

COVID RESISTANCE THROUGH DECENTRALISATION PLANNING

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Abstract

The "People's Planning" program was implemented through participatory democracy through the Local Self Government Institutions in Kerala. The Covid-19 started to spread when Janakeeyasoothranam -the people's planning program entered its 25th year. The objectives of decentralized participatory planning are to prepare the people's system for dealing with the development and emergencies of a community. The knowledge and experience for this was gained from the participatory planning process. This helped to plan and execute the pandemic defense activities flawlessly in the most scientific and participatory manner. The society has set up a mechanism to combat the pandemic by keeping people from all walks of life involved in preventive activities. The working experience gained through the people's planning movement (Janakeeyasoothranam) implemented by Kerala, has enabled to keep the people together and work with a sense of direction without giving up vigilance. The main agenda of decentralized participatory planning is to prepare the people's system for dealing with the development and emergencies of a community. It was through this kind of people's participation program that Kerala organized the Covid defense activities beautifully. Through the experience from peoples planning process being implemented through local bodies Kerala has come a long way in shaping infrastructure and nurturing peoples community. The culture formed through this community helped to prevent Covid-19 in grass root level. The agencies like Kudumbasree under local bodies have an important role in preventing the society during covid pandemic. To ensure food availability in the lockdown Janakeeya hotels and community kitchens were started by Kudumbasree along with the support of the locals. This paper aims on How the Local Bodies was able to prevent covid pandemic by inter joining the support from the community.

Keywords: Janakeeyasoothranam, Community Kitchen, Janakeeya Hotel, Decentralisation planning

INTRODUCTION

Decentralization became legal through the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India. Kerala is one of the state that has implemented decentralization in its fullest sense . The constitutional mandate resulted to establishing and institutionalizing a Panchayat Raj system of administration to devolute powers directly to people. The main agenda of

decentralized participatory planning is to prepare the people's system for dealing with the development and emergencies of a community. Government of Kerala took a decision to devolve 35 to 40 percentage of state plan fund through local government. It was started as a community based development project in Kerala under the name -'Janakeeyasoothranam' with the participation of the people. Peoples planning has become a milestone in the history

of social development in India itself and in the world. The project was launched on August 17, 1996 in Kerala. The first step in implementing the decentralization process was to find skilled people from different walks of life and to mobilize them and their efficiencies along with the people from different walks of life to enable the local bodies to plan and execute the project. Kerala's revolution in the process of social development after 25 years of continuous evaluation of the knowledge and project achievements helped at each stage. People's Planning, the participatory democratic process initiated by Kerala during the Ninth Five Year Plan. As it enters its 25th year, Kerala has come a long way in shaping infrastructure and nurturing people's community. The culture formed through this community helped to prevent epidemics like Covid. The participatory development program in 'People's Planning' changed the development culture of the society itself. Covid defense activities could not have been carried out without the moral support of the people and the support and strength of the participatory planning system, and the experience of people's planning had strengthened this. Through its own 'People's Planning' in Kerala, which has been discussed at various levels around the world, the people have been able to come together on the path of planning and execution and implement their needs as a whole especially in health activities which includes the pandemic resistances.

Discussion and Interpretation

Kerala is a state that has carried out exemplary covid defense activities in its every sense. The experience, ability and people's participation for this was gained from the people's planning process being implemented through the local bodies. In three-tier panchayat raj system, the gramasabha/ward sabha alone have the power to decide project planning including health and social welfare activities.

The main agenda of decentralized participatory planning is to prepare the people's system for dealing with the development and emergencies of a community. It was through this kind of decentralization planning program that Kerala organized the covid defense activities beautifully. The knowledge and experience for this was gained through the above people's

planning process. This has enabled to plan and execute the covid defense activities flawlessly in the most scientific and participatory manner. Kerala has set up a mechanism to combat the covid pandemic by keeping people from all walks of life involved in preventive activities. Kerala has already realized that preparing people's systems to deal with emergencies is an important component of development from the experience of participatory planning. The "People's Planning" program was implemented through participatory democracy through the Local Self Government Institutions in Kerala. Covid defense activities could not have been carried out without the moral support of the people and the support and strength of the participatory planning system, and the experience of people's planning had strengthened this. Local bodies like Grama Panchayaths and Municipalities coordinated various grass root level activities to streamline defense operations and ensure emergency services to the people. This was spearheaded and planned by the Local Bodies.

Janakeyasoothranam began in Kerala in the year 1996 as a democratic experiment and was started as a community based development project for local development. In this, attention was given for solving the basic problems of the people. Making decisions for local development was given to them. The resources and responsibilities were decentralized and it strengthened the local bodies to meet the local needs in every sense. The most powerful local people's group named 'Grama sabha' are the decision makers of local planning and decisions taken by them are unquestionable. The 'Grama sabha' are the group of all peoples of the society and this people's system are working for the development and to meet the emergencies of the society. The local government institutions have the responsibility to implement the planning projects including emergencies as decided by the Gramasabha/ward sabha. Gramasabha/ward sabha are the guardians of the process of people's planning

However, there was a legally prescribed quorum in the gramasabhas and ward sabhas, but today most of the village and ward councils are fully run responsibly. These gramasabha/ward sabha are also the means of alleviating and solving today's social problems.

At the same time, the neighbouring groups formed at various stages brought many people closer to the gramasabha/ward sabha. So the local govt institution is bridging the gap between local realities and policy measures.

The Kudumbasree system for the empowerment of women in Kerala and its basic components, the neighbourhood groups ADS and CDS, act as support volunteers in the Local Bodies and in Gramasabha/ward sabha. All sections who were reluctant to reach out to public places reached the mainstream of society through neighbourhood groups and gramasabha/ward sabha. It was formed as a social community for the mitigation and solution of any social problems. These grassroot level communities are able to work with people as people on any issue. When the people's representatives, officials and the Local Bodies headed by them work together with such self-sacrificing communities, it becomes a community capable of dealing with any epidemic. The knowledge and experience gained in grass root level planning and execution process over the last quarter of a century and the co-operation and service of the lowest strata of the society and the presence of Local Bodies in Kerala, both legally and non-legally, will set an example for Kerala to exemplify against Covid, which erupted in 2019 as the epidemic of this century.

The Local Bodies in Kerala have taken various measures against these global pandemics as per the directions of the State and Central Governments.

In the last quarter of March 2020, due to the covid epidemic, lockdown was declared across India. Suddenly one day lockdown was announced in the country without any preparation. With the announcement of the Lockdown, people from all walks of life, rich and poor alike, regardless of whether they were healthy or sick, were forced to stay in their homes or in their final resting places. Those who had reached many places for various purposes were trapped and unable to return. With the closure of hotels, shops, markets etc.. people started to starve without access to food. The government has directed the local bodies to start community kitchens for immediate distribution of free food. As soon as the community kitchens were started by the local bodies by collecting donations from public and

by using volunteer ship. Food parcels were delivered free of cost from these community kitchens to the needy. The control and management of the community kitchen was left to the local bodies. Distribution of food parcels was entrusted to volunteers and RRTs. Kudumbasree groups and volunteers were responsible for cooking the food. . In this way, the Local Bodies constantly analyzed the activities of the community kitchens and paid special attention to ensure that they functioned smoothly without any shortcomings. Subsequently, the Janakeeya hotels were started to cater to the needy at affordable prices by the Kudumbasree group.

Even before the start of Covid, the Disaster Management Plan had been formulated as a part of Janakeeyasoothranam by the local bodies . Under this scheme, each local body had set up a Rapid Response Team to cope with disasters, including frequent catastrophic floods. The operation of this force was able to use Covid 19. At each ward level, these RRTs spearheaded the Covid defense activities like food and medicine distribution , identification of positive cases etc .

The Local Bodies placed special emphasis on solving the problems of the homeless and preventing the spread of covid. In addition to implementing the government's directives, the Local Bodies have been conducting awareness campaigns, nuclear disarmament, social isolation and preventive measures. The bureaucracy, the people's representatives and the social workers have worked tirelessly for this. During the Covid period, the Local Bodies offices were constantly working day and night to coordinate all these activities.

The Local Bodies had conducted tests involving health workers to detect the presence of the disease in the event of a covid outbreak. Rehabilitation of people sleeping on the street , other homeless and guest workers was the next task. With the help of volunteers and Rapid Response Team members the list of them were collected and rehabilitated in camps. Food , medicine , cleaning materials , protective measures were supplied in free of cost to them.

The Local Bodies were responsible for issuing passes to those arriving after international and inter-state travel and monitoring such persons. For this, health workers and Asha activists

working as health workers worked for the Local Bodies. Their invaluable service deserves special mention.

At the grassroots level, the next step was to raise awareness about the spread of covid disease and immunization mitigation measures. To this end, a health force has been formed at the ward level and a health awareness committee has been formed at the Local Bodies level to monitor its activities. At the ward level, the health workers worked for the Local Bodies by giving instructions to the volunteers. The Local Bodies also implemented the 'Break The Chain' campaign launched by the government. The Local Bodies worked tirelessly to coordinate and implement welfare activities for the guest workers who were residing in different parts of the state. When the spread of the disease started, it was the responsibility of the Local Bodies to lead the conduct of covid inspections at the ward level as directed by the Government, to prepare the necessary facilities for the health workers, to prepare the necessary volunteers and to prepare various reports in this regard. As covid expanded, the next task was to run 'Quarantine Centers' and 'Covid First Line Treatment Centers'. Local Bodies are also responsible for its complete maintenance and control. To provide first aid to the patients, the Local Bodies took over the public buildings and set up the 'Covid first line treatment center' with all the basic facilities.

The first phase of Covid-19 is the best strategy to control the spread, implemented by Kerala using the co-operation and service of the people and the grassroots. The basis for this was laid down by the staff of the Local Self Government Department working at the grassroots level of the government and the people's representatives at the lowest level of the democratic system. The public health system, which is part of the local government body, has also become a feather in the cap of corona prevention. In this way, Kerala has come up with the best strategy to control the spread of covid 19 through the Local Bodies which are the foremost in the three tier panchayat system in Kerala. Kerala has been more successful in corona prevention than any other Indian state because it has been able to bring ordinary people into such participatory democratic processes. In addition, high literacy, community education, secular

sensitivity, deep political awareness, love of coexistence, and a sense of citizenship formed as a result of these contributed to the success story.

At the grassroots level in Kerala, social and intellectual progressive ideas are being developed by a group of people into community development projects. Such schemes discuss the need of the citizen. In this way, the presence of the public gives a great impetus to Kerala's pragmatic democracy. Civil society cares to integrate public health systems. The concept of rights and citizenship is constantly discussed and local projects that are formed prioritize the right to health. This was also reflected in the covid defense activities.

In government systems, the police department has put in place excellent service for covid defense operations. The Police Department has been working tirelessly with the Health and Local Self Government Departments on awareness and control of covid Zonal Control, Contact Prohibition, Domestic Contact and Contact Investigation. More importantly, the state government and its rulers have been able to nurture and raise the awareness among the people.

The social prevention and support system and early detection system have set Kerala apart from other states with an emphasis on individual health, mental health and diet. This is what the government gets from the people and what the government gives to the people.

Such covid prevention activities could be carried out in a timely and exemplary manner only with the experience gained by the Local Bodies through people's planning and the co-ordination of the community.

At a glance

Important activities taken by the local bodies to rest Covid-19

- 1) Ensuring that people approached the pandemic with caution by avoiding fear.
- 2) Give information and education to the people.
- 3) Coordinate all administration systems including health and police to prevent the pandemic'

- 4) Rehabilitation of people sleeping on the street and other homeless.
- 5) Ensure the facilities to all SC,ST, fisherman , Colonies.
- 6) Rehabilitation of guest workers and facilitate the camp of them.
- 7) Conducting community kitchens to supply food to needy person.
- 8) Supply medicines ,protective measures like soap , mask , sanitizers etc in free of cost.
- 9) Conduct Covid First Line Treatment Centres and Domicilory Care Centres to Covid positives and to primary contacts
- 10) Conduct Disinfection activities to houses and public places
- 11) Ensure transportation , isolation , quarantine facilities and other facilities

The Resources in local bodies to covid resistance activities

- Gramasabha/ward sabha
- Elected Representatives
- Employees
- Health Workers
- Asha Workers
- Anganwadi workers
- Local Volunteers
- Rapid Response Team members
- Social Workers and interested Local Groups

Statistical Data showing the activities of local bodies

➤ Community kitchen started	1034
➤ Janakeeya hotels started during the first month	134
➤ Food parcel distribution within 10 days	43,78,813
➤ Rehabilitation of street sleeping people	2321urban 489 rural
➤ Buildings setup CFLTCs and DCCs	2378

➤ Labour camps to Guest workers	20
➤ Community kitchen to Guest workers settlement	29749

(Source: Panchayat Raj magazine edition 1 book 60 of 2020)

Conclusion

Kerala have been highly praised by various national and international agencies for covid prevention activities. Even though Kerala recorded one of the highest numbers of patients in India from January to March, it only registered the lowest number of deaths but also a high rate of recovery from the pandemic. Decentralization of power and the mass planning that was born out of it are still a socially oriented activity in Kerala to prevent any crisis like the global pandemic. Such covid prevention activities was possible to carry out in a timely and exemplary manner only with the experience gained by the peoples planning and coordination of the community . This grassroot level prevention method with the help of the community is a distinct method than other States. Such like prevention against the covid resulted in low covid death rate . May be the pandemic provides us another opportunity to rethink our approach to the decentralisation in the country, like the Kerala model.

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