

PARTICIPATION OF SELF HELP GROUP MEMBERS AND NON- MEMBERS IN PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM - A COMPARATIVE STUDY*

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ABSTRACT

Level of participation of livestock farmers in Panchayati Raj system of democratic decentralisation was analysed in the study. A comparison was made between Self Help Group (SHG) members and non members in terms of level of participation. The results showed that the level of participation was medium to high for SHG members, whereas, it was low to medium for most of the non members. The difference was statistically significant.

Key words: Panchayati Raj, Democratic decentralisation, Self Help Group, Participation

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), in planning, formulation and execution of development programmes. Decentralisation is effected in terms of political, financial and administrative dimensions.

Panchayati Raj system of democratic decentralisation was revamped in Kerala state since 1995. It has coordinated grass root level planning. It is vested with the authority of formulation and implementation of projects. Local needs are found out through the gram sabha and resources are allocated based on the priority of needs. People participate in the governance, decision making and implementation. Transparency and accountability are the key features of the system. Local self governance is important because, weaker sections of the society have greater chances of participation in decision making which might affect their lives directly or indirectly.

The common people, especially the livestock farmers, have vested much hope in Panchayati Raj believing that need-based participatory planning at grass roots can take place to their own benefit. They are known to participate in the Panchayati Raj system at varying levels hopeful of receiving benefits. Self Help Groups (SHGs), neighbourhood groups (NHGs), Gramsabha etc. are the venues of participation.

INTRODUCTION

Democratic decentralisation, often referred as Panchayati Raj system in India, is meant for the transfer of authority, responsibility and accountability from central to local governments. Any rural development programme in order to be effective should ensure people's liberal participation. Thus, in the Panchayati Raj system of local self governance, the emphasis has shifted towards the participation of people through

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Self Help Group (SHG) is a small group of rural people, usually 10-20 in number, gathered voluntarily to undertake some common income generating activities through mutual trust and mutual help (Arunkumar, 2005). In Kerala, SHGs are gaining more impetus nowadays and many are taking livestock rearing as the key activity. Furthermore, the poverty eradication mission of Kerala Government, Kudumbasree is also organizing women SHGs including that of livestock based SHGs.

The present study was carried out with the objective of comparing the level of participation of SHG members and non members in PRIs.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Thrissur district of Kerala state. Two block panchayats, viz., Ollukkara and Irinjalakuda were selected purposively, since one of the key activities of SHGs in these blocks was livestock rearing. There were 65 viable livestock- based SHGs in these blocks. The list of SHG members was prepared with the help of office bearers of these SHGs. One hundred members were selected from among the total of 675 members, and they formed the sample of SHG members. The sample of non-members comprised of 100 livestock owners selected randomly from the list prepared with the help of secretaries of milk co-operative societies and extension personnel working in these blocks. Thus a total of 200 livestock farmers formed the sample of the study.

The level of participation in PRIs meant the degree of respondents' participation in the various Panchayati Raj bodies and activities concerned with the planning and implementation of projects. It was measured by personal interview method

using the schedule developed for the purpose. The findings were expressed as percentage. Based on the Delenius-Hodges cumulative \sqrt{f} method, the respondents were grouped into three groups as low, medium and high for level of participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Panchayati Raj system of participatory planning replaced the earlier Community Development Programme to ensure people's participation in community development. According to Mishra (1994) participation means co-operating or taking part in something and the mere presence, even the silent presence of an individual or a representative of an organisation at different levels can be taken as participation.

Level of participation in PRIs

Table. 1. Distribution of respondents based on the level of participation in PRIs n=200

Sl. No	Category	Score	Frequency (Percentage)	
			SHG members	Non-members
1	Low	< 8	00	60
2	Medium	8 - 31	21	38
3	High	> 31	79	2
Total			100	100

Data in table 1 show that majority (79 percent) of the SHG members were having high level of participation in PRIs. For the rest 21 per cent, the level was medium. There was nobody in the low category. But the situation is different as far as non members are concerned. The level of participation in PRIs was low for 60 percent of the non SHG members, medium for 38 percent and high for only 2 percent of the respondents. As for

non SHG member livestock owners, reporting either a medium level or low key participation in PRIs, was not at all the result normally expected. This is a precarious situation and as such this system does not seem to give any hope as far as livestock owners are concerned. Remedial measures are urgently needed on a war footing before it collapses.

Z test on selected variables

Table 2. Z test on selected variables

Sl. No	Variables	Mean \pm SE		Z value
		SHG members	Non-members	
1	Level of participation	28.41 \pm 1.56	22.96 \pm 2.79	17.02**

** (p<0.01)

Z test indicated that (table 2) there is significant difference between the SHG members and non members in terms of level of participation in Panchayati Raj.

While studying the perception of veterinary surgeons of Thrissur District of Kerala about people's participation in PRIs, Tajne (2003) confirmed that majority of them felt the extent of people's participation to be only somewhat satisfactory. David (1998) also reported that participation of people in the planning process to be not satisfactory.

There are apparent synergies between SHGs and local politics also. Through membership in SHGs rural people can gain experience in regular meetings, taking decisions and allocating money. Since SHG members have more public contact than others, they can effectively participate in campaigning too (Anon, 2006). SHG membership generally contributes to women getting nominated in election to local bodies.

CONCLUSION

Majority of livestock owners were reporting either a medium level or low key participation, where as majority of SHG members level of participation in PRIs was reported to be high which was statistically significant. Capacity building through appropriate training programmes would be the best strategy for better participation. The results indicate the need to reconsider the nature and intensity of SHG promotion. SHG promotion cannot be considered as a one-shot, simple input. It has to be more strategic, adaptive and long-term.

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