

“Relevance of Citizen Empowerment for better Public Service Delivery: An Empirical study conducted in selected Grama Panchayats in Kerala

***Minu Prakash**

Ph.D, Research Scholar, Institute of Management in Kerala, University of Kerala, Kariavattom.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51583/IJLTEMAS.2026.150700157>

Received: 10 August 2026; Accepted: 15 August 2026; Published: 26 August 2026

ABSTRACT

In today's democratic world, the word inclusivity is the cornerstone for the success of any organisation. Grama Panchayats as the third tier of government is closely related to the everyday life of people. So its activities heavily rely on the active involvement of the people for its better performance. This paper is based on a study conducted in three selected Grama Panchayats in Kerala viz., Parassala, Chenkal and Venganoor, to analyse the factors required for effective service delivery, by taking the perceptions of the elected representatives, employees and stakeholders (people who come to avail various services and beneficiaries of various schemes implemented through Gram Panchayats) through structured questionnaires. The data were analysed and summarised using frequency tables to draw meaningful inferences. From the perceptions of the stakeholders involved, the level of public service delivery offered by the Grama Panchayats is found to be not sufficient to reach the level of citizens' expectations. Awareness of the public is found to be one of the major factor that influence the quality service delivery. The study points to the fact that with the effective application of proper empowerment tools like the Right to Service Act, Grievance redressal mechanisms etc, more awareness could be created about the quality and quantity of service to be received, rights to access services within the prescribed time and the possibility of using available redressal mechanisms when services are delayed/ denied, thus empowering the citizens. With the process of empowerment, the authorities become more accountable and responsive to the people thereby facilitating better service delivery.

Key words: Citizen Empowerment , Public Service Delivery, Right to Service, Grievance redressal handling

INTRODUCTION

Grama Panchayats as the third tier of government, practices decentralisation of power at the grass root level. As per the 73rd and 74th amendment of the constitution of India, constitutional rights have been granted to the local self-governments thereafter. This allows the government at grass root levels to function independently with its available resources and funds. So most of the basic functions dealing with human and social development are being done by them. Since the local governments work so close with people's activities, their active involvement is very essential. Good participation is considered as the basis for a sound democracy.

Citizen participation, an important element of democratic and citizen-centred governance refers to how the citizens raise their problems, voice their opinions, keep an eye on government actions, offer criticism, and look for ways to improve public services. In Grama Panchayats, there are various methods for the citizens to actively take part in the decision making process like Grama sabha, social audit, digital platforms etc. These mechanisms provide an opportunity for the public to come in contact with respective authorities to share their demands and concerns. Through this process, the citizens have a front row seat to monitor the policies which greatly affect them as well as voice their concerns, find out the defects and point out areas which need to be corrected. This improves the overall accountability and responsiveness of the officials and increases transparency and quality of services. But participation alone does not guarantee better governance. There needs to be a mechanism to provide timely information to keep the citizens aware, as well as proper tools to

convey any issues. There also needs to be an open mind on the part of public institutions to be inclusive and willing to take active actions.

Citizen participation is closely associated with citizen empowerment. The word citizen empowerment is the process by which individuals within a community or society gain the ability to actively participate in decisions that affect their lives. Thus in simple terms it refers to the ability given to people to make decisions on matter that affect their lives. The greater the people are aware about the rights and services and in what level it is expected to be provided and time interval, the authorities become accountable and responsible for the things that is happening around them. And if the said services are not up to the desired level, citizens can complain about the same, through the available redressal facility making the authorities to be accountable and transparent in the whole process.

From the above background, this paper examines the importance of citizen empowerment and its importance in providing better service delivery in the Grama Panchayats . The empower measurement tools used in the study are:

1. Right to service
2. Awareness regarding the rules
3. Redressal facility available
4. Time frame of services provided

Right to Public Services are statutory laws which guarantee time bound delivery of various public services provided by the Government. It also provides mechanism for legal actions when the said services are not properly provided. It is expected that the measures will lead to a corruption free environment and to increase transparency and public accountability. Another key aspect of empowerment is efficient grievance-redressal system, where citizens can complain about service delays/denial or administrative lapses and seek solutions, which in turn makes the authorities more accountable. Once the citizens get empowered, transparent public service delivery is received in a time-bound manner, and if it is denied they could go for claiming of their entitlements rather than depending on sole administrative discretion.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Putnam et al., (1993), in a comparative analysis of Italian regional governments found that institutional performance can be greatly improved by active citizen participation. Factors like civic engagement, social networks, trust and norms of cooperation all lead to the active citizen participation.

Crook and Manor (1998), in their comparative study Democracy and Decentralisation in South Asia and West Africa, examined the relationship between decentralisation, citizen participation, accountability and institutional performance in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Bangladesh and Karnataka in India. The study shows that local democratic institutions performance can be greatly improved by providing greater opportunities for citizens to engage in governance and express their preferences. The study also points out that while participation is necessary, it must be accompanied by accountable and effective institutions.

Zimmerman (2000), in his Empowerment Theory states that empowerment operates at individual, organizational and community levels and is closely associated with participation, control and the ability to influence decision-making.

Fung (2006) states that by giving citizen a part to be in the decision making process, legitimacy and justice of the governance process can be increased, which in turn, strengthen democratic governance. In a study conducted on the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions and the challenges involved in achieving effective decentralisation in India, Behar (2009) highlighted the importance of people's participation, accountability and institutional capacity for successful local governance.

The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2009), in its Twelfth Report Citizen Centric Administration recommended clearly defined public services and their time-bound delivery and the standards

set for them, performance monitoring system. It also recommends the need of grievance redressal mechanisms which gives accountability to public officials.

Gaventa and Barrett (2012) found that citizen participation can contribute to stronger citizenship, greater participatory practices, more responsive and accountable government, and more inclusive societies. Their analysis demonstrates that meaningful citizen engagement can therefore strengthen governance and improve the relationship between citizens and public institutions.

According to Mansuri and Rao (2013), when the voices of the citizens are heard, better service delivery can be expected. The citizen participation makes the government more accountable and transparent.

Fox (2015), in his study on Social Accountability states that public sector performance can be improved and they can be held accountable, when the citizens are able to organise their voices collectively. The study also emphasised the capacity of the institutions and their willingness to respond to the demands of public.

The World Bank (2015), points out the importance of citizen engagement to strength the relation between citizens and public institutions. It gives emphasis on mechanism like participation, accountability, citizen feedback which contributes to citizen engagement thereby improving the public service delivery.

Joshi (2017), states that through social accountability and legal empowerment, citizens can be empowered their by improving service delivery. Citizens by understanding and exercising their rights becomes more aware of their rights and can make claims and challenge failures in service delivery.

The OECD (2019) focuses on people-centred public service delivery, and emphasises on factors like access, responsiveness and quality as key dimensions for the principles of people-centred governance. It also highlights the importance of transparency, accountability and responsiveness.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted as a part of the PG dissertation submitted to the University of Kerala. This research is based on the problems sensed by the researcher by observing the functioning of gram panchayats and related news appeared in the media. It is conceived and conducted as a cross sectional study design as there are perceptions of three sections connected to the research problem are investigated at a given point of time.

Out of the 941 Grama Panchayats in the state, Parassala, Chenkal and Venganoor Grama Panchayats were selected as the sample units for the study because of their size, functions and services available. The perceptions of Management (elected representatives), employees (selected randomly from all sections) and stakeholders (who come to avail various services and beneficiaries of various schemes implemented through Gram Panchayats) on the above areas were collected with the help of questionnaire/schedule prepared for this purpose. The questionnaire is designed for three levels. Questionnaire- I for management, Questionnaire- II for the Service Providers (employees), and Questionnaire- III for stakeholders. Each Questionnaire had different variables with each variable having four options ranging from extreme negative aspect to extreme positive aspect with reasonable level of intermediary positions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Perception of the Panchayat members regarding the awareness of the public about the quality and quantity of services to be received

No	Option	% of expression
1	Not at all	6.67
2	Sparingly	60.00
3	Somewhat	26.67

4	Extremely	6.67
---	-----------	------

From the data given in Table 1. it can be seen that 6.67 % of the participants think that the public are not at all aware of the quality and quantity of services to be received. In contrast equal amount of members think that the customers are fully aware. However, majority (60 %) are of the opinion that the customers are only marginally aware while 26.67 % of the participants reported that the customers are aware to a certain extent. Thus the general perception of the members is that public awareness is relatively low. Citizens can effectively exercise their rights only they are aware of their entitlements. People should also be made aware of the authority responsible for service delivery, the procedures and also the time limit.

Table 2 : Perceptions of the stakeholders regarding the awareness about Right to Service Act

No	Option	% of expression
1	Not known at all	50.67
2	Sparingly know	30.33
3	Somewhat know	15.67
4	Know it well	3.33

From the data given in Table 2. it can be seen that nearly half of the stakeholders (50.67%) are not at all aware of the Act whereas, 30.33% scarcely know about it. While 15.67% know something about the Act, only 3.33% of the participants are well aware about the Act. Right to Public Services are statutory laws which guarantee time bound delivery of various public services provided by the Government. It also provides mechanism for legal actions when the said services are not properly provided. People lacking in such information are incapable of identifying delay/deficiency in services which in turn limits their willingness or capacity to demand corrective action. This points to the need for a mechanism to provide timely information to keep the citizens aware, as well as proper tools to convey any issues. The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2009), emphasizes the need to place citizens at the centre of public service delivery. The Commission recommends clearly defining public services, establishing service standards, developing institutional capacity to meet those standards, monitoring performance and continuously improving service delivery. It also recommends effective grievance redressal mechanisms and accountability of public officials when service commitments are not fulfilled. These recommendations provide an important foundation for the Right to Service approach, as they recognize citizens as active claimants of public services rather than merely recipients and emphasize timely, accountable and responsive service delivery. Joshi (2017) argues that empowering citizens to understand and exercise their rights, collectively voice their concerns, and demand accountability can strengthen their ability to influence public institutions. By combining social accountability with legal empowerment, citizens can gain greater capacity to make claims and challenge failures in service delivery. Thus, citizen empowerment can contribute to more accountable and responsive public institutions and improve the effectiveness of governance and service delivery.

Table 3: Stakeholders perception about awareness of the employees regarding the rules and regulations of service delivery

No	Option	% of expression
1	Not at all	21.33
2	Sparingly	41.33
3	Somewhat	23.33
4	Extremely	14.00

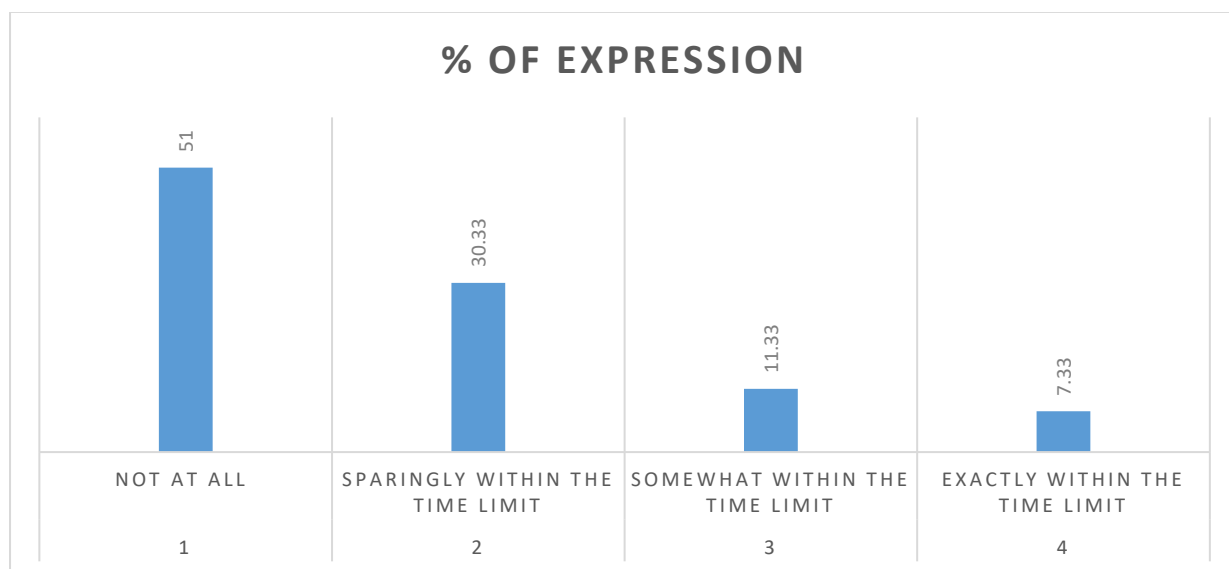
From the table 3. it can be seen that 21.33 % of customers believe that employees are not at all aware of the rules and regulations regarding service delivery and 41.33 % think that they have only marginal knowledge

about the rules and regulations. Only 14 % think that the employees are well aware of the rules and regulations regarding service delivery.

Provision of quality service by all spheres of Government to citizens is the primary responsibility of the same. In service organisations, employees are the ones who link the organisation with customers (Beatson et al., 2008; Babin and Boles, 1998) and customers make evaluative judgement of the quality of service delivered by employees (Beatson et al., 2008).

Given the critical role of employees in service organisations, Grama Panchayats cannot ignore the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours of its employees and their likely impact on service delivery. The service employees, who are knowledgeable, understanding, and concerned about the customers' needs, also influence the five dimensions of service quality: reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles (Wilson et al., 2008). It is essential to understand and meet what the customer wants and needs with service employees' abilities to deliver (Wilson et al., 2008).

Figure 1: Perception of stakeholders regarding the time limit of the service provided



From figure 1. it can be seen that only 7.33 % of the customers opined that the services provided exactly within the time limit. Majority of the stakeholders are of the opinion that the services are not provided within the reasonable time limit. This indicates that customers are not satisfied with the present level of service delivery and needs improvement.

Pareek and Sole (2020) reviewing the importance of time bound service delivery, explains that delays caused by administrative negligence, red tape and bureaucratic procedures contributes to public dissatisfaction and strengthens the need for mechanisms guaranteeing services within specified periods. They further argue that time-bound delivery supports transparency, accountability and citizen-centric administration. Chaubey, Mathur and Taneja (2025) in their review of time-bound delivery of public services in India, found that the number of services covered by Right to Service legislation has increased across states and that information technology has been used to automate processes and facilitate timely delivery. Their review concludes that Right to Service Acts have played a significant role in reducing service-delivery timelines, although citizen awareness of notified services remains limited. When citizens become aware of these prescribed timelines, they are better equipped to monitor service delivery, demand accountability and seek grievance redressal in cases of delay.

Table 4: Perception of stakeholders regarding the condition of the Grievance Redressal mechanism in Panchayats

No	Option	% of expression
----	--------	-----------------

1	Not at all	56.67
2	Sparingly working	17.00
3	Somewhat working	14.67
4	Working well	11.67

Data presented in Table 4. shows that only negligible percentage (11.67) of respondents supported proper working of redressal grievance system in Panchayats. Majority customers opined that an effective redressal mechanism is lacking in Panchayats. In the absence of a proper redressal facility, citizens cannot complain or appeal when services are denied, delayed or improperly delivered. World Bank (2015) emphasizes that citizen engagement can improve development outcomes when citizens have opportunities to provide feedback and when public institutions are responsive to that feedback. This provides a useful framework for understanding how awareness and grievance mechanisms can strengthen accountability in public-service delivery. Pareek and Sole (2020) identify timelines, quality and grievance redressal as three essential pillars of public service delivery.

The results of the study show that the stakeholders have given relatively low rating for the four empowerment tools examined viz., awareness of the Right to Service , awareness of the rules and procedures, availability of grievance-redressal mechanism and adherence to the prescribed time limits for public service delivery. The perception of the stakeholders indicate that although institutional mechanisms for the time-bound service delivery exist, due to inadequate awareness by the public and the limited accountability and redressal mechanisms, their effectiveness may be constrained.

Another important observation of the study is the low level of awareness regarding rules and service by the employees. This requires appropriate level of empowerment of the employees so that they can rise to the occasion demand.

Citizens can effectively utilise their rights only when they are aware of their service entitlements, its procedures, the responsible authorities and also the time frame within which they have to be provided. Citizens lacking in such information may fail to identify delay/ deficiencies of services which in turn may adversely affect their grievance redressal.

Lack of proper functioning of the grievance-redressal system as indicated by the stakeholders may lead to weaker accountability. A proper grievance mechanism provides the citizens an opportunity to question delays/ denial of services/ administrative deficiencies which in turn empowers the citizen. The provision of appropriate grievance redressal mechanism coupled with enhanced public awareness can thus make citizens capacity to seek appropriate service within the prescribed time limit. The low rating regarding adherence to service time frame has influence on better service delivery. If the citizens are aware about the prescribed time limit, then only they will be able to raise the problem if the time limit is exceeded. Thus for effective service delivery, citizens should be aware about the time limits, procedures and also accessible grievance redressal mechanism. The study thus indicates the importance of strengthening these areas which in turn enable the citizens for better service delivery by making the authorities more responsive and accountable.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the importance of citizen awareness, access to grievance-redressal mechanisms, and timely delivery of public services in strengthening citizen-oriented local governance. The relatively low ratings given by citizens to the four dimensions studied indicate that there is a significant gap between the formal availability of service-delivery mechanisms and citizens' practical awareness and ability to utilize them effectively.

The findings suggest that the existence of a service entitlement or prescribed time limit alone may not be sufficient to ensure effective service delivery. Citizens need to be adequately informed about their rights,

procedures, responsible authorities and service time limits. They also need accessible and effective grievance-redressal mechanisms through which they can seek remedies when services are delayed, denied or inadequately provided. Greater awareness of these mechanisms can enable citizens to monitor service delivery, identify deficiencies and demand accountability from service providers.

The study therefore highlights the need to strengthen public awareness initiatives, simplify information about service procedures and time limits, improve the accessibility and effectiveness of grievance-redressal mechanisms, and ensure greater adherence to prescribed service-delivery standards. Such measures can enhance citizens' capacity to claim public services and become more empowered.

In a nutshell, it can be stated that citizen awareness, time-bound service delivery and effective grievance redressal are the key components of citizen empowerment and responsive public administration. Strengthening these areas can create a more accountable relationship between citizens and service providers which in turn contribute to improved quality, accessibility and responsiveness of public services.

CITATION

1. Baiocchi, G., Heller, P., & Silva, M. K. (2011). *Bootstrapping democracy: Transforming local governance and civil society in Brazil*. Stanford University Press.
2. Bartel, A.P. (1994) 'Productivity Gains from the Implementation of Employee Training Programs', *Industrial Relations*, 33(4): 411–25
3. Beatson A, Lings I, Gudergan SP (2008). Service staff attitude, organisational practices and performance drivers. *J. Manage. Org.* 4: 168-179
4. Behar, A. (2009). Panchayati Raj institutions in India: A critical perspective. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 55(1), 1–18.
5. Chaubey, S., Mathur, K., & Taneja, D. (2025). A review of the right to time-bound delivery of public services in India. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 71(4), 701–716.
6. Crook, R. C., & Manor, J. (1998). *Democracy and decentralisation in South Asia and West Africa: Participation, accountability and performance*. Cambridge University Press.
7. Fox, J. A. (2015). Social accountability: What does the evidence really say? *World Development*, 72, 346–361. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2015.03.011>
8. Fung, A. (2006). Varieties of participation in complex governance. *Public Administration Review*, 66(s1), 66–75. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00667.x>
9. Gaventa, J., & Barrett, G. (2012). Mapping the outcomes of citizen engagement. *World Development*, 40(12), 2399–2410. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2012.05.014>
10. Joshi, A. (2017). Legal empowerment and social accountability: Complementary strategies toward rights-based development in health? *World Development*, 99, 160–172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.07.008>
11. Mansuri, G., & Rao, V. (2013). *Localizing development: Does participation work?* World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-0-8213-8256-1>
12. OECD. (2019). *Government at a glance 2019*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/8ccf5c38-en>
13. Pareek, U., & Sole, N. A. (2020). Delivery of time-bound public services to citizens: Indian experience. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 66(3), 343–355.
14. Putnam, R. D., Leonardi, R., & Nanetti, R. Y. (1993). *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton University Press.
15. Second Administrative Reforms Commission. (2009). *Citizen centric administration: The heart of governance* (12th Report). Government of India.
16. Wilson A., Zeithaml V. A., Bitner M. J. and Gremler D. D. (2008) *Services marketing: integrating customer focus across the firm*. 1st European Edition. McGraw-Hill Education



17. World Bank. (2015). World Bank Group citizen engagement: A framework for implementation. World Bank.
18. Zimmerman, M. A. (2000). Empowerment theory: Psychological, organizational and community levels of analysis. In J. Rappaport & E. Seidman (Eds.), Handbook of community psychology (pp. 43–63). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-4193-6_2.