

Shifts in urban governance: a study of education projects in two urban local governments in Kerala, India

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This paper reports partially on a study of the efficacy of urban governance institutions following decentralisation in the state of Kerala, India in three sectors – health, education and sanitation. The study was funded by the Ford Foundation. This paper focuses primarily on the education sector.

Within the larger study, shifts in urban governance were conceptualised as undergoing qualitative transitions with regards to 1) efficiency in terms of cost effectiveness and greater inclusion in the delivery of objectives of the service sector; 2) transparency and accountability to stakeholders and 3) participation in decision making and implementation. The aim of the wider study was therefore to identify, examine and compare the new forms of governance with what existed earlier with respect to the nature of the shift, the significant features and the impact of the shift.

The guiding research questions that were formulated at national level were therefore as follows:

- How was policymaking and service delivery organised both in terms of structures and processes in the pre-liberalization period?
- What were the new institutional arrangements between the state and local level undertaken as a consequence of the reform process? What were the specific features of collaborative forms as a result of new arrangements?
- What regimes were instituted by government in the form of initiatives, programmes and mandates to allocate resources? How did these regimes guide

(create or sustain competitive and/or cooperative pressures on) local agents' service delivery roles and processes?

- What new methods were instituted -
 - a. In the processes of decision-making and financial allocation to ensure transparency?
 - b. for accountability and access?
 - c. to engage variously defined stakeholders in the governance processes?
 - d. and what was the nature of participation in decision making processes?
- How might globalization have impacted upon the capacity of the State to deliver public services, when the government's role is primarily reduced to facilitation of new governance processes?

Kerala is generally known as a welfare oriented state. One of the major governance reforms in the period of study was the decentralization initiative and the launch of what is commonly known as People's Planning Campaign (PPC), a process of participatory budgeting and planning. In Kerala, the study formulated the following empirical research questions:

- What were the state, district and local government level contextual factors that would help understand the post liberalisation changes in governance?
- What were the overall state of affairs at state, district and local government level in education, health and sanitation?
- What were the main projects currently being executed in health, education and sanitation in the LSGIs?
- How did the projects come about and who were the various actors (levels of government, private sector, NGOs/CBOs) in project planning and implementation?
- What were the roles of the various stakeholders in the projects and why?
- What does the above data say for urban governance in practice in Kerala today?

Two urban local governments were chosen for study - Kozhikode and Alapuzha. Following an initial search and study of state level data through relevant documents and websites, within the case studies, a mixed methods qualitative enquiry was employed. For information on local government level projects in the three different

sectors, local government records and publications were studied. Also elected representatives, key officials in charge of these sectors at the local government level and local media representatives were interviewed at length. From the overall picture that emerged, at least one important project that emerged as significant was chosen for documentation in each sector in each local government. More closely focused qualitative fieldwork was then carried out to document institutional arrangements and project implementation arrangements in these projects. The methods employed included site visits, analysis of project related documents and in depth interviews with various stakeholders.

As mentioned earlier, this paper will report primarily on the education sector. The empirical evidence suggested interventions were fairly comprehensive and targeted at improving the infrastructure and quality of education in the public sector explicitly posing an undisguised challenge to the privatisation of education. Public involvement by way of local volunteers, PTA members and teachers are substantial and they constituted the major drivers for the programme. In Kerala, the process is not hijacked by the elites as is reported in the wider literature. This could be symptomatic of both the process of plan formulation and also the different development ethos of the state. The local government projects in the education sector can then be seen as equalising, mobilising and challenging (of privatisation) in its scope and detail. The similarities in the projects formulated in both cities were however striking. This may be due to the steering impact of GoK guidelines, similarities in the issues faced by the public sector in education in Kerala and also due to diffusion of ideas amongst local governments through the various state level meetings and training workshops organised and facilitated by the state Govt, venues where councillors and officers meet regularly. Though similar, there is still a difference in the emphasis of the projects. Thus while in Kozhikode there is a focus on arts and art forms in the curriculum, in Alappuzha the emphasis is on sports. This is partly reflective of Alappuzha's aspirations to be known as a major sports centre, especially in water sports and tied to this, its investment in a stadium for the city. The untied devolved funds provided by the state govt allows for such variation. The significance of the infusion of funds (from centrally

sponsored schemes such as the SSA) which permitted such investment should not however be missed.

In our study we found an increasing sense of accountability, tied more to logics of responsibilities to citizens rather than a universal notion of efficiency that is symptomatic of neo-liberalism. Local governance seemed to actively offer a resistance to the extension of global capitalism. However this is not to mean that the private sector is not active. Instead we found that the logic of responsibility to citizens, citizen rights and poverty alleviation seemed to infuse the functioning of the local government at least within project formulation in the service sectors. As Spivak (1992) notes this acknowledgement is in itself significant as it is disruptive of capitalism. Kerala experience seem to suggest Mouffe's (2000) ideals for an agonistic and conflictive polity, ultimately resulting in the formulation of more redistributive and accountable projects that place citizens centre-stage.

References:

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