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Research Article

A CASE STUDY OF ISO CERTIFIED GRAM PANCHAYAT IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT

Panchayats are meant to be autonomous institutions of Local Self-Government however they are treated as subordinate institutions. It is found wide variations in devolution of powers to the panchayats across the states in India. As per the 73rd amendment, 29 subjects were earmarked under the Eleventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution. It is mandate that the state government has to devolve functions, functionaries and funds to the Panchayati Raj Institutions for fair planning and implementation of various welfare and development schemes pertaining to the gram panchayat. Few states have made commendable efforts in encouraging the panchayats to function effectively by devolving powers and funds as per the provisions in the act. Panchayat Raj is a system which paves ways and means towards achieving good governance. In the Country few panchayats were obtained ISO certification focusing on bringing e- office which will gradually get transformed into on-line administration through paperless communication. The study documented the initiatives and effects of ISO certification on the services delivery in Chottanikara Gram Panchayat in Kerala.

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INTRODUCTION

Good governance intends protection of human rights, maintaining rule of law, strengthening of democracy, promoting transparency and improving the capacity of administration. The responsiveness of the government and its institutions to the needs and aspirations of the people and inclusive development are imperative to good governance and participatory democracy. It focuses on the equality among people, right to participate in political developmental decision making and to live in dignity. Panchayat Raj is a system which paves ways and means towards achieving good governance. Panchayats are meant to be autonomous institutions of Local Self-Government however they are treated as subordinate institutions. It is found wide variations in devolution of powers to the panchayats across the states in India. As per the 73rd amendment, 29 subjects were earmarked under the Eleventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution. It is mandate that the state government has to devolve functions, functionaries and funds to the Panchayati Raj Institutions for fair planning and implementation of various welfare and development schemes pertaining to the gram panchayat. Few states have made commendable efforts in encouraging the panchayats to function effectively by devolving powers and funds as per the provisions in the act.

Kerala had made innovative approaches and ranked as front run states in terms of making the local bodies as self-reliant

institutions and made a number of efforts to make transparent and accountable institutions. One of the initiatives has been announcement of cash prize of 'rupees one lakh' for each panchayat which obtains ISO certification. State governments are focusing on bringing e- office which will gradually get transformed into on-line administration through paperless communication. Computerization of records for quick references and online correspondences are part of the ISO acquisition. The people are the most important beneficiaries as addressing of grievances redressal and receiving essential services as quick as possible even without physical presence. The study documented covering various aspects, initiatives and effects of ISO certification on the services delivery of selected panchayats.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the process and strategies followed to achieve ISO certification
- To analyze the performance of Panchayat in delivery of basic services after ISO certification.
- To identify the strategies of peoples mobilization for participatory decision making.
- To identify the factors contributed for the success and sustainability of performance

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Chotanikkara Gram Panchayat

About the panchayat

Chotanikkara Grama Panchayat is located in Mulanthuruthy block, Ernakulam district, Kerala. The Panchayat consists of 14 wards and 3 villages and spread over 12.68sq.km having 814 households including 617 Scheduled Caste and 2 Scheduled Tribe households. The total population of the panchayat is 22,656.

Background initiatives by the state for Quality Improvement

Department of Local self Government, Government of Kerala has given the required training for the Presidents and Secretaries of the panchayats on Total Quality Management. The state motivated the panchayats to get the international standard certification under the total quality management by announcing financial incentive of rupees one lakh to each panchayat. Chotanikkara panchayat received the award of ISO 9001:2008 in the year 2014 by fulfilling the process of ISO through formation of quality circle, quality policy, quality objectives, rules manual, citizen charter, quality service delivery and computerizations of data and documents enabled the on-line services. Through this effective process, the Gram Panchayat has got an International standard certification with the validity up to year 2017.

Awards and Recognition

In appreciation of the good works by the panchayat, it received 7 awards namely Nirmal Gram Puraskar (2007-08) and Panchayat Sasaktheekaran puraskar (2012-13) by the president of India, Best Panchayat in the District (2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12 & 2013-14), Chief Minister award (2014) by the State.

Concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) in the process of ISO

Kerala State Government with the help of Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) framed the strategies of getting ISO certification for Panchayat in the vision of Good Governance through Total Quality Management. The concept of TQM is to ensure efficient office management and timely delivery of quality service and by making use of the existing resources. Good Governance through quality in service delivery mechanism can be achieved by adopting TQM measures.

Process of ISO

1. **Participatory Decision Making** - One of the important criteria's for ISO certification is maintaining transparency through proper documentation and quality service delivery. For the purpose of maintaining transparency, the people were given liberty to express their views through Gram Sabha which is important bottom most democratic unit serves an active and vibrant institution allows people's participatory decision making on the development initiatives of the panchayat.
2. **Citizens Survey** - It is a kind of survey where people play vital role in understanding their own situation and plan for their development. In the process of citizen survey, a group of people collect information on the demography, problems and needs of the people and resources availability in the panchayat. The group will

collect additional information by referring a number of documents and literatures pertaining to the panchayat and people, finally made data readily available for use by any clients. As we know basic information about the people, issues and resources are inevitable components of the planning. This panchayat made appreciable action on collection and compilation of data and used for planning for the development of the panchayat. The data collected through citizen survey have been presented in the gram sabha and gets approval after thorough discussions on the validity of data before use.

3. **Formulation of a Quality Policy**- Another important area of requirement for obtaining ISO certification is developing policies on authenticating the quality of service on delivering of basic needs of the community. In this direction, the panchayat has prepared policy on development maintaining the quality in all its projects. Accordingly Chotanikkara gram panchayat framed the Vision and Mission.

Vision - "Transforming the panchayat as people friendly by giving quality service".

Mission: "Transforming the panchayat as people friendly by achieving the ISO certification through TQM"

Based on the vision and mission, the panchayat has framed a quality policy. *"The quality policy of the panchayat is to ensure ardent efforts in all phases with team work, transparency, friendliness, responsiveness and based on democratic principle to achieve the ISO certification through a time bound implementation of TQM to realize the vision of a completely people friendly panchayat there by attaining satisfaction of citizen"*

1. **Quality Objectives**-Focusing on the vision, mission and policy of the panchayat, it developed the objectives to fulfill the people's needs with quality, time bound and reach the needy. While developing the objectives, priority has been given to the problems of the poorest of the poor simultaneously underlined the feasibility and viability options of any initiative under development process.
2. **Standard operating procedures (SoP)**-Developing and maintaining of SoP is an another important component towards obtaining ISO 9001:2008. The panchayat has made very good attempt in developing Terms of Reference manuals to each service provided through panchayat. The manual comprises of the information on the requirements, approach, service division and documents to be annexed for the purpose to guide the beneficiaries. Further, this SoP manual contains functions available in the panchayat, particulars and responsibilities of the elected representatives and officials, etc.
3. **Planning and Monitoring** - In order to achieve the objectives and vision of the panchayat, existence of suitable planning mechanism is vital for any institutions dealing with people. As it has been well known that the state of Kerala is a proven success of decentralized democracy, follows participatory planning at every tier of the PRIs. Even for obtaining ISO, proper planning mechanism play as part and parcel in achieving quality service. This panchayat has appropriate institutions namely Ayal Sabha, Ward Development Committee and Working Groups and these institutions are guided and supported by

the number of committees namely, Steering Committee, Standing Committees, Institutional Management Committees, etc. The panchayat made adequate actions to conduct subject specific capacity building programmes for the members of the committees orienting towards achievement of better performance.

Quality Audit is aimed to weed out the malfunctions if any in implementation of development programmes of the panchayat. In Kerala each panchayat has to undergo various stages of auditing procedures, it includes first party audit, internal audit, pre-assessment audit and surveillance audit. The surveillance audit is conducted by a qualified auditor appointed by the state government and other audits are carried out by the panchayat with the help of different committees. Auditing the accounts and documents is most important pre-requisite for obtaining of ISO certification which was fulfilled by this panchayat without any issues.

Initiatives under TQM in the process obtaining of ISO

- a. Creation of Front office - A Service Counter was opened in the front corridor of the Gram Panchayat to ensure the smooth delivery of various services. The receptionist at the counter receives the application from the visitors and issue acknowledgement on receipts; which shows the proposed date of service response. Proper registration of all applications is ensured. The counter works as a single window for receiving applications, service delivery and information dissemination. The applications collected from the public are dispatched to the official concerned at the earliest for the timely delivery of service. Adequate furniture's were provided in front office of the service counter for the complainants which enable the people to write applications and other requests. In addition, it also made available of table accessories like papers, pens, application formats for various services, gum, pins, tags, clips, drinking water, TV, reading corner for public, clean separate toilets for men and women, first aid kit, complaint drop box for dropping the applications in official's absentia.
- b. Office Arrangement- The seating arrangement inside the office has been made accordingly to ensure optimum service. Contact numbers and addresses of elected representatives and other service providers are made available in the service counter for the easy access to the people. Necessary mechanisms were created to ensure for the speed movement of complaints and service applications on proper registration in the movement register as per the office procedure. File tracking system also created for effective transparency to know the file status by both public and panchayat.
- c. Office Renovation - The panchayat office building was renovated and painted, furniture repaired and polished, office premises cleaned and the efficiency of the computer section improved so as make it a real management information system. Name boards of officials with designation and sections were exhibited in the chamber of officials. Record room was rearranged systematically in such a manner to get any document or record for quick and easy access.
- d. Citizen's Charter - Citizen Charter is a written commitment by the panchayat for assured service delivery. It is a commitment document on the fundamental basic service delivery which was erected and it displays various services offered by panchayat, required time, fees charged for services, documents required, etc. The copies of citizen charter were distributed to trade union officers, LSGIs, households, village office and other offices which has public contact.
- e. Organogram and Notice boards - An organization functional chart having details with designations and responsibilities of the functionaries is exhibited in the panchayat office with a sign board. Notice boards display about the meetings of various bodies like Grama Sabha, Panchayat, steering committee, standing committee and staffs of the panchayat. Other information related to the Ombudsman, Appellate Tribunal, formalities of birth and death registration, Right to Information, addresses of Vigilance and Anti corruption bureau are also displayed in the panchayat premises. These display boards help the people to have a better understanding and access to various officers. The gram panchayat takes initiative for continuous monitoring and evaluation for the updation and sustainability of these mechanisms.
- f. The Quality Circle - 'Quality Circle' is a platform which consists group of officials having similar job chart come together discuss and resolve the work related problems. It is a kind of participative management approach within the organizational framework to ensure quality functioning system. The Quality circle is an informal mechanism to build team work which facilitated hassle free atmosphere in the organization. It solved many official and personal problems of functionaries. The members were given a number of trainings for capacity building and established healthy working environment. The Vice President of the gram panchayat is chairing the quality circle with the provision for change of Chairman in every 3 sittings on rotation.
- g. The Grievance Redressal System - Citizen's complaints related to administration, development and welfare activities are effectively addressed by the panchayat in a time bound manner and maintained proper records. The grievances arise from officials and elected representatives are redressed by the Joint Redressal Committee formed for the purpose. The complaints between officials and people were solved through Quality Circle. Those complaints unsolved by the Quality Circle are referred to the Finance Standing Committee for clearance. The recommendations of the Finance Standing Committee are implemented by the panchayat, which is very active in solving the grievances. Timely intervention and continuous efforts of monitoring by the panchayat ensure conducive functional environment among elected representatives and officials.
- h. Capacity Building and Rewards - Gram Panchayat conducts periodical trainings to the officials and elected representatives on the functional domain includes office procedures, file management, amendment rules and orders, personality development on every first Wednesday of the month and officials are asked to

complete the tasks day prior to the training schedule to avoid inconvenience to the public. One official made in charge to cater the needs of service delivery during the training. Better performing officials are appreciated well and rewarded.

- i. E- Governance - All the documents and records of the panchayat were made online with current updation according to the guideline of the Kerala Information Commission.

Major development activities carried out by panchayat after getting ISO certification

- The panchayat has constructed a Bus Stand cum Shopping Complex with the built up area 13500 Sq. feet. It covers two storied building, consisting of 37 commercial units and grama panchayat office. The office is having multipurpose auditorium with fully furnished conference hall. It also constructed a gas oriented Common Crematorium. Moreover, it facilitated to construct 54 houses to the houseless people of the panchayat with the help of Kerala State Housing Board.
- Health Support - The panchayat implemented the Palliative Care projects and provide services to the aged, weak people, permanently disabled and bed ridden patients. In addition, the GP is providing necessary medical care and medicines to 80 psychiatric patients in collaboration with local hospital run by the TATA private Ltd and Mehac Charitable Foundation. In appreciating this effort, Cochin Shipyard donated an ambulance and an Omni van to attend the emergency medical cases. A Physiotherapy center was also established for the welfare of physically and mentally challenged people with priority to children. The children are also gets support like life protective instruments and scholarship for studies.
- Efforts on Energy Saving - As per the instructions of Govt. of Kerala on energy saving, the panchayat replaced 522 CFL lights with LED lights. It also installed 6 LED High mast lights.
- Drinking Water and Sanitation - All the houses of the panchayat were provided with tap water connection and supplies water adequately without break. In the series of efforts on strengthening the panchayat development, it decided to create 'less waste' panchayat. Chotanikkara being one of the pilgrimage centers, large crowd use to visit during Sabarimala Holy period. Systematic arrangements were made to collect, segregate and safe disposal of home based waste as well as waste from common areas in the jurisdiction of the panchayat.
- Social Security welfare schemes - For the purpose of strengthening and supporting of poor people for their socio-economic development, the panchayat facilitated to avail social security schemes. In the panchayat, 1101 people receives Old Age Pension (OAP), 219 person avails handicapped pension, around 727 women receives widow pension in addition to 44 aged unmarried. More over 482 agri

laborers also enjoy the benefits of financial assistances.

- Kudumbasree - Kudumbasree is one of the innovative approaches implemented by the state government aimed to achieve the socio - economic empowerment of women. The activities of the groups are paddy cultivation, running of flour mill, sewing machine unit and 85 other cottage industries are successfully operated by these groups. Panchayat also constructed 15 lakh worth of workshed for flour mill for the SHGs of Scheduled Caste women. The panchayat has organised 163 SHGs and coordinated to start economic activities by all the groups. It also extended forward and backward linkages for the better functioning of micro enterprises.

CONCLUSION

The ISO 9001:2008 specifies requirements for a quality management system where an organization needs to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide product that meets customer and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements, and aims to enhance customer satisfaction through the effective application of the system, including processes for continual improvement of the system and the assurance of conformity to customer and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements. As it is mentioned the ISO certification is not directly aiming to mention the services of different organisations, it puts common yardsticks to measure the standard operating procedures. But, for obtaining this certification each organization has to put enormous efforts, innovative approaches and strategies to improve the performance level ultimately to satisfy the consumers at the maximum. The panchayats selected for the study in both the states made maximum effort to deliver basic services to satisfy the needs of the people living in the panchayats. The direct purpose of obtaining ISO certification by the panchayats was to get better name and fame among the people as well as state and central governments. This endeavours enable the panchayats to maintain transparency and accountability through participatory process by establishing a number of community based institutions and empowered them to act with autonomy and responsibility. The major difference between ISO certification panchayats is, in Kerala the state government made appropriate interventions, guidance and motivation with conducive strategies for fulfilment of requirements of ISO by creating a number of institutions at the panchayat level. The structures created at the panchayat level are given statutory powers and functions and it carry forwards the roles even after the expiry of ISO certification. Overall performances of both the ISO certified panchayats have improved the performance level in all aspects of quality management, transparency in administration, accountability in documentation, appropriate grievances redressal and timely delivery of services. Therefore the state government has to make appropriate strategies to encourage the elected representatives at various levels of PRIs to achieve quality improvement in the services delivery and obtained ISO certification to fulfil the needs of the local community.

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