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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**KERALA LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICE DELIVERY PROJECT-AN
ANALYSIS**

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ABSTRACT

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Kerala Local Government Service Delivery Project (KLGSDP) is an innovative project implemented by Government of Kerala with the help of World Bank. The main objective of the project is to boost and strengthen the institutional capacity of the local government system in Kerala to deliver services and carry out basic administrative and governance functions more effectively and in a sustainable manner. The study was to analyze the criteria of the performance grant and also to understand the awareness level of officials regarding the implementation of KLGSDP. The core respondents of the study were Governing council members, that is Panchayat presidents and implementation staff who are directly connected with the implementation of the project.

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Introduction

India opted for decentralization to increase the accountability of government and reach out to the people in terms of services. In 1992, a revision to the Constitution (73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments) created rural governments at the district, block and village levels and urban governments at the city and township levels, as well

as mandated states to hold periodic elections for these bodies and devolve functions and funds to them. Decentralization to rural governments is a state subject. It implies the transfer of functions, functionaries and finance to the local bodies. States proceeded at different speeds. Progress has not always been easy in part due to vested interests often opposing the process. The central administration

considers local governments as the key mechanism for delivering basic services to people and, one of its priorities is to make this approach in practice in some states to serve as an example and a model for the rest of the country.

Decentralization of governance in Kerala since October 1995 has made rapid steps and act as the leading State in transfer of functions and responsibilities of administration to Local Governments for better delivery of infrastructure and services to the communities in their respective jurisdictions. Here arises the importance of a better service delivery system.

The decentralization and strengthening of Local Governments has increasingly been achieving effective and efficient governance, especially in delivering minimum needs, public services and poverty alleviation to the people. In order to address emerging needs, the Kerala State has entered into an agreement with the World Bank for providing financial assistance to address the aforesaid issues aggressively and to raise the level of service deliveries by LSGs using modern tools of planning, development, project implementation and transparency in administration. It aims at increased revenues and enhanced utilization of finance resources and thereby improving the quality of lives of the people. Accordingly the Government of Kerala has formulated Kerala Local Government Service Delivery Project (KLGSDP) to enhance and strengthen the institutional capacity of the local government system in Kerala to deliver services and undertake basic administrative and governance functions more effectively and in a sustainable manner.

Review of Literature

David H. Folz explored Service Quality and Benchmarking Performance of Municipal Service. This study suggests the process for selecting the most appropriate benchmarking partners and for making fair performance comparisons. Using data collected from a national survey, the study presents a framework for measuring service quality for municipal solid waste recycling programs. It examined the connection between input service

quality and service outcomes and best practices that distinguish the top recycling performers and potential benchmarking partners in each service-quality class. The study suggests a model for how local officials can use this type of information to select an appropriate benchmarking partner.

Santhakumar find out that the weakest outcome of decentralization in Kerala is in the realm of basic governance and service delivery. For example, services such as issuance of birth certificate, or collection of building tax, which are the basic functions of local governments continue to be carried out lethargically and strategies such as 'citizens' charter' to speed up such processes have not been very successful. Cleaning of public spaces, another local public good - a prime justification for the existence of local government - is also indifferently carried out.

Aziz defined decentralization as a transfer process of resources and competences from the central or national administration of a particular state to the sub national administrations that are local, regional in the constitutionally Unitarian countries, municipal, and state in the federal countries. Moreover, public finances decentralization needs, an existing condition, in which country is categorized into smaller or inferior units, each of the needs include its corresponding local and/or regional governments and they are closely relevant to the central government or superior unit.

Renu Krishnan.G observed that the fiscal decentralization is considered very important and it is necessary in a country or a state for its economic benefits, enhanced political and financial accountability and improved effectiveness. In addition, there are some issues like declined investment in social infrastructures, macro-economic instability and increased horizontal inequities and conflicts. In this study, the fiscal decentralization in Kerala has been analyzed with respect to the participation and accountability of local government. The main objective of that study was to analyze the participation and accountability of local government (Gram Panchayat) in fiscal decentralization in Kerala.

Scope and significance of the study

As an untied –discretionary fund, the performance grant from the Kerala Local Government Service Delivery Project will give new avenues for the local bodies. The present study is conducted among the implementation staffs and governing council members of various Panchayats in the Kollam district. The study helps to know the views of officials towards this project and how it makes changes in financial decentralization of the local bodies. The present study covers the period 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14 and 2014-15.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the criteria and benchmarking policy adopted by KLGSDP for performance grant.
- To study about the awareness and attitude of officials regarding the KLGSDP.

Methodology of the study

Primary data was used for the study. Primary data for the study collected with a structured interview schedule, the researcher selects Kollam district as the area of study. Kollam district consists of 11 block Panchayats and 70 Panchayats. From 11 block Panchayats, 5 blocks were selected on random basis. These 5 blocks Panchayats have 29 Grama Panchayats. Each Panchayats has a Governing Council consists of a president & elected representatives and Implementing authorities consisting of all staff in Panchayat including secretary, plan clerk and accountant. Thus 520 Governing Council members and 380 Implementation Staff constitute the sampling frame. Out of this, 15 Panchayat presidents and 35 Implementing Staff were selected on simple random basis which constitutes the sample respondents for the study.

Data analysis and interpretation

KLGSDP gives training to different officials in the Panchayat regarding the implementation of project. The training programmes are conducted on district wise.

Table No: 1. Participation in Training Programme Conducted by KLGSDP

Opinion \ Category of Respondents	Yes	No	Total
Governing council	7 (47)	8 (53)	15 (100)
Implementing staff	31 (89)	4 (11)	35 (100)
Total	38 (76)	12 (24)	50 (100)

Source: Primary data

Note: Figures in the parenthesis shows percentage.

Majority of the respondents (76 per cent) had attended the district-wise training programme conducted by the KLGSDP. 53 per cent of the respondents from the category of governing council had not yet attended the training where as 89 per cent of the implementing officers had attended the programmes.

The respondent’s satisfaction over the training programmes under KLGSDP is illustrated in table: 2

Table No: 2. Satisfaction in the Training Measures Adopted by KLGSDP Programme

Opinion \ Category of Respondents	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Total No of Respondents
Governing council	3 (20)	7 (47)	5 (33)	15 (100)
Implementing staff	7 (20)	19 (54)	9 (26)	35 (100)
Total	10 (20)	26 (52)	14 (28)	50 (100)

Source: Primary data

Note: Figures in the parenthesis shows percentage

Results of the survey reveal that most of the respondents (72 %) are satisfied with the training programme conducted by KLGSDP. Twenty eight

per cent of the respondents are not satisfied with the training measures. The respondents who positively respond also point out that the training gives at the district level was in a professional way.

KLGSDP publishes different publications relating to its project and its success stories. KLGSDP Digest and Tadessa Sevana Vartha are the important publications of the KLGSDP and the respondents were asked about how frequently they refer their document and their responses are shown in the table 3.

Table No: 3. Habit of Reading KLGSDP Digest and Tadessa Sevana Vartha

Opinion Category of Respondents	Regularly	Sometimes	Never	Not Aware	Total
Governing council members	3 (20)	3 (20)	5 (33)	4 (27)	15 (100)
Implementing staff	5 (14)	10 (29)	11 (31)	9 (26)	35 (100)
Total	8 (16)	13 (26)	16 (32)	13 (26)	50 (100)

Source: Primary data

Note: Figures in the parenthesis shows percentage

Table 3 shows that 58 per cent of the respondents had not referred their KLGSDP publications. From the response, it is clear that most of them are not giving much importance to these publications. But 16 per cent of the respondents claim that they were regular readers and 26 per cent as passive readers.

KLGSDP proposes upward reporting as a part financial reporting to the state level monitoring unit.

A prescribed proforma is used for this purpose and awareness of the respondents are collected and presented in table 4.

Table No: 4. Awareness about Upward Reporting Proposed by KLGSDP

Opinion Category of Respondents	Completely Aware	Partially Aware	No idea	Total
Governing council members	4 (27)	7 (46)	4 (27)	15 (100)
Implementing staff	22 (63)	10 (28)	3 (9)	35 (100)
Total	26 (52)	17 (34)	7 (14)	50 (100)

Source: Primary data

Note: Figures in the parenthesis shows percentage

Most of the respondents (52 %) were aware about the upward reporting system proposed by KLGSDP. But category-wise classification showed that there exists significant difference as only 27 per cent GCM are completely aware about upward reporting. Whereas 63 per cent are fully aware about upward reporting.

Like upward reporting, downward reporting system is introduced for the purpose of increasing transparency in the local bodies. This helps the public to know more about the projects that are implemented in the local bodies and awareness level of respondents regarding this is collected and presented in the table 5.

Table No: 5. Awareness about Downward Reporting System

Opinion Category of Respondents	Complete ly aware	Not aware	No com ment	Tota l
Governing council members	3 (20)	5 (33)	7 (47)	15 (100)
Implementing staff	10 (29)	10 (29)	15 (42)	35 (100)
Total	13 (26)	15 (30)	22 (44)	50 (100)

Source: Primary data

Note: Figures in the parenthesis shows percentage

Majority of the respondents (54 %) are not aware about the downward reporting system proposed by KLGSDP as only 26 per cent opined that they are completely aware about downward reporting. As compared to GCM 20 percent awareness level is more among IS .This shows that the reporting to the public regarding with this project has not reached as expected.

Project Management Unit (PMU) is primarily responsible for the monitoring of the project in the state level and opinion of the respondents regarding this monitoring aspect in collected and presented in table 6.

Table No: 6. Opinion about the State Level Monitoring

Opinion Category of Respondents	Excel lent	Go od	Aver age	Po or	No com ment	To tal
Governing council members	2 (13)	4 (27)	4 (27)	2 (13)	3 (20)	15 (100)

Implementing staff	3 (9)	19 (54)	6 (17)	3 (9)	4 (11)	35 (100)
Total	5 (10)	23 (46)	10 (20)	5 (10)	7 (14)	50 (100)

Source: Primary data

Note: Figures in the parenthesis shows percentage

Most of the respondents responds that monitoring system and management of the KLGSDP at the state level is above average (56%).And they also pointed out in the project management unit is constituted in a professional manner. Ten per cent of the respondents opined that the project management unit (PMU) is pure and further 14 per cent declined to comment on this aspect.

There is a criticism that institutional agencies are influencing our policy making authorities. Hence the respondent’s opinion on this issue were collected and shown in table 7.

Table No: 7. Influence of International Financial Institutions in Policy Making

Opinion Category of Respondents	Alw ays	Someti mes	Nev er	No comm ent	Tot al
Governing council members	3 (20)	5 (33)	2 (14)	5 (33)	15 (100)
Implementing staff	4 (11)	16 (46)	8 (23)	7 (20)	35 (100)
Total	7 (14)	21 (42)	10 (20)	12 (34)	50 (100)

Source: Primary data

Note: Figures in the parenthesis shows percentage

Majority of the respondents (56 %) opined that the international institutions which give financial aids influence the policy making to a certain extent. They

made this possible through fixing certain criteria or by giving advices to the local government. The performance grant given to the local bodies is free from restrictions, as an untied fund discretionary fund.

Benchmarking policy is the set of prescribed additional qualifications that helps the local bodies to claim more performance grant in the annual performance assessment. The respondent’s opinion in their additional qualifications were enquired and reported in table 8.

Most of the respondents (50 %) negatively responded to this question. They point out that the policy adopted by the KLGSDP is more advantage to the Panchayats which already have well infrastructure like Slaughter house, Crematorium etc. However, the respondents in the category of implementing officers (48 %) are satisfied with the benchmarking policy and it is among the GCM (27%) low satisfaction is reported.

Table No: 8. Satisfaction on Benchmarking Policy for Performance Grant

Opinion Category of Respondents	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Highly dissatisfied	No comment	Total
Governing council members	4 (27)	5 (33)	3 (20)	3 (20)	15 (100)
Implementing staff	17 (48)	14 (40)	3 (9)	1 (3)	35 (100)
Total	21 (42)	19 (38)	6 (12)	4 (8)	50 (100)

Source: Primary data

Note: Figures in the parenthesis shows percentage

Findings, conclusion & suggestions

The Government of Kerala has formulated Kerala Local Government Service Delivery Project

(KLGSDP) to enhance and strengthen the institutional capacity of the local government system in Kerala and to deliver services and undertake basic administrative and governance functions more effectively and in a sustainable manner. Present study is an attempt to evaluate the implementation of KLGSDP. The analysis of the data leads to the following findings, suggestions and conclusion.

- It is evident that the majority of implementing staff (89%) availed training programme related with KLGSDP whereas most of the governing council members (53%) had not actively participated in the training. It is also noticed that the training programmes are conducted in a professional manner.
- The study reveals that the Annual Assessment Framework and other related materials give adequate data about the project to the respondents. Some of the respondents pointed that the APA framework contains a lot of data that are not relevant to the officials in the local bodies.
- It was observed that the majority of the respondents (56%) are not much aware about the publications of KLGSDP regarding the implementation of the project.
- Majority of the respondents (52%) were aware about the proposed upward reporting system and proforma of upward reporting to the Project Management Unit.
- It was evident that most of the respondents were not aware about the downward reporting system proposed by KLGSDP. This shows that the awareness possessed by the public is very low.
- Most of the respondents (56%) pointed that monitoring system and management of the KLGSDP in the state level is above average.
- It was observed that majority of the respondents have an opinion that the international institutions which give financial aids are indirectly influence the policy making process of the state government.
- The study found that majority of the respondents(42%) were not satisfied with the benchmarking policy adopted by the KLGSDP

- It was found that majority of the respondents are of the opinion that the project does not make any significant difference in the areas of transparency and accountability.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are observed:

- The higher authorities should give more awareness to the officials related to the objective of the projects proposed by the KLGSDP.
- PMU is required to monitor and ensure the viability of projects before the approval of local bodies.
- Encourage local bodies to give priority for improving service delivery mechanisms.
- Reduce the complexity of minimum mandatory conditions and express it in simple terms.
- Ensure the downward reporting system more effectively to keep the transparency and accountability of the projects undertaken by KLGSDP.

Conclusion

The main objective of the study was to analyze the criteria of the performance grant and to understand the awareness level of officials regarding the implementation of KLGSDP. Respondents were the Governing council members and implementation staff who are directly connected with the implementation of the project. The study reveals that the performance of the Grama Panchayats in terms of service delivery and governance had enhanced through a fully discretionary performance grant and strengthened institutions. Therefore, a project like KLGSDP which incentivizes GPs and Municipalities through a discretionary performance grant is a better option to provide greater impact under the State's current decentralization agenda. KLGSDP has made a significant improvement in the financial decentralization and there by strengthening local governments institutional capacity.

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