

# **EFFICACY OF OPEN GOVERNANCE SYSTEM IN DELIVERY OF BASIC SERVICE AT THE GRASSROOTS – A CASE OF NADAPURAM GRAM PANCHAYAT, KERALA**

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## **Abstract**

People's Participation, Innovation, Transparency and Accountability are the major aspects of practicing the Open Governance System. It means that, the people should have the access to Gram Panchayat to get information and be informed the proceedings of the Gram Panchayat. Over a period of time, the concept of Good Governance has been widened and definition also included the various expectations of the people. It certainly, included people governance through participation of citizens in every activities of the gram panchayat and every decisions pertaining to the people's life. The outcomes and impact of open Governance interventions are making remarkable change in the field of implementation of rural development programmes in the study panchayats. In this context, this Paper documented the practices and experiences of open governance system in the selected gram panchayats with an idea of wider dissemination. It studied the process of effective people participation; practices of transparency and accountability; open data access and their impact on development in the panchayat. Presenting such events and practices will be having immense academic importance and also as the cases of best practices, it will motivate other leaders who are having motivation for good governance.

**Keywords:** Open Governance, Accountability and Transparency

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Open Governance refers to transparent administration means increased people participation and good faith between government and citizens. It is essential element of development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. People-centric governance and administration, with transparency and accountability will make all efforts on rational utilisation of public resources; will facilitate participatory decision-making and inclusive growth. Open government system is a strong mechanism will easily convince the stakeholders to foster growth and thereby fulfil the needs of all citizens.

In recent time governments all over the world are taking various initiatives to make administration more transparent and people oriented. One of such next generation reform is Open Government Data. It is information and data collected, produced and reproduced by government or its agencies and made available free for anyone can use, re-use and re-distribute for various purposes. In fact, Open Government Data plays an important role in bringing transparency in the government system. Transparency, which is one of the essential elements of Good Governance in the modern time, is the degree to which a political or administrative institution publically, timely, reliably, accurately and in an understandable manner discloses information on its actions and processes in order to enable the constituents, a third party or government itself evaluates the entity through such actions and processes. It also brings collaboration, participation and public engagement and enables government and administration to take more effective and rational decisions.

## 2. OPEN GOVERNMENT

The term open government is to access the information from the institutions, encourages citizen participation, transparency, accountability, data display, collaboration with government and civil society, innovation in public policy management.

Transparency is the major thrust of open government system, it means, the citizens irrespective their sex, race, social class and political affinity have the right to access documents or data pertaining to the functioning of the institutions. Legal framework has also created by the upper governments for citizen participation under democratic decentralisation and questioning of the governing system under Right to Information Act. There is healthy tendency in recent times not only in India many countries are in front run in realising participatory governance. Thus, the freedom of speech and the right to receive information are important elements of Open government system.

## 3. MAIN PRINCIPLES OF OPEN GOVERNMENT FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

S.NO	Principle	Description
1	Effective participation	Participation is encouraged and includes informing, consulting, involving and empowering citizens and social organizations
2	Transparency and accountability	Government must actively account for all their actions and take public responsibility
3	Open Data	Open, complete, primary, timely, accessible, machine processable, non-discriminatory, non-proprietary, license-free data must be made available and in accordance with international standards
4	Opening and reusing public information	Public information must circulate to reach its full potential.
5	Access and simplicity	Whenever possible, simple and easy-to-understand language is used.
6	Collaboration and co-creation	Practices and policies are designed to encourage collaboration and co-creation at all stages of the process.
7	Inclusion and diversity	There is attention to diversity and inclusion. Socially and economically oppressed are needed to be included.

## 4. NEED FOR THE STUDY

The Panchayat, as a system of democratic decentralization can show better results if local people are fully involved in planning and implementations of development programmes. The open government system enables people to participate in all the process of planning development decision making, implementation and monitoring of rural development programmes ultimately addressing the issue of poverty reduction. In this context, this study endeavour on capturing the performance on proactive role of panchayats in maintaining transparent administration in a participatory manner. The main purpose of this study is to document the practices and experiences of open government system in Nadappuram gram panchayat and verify the principles such as effective people's participation; transparency and accountability; open data followed. It also aimed to study the people perception and their satisfaction on the performance improvement and its effect on the delivery of services.

## 5. OBJECTIVES

This case study was undertaken to know the approaches and proactive role of panchayat leaders in developing and implementing open governance practices and understand the people response on the performance of the panchayat.

## 6. ABOUT THE GRAM PANCHAYAT

Nadapuram Gram Panchayat is located in Kunnummel block in Vadakara taluk in Kozhikode district, Kerala. The Panchayat consists of 22 wards and spread over 20.44sq.km having 8455 households including 572 Scheduled Caste households. Total population of the panchayat is 40,230.

## 7. OPEN GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES TAKEN BY THE GRAM PANCHAYAT

- ❖ **Functioning of Front office system-** A Service Counter was opened in the front corridor of the Gram Panchayat to ensure the smooth delivery of various services. The counter receives application from visitors with issuing of acknowledgement with the commitment of timeline for the service or redressal of complaints. Applications and complaints are registered properly by making entries in the respective registers and sent to the respective divisions for reaction. The centre functioning as a single window system to receive service requests, ensuring service delivery with timeline and information dissemination. The front office has been well furnished to enable the visitors to feel comfortable and write complaint/application for required services. In addition, facilities like news paper, drinking water, all accessories like pen, gum, clips and tags for writing of complaints along with formats of applications for different services also made available. All the visitors and readers can relax a moment by watching Television, separate room is arranged with all facilities including clean separate toilets for men and women. Interestingly 'First Aid kit' also kept in the office reception. Complaint drop box has kept outside the office to drop service applications during holiday or in the absence of the officials. Contact details of the President, Vice Presidents, Ward Members, Panchayat Secretary, Assistant Secretary and other service providers are displayed for direct contact by the people. Contact mobile numbers of the line departments are also made available in the service counter. The Gram Panchayat has made adequate arrangements for proper registration of applications from citizens and ensure prompt response adhering timelines. File tracking system in GP is most important strategy helps avoiding delay of process and enables the applicants to get update of status of service requests or complaints.
- ❖ **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 sent to all stakeholders of development at the grassroots.

- ❖ **Information boards** - Organization functional chart having details with designations and responsibilities of the functionaries is exhibited in the panchayat office with a sign board. Various events of the GP has been displayed in notice boards and information about the meetings like Grama Sabha, Panchayat social audit, standing committees are also informed through notice board well in advance to mobilise more people for the meetings. 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.
- ❖ **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. As unique system of grievances redressal have created at various level to find solutions. Issues between elected representatives and officials are dealt by the 'Joint Redressal Committee' formed specifically for the purpose. Another committee namely 'Quality Circle' is dealing the problems between people and officials of the Gram Panchayat. The unsolved issues by the Quality Circle are referred to the Finance Standing Committee for detailed discussion and appropriate action. The GP has to implement to directions of the Finance Standing Committee. Timely decisions and actions along with concurrent monitoring yields good results in terms of service delivery.
- ❖ **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. Appreciation and rewards on well performing officials by the elected representatives create good environment of functioning.
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **Participatory Decision Making** - One of the important activities of the GP is maintaining transparency through proper documentation and quality service delivery. People are given enough choice to express their views on the problems and needs to arrive participatory decisions which leads for transparent administration. Every decision is taken in the Gram Sabha and given priority to those decisions for implementation. It enables the GP become vibrant institution and facilitates the development initiatives of the panchayat.
- ❖ **Citizens Survey** – It is a kind of survey where people play vital role in understanding their own situation and plan for their development. To conduct citizen survey, a group has been formed and it collects particulars related to people socio-economic conditions, problems and needs and resources 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. The group present data collected through citizen survey, after detailed discussion on the true of data get approved in the gram sabha.

- ❖ **Standard Operating Procedures (SoP)** – Developing and maintaining of SoP is another important area of transparency achieved by this GP. Terms of Reference manuals have prepared and in prompt use for each and every service in the panchayat. It is really highly appreciable initiative of this panchayat which clarify the process to be followed and documents to be annexed for each service. Further, this SoP manual contains functions available in the panchayat, particulars and responsibilities of the elected representatives and officials, etc.
- ❖ Audit is aimed to weed out the malfunctions if any in implementation of development programmes of the panchayat. Periodical audit of accounts and disclosure of income and expenditure of the panchayat is an essential element of the accountability. It has been achieved every year through various stages of audit namely first party audit, internal audit, pre-assessment audit and surveillance audit. The surveillance audit is conducted by the state government. Other audits are conducted by different committees. Auditing the accounts and documents is most important pre-requisite for obtaining of ISO certification.

## 8. STATUS OF OPEN GOVERNANCE PRACTICES BY NADAPURAM GRAM PANCHAYAT

S.No	Practices of Open Governance at GP level	Yes	No	Total
a.	Whether the ward members are having pro-activeness in the development of wards	93 (84.6)	7 (6.4)	110 (100)
b.	Whether the President/Sarpanch having pro-activeness in the development of the panchayat	86 (78.2)	24 (21.8)	110 (100)
c.	Voluntary disclosure of panchayat works related documents	110	-	110 (100)
d.	Responses on Transparency in beneficiary selection on various schemes	101 (91.8)	9 (8.2)	110 (100)
e.	Responses on Status of Quick Response to the complaints and grievances	87 (79.1)	23 (20.9)	110 (100)
f.	Responses on Status of Timely issue of certificates for the people on request	76 (69.1)	34 (30.9)	110 (100)
g.	Do you support the openness in financial transaction	89 (80.9)	21 (19.1)	110 (100)
h.	Is there public display of income and expenditure of the panchayat	103 (93.6)	7 (6.4)	110 (100)
i.	Whether the GP practice wall display, posters, pamphlets distribution etc, on public information	103 (93.6)	7 (6.4)	110 (100)
j.	Whether the GP conducts periodical Social Audit on GP schemes	83 (75.5)	27 (24.5)	110 (100)
k.	Whether the GP shows positive response to RTI	86 (78.2)	24 (21.8)	110 (100)
l.	Do you support the GP on transparency and Accountability	98 (89.1)	12 (10.9)	110 (100)

In the cases of many successful Gram Panchayats, leadership played very important role leading the panchayat to attain achievements in many fields. Motivation, pro-activeness, pro-poor attitude and capability of leaders are basic requirements for successful initiation and completion of tasks.

Nadapuram Gram panchayat achieved significant improvements in many facets of Rural Development within their jurisdiction. Even though people are prime stakeholders, organising them and facilitate them into adherence and adoption of roles and responsibilities prescribed by the panchayats needs effective leadership. Therefore, electing active leaders and following the leadership are pre-requisites for initiating development efforts. In the study panchayat, status of pro-activeness, qualities of elected members were discussed and results reflect that, majority of the respondents in the panchayat agreed for having pro-active elected representatives i.e ward members as well as President/sarpanch. Around 84 percent supported their ward members and 78.2 percent supported the President for having better qualities.

Transparency in maintaining panchayat's works and administration related documents is one of the major roles of the GPs. In addition, voluntary disclosure of information pertaining to the panchayat and its people is one of the most important principles of open governance practices. For the purpose, the panchayat has to disclose information by keeping the documents for open access to the people and needy. It was verified the documents of the panchayat in which maintenance of records and documents are highly appreciable. It is very easy to access the records and retrieve any kind of data or information even related to decades old. It was verified on the practice of voluntary disclosure of information and access of documents, all the respondents agreed for having easy access of information.

Though open governance system, in this GP all the schemes were implemented in a transparent manner through participatory process of Decision Making on selection of beneficiaries. The selection of beneficiaries and works are taking place in the Gram Sabha with majority member's concurrence without hiding. The status was supported by 91.8 percent respondents.

Similarly, related to provision of certificates pertaining to its citizens, namely Birth and Death, income, migration, land ownership, house title and other services of linking various departments through online process also handled by the GP. In these line 69.1 percent responded positively on timely issue or provision.

An important element of open government system is disclosure of financial transaction specifically annual income and expenditure statement of the panchayats. Regarding this, questions were asked with the respondents around 81 percent supported the openness of financial transaction and 93.6 percent supported on public display of income and expenditures.

The GP has made wall writings, displays, posters, distribution of notices and also notice boards on different places about their performances. The information on services availability, conditions for eligibility, display of on service providers, type of schemes available intended beneficiaries appropriately. Disclosure of information through WIFI network also managed very well by the GP. Therefore, more than 93 percent respondents have supported positively on IEC activities and online access of data in the panchayat. Accountability consists of

responsibility in owning the activities carried, expenditures incurred and benefits accrued. It is mandate to the GPs, every activity or project / programme has got audited by the public with prescribed guidelines issued by the government, it is called social audit. Nadappuram GP conducts periodical social audit on specific schemes. Even though, all the schemes have to be audited by the people, the panchayats give priority only to the MGNREGA but disclosure of income and expenditure statement mentioning all other schemes were presented in the Gram Sabha and discussed in detail.

Even though the RTI made alert of functionary in local institutions, lack of interest and activism among people still way to improve. The situation is far better in the study panchayat as reported by 78.2 percent on responsive governance to the RTIs.

The overall opinion of the selected respondents on the efforts of GP in maintaining transparency and accountability have been reported in the previous table on different parameters. The consolidation of perception of the people on transparency and accountability are perfect in the panchayat as supported by 89.1 percent in Nadappuram GP. Along with adequate functionaries, digitalization of data and service delivery impacted on achieving high level of transparency lead to accountable in delivery of services.

## 9. RESPONSES ON PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

S.No	Effect on Participatory Process	Yes	No	Total
a.	GP communicate on meeting adequately	110	-	110 (100)
b.	Meetings get adequate quorum	110		110 (100)
c.	Adequate representation from all sections in Gram Sabha meetings	83 (75.5)	27 (24.5)	110 (100)
d.	Status of equal chances for raising voices	85 (77.3)	25 (22.7)	110 (100)
e.	Status of disadvantaged sections voices	92 (83.6)	18 (16.4)	110 (100)

Social Mobilization is an integral part of participatory process at the grass roots. In general, people are reluctant to participate in the panchayat meetings due to various reasons mainly lack of awareness and lack of self-interest. It is also hamper due to ineffective initiatives of the panchayats and inability of the leadership. But in Nadapuram Gram panchayat all the respondents agreed for their participation either one or the other meetings conducted by the GPs. Again the participation level or number of people attending the meetings is depended on the effectiveness of the communication about the meetings and its purpose. The panchayat made adequate effort through various methods of communication. The Panchayat use one or the more methods of communication namely circulation of notices, pasting of wall posters, drum beatings, oral communication, and display in notice boards, etc. Due to those effective methods of communication the panchayat use to get adequate quorum for gram sabha and also gets representation from all the social sections.

Social inclusion is also equally important in realising the decentralized democracy. Mere participation will lead to transparency and taking people on board in decision making and programme implementation will help to achieve real participatory inclusive development. In Nadapuram Gram panchayat, majority people were agreed on having freedom of raising voices

and concerns in the gram sabha meetings and it was reported by 77.3 percent. Disadvantaged section participation in discussion was positive as supported by 83.1 percent.

## 10. AWARENESS LEVEL DUE TO OPEN GOVERNANCE ON THE GP RELATED ACTIVITIES

Sl. No.	Nadappuram GP Activities	Fully Aware	Partially Aware	Not Aware
a.	Peoples rights	59 (53.6)	43 (39.1)	8 (7.3)
b.	Panchayat Law	66 (60.0)	33 (30.0)	11 (10.0)
c.	Elections	89 (80.9)	16 (14.5)	5 (4.5)
d.	Reservation Rules	22 (20.0)	13 (11.8)	75 (68.2)
e.	Basic Services	110 (100)	-	-
f.	Committees of PRIs	31 (28.2)	15 (13.6)	64 (58.2)
g.	Gram Sabha Meetings	110 (100)	-	-
h.	Village Planning	87 (79.1)	16 (14.5)	7 (6.4)
i.	Budgeting and funds availability	35 (31.8)	21 (19.1)	54 (49.1)
j.	People's Role in Implementation	37 (33.6)	16 (14.5)	57 (51.8)
k.	Panchayat Income and Expenditure	56 (50.9)	11 (10.0)	43 (39.1)
l.	Social Audit	36 (32.7)	33 (30.0)	41 (37.3)
m.	RTI	56 (60.0)	16 (14.5)	38 (34.5)
n.	Employment Guarantee Act Provisions	87 (79.1)	13 (11.8)	10 (9.1)

People's participation in various activities of the panchayat, greater accessibility of services and service providers, motivation of social mobilization, status of friendliness attitude of the leaders, pro-activeness have made greater impact on people through open governance.

Impact of open governance system on people pertaining to various parameters related to panchayat functioning has been improved significantly. It is to note from the views of respondents, awareness level has been increased on various dimensions like people's rights, timely elections to the panchayats, role of panchayats in service delivery, various committees of panchayats and importance of gram sabha meetings. Further people were aware about the needs and importance of preparation of development planning. People were also understood on the provisions of MGNREGA and get adequate employment. The increased people participation and increased awareness level further contributed for strengthening the GPs to deliver better services through open governance system. The scenario of impact of open governance system more or less similar in both the GPs. Significant level of awareness increased in other parameters like procedures of RTI, importance of Social Audit, People's role in implementation of RD Programmes and need for display of finance of the GP.

## 11. MAJOR DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES CARRIED BY PANCHAYAT

- The Gram Panchayat has constructed an indoor stadium and wedding hall where the organizations and individuals can avail spaces to organize functions in moderate rates.
- The panchayat has constructed a Shopping Complex, It covers two storied building, consisting of 37 commercial units.



- Moreover, it facilitated to construct 54 houses to the houseless people of the Cheralil colony with the help of Kerala State Housing Board and Kerala Muslim Cultural Centre.
- The garbage treatment plant in the panchayat is a model for the whole state, where cities as well as the rural areas are gripped with the garbage dumping issues. It converts solid waste into organic manure and sold to farmers at subsidised rates. The plant gives a sigh of relief for the public by keeping streets, roads and house-holds clean and at the same time it lends a helping hand to the farmers folk.
- Health Support - The panchayat implemented Palliative Care projects and provide services to the aged, weak people, permanently disabled and bed ridden patients. Physiotherapy unit is managed and extends services with priority to the physically and mentally challenged children. The children are provided with life protective instruments.
- Efforts on Energy Saving - As per the instructions of Govt.of Kerala on energy saving, the panchayat replaced CFL lights with LED lights and installed 6 LED High mast lights in the panchayat area.
- Drinking Water and Sanitation - All the houses of the panchayat were provided with tap water connection and supplies water adequately.
- 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.
- Kudumbasree - Kudumbasree is one of the innovative approaches implemented by the state government aimed to achieve the socio - economic empowerment of women. In this GP also hundreds of women entrepreneurs are scripting success stories of empowerment through Kudumbasree Mission, envisioned by the State Government for the comprehensive uplifting of the women in the state.
- The panchayat administration has been extending priority to the construction of modern and fully equipped buildings for all government-owned institutions including the panchayat office, Krishi Bhavan, schools, Anganwadi and hospitals.
- Most of the roads in the panchayat, both wide and narrow, are effectively repaired when it requires.
- The Nadapuram GP won the best GP award continuously for last 7 years in the district and won the swaraj trophy. It won the national award also.

## 12. CONCLUSION

This study examined on the outcomes and impact of open government interventions in the field of implementation of rural development programmes in the study panchayats. Open government 'Outputs' include measures of efficiency, and the extent to which the initiative worked as intended. Outputs are largely within the control of the government implementing the interventions through open government mechanisms. Further, open government outcomes

include the degree to which outputs actually lead to greater transparency, citizen engagement, and government responsiveness. Access to information will lead to greater transparency and public scrutiny, participatory planning initiatives that actually lead to greater citizen engagement in the planning process, and grievance redress mechanisms that actually respond to citizens. Accountability and effectiveness is reflected in the degree to which governmental behaviour substantively changes in response to greater transparency, citizen engagement, or responsiveness reforms and initiatives. This governmental behaviour change includes, improvements in public services; reduced corruption; and discipline of public employees. Greater accountability will lead to social, economic or environmental change. The present study also made deep attempt to verify this theory that, the open government system made commendable impact on the delivery of basic services and people supporting functions. It also improved transparency, accountability which lead to improved people awareness, role clarity and responsive governance. Particularly, open government system enhanced people participation, collective decisions, realisation of people' planning and achieved overall development of the gram panchayat.

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