The Journal for Social Advancement 3 (2018) 309-316

Contents lists available at https://www.jsa.social/archive/

The Journal for Social Advancement

Journal Homepage: https://www.jsa.social/

Social security for the destitute through Community Participation

Dr.Leela Kumari.P[1]

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Received *10 November 2017*
Revised *27 February 2018*
Accepted *15 March 2018*

Keywords:
Social Security
Destitute
Community Participation

A B S T R A C T

Kerala's ambitious decentralization programme has helped to a large extent in reducing risk and vulnerability of the marginalized groups. It has received wide acceptance for being a key factor in generating a sustainable rural livelihood and is renowned for poverty eradication. This article examines the dynamics and methods of strengthening community-based participation with a special focus on poverty reduction programmes under Democratic Decentralised Governance. On the basis of performance, in relation to actual implementation of the poverty reduction programmes, two sets of sample Local Self Government Institutions were selected for the study and data was collected through several rounds of discussions with main stakeholders of Ashraya project, such as the key officials of Kudumbasree, Implementation officer, President of Grama Panchayat and various support providing departments of Local Self Government Institutions. This article visibly highlights the variance in Asraya project across different development schemes of Local Self Government Institutions. The study concludes that incongruence in Ashraya project performance is due to lack of awareness regarding the programme and inconvenient location of identifying the destitute. It is suggested that special care needs to be taken to ensure participation of marginalized groups such as the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes.

[1] Assistant Professor, Institute of Management in Government, Kerala, India.
Corresponding Email: facultyimgplk@gmail.com

Background

Kerala has been in the forefront of providing reasonable equality for human and social development. It has evolved innovative social security schemes like welfare funds, pensions, universal Public Distribution System etc. However there is a feeling that there are some outliers whose social security needs have not been met. They can be classified destitute or absolutely poor and the other disabled groups among the poor facing physical and mental challenges. The existing schemes often do not reach them and even if they reach are inadequate compared to the severity of their problems. In Kerala, one of the most popular state reforms that have opened spaces for a wider and deeper participation of citizens at the local level has been the decentralization process. Strengthening of participation in local governance has to do with the strengthening of direct citizen involvement in decision making by individuals or groups in public activities, often through newly established institutional channels such as beneficiary identification, project planning processes, monitoring committees, etc. Within development, perhaps the dominant concern with participation has been related to the community or social sectors. Kerala is a model state where the scale and magnitude of the decentralization process and transferring of powers, function and resources is considered to be the most significant achievement of the state combined with a viable and realistic planning from below.

Kerala's initiatives in democratic decentralization have thrown up several good development practices, the most outstanding of which is 'Kudumbasree', the State Poverty Eradication Mission of Government of Kerala. Kudumbasree was conceived as a joint programme of the Government of Kerala and NABARD implemented through Community Development Societies (CDSs) of Poor Women, serving as the community wing of Local Governments. Kerala society has a significant presence of socially marginalized destitute people. ***Asraya*** is a community based social security programme for the poorest of the poor (destitute) implemented by Local Self Government Institutions in partnership with State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM),Kudumbasree. It has attained the status of National Best Practice in social security and has reached a stage of replication. Thus ASRAYA is a pioneer project model which can be adopted by rest of the country in recognition of its exceptional merit. It was conferred the Prime Minister's award for best practices in public administration in 2008.In this context; it is relevant to examine the intersection of community participation in implementation of Asraya project, especially in the development framework. The present paper is prepared on the basis of two case studies conducted at Grama Panchayath level to explore the dynamics and methods of community participation in Asraya project, implemented by Kudumbasree under democratic governance in Kerala.

Objectives

The main objective of the study is to explore the dynamics and methods of strengthening community-based participation in the context of poverty reduction programmes under Democratic Governance.

Methodology

A sample group of two Local Self Government Institutions were chosen from southern part of Kerala for the field study, on the basis of performance in relation to actual implementation. The samples were selected with good performing and poor performing Local Self Government Institutions. On the very outset, preliminary discussions were held with key officials of Kudumbasree and various support providing departments of Local Self Government Institutions regarding the implementation of Asraya Project. These discussions clearly highlighted the variance in Asraya project across different development schemes of Local Self Government Institutions

Case study method was mainly used for field data collection. Interview schedule and Guided questions were prepared for conducting personal interviews with key actors of the project.

The sample consists of major stake holders of Asraya project such as implementation officer /Member secretary, Grama Panchayath Secretary /President, Elected Representatives of Local Self Government Institutions (Standing Committee Chairman (Welfare) Standing Committee Chairman, (Development) President of Community Development Society, Area Development Society Chairperson, neighborhood members and a good number of beneficiaries.

Hypothesis

Community participation is a contributory factor for the successful implementation of anti-poverty programmes.

Community Participation

For the last twenty years, the concept of participation has been widely used in the discourse of development. For much of this period, the concept has referred to participation in the social arena, in the community or in development projects. Increasingly, however, the concept of Participation is being related to rights of citizenship and to democratic governance. Nowhere is the intersection of concepts of community participation and citizenship seen more clearly than in the multitude of programmes for decentralized governance that are found in both southern and northern countries. Linking citizen participation to the state at this local or grassroots level raises fundamental and normative questions about the nature of democracy and about the skills and strategies for achieving it.(John and Camilo1999).

Each of the concepts of participation carries with them differing methods for strengthening or enhancing participation. Traditionally, in the field of political participation, such methods have included voter education, enhancing the awareness of rights and responsibilities of citizens, lobbying and advocacy, often aimed towards developing a more informed citizenry who could hold elected representatives more accountable. In the social and community spheres, however, we have seen the development of a number of broader participatory methods for appraisal, planning, monitoring large institutions, training and awareness building. Greater emphasis here has been on the importance of participation not only to hold others accountable, but also as a self development process, starting with the articulation of grassroots needs and priorities, and building popular forms of organisation. Participation has included the realm of knowledge and direct action, not only the realm of representation and accountability.

For those concerned with participation at the project or community level, the 1990s have given rise to the rapid .scaling up of participatory approaches. Often responding to donor pressure, governments have been urged to adopt participatory approaches in their ministries (e.g. forestry, health or irrigation) as a means of influencing policy, and as a form of planning at multiple levels. (Holland et al., 1998). Inevitably, the scaling up of participation necessarily leads those involved in development projects and programmes to engage with the state, and with broader issues of governance, representation, transparency and accountability. In 1998 World Bank has organized a workshop on "Mainstreaming and upscaling Participation of Primary Stakeholders", and the main theme was the need to engage with government to ensure success and sustainability through participation of community, rather than focus only on the participation of officials. There was a high degree of consensus on the need to link participation to secondary and tertiary stakeholders .In this sense, understanding the dynamics of partnership and engagement between civil society, governments and donors becomes a critical concern.

Social and Project Participation

Within development, perhaps the dominant concern with participation has been related to the community or social sectors. In a highly influential study in the late 1970s, participation was defined as the organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations, on the part of groups and movements hitherto excluded from such control (Stiefel and Wolfe:1994). In this sense participation was located atleast initially outside of the development layer and also amongst those who had been excluded from existing institutions. It could take a variety of forms, ranging from social movements to self-help groups.

More recently, the definition of participation in development has often been located in development projects and programmes, as a means of strengthening their relevance, quality and sustainability. In an influential statement, the World Bank Learning Group on Participation defined participation as a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them. (World Bank, 1995).

From this perspective, participation could be seen in the level of consultation or decision making in all phases of a project cycle, from needs assessment, to appraisal, to implementation, to monitoring and evaluation. While these participation projects could be funded by the state, participation within them was seen not as related to broader issues of politics or governance, but as a way of encouraging action outside the public sphere. Moreover, the focus was often on direct participation of primary stakeholders, rather than indirect participation through elected representatives.

On the one hand, we have those approaches to participation which have focused on community or social participation, usually in the civil society sphere or in which citizens have been beneficiaries of government programmes. On the other hand, there is the tradition of political participation, through which citizens have engaged in traditional forms of political involvement e.g. voting, political parties, and lobbying. Increasingly, in the context of democratic decentralization, these two traditions are being linked to a broader notion of participation as citizenship. Each of these approaches may draw upon a variety of participatory methodologies of planning, monitoring, research, education and action.

Kudumbasree as a model for Participatory Development

Kudumbasree is formally registered as the "State Poverty Eradication Mission" (SPEM), a society registered under the Travancore Cochin Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies Act 1955. There is a state mission with a field officer in each district. This official structure supports and facilitates the activities of the community network across the state.

The grassroots mechanism of Kudumbashree is the Neighbourhood Group (NHG) that sends representatives to the ward level Area Development Societies (ADS). The ADS sends its representatives to the Community Development Society (CDS), which completes the unique three-tier structure of Kudumbasree. Today, there are 2.58 lakhs NHGs, over 19,700 ADSs and 1072 CDSs in Kudumbasree. It is this network that brings women to the Grama Sabhas and helps them bring the needs of the poor to the attention of the local governments. The Community Development Societies are also very active in Government programmes and play a significant role in development activities ranging from socio-economic surveys and enterprise development to community management and social audit.

Asraya as a boom and closing door for destitution

Kerala's model for poverty alleviation revolves around improving access to basic minimum services for the socio – economically marginalized poor and destitute. Its social security systems covers provision of pensions to nearly 14.33 lakhs persons belonging to vulnerable groups, and welfare services through welfare funds for various groups of labourers both organized and unorganized. Tackling poverty under Kudumbashree centres around a model participatory development, which focuses on building capacities of the marginalized on the one hand and improving access to essential services and entitlements on the other. Though its efforts to engage women in civil society in development issues and opportunities, Kudumbashree in association with the Local Self Government of Kerala is charting out new meaning and possibilities for local economic development and citizen centric governance.

Asraya is the first intended community based initiative for addressing issues affecting destitute not covered by any of the designated anti-poverty programmes. An estimated 2% of the total population is estimated to be under this category. The destitute are the poorest of the poor. They are the outliers of the development scenario in the negative extreme. They live at the margins of the economy, society and policy. They do not have a voice or the power of choice. They face the worst forms of deprivation and lack of access even to the basic minimum services. They are exposed to all forms of vulnerability and do not have any safety against risks. Their income is below subsistence and they are neither aware of their entitlements nor are they in a position to access them. Asraya was conceptualized to address these issues.

The Project is being implemented in 1056 out of 1057 Local self government institutions 81,835 destitute families have been identified and projects worth Rs 41,075.82 lakhs have been prepared and are in various stages of implementation throughout the state.

Besides the Plan fund of the LSGIs Kudumbasree also provides money as challenge fund, the LSGIs have to mobilize funds from other sources including contributions from individuals and donors. Projects are implemented with public participation and convergence of services across sectors. As an incentive to local governments to take up Asraya, government has committed to provide 40% of the project cost subject to a maximum of Rs.15 lakhs.

Project Implementation Process

The implementation process starts with building ownership of the project and creating an enabling environment for the institutional framework in Local bodies for smooth execution of the project. It included the following -

- Environment creation for implementation by Local Governments.
- Sensitization of elected representatives of all Local Self Government Institutions on issues of destitute and need of the project.
- Ownership building of the project in Local Self Government Institutions.
- Identification of destitute with transparency through a nine point verifiable index.

Besides the 9-point index, another 15 points that lead to destitution are also included for identifying destitute families. The individual needs of the destitute are identified through a participatory need assessment, involving the Community Based Organization members and the elected representatives. The project envisaged to address the various deprivations faced by the destitute families such as scarcity of food, health issues including chronic illness, treatment for life threatening diseases, lack of pension, educational facilities to children, land for home, lack of shelter and its up gradation, drinking water, safe sanitation facilities, skill development, employment opportunities, etc. Comprehensive and individualized project proposals are prepared wherein the needs of each beneficiary are addressed.

This is sought to be achieved through the principle of public participation combined with self-help and support from other organizations. The Special Tribal Asraya project was launched taking into consideration the special needs of Scheduled Tribes. Socially excluded tribal people were included through this special tribal programme.

Training and Sensitizing Officials and Elected Representatives

While some participatory education strategies have focussed on building the awareness and capacity of local citizens, others have focussed on training of elected officials and government staff.

Participatory Approach in beneficiary Identification

Preliminary identification of probable destitute family is done by special groups of trained volunteers from each neighbourhood group. The short-listed households are visited by the teams often accompanied by the elected Ward Member, and interact with the families.

Following were the criteria/poverty indices used to identify the beneficiaries:

1) No land/less than 10 cents of land
2) No house/living in dilapidated house
3) No drinking water facilities within 300 meters
4) No sanitary toilet
5) No employment to any person in the family (Empowerment for less than 10 days a month)
6) Women headed family /widow/abandoned women/presence of unwed mother in the family.
7) Presence of physically/Mentally Challenged /chronically ill member in the family
8) Family belonging to SC/ST
9) Presence of an adult illiterate member.

Families with seven or more indicators are subject to another list of five special indicators for rural areas and for urban areas respectively. If a family has at least one of these special indicators in addition to the seven or more from the first set, it is classified as a destitute family.

Special Indicators for rural areas:

1. Having no landed property to set up a dwelling place to live in.
2. Spending the night time in public places/Streets.
3. Having no healthy member as breadwinner to the family.
4. Resorting to beggary to meet his/her both ends meet
5. Having women subject to atrocities.
6. Having children below the age of 14 who work to earn money for the family.

Special indications for urban areas:

1. Having no landed property to set up a dwelling place to live in.
2. Spending the night time in public places/Streets.
3. Having no healthy member as breadwinner to the family.

4. Resorting to beggary to meet his/her both ends meet
5. Having women subject to atrocities.
6. Having children below the age of 14 who work to earn money for the family.
7. Having commercial sex workers.
8. Having women members who live in Abala Mandiram(Welfare institutions).
9. Living in slums

Participatory Need Assessment

After ensuring that the families come within the definition of destitution, their multiple needs- namely , the survival needs (food ,health, pension ,education etc) infrastructure needs (land for house, new house, shelter up-gradation, sanitary latrine, drinking water ,electrification etc) development needs (awareness creation for employment, skill development, accessing employment opportunities ,livelihood for sustenance etc) and psychological needs (building of confidence, social inclusion, safety etc)of each family are identified.

Any effort to improve the conditions of poor should be include an assessment of their real problems for need identification. Experience shows that most of the families cannot even articulate their needs. Here a sensitive enquiry and elaborate interaction by the volunteers from neighbourhood groups and community based structures with empathy helps in real need identification.

Participatory Micro level Planning

After the needs identification, the Asraya plan is developed with individual family as the building block. The Asraya plan of each family which includes benchmark description, required needs, and photograph of the beneficiary, and cost of different project components. These components were collated together to develop the Asraya Plan for the local government. This plan is prepared through micro level planning.

Once the beneficiary list and project has been prepared, it will be placed in the Grama Sabha for vetting and finalization. Then it is submitted to the office at District level, and thereby sent to Government for sanction. After getting sanction, the project is implemented by Local Self Government Institutions.

Asraya follows the principle of empowerment of the poorest of the poor by giving proper information, awareness, and perception regarding the project Asraya. The strategy of bridging the synergy between elected local governments and the organization of the poor is fundamental to Asraya. From the case study it is revealed that the success of the project depends on the level of awareness about the project objective, its relevance in addressing problems of destitute, a process of understanding issues of implementation, proper care in monitoring, compassion and continuous hand holding support with empathy.

Community Based Monitoring System

A Monitoring Committee is formed at Local Self Government Institutional level. The committee consists of President of the LSGI as President, Welfare Standing Committee Chairman, Development Standing Committee Chairman, CDS Chairperson, Member Secretary, Medical Officer, Convener, Social Development, and other two social workers as committee members. Sub committees are entrusted with evaluating the project implementation and are required to submit the report before the committee. The committee should meet once in three months and prepare quarterly reports for the District Planning Committee. Taking account of the problems encountered in the report, new solutions and strategies were formulated for better implementation

The study findings show that the following are the reasons for poor performance of project implementation.

- Lack of awareness and low level of understanding of the scope of the project among the elected representatives affects the implementation and service delivery of the project. They perceive it as a welfare programme just like other development schemes.

- Absence of team work and convergence of services , lack of co-ordination between stakeholders were also the factors of poor performance in project implementation.

- Lack of accountability and interest of the implementation officers were also creates problems in project implementation.

- It is the responsibility of the PHC doctor to convene medical camps to identify the health needs of the beneficiaries. Medical officers are not properly taken this responsibility, in identifying the health needs of destitute. As a result the chronic patients denied timely treatment and medicines.

- Dual control of line departments and lack of role clarity of officials were also leads to poor performance of project achievement.

- Shortage of fund, lack of interest of the doctors, reluctance of supporting service providers, political influence, and delay in getting sanction for the project are the sustainability issues of the project.

Transferability and Replication Model

It is interesting to note that the State Representatives of National Resource Organizations (NRO) have visited Kerala to study about the Asraya project. The key officials opined that states of Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Assam were keen in replicating Asraya to their states. From the starting level to final stage there was scope for transferability and replication of the project. Initially 137 Local Self Governments have implemented the project now almost all the local self-government institutions have implemented the same.

- The participatory process of identification of destitute has given birth to several new initiatives at local level for ameliorating poverty and inclusion of socially excluded poor. As a result of this, LSGIs initiated several innovative projects like Palliative care, Santhwana Project etc which is highly beneficial to the real poor and implementing in an appreciable manner under decentralized governance. The convergence of services and inter-departmental co-ordination were the key factors of success in Asraya project.

Conclusion

Kerala is the ideal state for the introduction of participatory local democracy because of its widespread literacy. The community could easily identify the poverty indexes/risk factors of the family and therefore the poor could be identified in a transparent and participatory manner.

Vast numbers of aged people, and people nearing old age, the loss of their savings brought with it the prospect of living their remaining years in destitution. At the height of the Depression, many old people were literally destitute. One-third to one-half of the aged was dependent on family or friends for support. The poor houses and other relief agencies that existed assist people who had fallen on hard times were financed mainly from charity and local funds. They could not begin-either financially or conceptually to respond adequately to the special needs of these destitute. Here the importance and relevance of Asraya project is remarkable.

Opportunity for the individual to secure protection for himself and his family against the economic hazards of old age and death is essential to the sustained welfare, freedom, and dignity of any citizen. For some, such protection can be gained through individual savings and other private arrangements. For others, such arrangements are inadequate or too uncertain. Since the interest of the whole Nation is involved, the people, using the Government as the agency for their cooperation, should make sure that all members of the community have at least a basic measure of protection against the major hazards of old age and death.Asraya is answering to these vulnerability issues of voiceless socially excluded people.

From the discussions with the officials it is revealed that lack of awareness regarding the programme and inconvenient location of identifying the destitute, are the major constrain for ensuring community participation. Special care has been given to ensure the participation of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes and other marginalized groups.

Kudumbasree as a comprehensive programme aims at the alleviation of poverty. It is a participatory poverty reduction programme focusing on women empowerment through convergence of resources and community action. It encompasses thrift and

credit activities, micro enterprises, several income generating activities and a wide range of welfare activities. The three-tier community based organizations under Local Government Institutions have covered almost all social and economic activities ranging from manufacturing, farming, trading, service providing, housing, collection and processing waste material and welfare activities including protection of destitute.

The moves from government towards civil society, and from social and project participation towards governance offer new spaces in participatory development. It also offers new opportunities to share the methods for strengthening participation across boundaries, so that, those who have been promoting participatory planning can learn lessons about advocacy or human rights education, and those who have developed participatory methods for consultation, planning and monitoring are able to link them to the new governance agenda.

In sum, within the discussions on mainstreaming participation, governance and citizenship, we begin to see a redefinition of the concept of participation, that it moves from only being concerned with beneficiaries or the excluded to a concern with broad forms of engagement by citizens in policy formulation and decision making in key areas which affect their lives.

References

Stiefel M. and Wolfe M. (1994), A Voice for the Excluded: Popular participation in Development: Utopia or Necessity? London: Zed Books.

UNRISD (1996). Their choice or yours: Global forces or Local voices? Discussion Paper No.79.

Verba S. and Nie, N. (1972), Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.

Velaquez, F(1991*)*. Local Governments in Intermediate Cities in Colombia; Municipal Administration for whom? Environment and Urbanization, Vol. 3, No.1, April, 1991.

World Bank (1995), World Bank Participation Sourcebook, Environment Department, Papers Participation Series Washington D.C. World Bank. (1995), Better Urban Services: finding the Right Incentives.

Holland J. and Blackburn J. (eds.) (1998), Whose Voice? Participatory research and Policy Change, London: IT Publications.