 65000 as beneficiaries' contribution or bank loan at the rate of Rs 3250 per beneficiary. Training of the members of all the four units started in March 1999. Rs 37900 was spent from the plan fund for this scheme in 1998-'99, mainly for giving out stipend and honorarium. The project spilled over to 1999-2000 with an allocation of Rs 1.35 lakh and Rs 117106 was spent mainly for the purchase of tools, equipment and materials.



Three months stipendiary training of the selected beneficiaries was conducted in March-June 1999. There was no follow up action after training. Chokes manufactured during the course of training and the tools and equipments purchased are dumped in a Block Office building. Not a single choke manufactured could be sold in the market although the project report had envisaged an annual sales turn-over of Rs 12 lakh by selling 18000 chokes at the rate of Rs 150 a piece. Plan fund now available for each unit to start commercial production is Rs. 25000 - the first year's allocation deposited in the bank – which is far too inadequate to start the units again. Beneficiaries' contribution/ bank loan of Rs 3250 per member has also not materialized. According to the President and Secretary of the Block *Panchayat*, efforts are on to pump in more money to make the units viable. But our assessment is that the chances of reviving the project are remote for two reasons. First, many of the beneficiary members of the units dispersed after the training and might have either lost interest in the project or sought other occupations. They are scattered over four village *Panchayats* of the Block and our repeated efforts to trace at least a few of them could not succeed. Second, the quality of the chokes manufactured by them is reported to be poor and may not sell in the market competing with other quality products available in plenty.

The basic reason for the failure of the project seems to be the faulty formulation of the project without proper feasibility studies or even a preliminary assessment of the marketability of the product. The project report does not even touch the marketing aspect. This is a project that has very little chance of revival, let alone sustainability, even with continued subsidy from the plan fund.

#### **Grant to Handloom Society (Pallichal Grama Panchayat)**

Pallichal *Panchayat* has a sizeable concentration of handloom weavers and workers. Handloom industry has been the leading employment provider in the area. According to the socio-economic survey conducted in the *Panchayat* in 1998 as part of the People's Plan Campaign, about 11 percent of the total population of 42308 of the *Panchayat* depended either directly or indirectly on handloom industry, both in private and co-operative sectors. These handloom workers, like their counterparts in many parts of the State as well as in the country, have been facing problems like lack of employment opportunity, high cost of production, inadequate demand for their products, and low income. The *Panchayat* initiated in the first year of the People's Plan itself rehabilitation programmes like financial assistance to purchase looms to deserving individual weavers.

Thittavelikkara Gramodharana Handloom Industry (workshop) Co-operative Society Ltd., established in 1967, is one of the oldest handloom societies in the *Panchayat*. The society was functioning fairly well for many years. It has been facing problems in recent years as part of the general crises gripping the handloom industry in general. The society, which earned a net profit of Rs 1.23 lakh in 1997-'98 and Rs 0.24 lakh in 1998-'99, incurred a loss of Rs 1.44 lakh in 1999-2000. Between 1998-'99 and 1999-2000, production fell by 7 percent and sales by 23 percent. In order to save the society from the crisis, the *panchayat* decided to give a grant of Rs 3.11 lakh from the Plan fund by including this as a project in the annual plan for 1999-2000. The grant was given for the specific purpose of purchasing yarn from the Co-operative Spinning Mill, Kollam.

A novel feature of this project, distinct from normal welfare grants doled out by governments, is that although the money given to the society from the plan fund in an outright grant, the project report envisages that it would generate an indirect or deemed income to the *panchayat* in the form of a 20 percent subsidy the society would give on the sale of handloom cloth to women self-help groups (SHG) sponsored by the *panchayat* under the People's Planning Programme and to the schools for uniforms. This meant that by selling cloth worth Rs 1 lakh to SHGs and schools, the society would get only Rs 80000 and the balance Rs 20000 received from the government as subsidy would be treated as a deemed return to the *panchayat*. Thus the entire grant would be deemed to have been returned by the society to the *panchayat* when the society's sale under this arrangement reaches Rs 16 lakh. The project report also envisages a second phase of the project when the *panchayat* will organise a massive awareness programme and publicity campaign among the school authorities and schoolchildren of the *panchayat* in order to persuade them to purchase uniform cloths from the society taking advantage of the subsidy scheme. A *Panchayat*-level Guidance Committee has been formed to oversee the functioning of the project.

In spite of the grant granted, the *panchayat* has no control over the society. The sustainability of the project is dependent entirely on the sustainability of the society, on which this project has no significant bearing.

### **Reed-based Cottage Industry (Vellanad Grama Panchayat)**

Vellanad *panchayat* has a sizeable number of families mostly belonging to SC/ST, traditionally engaged in reed based cottage industries like making of mats, baskets, winnowers and various other household and decorative products from reed. In order to assist these people to improve their economic condition, a project was formulated and included as a women development programme in the annual plan of the *panchayat* for 1999-2000. According to the approved project report, 20 units, each consisting of 5 neighbourhood women who have the skill in making these products, would be set up and registered under Charitable Societies Act. Only one person would be allowed to be a member from each family. Each unit should contribute Rs 1000 for the purchase of necessary tools. On production of vouchers for the purchase, each unit would be given a grant of Rs 10000 (Rs 2000 per member) as share capital. This amount would be deposited in the bank account of the society. Each society would have an elected Convener. Total outlay of the project was Rs 2.2 lakh – Rs 2 lakh from the Plan fund and Rs 20000 as beneficiaries' contribution. Nineteen such units were set up in 1999-2000 and one more in 2000-'01.

The Kerala State Bamboo Corporation from its depot at Veliyannur supplied reeds on credit. Reeds were usually supplied in bundles of 10 or 20. The members had to take delivery of the supply from the depot and carry them home by themselves. For every Rs 100 worth of reeds supplied, the members had to deliver back to the Corporation woven reed mats of prescribed specification and quality worth a minimum value of Rs 450. Supply prices of reeds and purchase prices of woven mats were decided by the Corporation. Value of reeds borrowed by the members was deducted from the value of mats they delivered back to the Corporation. The present purchase price of mats fixed by the Corporation is Rs 16.20 for a 24 sq.ft mat of the size 6'x4' and Rs 45.90 for a 35 sq.ft. mat of the size of 8½' x 4½'.



From a bundle of 10 reeds, roughly 750 sq.ft of mats can be made. Cut pieces of reeds left after making mats are made use of for making baskets, winnowers, lampshades, and other household and fancy items that the members sell in the market.

As mentioned earlier, there are 20 units functioning under this project. Each one is independent and has a separate name and identity e.g., Kripa *Eera* Industrial society, Deepti *Eera* unit, Sarvodaya *Eera* unit, Sudhir *Eera* unit, Rejani *Eera* unit, and Sanu *Eera* unit at Veliyannur. Some of these units are functioning well, but some not that well, depending on the skill of the members and quantum of their work. Each member of the society contributes a small share of their earning to the society to constitute a common fund from which annual bonus is distributed to the members.

Two main reasons for the success of the project that we could identify are:

- (i) Making of reed-used products is a craft requiring skill and most of the members engaged in this industry are people who have acquired the skill traditionally. These products have a market segment of their own, somewhat protected by the traditional skill of the producers and ethnic character of the products.
- (ii) The participation by the beneficiaries of the project, although mobilised, is genuine as it earns them their livelihood.

After the one-time assistance given from the plan fund, the project is operating without any continued assistance and has become self-sustainable. Given the present conditions, the project will sustain. But there are external factors like increasing competition from plastic substitutes, which may cut into the market of the products of this traditional cottage industry.

### **Pezhumkamukal water supply scheme (Vamanapuram Grama Panchayat)**

Pezhumkamukal in Kalamachal ward of Vamanapuram Grama Panchayat is a hilltop area inhabited by 96 families consisting of 486 people. This area had been experiencing severe shortage of drinking water, especially during the 9 months' period from August to May every year. It was an ordeal, a strenuous and time-consuming effort for the people of the area, particularly for the women folk, to fetch drinking water from wells in the valley, some 300 to 500m down the hill. A scheme for supply of drinking water was a felt need of the people of the area. As demanded by the local people as well as the ward Grama Sabha, Vamanapuram Panchayat formulated a project for supply of drinking water to the area by digging a well at Chirakkonam in the valley, pumping water to an overhead tank at the top of the hill and laying a distribution pipeline with public taps. The project was included in the annual plan of the Panchayat for 1998-'99. The project was to be completed in two years. Estimated outlay of the project was Rs 8.8 lakh – Rs 3.2 lakh from the Plan fund in 1998-'99 and Rs 5.6 lakh from plan fund and Rs 10000 as voluntary services and contribution of the beneficiaries in 1999-2000. Later, the District Panchayat allotted Rs 3.0 lakh for the project in 1998-'99. Work on the project started in February 1999. With the technical guidance and co-operation of Kerala Water Authority, the project was completed and commissioned in August 2000.

The task of implementing and running the project was entrusted to a local Beneficiaries Committee. Two cents of land for the well and the pump house was purchased by the Panchayat at Chirakkonam, adjacent to the existing tank in the valley. A well of 2.5m diameter and about 10m depth was dug in the land. A pump house was constructed at the site and a 15 hp motor was installed. A 4x3x2.5m water tank with 25000 litres capacity (as against 15000 litres originally envisaged) was constructed at the top of the hill, about 500m away from the pump house. A local resident donated the land for construction of the water tank. Distribution pipelines covering the area within about 2 km radius of the water tank was laid and seven public taps were installed. After some usual delay in completion, the project was commissioned in August 2000, about three months behind schedule.

Recurring expenses for running the system – salary of the pump operator, Rs 300 per month, and electricity charges are borne by the *panchayat*. Consumers need not pay anything for the water. However, if there occurs any damage to the pipeline or taps in any locality the replacement or repair charges should be borne by the consumers of that locality. Water is supplied for about 1 to 1 ½ hours on alternate days.

This one is the only success of the three drinking water projects covered by our sample study. The prime or rather the critical reason for the successful functioning of the scheme is that the running expenses are borne by the *panchayat* making the supply of water absolutely free. Beneficiaries' participation in the formulation and execution of the project was good. All the 10 beneficiaries we interviewed had participated at one or other stage of the project. Five of them had actively participated and nine contributed voluntary labour.

So long as the present system of the *panchayat* bearing the running cost continues, there need not be any threat to the sustainability of the project. But once the *panchayat*'s assistance is withdrawn and the consumers are asked to bear the running cost or to pay for the water, the continuance of the projects may become uncertain. Whether the *panchayat* should do so or not is an issue on which opinions might differ. There is a case for making the beneficiaries pay for the water at least equal to their opportunity cost they saved, i.e., the cost of manually lifting water from the wells in the valley. At the same time there is a case for supplying this basic need free to the people of the area who are in a geographically disadvantageous position especially when most of them are poor weavers and agricultural labourers. Any suggestion on this issue will involve a value judgment. The decision has to be political.

#### **Chevalakkonam water supply scheme (Pazhayakunnummel Grama Panchayat)**

Thundilkada-Chevalakkonam is an area in Pazhayakunnummel *Panchayat*, which had been facing the most acute scarcity of drinking water. Seventy-eight families consisting of more than 500 members inhabit this area. A project for solving the problem of drinking water shortage of this area was taken up by the Pazhayakunnummel *Panchayat* under the People's Planning Programme. Two cents of land was purchased for the purpose in the first year of the plan, 1997-'98. A project for digging a well in this land, pumping water to a 20000-litre capacity tank constructed some 300m away and distributing it through pipelines and public taps was included in the annual plan of the *Panchayat* for 1998-'99. Total estimated outlay

of the project was Rs 3.48 lakh – Rs 3.03 lakh from the Plan fund, Rs 25000 from *Panchayat* Fund and Rs 20000 as beneficiaries' contribution.

Work of the project commenced in January 1999. It could not be completed by December 1999 as expected and the project spilled over to 1999-2000 annual plan with an outlay of Rs 1.2 lakh from the plan fund. The project was executed by a Beneficiaries Committee. A well of 3m diameter and about 6m depth was dug at Thundilkada-Pottimukku. Project proposal was to dig a well of 8 metres depth but it could not be done because hard rock was struck before reaching that depth. A pump house was built in the site and a 15-HP motor was installed. An overhead tank of 20000-litre capacity was built some 300m away at the delivery site at a height of 75m from the ground level. Some 2000m of distribution pipelines were laid (as against 750m estimated originally) with seven public taps for the supply of water. The project was commissioned in February 2000. Initially a Committee of Beneficiary women was in charge of operating the system. A monthly charge of Rs 20 per month was collected from each beneficiary family towards the operational cost, which included operator's remuneration and payment of bi-monthly electricity bill of Rs 1500-2000, on an average. Within a couple of months after the system started functioning, rifts developed among the beneficiaries. Some people demanding that water should be supplied free refused to pay the monthly charge. Somehow, water supply continued, though at a reduced level depending on the availability of funds with the committee, till May 2000. Since then, there has been no water supply except for a few days at the time of Assembly election in May 2001. The rift among the beneficiaries has assumed a political colour now, with the supporters of LDF (which controls the *Panchayat*) willing to pay the monthly charge probably out of political compulsions and the supporters of UDF (which rules the State but in the opposition in the *panchayat*) refusing to pay any charges demanding free supply of water as promised by both the political parties at the time of election campaign. The stalemate continues and the project meant to meet an essential need of the local people remains idle. The *panchayat* could have redeemed the situation by agreeing to pay the running cost of the project from the *Panchayat* Fund as the neighbouring Pezhumkamukal *Panchayat* has been doing. This is a typical case, and the only one we came across in our study, of an essential community project involving sizeable investment of public funds is sacrificed to further the ends of narrow political interests. One can only wish that this were only an isolated and localised case and not indicative of the way the People's Plan projects may go in the future.

The project had good participation of the beneficiaries. All the five beneficiaries of the project we interviewed had taken part in the selection and execution of the project; two of them actively, and contributed voluntary labour. Actual beneficiaries' contribution to the project was Rs 12800 as against Rs 20000 originally envisaged in the project report. Many of the beneficiaries have offered voluntary services of some kind or other for the execution of the project. So, the beneficiaries have a clear stake in the project but paradoxically, this does not appear to be a reason strong enough to sustain the project withstanding the onslaught of the negative impact of the exogenous forces emanating from the excessive politicisation of the society.

### **Panchikkala Water Supply Scheme (Poovar Grama Panchayat)**

Payanthi-Panchikkala area of Poovar *Panchayat* is a rocky area with an undulating topography,

and has been experiencing scarcity of drinking water. There are about 1000 families living in this area. In order to solve this problem, the *Panchayat* formulated two projects to set up two water supply schemes, one for Payanthi and the other for Panchikkala. Initially it was taken up as a twin project in the annual plan for 1997-'98. Land for digging wells and construction of pump houses and water tanks for both the projects was acquired at a cost of Rs 1.88 lakh. The project was to be implemented in three years. In the annual plan for 1998-'99 water tanks were constructed for both the projects in the site purchased. Two wells, one at Koikkavilakom for Panchikkala and the other at Poovar for Payanthi were dug in 1999-2000. As both the projects were similar and on nearby sites, we selected only the Panchikkala project as one of the sample projects for this study. Both the projects have been progressing more or less as parallels. The two were treated as separate projects up to 1998-'99 because Payanthi and Panchikkala were in two different wards of the *panchayat* at that time and the people of the two wards and the members of *panchayat* elected from these wards were demanding two separate projects. As a result, two separate wells, two pump houses and two overhead tanks had to be constructed in the same site. At least in the cases of wells and pump sets, this duplication of efforts and double expenditure could have been avoided by increasing the size of the well and capacity of the pump set. The reasons for the duplication of efforts are no more valid; after delimitation of wards (in 1998) of *panchayats*, Payanthi and Panchikkala are now in the same *Panchayat* Ward.

A 75000 litre capacity water tank (instead 50000-litre capacity envisaged in project report) was constructed for the Panchikkala project in 1998-'99 spending Rs 2.4 lakh from the plan fund from an approved outlay of Rs 6.5 lakh for both the projects combined. In the third year, 1999-2000, Rs 2.4 lakh was spent for digging a well with three-metre diameter and about 15-m depth for Panchikkala alone. Two 7-HP pump sets (as against 5-HP approved in the project report) have been installed. Part of this work spilled over to 2000-'01, and Rs 1.64 lakh was spent in the year. Pipes have been purchased and kept for laying. Electricity connection has not been provided so far.

According to the original schedule, the project would have been completed in 2000-2001. But work of the project is still incomplete even after spending more than Rs 7 lakh (including proportionate cost of land). Constructions and installations already made are kept idle. Main reasons for the delay in commissioning the project that we could identify in the field survey are:

- (i) There were faults in project formulation. Land was purchased in 1997-'98. Tank was constructed in the next year without assessing the availability of water and its potability. Quantity of water available from these wells should have been assessed before deciding the capacity of water tank and the construction of it. The engineer who did the technical appraisal of the project had pointed out this issue, but his suggestion was overlooked by the then *Panchayat* Committee. But the new *Panchayat* Committee, which came to power after 1999 local body elections reviewed the issue. Laying of pipelines is held up pending the testing of the water in the well for potability and also for an assessment of the quantity of water available from the well. Slow down of the work of the project, according to the new *Panchayat* Committee, is also due to paucity of funds.

- (ii) The second reason seems to be the competing demands of the two groups of beneficiaries of the twin project – Panchikkala and Payanthi, backed by some local politicians to serve their own interest. The prospective beneficiaries of Payanthi project which lies behind Panchikkala project in the progress of work demand that both projects should be completed and commissioned simultaneously. The member representing the ward in the *panchayat* has also taken this stand. Issues of availability of water and its potability, sidelined by the earlier *Panchayat* Committee, have again been brought to life. The project that would have been activated long ago is held up because of narrow political and parochial interests. An allocation of Rs.2.5 lakh earmarked for the project in the annual plan of the *Panchayat* for 2000-'01 is reported to have lapsed.

There has been good participation by the local people in the implementation of the project. They have built an approach road to the project site by donating land and contributing voluntary labour. Many of them expressed their anguish over the inordinate delay in the completion of the project. Even if the water is tested positive and availability assessed as sufficient, it is still uncertain how far the pumping of water from the project will affect the overall availability of ground water in the area, particularly that of private wells and tanks. Problems might also arise about who should bear the operation costs of the project: whether the *panchayat* should pay the electricity bill and pump operator's salary. Project report is silent on this issue and it seems that the *panchayat* authorities have not taken a decision on this issue.

As of now, the future of the project is uncertain. This is an example of how a typical People's Plan project conceived to fulfil the aspirations of local people could get messed up by conflicting sectoral interests stirred up by visionless political leadership compounded by the indifference of the so called technical experts who cleared the project.

### **Computer Centre (Karakulam Grama Panchayat)**

A computer centre mainly meant for imparting advanced and job-oriented training in computer application, data processing, DTP, Software, and information technology to the aspiring students of the *panchayat* and the neighbouring areas was set up by Karakulam *Panchayat* as part of its annual plan for 1997-'98. The centre functions as part of the Rural Study Centre established as a separate project in the same year with the objective of conducting scientific studies and providing consultancy services and training in different fields of local level planning.

Total outlay of the computer centre project was Rs 7.61 lakh. To start with, 10 computers, accessories, furniture, and air-conditioner were purchased utilising the plan fund. It was inaugurated in April 1999. The centre is functioning in the Rural Study Centre building, a renovated building in the *Panchayat* Office compound at Enikkara. The centre offers different job-oriented computer training courses like PGDCA and DCA. The fee charged by the centre for its various courses are almost 40 to 50 percent less than the rate prevailing in the open market. The centre using its own resources has acquired more computers and accessories. The annual report of the centre for 1999-2000 shows a gross profit of Rs 1.97 lakh. The quarterly intake of students, on an average is 40-45 for PGDCA, 25-30 for Diploma,

and 25-30 for certificate courses. All the student-beneficiaries, present and past, we interviewed expressed, unanimously, satisfaction over the cost-effectiveness and high quality of the training course offered by the centre.

The project is certainly a success. A nine member Board of Directors registered as society under the Charitable Societies Act governs the Rural Study Centre, which controls the computer centre. President of Karakulam *Panchayat* is the Chairman. Vice-President of the *Panchayat*, Standing Committee Chairman and six experts nominated from among the Plan activists are members of the Board of Directors. The centre is working more or less on commercial lines. It earns substantial profit because of its competitive advantage over other private computer training institutes in the city and suburbs because of its zero capital cost. The project has become self-sustainable.

### **Renovation of Kunnathukulam (Kudappanakkunnu Grama Panchayat)**

Kunnathukulam in Kudappanakkunnu *Panchayat* is an ancient pond used by the local people for bathing, washing clothes, irrigation, and also to practise swimming. There are quite a few people in the neighbourhood and nearby areas of the pond, who trained themselves for swimming in the pond and became known swimmers at district and State level. Some of them have secured jobs in sports quota in various Government departments. In course of time, particularly in the past 5-10 years, there was no proper maintenance and the pond became unusable due to silting and weeds growth. There had been persistent demand from the local people, particularly the swimming ‘alumni’ of the pond, to renovate the tank and make it useful for practicing swimming. Sporadic efforts were made by members of three or four families in the neighbourhood to renovate the pond by removing the silt. But their efforts could not succeed because the work involved was too voluminous for a few families to tackle. When the campaign for People’s Planning started in the *Panchayat* in 1997, the local people again raised this demand in the *Grama Sabha* meetings of their ward. Conceding to the demand of local people the *Panchayat* included a project for renovation of the tank in its annual plan for 1997-‘98. Approved outlay of the project was Rs 5.8 lakh. This entire outlay was to be met from the plan fund. A project report was prepared. Objectives of the project as laid down in the project report were (1) To supply pure drinking water for the people of the area, and (2) To irrigate about 30 acres of land in the neighbourhood of the pond. An Implementation Committee was constituted to execute the project. The Implementation Committee carried out the entire work of the project without engaging any professional contractor. Silt and weeds were removed from the tank with the active participation of the local people. Many of them did voluntary work. A dry rubble masonry bund was constructed around the tank and plastered. During the course of implementation, the objectives of the project changed from irrigation to converting the pond into a swimming pool. The bottom bed of the tank is so laid as to suit swimming practice - slanting from the boundaries to the centre. No additional facility has been provided for irrigation. The paddy field across the road gets water through the existing sluice. All the neighbouring compounds are at a higher elevation than the water level of the pond. Owners of these compounds lift water manually to irrigate their homestead cultivation.

In the annual plan for 2000-‘01 the *Panchayat* gave an additional grant of Rs 30000 to the



project for providing a swimming track in the pond. Eight tracks have been laid utilising the grant. A number of students and youngsters of the local and neighbouring areas come to this swimming pool regularly to practice swimming. The local Kusavarkal Sports Club, set up in 1952, presently looks after the swimming pool. The main driving force behind the success of this project is the collective leadership of this club and some local sports enthusiasts.

One of the widely accepted and distinct advantages of participative development project is its flexibility or adaptability. Unlike the conventional blue print approach, where project implementation should strictly be on the already formulated or pre-determined lines, in the flexible approach the design, activities, objectives, and cost estimates of the project could undergo changes in accordance with the changing needs and priorities of the participants or beneficiaries of the project. Kunnathukulam swimming pool project is an example of this flexibility approach. As the participation of local people is genuine, the project may sustain without any further aid from the *panchayat*.

### **Labour Bank (Kunnathukul Grama Panchayat)**

The Labour Bank project of Kunnattukul *Panchayat* is one of the very few innovative projects taken up by any *panchayat* in Thiruvananthapuram district under the People's Planning Programme. Originally conceived to constitute a labour corpse as part of a comprehensive agriculture development programme, the project was included in the annual plan of the *panchayat* for 1997-'98. It was implemented in 1998-'99 by constituting a Labour Force with an initial membership of 125. Next year the number of members had gone up to 225. The declared objectives of the labour corpse were:

- (1) To arrest the declining trend in the area under paddy cultivation, which is mainly due to high cost of cultivation and non-availability of farm labour especially during peak operating seasons.
- (2) To increase the employment opportunity of local labourers by collectively taking up the development works like construction of houses and roads and renovation of irrigation tanks.

Total outlay of the project for 1998-'99 was Rs 2.41 lakh – Rs 1.99 lakh from the plan fund and Rs 0.42 lakh as voluntary services of the participants. This project for labour corpse was subsequently transformed into a Labour Bank in the annual plan for 1999-2000 with the added objectives of:

- (1) Making labour available to the needy farmers on credit in the form of labour loans;
- (2) Taking up the cultivation of fallow land and leased-in land collectively on crop-sharing basis; and
- (3) Reducing the cost of cultivation by partial mechanisation of farming operations like tilling, harvesting, and threshing by providing these services on a collective basis.

At present the labour bank has about 425 labourers as members. All these members have been

given two days training in farm operations. Selected members have been trained in operating farm machinery like tractors and threshers. The Bank has a full-fledged office with a secretary and staff. It has all the essential agricultural implements, machinery, and tools.

Main features of the functioning of the Bank project are:

- (1) Making trained farm labour available to the farmers at reasonable wage rate. The present wage rate charged by the Bank is Rs 115 per day as against the prevailing market rate of Rs. 125. Farm machinery services are provided at reasonable charges. Supplies of other inputs like planting materials are also arranged.
- (2) Labour is supplied to the needy farmers on credit almost on the line of bank loan. Any farmer who wants to raise seasonal crops like paddy, tapioca, and plantain in his farm but does not have the means to meet the labour cost may approach the Bank and by executing a bond he can get on credit Rs 5000 worth of labour and machinery services. This labour loan has a maximum term of 12 months. It will have to be repaid with 12 percent interest after the harvesting of the crop is over. For farmers with limited resources and time, this is a better and more convenient alternative to a conventional crop loan from a bank or primary co-operative society.
- (3) All subsidies available to the participant farmers from the *Panchayat* and Agriculture Department are routed through the Bank. These subsidies – on seeds, fertiliser, etc – are adjusted against the dues the participant farmer owes to the Bank as wages of labourers and hire-charges of machinery. This arrangement, to a great extent, avoids the farmers' botheration of getting the subsidies direct from the Agriculture Department or *Panchayat*.
- (4) During the lean season for farm operations, the Labour Corpse undertakes other development works like construction of houses, roads, and renovation of irrigation tanks under the People's Planning Programme entrusted to them by the *Panchayat*. This provides a steady stream of employment to the members of the Corpse.
- (5) The Labour Bank also takes up cultivation of fallow land and land taken on lease on share-cropping basis from the owners. The Bank carries out the cultivation of these land and the produces are shared with the landowner on a mutually agreed proportion. Bank's share of the produce is distributed among the participating members of the Labour Corpse at nominal prices.

During the first year of its operation (February 2000 to January 2001) the Labour Bank could provide 12694 days of work to its members, i.e., on an average, 1058 days per month. Barring the initial month of February 2000, monthly employment provided by the bank varied from 537 to 2111 days. Most of the members of the Labour Corpse we interviewed get, on an average, 15 to 20 days work in a month. Many of them expressed the desire to get more days of work.

Farmers who engage labourers from the Bank remit the wage charges to the bank. The Bank makes payments to the labourers once in a week. Some of the members of the Labour Corpse we interviewed complained that this payment system causes some difficulties to



them because they do not get cash for their daily needs, but we do not find much validity in this complaint. The members are given credit slips for the work they do everyday, which can be used to purchase their daily needs from the co-operative store run by the Agricultural Labourers Co-operative society, a sister concern of the Bank. However, credit coupons and ready cash make a difference in the consumption choices of the members especially of those who are used to take daily doses of liquor.

Members of the Labour Corpse are covered by a group insurance scheme at a nominal rate of premium and are also paid annual bonus based on the number of days worked in the year. Majority of the participant labourers and farmers support the project and are confident about its success and sustainability. But there are dissenters, mostly among the non-participants.

Some of the criticisms levelled against the project are:

- (1) It reduces the employment opportunities of non-participating labourers as the Labour Bank appropriates bulk of the employment opportunities in subsidy-linked farm operations and *Panchayat* works under the People's Planning Programme.
- (2) Some of the farmers complained that members of the Labour Corpse work strictly according to their time schedule – 8 am to 4 pm, with no flexibility and often behave in an authoritarian manner.
- (3) Another complaint is that farm labour from the Bank is not always available for the cultivation of crops like tapioca and plantain, which involve more physical strain than partially mechanised paddy cultivation.
- (4) The farmers have no choice in the selection of labourers. The warm inter-personal relationship, which traditionally existed between the farmer and labourers, has disappeared.

Notwithstanding these criticisms which may be partially true at least in theory, we find that the net social benefit of this programme is certainly positive in so far as labour loan facility, lower wage rate and better availability of farm labour have led to more cultivation and more production. There is no evidence to show that the project has reduced the overall employment opportunity of the farm labourers of the *Panchayat*.

One of the conclusions of our earlier study on People's Planning programme in two *panchayats* was that an efficient and sincere leadership acceptable to the people cutting across party lines is an important factor in the success of the programme. The success story of the Labour Bank project reiterates this conclusion. The main driving force behind the labour bank project of Kunnathukal *Panchayat* has been Girish kumar, the Agriculture Officer of the *Panchayat*. He has shown right from the inception stage exceptional leadership qualities, organisational skill, and sustained hard work in leading this project to success.

As regards the sustainability of the programme, we do not find any destabilising factors inherent in it, which may lead to its failure. But we do not rule out the possibility of two exogenous factors playing a destructive role in future. One is the probability of a leadership

vacuum created by the transfer of Girish Kumar out of the *panchayat*. Second is the political overtone of the programme. Membership and management of the Labour Bank are dominated by people lenient towards LDF, which rules the *panchayat*. Patronage of the *panchayat* and the then State Govt. has played a catalyst's role in the success of the project. With political patronage changing sides, a political fight for the control of the Bank threatening its existence cannot be ruled out.

### **Women self-help groups (Venganur Grama Panchayat)**

This is a project taken up by Venganur *Panchayat* in its annual plan for 1999-2000, for the promotion of six selected women self-help groups. It envisages providing them with financial assistance to start some income-earning self-employment activity. There are some two hundred registered women self-help groups (SHG) in the *Panchayat* but only about 25 of them are active now. Six SHGs are selected from among the functioning groups from different wards of the *Panchayat*. The SHGs selected, their activities, and the number of members is given below:

<b>Name the SHG</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>No. of members</b>
1. Aiswarya	Making of coir ropes	14
2. Darsana	Handloom weaving	16
3. Dhanalekshmi	Readymade garments	13
4. Anaswara	-do-	13
5. Lekshmi	Processing of copra	12
6. Sarika	Market on wheel	10

Total estimated outlay of the project for the year was Rs 2.57 lakh. Assistances were given to the SHGs for the purchase of assets, and the amount of assistance varied depending on the type of activity. There is a ceiling of Rs 50000 per society. These amounts, together with the beneficiaries' contribution, are deposited in a bank. Amount needed for the purchase of machinery and looms are met from this fund. Banks are expected to extend loan facilities up to Rs 15000 to these SHGs, but till the time of our survey in September-October 2001 none of the six SHGs have received bank finance.

All these units have been carrying out the thrift and credit operations in accordance with the common and almost standardised activity pattern of SHGs all over the State. As far as the specific income-earning activities are concerned, the performance of these 6 SHGs varied. The average earnings of the members were: Handloom units Rs 45 to 50 per day; Readymade garments units Rs 20-30 per day; Coir units, Rs 30-50 per day; and Copra units, Rs 50-75 per week. The market on wheel (unit selling grocery and provisions through its mobile van) operating once in a month or so, because of slackness in demand, does not earn any significant income.

Sustainability of these SHGs, and for that matter, any of the thousands of SHGs set up all over the State, depend on individual initiative and collective efforts of the members. With capital cost and opportunity cost of labour almost equal to zero, there is no reason why these groups should not survive the competition in the market if they select appropriate activity/product line and adopt an effective marketing strategy.

### 3. Assessment of Participation

Our study has hypothesised that beneficiaries' participation is a crucial determinant of the sustainability of the social development projects implemented under the People's Plan Programme of Kerala. Participation is a term that eludes a consensus definition. Its level could range anywhere from mere passive participation, to association with the project activities (i.e., attending meetings or giving moral support) and to active participation by taking leadership or controlling roles in the formulation and execution of the project. The levels of participation in the projects covered by this study have been assessed both in its passive and active forms. We have taken participation as active if the participant has creatively participated in the deliberations on the project or served as member of any committee or group like Task Force, Implementation Committee, and Monitoring Committee constituted to formulate or implement the project. In order to get a more realistic picture of public participation, Presidents and members of the *panchayats* who acted as project leaders in some projects, are excluded from the sample frame. Participation by contributing the beneficiaries' share of the project cost or voluntary labour is not counted as active as these are, by and large, mobilised types of participation.

Appropriateness of using this loose definition of participation for the purpose of the study may be open to question. Many of the studies on participative development at the international level conclude that the participation would be genuine and effective only if it encompasses:

1. all project activities including decision-making;
2. participants are empowered to conduct all affairs of the project; and
3. ownership of the project rests with the participants (Hartmut Schneider, et al, 1995).

As Bastian pointed out, participation is generally used in three ways:

- (1) as a cosmetic label to make whatever is purported appears good,
- (2) as a co-opting practice to mobilise local labour and reduce costs and
- (3) as a description of an empowering process (Sunil Bastian et al).

Participation envisaged in the People's Plan programmes of Kerala falls into either of the first two categories. The beneficiaries have no decisive role in the selection and formulation of projects. However, some of the Implementation Committees of the projects we studied (eg: Kunnathukulam swimming pool, Kavukulam Lift Irrigation, Pazhayakunnummel water supply) have exercised an informal decision making authority to make some minor alterations to the projects. In all cases, except outright grants to co-operative societies, the ultimate ownership of the projects rests with the Government, which is represented by the Panchayats. The Beneficiaries Committees, which cease to exist once the project work is completed, have no ownership consciousness about the projects. The character of their participation is more or less like that of a patron-client relationship. So, for the purpose of this study we had to dilute the concept of participation.

The ex-post survey method we used in the study for assessing the actual levels of beneficiaries' participation in the sample projects have some severe limitations in tracking the participation history and characteristics of the projects and documenting them. Conventional Participative Appraisal Method or the recently developed Process Documentation Research Method (David Mosse, et al, 1998) in which the evaluators associate themselves with the entire project activities right from inception to evaluation, living within the project area among the participant beneficiaries and documenting the whole project activity, could not be followed as it was beyond the scope of a limited purpose study that we have carried out.

Our assessment of participation is based on the opinions of the sample beneficiaries covered under the survey, corroborated by information gathered from some key informants among the local people, Conveners and members of Implementation and Monitoring Committees, Ward Members, and officials of the *panchayats*. Participation matrices [Overseas Development Administration (ODA), 1995] based on the responses of the sample beneficiaries interviewed, indicating the number of beneficiaries participated in each participative project classified by the levels of participation and activity stages were prepared for 15 sample projects. Combined participation matrix is given in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 Participation Matrix of 15 projects** (No. of sample beneficiaries: 120)

No	Activity/ Participation level	Informed	Consulted	Participated
1	Conceiving the Project	6 (5.0)	11 (9.2)	13 (10.8)
2	Selection of the Project	1 (0.8)	17 (14.2)	43 (35.8)
3	Formulation of the Project	5 (4.2)	11 (9.2)	38 (31.2)
4	Execution of the Project	4 (3.3)	9 (7.5)	55 (45.8)
5	Evaluation of the Project	0 (0)	1 (0.8)	1 (0.8)

Note: Figures in bracket show percentage to total

Participation Matrices were prepared only for 15 out of the 20 sample projects, which had some kind of participation, by the beneficiaries at some activity stage or other. Among the rest, one is executed departmentally (Kazhakkootam mini industrial estate), one by a *binami* contractor (Kadaikulam *ela*), two with no participating beneficiaries (Karakulam Computer Centre and Karumkulam Readymade Garment Units) and one with beneficiaries untraceable (Electronic Choke, Kilimanur).

Of the 15 participatory projects, only in six – Chooryode and Kavukulam lift irrigation schemes, Pezhumkamukal, Chevalakkonam and Panchikkala water supply schemes and Kunnathukulam swimming pool project – beneficiary participation was genuine and active. Five of these projects (excluding Chevalakkonam water supply) can sustain, with or without

*panchayat* subsidy. In seven other projects – Mushroom cultivation, Group farming for paddy, Chevalakkonam lift irrigation, Reed-based industries and Women self-help groups – participation was mostly mobilised by the *panchayats* after formulating the projects. In the other two cases - Handloom Society and Coir Society - participation was only notional, as the projects have no direct bearing on the existing participant workers of these societies.

By activity stages of projects, active participation by beneficiaries was insignificant (3.2 percent) in conceiving the project ideas, marginal (11.3 per cent) in the selection of the projects, fairly good (20.2 percent) in the formulation of the projects, and highest (37.1 percent) in the execution of the projects. Nearly half (45.2 percent) of the participants were associated with the execution of the projects but only 37 percent were active participants.

#### 4. Summary and conclusions

- (1) The key objective of our study was to assess empirically, whether public participation in the social development projects implemented under the People's Planning Programme of Kerala has improved the sustainability of the projects. Twenty sample projects from among the social/community development projects implemented by the Block and Village (*Grama*) *Panchayats* of Thiruvananthapuram district in the first three years (1997-'98 to 1999-2000) of the People's Planning Programme were selected for the study. Being an ex-post evaluation, the study has some conceptual and practical limitations in making a realistic assessment of the actual levels of participation by beneficiaries and local people in the formulation and execution of these projects and their sustainability. So, the concepts of participation and sustainability were somewhat diluted to make them operational. Sustainability is defined as short-term sustainability. Participation is defined to include both in its broad sense, meaning passive participation or mere association and in its real sense, meaning operational partaking. Number of beneficiaries participated in each project, classified by the levels or kinds of participation and activity stages are presented in a Participation Matrix format.
- (2) Only 15 out of the 20 sample projects (75 percent) had some participation by the beneficiaries at some activity stage or other. Among the rest, one is executed departmentally (Kazhakkootam mini industrial estate), one by a *binami* contractor (Kadaikulam *ela*), two with no participating beneficiaries (Karakulam computer center and Karumkulam readymade garments), and one with beneficiaries untraceable (electronic choke, Kilimanur).
- (3) Beneficiary participation in none of these 15 projects fulfils the three-fold conditions of genuine participation i.e., exercising some decision-making authority, realising some empowerment and enjoying a limited sense of ownership, except for some limited decision-making authority informally exercised by the Beneficiary Committees of three projects – Kavukulam lift irrigation, Pezhumkamukal Water supply, and Kunnathukulam swimming pool.
- (4) Of the 15 participatory projects, beneficiaries' participation was genuine and active only in six. Five of these projects (excluding Chevalakkonam water supply) in our opinion might sustain, with or without *panchayat* subsidy. In seven other projects participation was mostly passive and mobilised by the *panchayats* after formulating the projects. In two other cases participation was only notional, as the project has no direct bearing on the existing participant workers.
- (5) By activity stages of projects, active participation by beneficiaries was insignificant (3.2 percent) in conceiving the project ideas, marginal (11.3 percent) in the selection of the projects, fairly good (20.2 percent) in the formulation of the projects and highest (37.1 percent) in the execution of the projects. Nearly half (45.2 percent) of the participants were associated with the execution of the projects but only 37 percent were active participants.

- (6) Only 10 out of the 20 projects were local-specific. Others were foot-loose projects, more or less standardised, which could have been started anywhere and were apparently picked up from the State Planning Board's project shelves as convenient avenues to spend the Plan fund on time and in accordance with government guidelines.
- (7) Voluntary services as envisaged in the project reports were not realised in majority of the projects. Main reasons for this indifferent attitude of the beneficiaries and local people that we could identify are:
  - a They consider that these projects as government works like any other conventional Government or *Panchayat* programme for which funds are provided by the government. Therefore they feel that it is the sole responsibility of the *panchayat* to carry out the works.
  - b Unwillingness, indifference or failures of the Plan activists like Conveners or active members of Implementation Committees to mobilise voluntary services.
- (8) Co-operation and collective action among the beneficiaries cutting across party lines have been observed in all but one of the 15 participatory projects. Only in one project, Chevalakkonam water supply scheme in Pazhayakunnummel *Panchayat*, political divide among the beneficiaries have stalled the functioning of the project in spite of their clear stake in the project.
- (9) Only 4 of the 20 projects failed to achieve their objectives due either to faulty formulation (Mushroom cultivation, Ready made garments and Choke manufacturing) or defective implementation (Chavarcode lift irrigation).
- (10) Failure of two projects – Mushroom cultivation and Chevalakkonam water supply – may partly be attributed to the 'dependency syndrome' in which the beneficiary participants look forward to the Government even to solve minor problems confronted by them in the execution of the project, which they could have solved by their own initiative. Mindset of the beneficiaries of some self-employment programmes sponsored by the *Panchayats*, (e.g. Mushroom cultivation and electronic choke manufacturing) appears to be that of paid employees of a Government programme. They seem to have expected that the onus of the responsibility of management rested exclusively on the *panchayat* authorities.
- (11) Political and parochial interests, often pointed out as two major detractors of decentralised planning, have caused the suspension of the activity in one project (Chevalakkonam water supply) and halted the commissioning of another project (Panchikkala water supply).
- (12) Documented case studies on evaluation of participative development projects in some developing countries have concluded that dominance of interest groups, patronage relations, leadership struggles and other power relations determine the social conditions of participation over-riding the common welfare objective.<sup>1</sup> This, we find,

was true only in the cases of two projects – Chevalakkonam and Panchikkala water supply schemes.

- (13) A project, the success of which is excessively dependent on individual leadership (e.g., Kunnattukal Labour Bank) runs the risk of unsustainability with an adverse change of leadership.
- (14) Chooryode lift irrigation, Kavukulam lift irrigation, Pezhumkamukal water supply, and Kunnathukulam swimming pool have very high probability of sustainability. In all these projects the beneficiaries have a clear stake in the physical assets created and a sense of belonging and receive direct benefit from the projects. There are no foreseeable exogenous factors that may affect the sustainability of these projects in the immediate future. Sustainability of the other 16 projects – 12 participatory and 4 non-participatory – which have no built-in sustainability factors depends, largely, on exogenous factors like continued financial support from the *panchayats*, and changes in the market environment. In the cases of the 11 participatory projects, beneficiary participation was too weak and ineffective to sustain them. Participation is certainly a decisive element of sustainability, but not a sufficient condition.

Summing up the findings of the study, we find that a majority of the projects investigated are not sustainable. Faulty formulation of projects, dependency syndrome, interference on political and parochial interests, and *panchayat*'s decision to blindly follow the government guidelines without proper investigation about its appropriateness and feasibility are among the major causes for this sad state of affairs. We conclude that in a majority of the social development projects taken up under the People's Planning in Kerala, there was no genuine or effective participation by the beneficiaries. The sustainability of the projects would have improved with genuine or effective participation.



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