

Project title	<b>Gender Differentials at Local Self-Government Level in Kerala</b>
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### Abstract

Active participation of women is fundamental for achieving empowerment and gender equality. Besides the Panchayat Raj and Kerala Municipality Amendment Bills passed by Kerala State Legislative Assembly in 2009, fifty percent of the elected seats and positions in LSGs were reserved for women. Government of Kerala constituted a Gender Board.

The objective of the study was to examine the impact of decentralisation in reducing gender inequality and enhancing women empowerment in Kerala. The specific objectives were to examine and analyse the policies of Panchayats. Methodology adopted for the study included field surveys – interviewing of elected representatives and survey of households in four Panchayats of Thiruvananthapuram namely Kadakkavoor, Karavaram, Nanniyode and Vellarada. Details on awareness on gender issues, acceptance of women specific schemes, awareness, and role of women on development schemes and in household decision making, were collected.

Major findings of the study were the following. Panchayats were not able to identify projects to meet the special needs of women. Stereo-typed projects were taken up. Issues related to local resources and marketing were never addressed in Panchayats. Tendency to relegate more than proportionate SCP and TSP projects to WCP was observed. Panchayats could not achieve the minimum mandatory allocation of ten percent for Women Component Plan.

The survey revealed the functioning of Panchayat Raj Institutions in empowerment of women. The elected representatives were familiar with their living conditions. Reservation of wards for women members helped the local women to assume leadership roles and acquire skills. Local women also became capable of managing the implementation of various schemes like MNREGA. Elected representatives were not able to recognize several instances as gender issues and were unaware of women specific issues. There was no institutional mechanism for addressing such issues at the Panchayat level. Particularly women were not aware of Women Component Plans.

Problems identified by the elected representatives in addressing gender issues were Inadequate. The elected representatives made recommendations for the improvement of women like training on gender issues, orientation classes etc. About 70 percent of people attended Grama Sabha all alone while 14 percent attended with their spouses. Many households felt that decentralised governance enhanced women empowerment.

It was evident that there existed substantial gender differentials against women in the selected Panchayats of Kerala and to be noted that it existed in Kerala. Decentralised governance was not able to make any significant impact on gender differentials due to several reasons.

