

Summary
**Report on Gender Analysis of Select Gram (Village) Panchayat
Plan-Budgets in Trivandrum District, Kerala**

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1. Introduction

This study was in the nature of a Gender Budget Initiative at the local level, a first step towards building and developing further work on it. Our focus was on the gram (village) panchayat (GP), the real seat of power at the base of the three-tiered system of local self governing institutions (LSGIs) which came into being, consequent upon the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. Decentralisation also brought in its wake considerable 'feminisation' of political leadership at the local level, given the mandatory (by the Amendments) 33 percent reservation for women in the LSGIs as also its decision making bodies. It had a particular relevance in the state of Kerala which embarked on a pioneering experiment in decentralised governance beginning with the 9th Five Year Plan (1997-02), attempting to devolve almost 35-40 percent of plan funds to the local bodies who were given considerable autonomy to prepare comprehensive area plans addressing problems of local development. A conscious attempt was made in Kerala's decentralized planning framework to integrate gender issues in all phases of the process, further strengthened by the mandatory requirement of 10 percent of plan grant to be set apart by LSGIs for projects directly benefiting women—the Women Component plan (WCP).

Despite Kerala's remarkable achievements in certain basic indicators of social development, like literacy and health, with a much lower gender gap, the state's development experience is implicated in extant assumptions regarding gender roles in a patriarchal society that give primacy to women's domestic role and identify men with the 'outside' world reinforcing their inferior position. It is critical therefore, to understand how management of economic resources at a decentralised level with a feminised political leadership, could throw up a more gender sensitive allocation of resources, particularly in respect of the WCP and make women less economically vulnerable while making the environment socially less hostile. Gender budget work focuses on the impact of government budgets, on women/girls and men/boys and different sub-groups within them.

2. Objectives

The main objectives of the study are:

- ?? To attempt as far as possible a gender analysis of gram panchayat plan- budgets for the 9th Plan period (1997-02) and 2002-03 of the 10th Plan for the selected panchayats to track flow of resources to women. Our focus is primarily on the women component plan;

- ?? To match, very broadly, the priorities implicit in these allocations to the socio-economic situation of women at the state level;
- ?? To offer some policy suggestions following largely from the mismatch between what was envisaged, given the mechanisms and processes put in place for assessing gender needs and priorities, and what has been the outcome.

3.Organisation of the Report

The Report is organised in two parts. In Part 1 (Chapters 1-4) we describe (a) the socio economic situation of women and men in Kerala and the state's unique experiment of decentralized governance wherein a conscious attempt was made to integrate gender issues into local level planning; (b) budget making at the local level based on aggregate published data on the revenues and receipts of LSGIs, and its links to the total state plan outlays; and (c) a gender analysis of panchayat budgets (in the aggregate) and our own methodology to undertake such an exercise in four gram panchayats selected from Trivandrum district.

Part 2 (Chapters 5-8) focuses on the primary field data starting with a socio-economic profile of the gram panchayats and the elected members; their plan budgets for the 9th plan period followed by a discussion on the findings from our direct observation of the plan-budget making process in the selected GPs. This experience is used to examine the GP budgets through a gender lens focusing on the WCP highlighting the limitations of Kerala's attempt to engender budgets. An indepth field study of a general (mainstream) item of expenditure, the 'primary health centre', which now falls under the purview of panchayats, was done together with a gender differentiated benefit incidence and assessment analysis. Specifically, in the Kerala context, what is more relevant to understand is whether decentralised governance with greater participation of the people, including women, has transformed such institutions into more women friendly structures. Finally we highlight certain shortcomings of the mechanisms and processes put in place to make local level plan-budgets more effective in meeting women's needs/priorities and offer some suggestions.

4.Methodology

- ?? An *ex-post* gender analysis of plan-budgets of the four selected GPs from the records provided by the panchayats for the 9th Plan and first year of the 10th Plan
- ?? A gender disaggregated beneficiary assessment of service delivery of a PHC
- ?? A gender disaggregated benefit incidence analysis of the above service
- ?? An *ex-ante* analysis, from a gender perspective, of the plan budget making in these four panchayats for the first year of the 10th plan, 2002-03, through self-participation in the process.
- ?? An attempt to assess transformation of the PHC into a more women friendly institution.

5. Major Findings

- ?? Our socio economic analysis reveals the need to focus on the limitations of 'conventional' indicators of gender development, such as education and employment, to capture discrimination against women, Kerala being an apt example of this. Families mediate such decisions to reflect extant gendered priorities, which also shape women's job preferences. Statistics have to be used somewhat differently to bring out the socially constructed relations of power between the sexes which reinforce the inferior position of women in society. We focused on some of the more quantifiable underlying causes of inequitable gender relations such as sex segregation of education (Box 1.1 and Table 1.1) and employment and unequal sharing of domestic responsibilities. These are reflected in low recorded work participation rates of women, shorter duration employment, poor occupational profile, extremely high levels of educated unemployment (Table 1.3), near exclusion of women from mainstream politics and growing domesticity (both voluntary and involuntary).
- ?? Hence even in literate Kerala, substantial numbers of women are directing their educational skills towards largely invisible home bound services. (Table 1.5). Hence women's low visibility in the public sphere and high economic vulnerability need to be emphasized. Social issues such as rising dowry demands, and gender based violence, in particular domestic violence, causing immense concern in the state, build on this economic vulnerability of women.
- ?? In the first (after the Constitutional Amendments) local bodies election in 1995 over 5000 women were elected, of whom about 75 percent were in gram panchayats and constituted more than 33 percent of the total members elected (Table 2.1).
- ?? Kerala's experience of decentralized planning initiated with the 9th Plan, was/is in many ways unique, most pertinent of which was the conscious attempt to integrate gender issues at each stage of a systematically thought out *process* of planning, from the convening of the gram sabha to the setting up of task forces to translate needs into plan projects, together with the mandatory WCP (Appendix 2B and 2C).
- ?? With the substantial devolution of funds to the panchayats, per panchayat grant receipts increased dramatically from about Rs.32 lakh to Rs.47 lakhs. Together with amounts transferred by line departments to local bodies, including centrally sponsored schemes and own revenues of local bodies, the panchayats were required (by the amended Panchayat Act) to present an integrated account of total funds and expenditures. However, this process was not fully initiated during the 9th Plan. Hence our focus is on plan funds and expenditures.
- ?? A major question was to guarantee that sectoral allocations in the local plans would broadly correspond to the overall strategy of development of the state. At the same time, grassroots initiatives should not be stifled. To mitigate this problem, it was decided to issue certain broad sectoral guidelines for allocating resources, within which the local bodies enjoyed substantial freedom to set their own priorities.
- ?? While agriculture, minor irrigation and village industries (the 'productive' sectors), do account for almost a quarter of the total expenditure of local bodies,

- much the larger allocations have been made in social services such as housing, water supply and sanitation, followed by roads and bridges. Almost 20 percent of local bodies expenditure was on roads and bridges. The priorities at the local level in terms of delivery of basic civic functions continue to dominate.
- ?? While effort was made to select gram panchayats based on distinguishing characteristics, like male/female headed panchayats, we did not perceive significant differences in their expenditure patterns, in particular directed at women. In all the four panchayats almost all women members had previously been unemployed.
- ?? A look at the plan budgets of the four GPs shows that there was a large and growing gap between revenues and what was actually spent. While in the first year over 90 percent of the plan grant appears to have been spent in all the panchayats, the proportion was just about 55-60 percent by the end of the plan. Importantly the shortfall was higher in the productive (that is agriculture and industry) sector while it was low in the infrastructure and least in the service sector (Table 5.5).
- ?? As far as a gender analysis of the mainstream expenditures of plan budgets of the selected panchayats is concerned, it could be done only indirectly through an examination of patterns of expenditure (productive, service and infrastructure) over the five year period, changes in which would throw some light on the direction of flows to men and women– a shift away from the productive sector is to the disadvantage of women (based on an analysis of expenditure patterns for all panchayats). If expenditure shares on service and infrastructure sectors is growing, it also indicates a tendency to include ‘general’ projects like housing, roads, anganavadi feeding, drinking water and sanitation, which have women beneficiaries, as WCP projects.
- ?? A focus on the WCP projects in the selected panchayats, (Tables 6.1-6.5) which is finally what we could do in the nature of a gender budget analysis, besides attempting a “gender differentiated benefit incidence analysis” for a primary health centre), did not reveal much of a transformatory potential. Projects for women have remained largely tailored to socially constructed gender roles, primarily in the nature of meeting practical gender needs. This ofcourse does not rule out some innovative projects that were undertaken in the panchayats studied.
- ?? Efforts to increase women’s employment have been mostly through activities undertaken by self help groups. The absence of a sustained stream of imaginative projects for the income generation linked SHGs is quite evident. There appears to be no collective discussion on the different activities each SHG could undertake and how each would ultimately link to the panchayat’s area development plan based on needs and resources.
- ?? Given the fact that 70-75 percent of women in Kerala are engaged in household duties, many of SHG activities enable the poorer among them, to combine roles and earn some incomes. Mushroom cultivation, poultry, kitchen garden, umbrella making etc allow work to be carried out in/near home and is not full time in nature. Women perceive them as a boon and the extra work appears to be no burden to them. In fact these are perceived to be better choices than working in the fields or as casual labour in non-agriculture, choices that are also dictated by

the wide spread of literacy, which shapes job expectations. However, while certain income generating activities undertaken by SHGs could be located at a distance from their residence, the general tendency was to engage in tasks which would enable women to be in the vicinity of the household thereby perpetuating their 'invisibility'.

- ?? The conscious efforts under the decentralized regime to recognize the market and domestic roles of women, and the gender differences in needs and interests, remained largely at the level of rhetoric in policy making and disappeared at the level of implementation.

5. Suggestions and Policy Implications

By supplementing our data analysis with participation in the budget making process at different stages, for the year 2002-03, we were able to throw more light on why this was so and how the process could be made more gender sensitive:

- ?? First and foremost, the conflictual aspect of a planning process which consciously attempted to transform gender relations, was not emphasized. Any attempt to upset the relationship would involve conflict in prioritisation and an attempt towards consensus in favour of status quo; innovative projects would be scuttled and projects relating to women's practical needs, end up as stereotype women's projects or as 'women beneficiaries' in common schemes.
- ?? The capability/availability of resource persons and experts to effectively intervene from a gender perspective was a critical limitation. It was the phase prior to the gram sabha meeting, the working group, resource persons available and the quality of discussions within it that was critical. The information on the socio economic background of panchayat members (Table 2.2) showed the relative unpreparedness of women elected representatives to assume assigned roles. Special efforts to bring women into the facilitative process structures as 'key resource persons' (KRPs) or 'district resource persons', (DRPs) which would have helped discussions on gender in the working group, formulation of projects to enhance women's occupational mobility and strengthened the gender strategy, were not very successful. Only 17-19 percent of resource persons were women against a proposed one-third of a total of about 400 KRPs and 11,000 DRPs. The fact that SHGs under Kudumbasree can have only women below the poverty line, has discouraged participation of the non-poor women in the gram sabhas among whom would be the professionals and those with university education who could have assumed the role of 'experts'.
- ?? That gender sensitisation was not deep enough is evident from the fact that the main problem lay in the difficulty of translating innovative ideas into concrete projects for women to achieve greater gender justice. A 'gender analysis framework' is essential to sort out this problem although obstacles may still remain due to entrenched social norms and practices regarding gender roles which make attitudinal changes difficult. Moser's framework (1993) has become familiar and is user friendly, based primarily on the distinctive gender roles and needs and balancing of roles by women. We felt that this could have been adopted to formulate projects, at least under the WCP.

- ?? While the burden of the double/triple role of women was part of gender discussions, which in fact affected the elected representatives themselves in constraining their participation in the gram sabhas, projects and programmes continued to make the usual assumptions about the family, its structure and gender division of labour. Women's role in the "reproductive" economy was taken for granted, where all adjustments would be made. Attempts to enhance women's participation in the planning process, was through the formation of neighbourhood groups, which would allow women to combine outside activities with household work. Similarly it was advocated that WCP projects should be organized and implemented through self-help groups (SHGs).
- ?? Tied to this was the fact that there was an almost exclusive focus on women, in practice. The social structures/institutions that subordinate them were matters acknowledged largely in principle. An attempt to assess whether an institution like the primary health centre had undergone a transformation with its transfer to an empowered local body, threw up disappointing results. While improvements in infrastructure had occurred, there was hardly any visible attempt to alter its approach to women who continued to play an instrumental role. Despite the women being very articulate in their demands, its impact on the functioning of the PHC was minimal.