



Front Office Management for People Friendly Local Governance: The Dream and Reality

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Abstract

The central and state governments were made a heap of efforts for good governance and to improve the quality of service delivery to citizens in particular, for attaining the dreams of Gandhi; Gram Swaraj and Gramn Su-raj. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, the modernization of Governance Programme (MGP), Right to Information Act, Citizen Charter, Right to Service bill, Social Audit, the proposed Right to Grievance Redressal Bill etc. are some among them. But the efforts for effective service delivery are not yet fruitful because of a myriad of reasons. It is the duty of each and every government to create a flawless service delivery mechanism to provide services to citizens with maximum satisfaction. The ninth to twelfth Five Year Plans strictly direct to improve quality of service delivery and good governance in Government, in general, and Local Self Government Institutions in particular. Several initiatives were taken and the Front Office Management (FoM) in GramaPanchayats is the latest in this genre in Kerala. The Fom is a change management initiative with focus on citizens' satisfaction. The front office functions as a single window for receiving applications and letters, service delivery, and informing the status of files. This study was intended to identify the lacuna and provide suggestive improvements. If we can apply the TQM elements, the LSGI scan achieve good governance without much sprain.

Keywords: Decentralisation, Local Self Government Institutions, Good Governance, Front Office Management, Citizen Charter, Continuous improvement.

1. Back Drop

The Father of our nation had two dreams, *Swaraj* and *Suraj*. The dream of Mahatma Gandhi for *Gram Swaraj* paved the way for decentralisation. With that dream, he wrote: "Independence must begin at the bottom" (Gandhi, 1946). From 2nd October, 1959, when the first Panchayati Raj was launched in April 24, 1993, when the 73rd Constitutional Amendment came into force, it has been an unsure and rough journey for

Panchayats in India (Rakesh 2012). The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments removed this weakness at long last. During these four decades, however, efforts were being made to bring in democratic decentralization of power in the country by strengthening the *Panchayati Raj* system. Consequent to these Constitutional Amendments, the State of Kerala passed the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 (KPRA) and the Kerala Municipality Act, 1994 (KMA) to enable LSGIs to work as a third tier of the Government.



Mahatma's second dream 'su-raj' stands for good governance. To attain good governance Government of Kerala (GoK) followed different dimensions in activities and its implementation. In view of good governance and high standard service delivery envisaged by the 11th Five Year Plan (2007-2012), the Government of Kerala, has introduced Front Office Management (FOM) in every Grama Panchayat during 2009. (Government of Kerala, 2009).

2. Railed Vision of Swaraj: Kerala Model of Decentralisation

Unlike other states, GoK followed a big-bang¹ approach in decentralisation. Apart from functions, a major chunk of functionaries and funds were also transferred to LSGIs. The Three 'F's² were transferred to LSGIs of Kerala as the finance follows function and functionaries rules. As per KPRA 1994, the village panchayats' functions are divided into Mandatory functions (27 functions), General functions (11 functions) and sectoral functions (19 sectors) as per schedule III. In order to endow the LSGIs to perform the functions efficaciously, second 'F' i.e. Functionaries were transferred to LSGIs (Vijayanand, 2009). As the case of Funds, the Government of Kerala, through budget window, transferred one third from her exchequer. Thus the calibration of LSGIs happened. As far as Kerala is concerned, it is not only far ahead in 3 Fs but also added more 'F's viz. freedom, fraternity, flexibility, framework, and futuristic; thus making the devolution process in its letter and spirit (Rajan, 2013).

3. Status of Good Governance

The initiatives for Quality Management in service delivery have been evident since the 10th FYP of LSGIs. The decentralization was introduced in Kerala during 9th FYP with focus on participatory planning. It was launched through People's Plan Campaign

(PPC)³. Hence the attempt was to device and launches the novel methodology for local planning envisaging local economic development and social justice. The shift in 10th FYP through not only from campaign mode to institutional mode but also towards improving service delivery. The guideline for 10th FYP of LSGIs insists that "Upgrade the quality of basic services provided by the local governments with special emphasis on health, education, water supply, sanitation including solid waste management and care of the disabled" (Government of Kerala, 2002).

The 11th FYP further moved to good governance by making good governance plan mandatory and states that: "In order to improve the development of Local Governments each Local Government has to prepare a good governance plan" (Government of Kerala, 2007). This was in view of bettering service delivery mechanism. It listed 13 aspects to be covered in the good governance plan that includes increasing people's participation, ensuring proper upkeep of accounts, creation of data base, revamping office system, operationalizing accountability, preparation of service delivery plans, inculcation of proper extension systems, introduction of public grievance system, improving efficiency of officials, and introduction of community based monitoring system (Kerala State Planning Board, 2006). The 12th FYP guide line of the State Planning Board also insists to follow good governance principles for quality of service delivery. The report of working group for Modernisation of governance and Project Implementation states that priority should be given to good governance for improving service delivery (Government of Kerala, 2011). These improved priority for insisting good governance highlights that the initiatives for quality governance in order to attain citizen satisfaction is not yet attained.



4. Front Office Management: Change Management initiative

Based on the principle 'first come, first served', FoM intends for change management in Gram Panchayats (GPs). The absence of proper system in GPs for meeting the requirements of clientele has been creating unnecessary crowds within the office and disrupts their smooth functioning. The existing Manual of Office Procedure (MoP) has its own limitations to provide people-friendly and efficient service. The front office, as a scientific office management system, envisages delivery of timely service to all by ensuring transparency and social justice. To make the Panchayat Offices people-friendly and office functioning more efficient, the afore-said G.O suggested for setting up front office and re-organising the office setup into front office and main office.

The front office functions as a single window for receiving applications and letters, service delivery, and informing the status of files. The advantages envisaged are; single window service delivery, efficient public administration, principle based service, reduced corruption, avoidance of intermediaries and recommendations in service delivery, smooth office atmosphere, better employees' understanding of the office functioning, improved office performance management, social equity and dignity of citizens, assurance of right to service, and enhancement of trust of people on administrative mechanism.

5. Study Setting and Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature. In order to study the facilities of Front Office Management (FOM), two levels of enquiries have been made. One was a survey on a sample of 278 GPs and other was a field reality check using a checklist on a sub-sample of 6 GPs randomly selected from three geographical zones of the State viz.

South, Central, and North. In the first level of enquiry, the survey questionnaire has been administered to the Secretaries, being the administrative chief. This has been to gather insider views of the Grama Panchayats on the arrangements for FOM. The information in this respect analysed are the various aspects envisaged in the Govt. Order on FOM (G.O (MS) 123/2009 dated 2/07/2009). The arrangements for Front Office (FO) were scored on the basis of installation (i.e. 1 or 0 respectively based on installation and non-installation). The opinions of Secretaries' about FOM are scored on the basis of a five-point scale, and satisfaction level on the basis of a ten-point scale. In the second level, field visits have been made to the sub-samples to observe whether the FOM is in place and the key functionaries' viz. President and Secretary were also interviewed. Interactions with other officials were also done as a part of this observation.

6. Results and Discussion

6.(A). Score on Front Office Facilities

The status of facility on FOM is assessed using two major indicators enunciated in the Guideline⁴ viz. information boards and physical facilities. The physical facilities are sub-divided into facilities for public and facilities for officials. These major indicators altogether have 46 sub-indicators⁵, which are basically the subject of study in this section (Table 1). In view of analysis, these facilities are scored based on their availability in the GPs. The results computed are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The overall average score on front office facilities is 60.46 per cent (Table 1). This indicates that there is gap in facility to the tune of 39.54 per cent. However, the covariance of overall score is 20.21, showing high dispersion between PRIs on front office facilities.

Table 1: Percentage Score on Front Office Facilities

Group	Major Indicators	Sub-Indicators	Average facilities	Average Score (%)	SD	CV	Min. Score	Max. Score
For Public	Information Boards	12	5.72	47.70	3.08	53.78	0	100
	Physical Facilities	15	8.7	58	2.2	25.0	13.3	86.7
	Total	27	14.4	53.4	4.4	30.4	7.4	85.2
For Officials	Physical Facilities	19	13.4	70.5	2.5	18.7	15.8	94.7
	Overall	46	27.81	60.46	5.62	20.21	10.9	89.1

Source: Survey data, 2013.

List of GPs; individual results suppressed; SD-Stands for standard deviation; CV-Stands for Co Variance

Out of the total 46 facilities, on an average, 28 facilities are arranged by the GPs. This is an eye opener that the cradle of Participative democracy institutions in Kerala gives least attention towards the citizen. The gap on front office facility is more pronouncing for the variables of physical facilities for public and information boards. As in the case of information boards and facilities to public, out of total 27 requirements only 14 are arranged. The percentage scores for these are respectively 47.7 and 58; with Co-efficient of Variation 53.78 and 25. The information board – which is the mechanism for ensuring transparency – shows lesser score as compared to physical facilities for public. Also shows wide disparity in display of boards. It is evident that the physical facilities arrangements for the citizen are the least cared. The score on physical facilities for officials is comparatively better side at 70.5per cent. It may be due to the special interest of staff to set up all facilities to smoothen their work. However, its Co-efficient of Variation is computed at 19per cent, showing dispersion between PRIs on physical facilities for officials. The overall percentage score varies from 10.9per cent to 89.1per cent; indicating that there are PRIs which lack facilities on FOM in a greater extent, while there are PRIs having most of the suggested facilities as per the guideline.

A further look into the data reveals that the percentage score on facility is comparatively better for those components that are suggested as essential. The guidelines categorise the facilities for public

into essential and desirable⁶. The average percentage score on essential components suggested both under information boards and physical facilities is 58 and 74. That reveals the fact that the boards intends to the principle of transparency is less cared. As the case of essential and desirable information boards, on an average, below 50per cent of boards are displayed. On the same time the physical facilities to public, the ‘essential’ are installed three times more than the ‘desirable’ facilities (Table 2). It is also noticeable that the Co-efficient of Variation of desirable components of information boards and physical facilities (respectively 80 and 71) are much higher (i.e., more than five and three times higher) than essential facilities, indicating more dispersion between PRIs. In short, the facilities on desirable components are not only poor but also much varies between PRIs.

The gap in respect of front office facility is further revealed by the distribution of PRIs on the percentage score (Table 3). Of the 278 GPs studied, 73 per cent have percentage score in the class interval of 50-75 and 16 per cent in the class interval of 75-100. Generally the GPs are skewed towards percentage score of 50 and above is a positive indicator. But this rosy picture of 90 per cent of GPs with score 50 or above vanishes when we look at the facilities for public separately and again on facilities of desirable nature. These are 85 per cent of GPs for information boards and 92 per cent of GPs for physical facilities for public. This reflects the apathy of the GPs in install a system unless otherwise there is compulsion.

Table 2: Percentage Score on Front Office Facilities

Group	Major Indicators	Sub-Indicators		Average Score (%)	St. Dev.	CV	Min. Score	Max. Score
		Total	AI*					
For Public	Information Boards							
	Essential	5	2.88	57.63	1.17	40.74	0	100
	Desirable	7	2.8	40.6	2.26	79.5	0	85.7
	Total	12	5.72	47.7	3.08	53.78	16.67	100
	Physical Facilities							
	Essential	10	7.4	74.2	1.8	23.7	20	100
	Desirable	5	1.3	25.5	.9	70.5	0	80
	Total	15	8.7	58	2.2	25	13.33	86.67
For Officials	Physical Facilities	19	13.4	70.5	2.5	18.7	15.79	94.74
	Overall	46	27.81	60.46	5.62	20.21	10.9	89.1

Source: Survey data, 2013. *AI = Average Implementation

This assumption will be hammered if we look into the fact that when 90 per cent of GPs score on arrangement of essential boards and facilities to public skewed to above the

score of 50, on the other hand of desirable facilities 90 per cent of GPs cored below the level of score 50 (Table 4).

Table 3: Percentage Score on Front Office Facilities – Range

No.	Name of variables	No/%	Percentage Score by Class Interval				
			< 25	25-50	50-75	75-100	Total
1	Information Boards:						
	Essential	No	5	22	136	115	278
		%	1.8	7.9	48.9	44.4	100
	Desirable	No	176	60	42	0	278
		%	63.3	21.6	15.1	.	100
	Total	No	17	137	96	28	278
%		6.1	49.3	34.5	10.1	100	
2	Physical Facilities for Public:						
	Essential	No	4	42	64	168	278
		%	1.4	15.1	23	60.4	100
	Desirable	No	172	84	18	4	278
		%	61.9	30.2	6.5	1.4	100
	Total	No	8	57	195	18	278
%		2.9	20.5	70.1	6.5	100	
3	Physical arrangements for Officials Essential	No	1	14	175	88	278
		%	0.4	5	62.9	31.7	100
	Overall	No	1	32	202	43	278
		%	.4	11.5	72.7	15.5	100

Source: Survey data, 2013.

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the fact that when 90 per cent of GPs score on arrangement of essential boards and facilities to public skewed to above the score of 50, on the other hand of desirable facilities 90 per cent of GPs cored below the level of score 50 (Table 4).

Table 4: Percentage Score on Front Office Facilities and Information Boards to Public – Range

No.	Name of variables	No/%	Percentage Score by Class Interval				
			< 25	25-50	50-75	75-100	Total
1	Essential						
	Information Boards	No	5	22	136	115	278
		%	1.8	7.9	48.9	44.4	100
	Physical Facilities	No	4	42	64	168	278
		%	1.4	15.1	23	60.4	100
	Total	No	1	8	168	101	278
%		.4	2.9	60.4	36.3	100	
2	Desirable						
	Information Boards	No	176	60	42	0	278
		%	63.3	21.6	15.1	-	100
	Physical Facilities	No	172	84	18	4	278
		%	61.9	30.2	6.5	1.4	100
	Total	No	144	106	28	0	278
%		51.8	38.1	10.1	-	100	
Overall (Essential and Desirable)	No	1	32	202	43	278	
	%	.4	11.5	72.7	15.5	100	

Source: Survey data, 2013.

A further look at the sub-indicators of two major categories of indicators viz. Facilities to public and to officials (Table 1) reveals that some of the components are totally neglected by the GPs. Hence an indicator-wise assessment is attempted hereunder.

6. (B). Facilities to Public- Information Board

Table 5: Status of GPs on Information Boards

No.	Type of Boards	Installation by GPs	
		No.	%
1.0	Essential:		
1.1	Notice Board	250	89.9
1.2	Service Information Board	120	43.2
1.3.1	Board on Right to Information (RTI) Officials	88	31.7
1.3.2	Board on Registration of Birth, Death, Marriage, etc.	74	26.6
1.4.1	Board on Anti-corruption	269	96.8
1.4.2	Board on Grievance Redressal	102	36.7
1.4.3	Board on Ombudsman	128	46.0
1.4.4	Board on Tribunal	105	37.8
	Overall [1]	124	57.6
2.0	Desirable:		
2.1	Attendance Board	108	38.8
2.2	GramaSaba Board	111	39.9
2.3	Meeting Board	129	46.4
2.4	Service Status Board	107	38.5
	Overall [2]	113	40.6
	Grand Total (1)+(2)	169	47.7

Source: Survey data, 2013.

As part of transparency, there are 8 types of information boards, suggested by the G.O. on FOM (Government of Kerala, 2009). Of these four are essential and four are desirable. The status of GPs on these are given in Table 5.

Of the Information Boards which are essential like Boards on Service Information, Right To Information (RTI), Anti-corruption, Marriages, and Grama Sabha are mandated respectively by Citizen Charter Preparation Rules 2004, RTI Act 2005 (Section 4(1)(b)(16)), Anti-corruption Act (GO(P) No 89/99/vig dated 6/10/1999), The Kerala Hindu Marriage Registration Rules 1957 (Rule 5) and Circular on Grama Sabha No. 37806/L3/1998/LAD, dated 10-09-98. This means GPs are bound to display these even before FOM and the new G.O on FOM also directed to display these boards, but still the indolence continues. The display of boards relating to provide information regarding Birth and Death Registration, RTI and grievance Redressal boards are least cared (Table.5). The Registration of Birth and Death are is a mandatory function of GP. RTI is the most appreciated Act to protect the interest of citizen in a democratic country like India, and Grievance Redressal is one of the

essential elements of people centred governance system as per SEVATTOM⁷ Guidelines of Government of India.

6. (C). *Physical Facilities for Public*

The physical facilities for public are broadly categorised as essential and desirable (Govt of Kerla, 2009); the former comprised of 9 components and the latter 5⁸. See the status of GPs on this given in Table 6.

Table 6: Physical Facilities for Public

No.	Type of Facilities	Installation by	
		No.	%
1.0	Essential:		
1.1	Front Office Counter	273	98.2
1.2	Tapal Box	225	80.9
1.3	Ramp for Physically challenged	67	24.1
1.4.1	Seating Facility for Public	253	91.0
1.4.2	Writing Desk for Public	224	80.6
1.5	Application Forms	257	92.4
1.6	Stationery for Public	150	54.0
1.7	Drinking Water Facility for	213	76.6
1.8	Toilet for Public	183	65.8
1.9	Complaint Box	219	78.8
	Overall [1.0]	206	74.2
2.0	Desirable:		
2.1	Wash Basin	74	26.6
2.2	First Aid kit for Public	19	6.8
2.3	Coin Telephone	14	5.0
2.4	Reading facilities-	178	64.0
2.5	Television/Radio facility to	70	25.0
	Overall [2.0]	71	25.5
	Overall [1.0+2.0]	161	58.0

Source: Survey Data, 2013.

On an average, while 206 of the GPs (74%) studied have essential physical facilities for public, 71 of GPs (26%) have desirable physical facilities. This further prove the fact that the essential components insisted by the guideline is arranged by the GPs. But even among the essential facilities, only 24 per cent GPs have ramp for physically handicapped and 54 per cent GPs have stationary provision. This shows the fact that attitude towards the differently abled and also to Aged have no change. Among the desirable components, only 5 per cent of GPs

have coin telephone; perhaps it is irrelevant in the present context. But First Aid Box, which is inevitable even though included in the desirable category, is not provided by majority of GPs (93%).

6. (D). *Physical Facilities for Officials*

As per the guideline on FOM, there are 12 types of facilities to be set up for Officials. Compared to the facilities of public, there is no categorisation like essential and desirable. The status of physical facilities by GPs studied is presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Physical Facilities for Front Office Officials

No.	Type of Facilities	Installation	
		No.	%
1.1	Chair	275	98.9
1.2.	Table	273	98.2
1.3.	Drawer for cash	207	74.5
2.1.	Front Office Diary	234	84.2
2.2.	Thapal Distribution Register	236	84.9
2.3	Application Forms	261	93.9
3.0	Acknowledgement Receipt	254	91.4
4.0	Citizen Charter	195	70.1
5.0	Acts, Rules, Orders	139	50.0
6.0	Intercom	35	12.6
7.1	Computer in Front Office	126	45.7
7.2	Internet in Front Office	51	18.3
8.0	Information Directory	122	43.9
9.1	Office Order for Work Division	253	91.0
9.2	Delegation of Duties for Front	258	92.8
10.1	Address Book of Elected	187	67.3
10.2	Address Book of Promoters,	164	59.0
11.0	Check List	175	62.9
12.0	Receipt Book	276	99.3

Source: Survey data, 2013.

It seems that there is wide variation between facilities set up for Officials; vary from 13 per cent of GPs for intercom to 99 per cent of GPs receipt book. Generally, majority of GPs studied have set up facilities like chair, table, receipt book, etc. While setting up of facilities like intercom, internet, etc. by GPs are not pronouncing. Majority of notices and orders from higher officials comes to GPs through internet. The 'soochika' a software for file tracking need

computer but 46 per cent of GPs only arranged computer in FO. Check List is essential thing in FO to receive applications for Services without any defect. The absences of this may lead to receive defective application and there by delay in service delivery and non-observation of offers to public through Citizen Charter.

The respondents' (in this study, the Secretaries) opinion about FOM is gathered to assess their own impression about FOM. For this, five main areas that comprise of 43 sub-variables are considered. The five main areas

are (i) Functioning of FOM, (ii) Benefits of FOM, (iii) File Management, (iv) Monitoring of FOM, and (v) Self Satisfaction of Secretaries about FOM.

6. (E). *Opinion about FOM - Overall*

The opinion on five main areas comprising of 43 sub-variables; of this 33 on arrangements are measured using five-point scale and 10 variables on self-satisfaction are measured on the basis of ten-point scale. For uniformity, the scales are converted into percentage score and are given in Table 8.

Table 8: Opinion about Front Office

No.	Main Variables	No. of variables	Score: Average	Score: SD	CV	Min.	Max.
1	Mechanism of Front Office	7	68.06	11.94	17.55	0	100
2	Benefits of FOM	19	72.40	12.48	17.24	0	96
3	File Management	4	68.73	14.49	21.08	0	100
4	Monitoring of FOM	3	68.68	22.08	32.16	0	100
5	Self-Satisfaction of Secretaries	10	58.45	23.96	40.99	0	96
	Overall	43	67.85	11.07	15.66	0	95.15

Source: Survey data, 2013.

The overall average percentage score of 43 variables under five categories is 68 with a co-efficient of variation of 16 per cent. It seems that the percentage score on benefits of FOM is more than the overall score, while the self-satisfaction is less than the overall score. The score on self-satisfaction is not only less than the overall score but also its co-efficient of variation is extremely high at 41 per cent; reflecting high dispersion with regard to satisfaction level. Followed by self-satisfaction, the co-efficient of variation of opinion on monitoring of FOM is 32per cent; indicating wide disparity on this variable also.

The overall co-efficient of variation on opinion about front office is 16 per cent and between variables it is in the range of 17 per cent (for benefits) to 41 per cent (for self-satisfaction). This indicates that there is dispersion between GPs with regard to opinion on front office. This is elucidated by looking at the distribution of GPs on the variables (Table 9).

Table 9: Overall Opinion Score

No	Variables	Range of Score				Total
		< 25	25-50	50-75	75-100	
1	Mechanism of Front Office	1.2	0	77.8	21.0	100
2	Benefits of FOM	1.2	3.1	47.5	48.1	100
3	File Management	1.2	8.6	60.5	29.6	100
4	Monitoring of FOM	3.1	16.6	42.0	38.3	100
5	Self-Satisfaction about FOM	10.5	16.0	48.8	24.7	100
	Overall	0.6	1.2	65.40	32.8	100

Source: Survey data, 2013.

The frequency of GPs skewed towards the range of 50 and above, with majority in the score range of 50-75 (Table 9). The exception being benefits of FOM, the frequency of which is equally distributed in the third and fourth quartiles. Almost 98 per cent of the respondents have score of 50 per cent and above (65% in the 50-75 score range and 33 per cent in the 75-100 score range) on the functioning of front office. However, the percentage of respondents for the score on self-satisfaction is not *paripasu* with the

proportion of overall opinion; 11 per cent GPs' score is less than 25 and 16 per cent in the range of 25-50. This hinders a question as to how the proportion on functioning of FOM is on higher score range when the satisfaction level is not to that much? In other words, why are certain respondents not satisfied when the functioning is good? Perhaps the Officials are overburdened for ensuring efficient functioning, but leading to self-dissatisfaction or because while launching the FOM, the 'people' element and their motivational aspects are missing.

6. (F).Opinion about Mechanism of Front Office

Opinion of the respondents regarding the mechanism of FOM is positive on all the seven sub-variables with the exception of one. The opinion on 'all information are providing to public through FO' is distributed more negatively at nearly 50 per cent, followed by 40 per cent positive response (Table 10). This indicates that internal system for functioning of FOM is generally satisfactory, while providing information to public in majority of cases are not satisfactory.

Table 10: Opinion about Mechanism of Front Office

No.	Opinion	-2	-1	0	1	2	Total
1	All applications are receiving through FO	4.9	25.4	12.3	42.0	15.4	100
2	All <i>thapals</i> are receiving through FO	3.7	25.4	8.6	46.3	16.0	100
3	No <i>thapals</i> are distributed without entering in inward	4.9	17.9	11.1	53.1	13.0	100
4	All services can be provided through FO	0.6	9.9	6.8	71.0	11.7	100
5	All Information are providing to public through FO	8.0	41.4	11.1	33.3	6.2	100
6	It is possible to give face to face interaction through FO	2.5	24.7	15.4	51.2	6.2	100
7	All front office activities are recorded in FO dairy	0	13.6	9.8	69.8	6.8	100

Source: Survey Data. [-2] for strongly disagree to [2] for strongly agree.

6. (G). Opinion about Benefits of Front Office

The opinion about the benefits of front office shows positive response in majority of cases (Table 11). However there are few questions on which the negative response is also pronouncing with two-digit that ranges from 10 per cent to 39 per cent. The questions are relating to follow MoP, timely upgradation of Citizen's Charter, reduction of queue length, submission of files with notes, and avoidance of middlemen. Of these, the

first two have negative response by about 40 respondents; indicating that there are GPs need improvement on MoP and upgradation of Citizen's Charter. This calls for rigorous training on MoP for upgradating the knowledge and continuous improvement in service delivery. The upgradation of Citizen's Charter is a mandatory requirement⁹. The commitment of elected representatives and officials and also the vibrancy of citizens will influence the timely upgradation of citizen's charter.

Table 11: Opinion about Benefits of FOM

No.	Opinion about Benefits	-2	-1	0	1	2	Total
1	FO helps to give receipt for all application	0	3.1	8.0	74.7	14.2	100
2	FO reduced queue length	0.6	18.0	11.1	61.7	8.6	100
3	After the introduction of FO, Files are submitted with notes		24.1	18.5	52.5	4.9	100
4	FOM helps the Inspection of all registers by Superiors	1.2	16.0	20.4	55.6	6.8	100
5	No difficulty to follow MOP	5.6	33.3	13.5	43.3	4.3	100
6	No difficulty in assigning FO duty to staff	3.0	16.7	11.8	60.5	8.0	100
7	Timely Updation of citizen charter is possible	1.9	35.8	16.0	43.2	3.1	100
8	All application forms can be supplied through front office		8.0	9.2	71.7	11.1	100
9	FO reduced entry of public inside the main office	1.9	7.4	9.2	71.0	10.5	100
10	FO helps to minimizes waiting time		9.3	9.8	73.5	7.4	100

Cont....

11	FO Ensures equity	1.2	9.3	13.0	68.5	8.0	100
12	FO helps to Provides timely service	0.6	7.4	11.7	73.5	6.8	100
13	FOM Provides all services as per Citizen Charter	0	21.0	23.2	51.9	4.9	100
14	Front office avoided middlemen	3.1	17.3	12.3	61.7	5.6	100
15	Front office reduced corruption	9.9	9.3	71.1	8.0	0.6	100
16	Front office increased efficiency	0	8.0	10.6	72.8	8.6	100
17	Front office ensure right to service		4.9	10.6	75.9	8.6	100
18	FO Increased confidence in Panchayat		9.9	14.2	67.9	8.0	100
19	FO provides equal consideration for all applications	1.2	11.7	11.8	64.2	11.1	100

Source: Survey data. [-2] for strongly disagree to [2] for strongly agree.

6. (H). File Management

The file management is pivotal in efficient functioning of any institution. This was well recognised in the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act that all records shall be properly maintained and managed. This is generally not found satisfactory in the GPs studied. The record room facility is the crux of the file management, but 30 per cent of the GPs have no record room (Table 12). The Govt. Order on FOM order insist for the distribution of *thapals* and applications on the same day, but 66 per cent of GPs only are adhering to this. It is evident that only 4 per cent GPs fully updated the record rooms and only 7 per cent of GPs have availability of previous records. The non-availability of previous records and lack of record room facility might be badly affecting the file management system of GPs.

Table 12: Opinion about File Management

No.	Opinion About	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
1	Distribution of thapals to concerned sections	1.2	0	1.9	6.2	24.7	66.0	100
2	Availability of previous records	1.9	1.9	22.2	19.7	47.5	6.8	100
3	Completeness of available records	1.9	0	19.1	25.9	46.3	6.8	100
4	Record room facility	1.2	30.2	3.7	40.2	21.0	3.7	100

Source: Survey Data.

The values zero to five indicates the degree of timely service; eg. For distribution of Tapals, value [0] indicates 'no opinion', [1] for 'no time schedule', [2] for 'in a week', [3] for 'after two days', [4] for 'next day', and [5] for 'same day'.

6. (I). Monitoring System

The efficiency and sustainability of any management system depends upon the systematic and continuous monitoring. In view of this, the FOM envisages a Monitoring Committee comprising of President as Chairperson, Secretary as Convener, and the Standing Committee Chairpersons as members (Government of Kerala, 2009). Table 13 reveals that only 17 per cent of GPs studied have convened Monitoring Committee meetings in every month. However 33 per cent of GPs convene staff meetings in every month. This indicates the fact that the majority of GPs are not serious on Monitoring Committee of FOM. This is further elucidated by the data that 19 per cent of GPs convened no meetings and 19 per cent convened only few meetings. It is interesting to note that 48 per cent of the sample GPs discussed about front office.

Table 13: Opinion about Monitoring System

No.	Opinion about	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
1	Staff Meeting	1.2	3.7	17.3	29.6	14.8	33.3	100
2	Discussion of FO	1.2	3.1	11.1	21.6	14.8	48.1	100
3	Monitoring committee meeting	1.2	19.1	19.1	29.6	13.6	17.3	100

Source: Survey Data.

[0] no opinion, [1] indicates no meetings, [2] few meetings, [3] some times, [4] most of the month, and [5] meetings in every month.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of the data collected from the respondents (Secretaries) and also field verification made in selected GPs reveals that the functioning of FOM is not satisfactory.



The scores given on various components of FOM by the respondents themselves are scattered widely; reflecting the high variations in physical facilities. It is surprising to note that there is more variation with respect to physical facilities to the public than the physical facilities for officials. Arranging facilities on information related aspects is also least bothered by many of the GPs. The GPs are consciously neglect the fact that we are living in information era with urge for transparency and accountability for which information is essential. The views of the respondents gathered from the study depict a contradiction - majority expresses the need for FOM but feels it as burden. The missing of spirit behind the system is very much evident from this contradicting view. Perhaps the FOM is conceived as a system to keep distance from people. If we can apply the TQM elements like Citizen focus, Top management commitment, Involvement of officials and people, Process approach, Systems approach to management, Continuous improvement, Fact-based decision making, and Mutually beneficial transferred institution relationship, the LSGIs can achieve good governance without much sprain!

Notes:-

1. "Big Bang" reforms are defined as comprehensive decentralization reforms that occur over a short time, comprehensive means, fiscal decentralization, administrative decentralization and political decentralization. (Manor, James 1999).
2. Three F's in decentralization in Kerala stands for Funds, Function and Functionaries.
3. People's Plan Campaign (PPC), held in 1996 in Kerala State, was a remarkable experiment in decentralisation of powers to local governments with focus on local planning. The "Janakeeya soothranam" (People's Plan Campaign) was launched to

- make the people better involve in the local planning.
4. Guideline for Implementing Front Office Mechanism in Grama Panchayats, G.O (MS) 123/ 2009/ LSGD, Thiruvananthapuram dated 02/07/ 2009.
 5. See section 6 and 8 of G.O (M.S) 123/2009/LSGD. There are 8 types of Boards suggested to be displayed (4 essential and 4 desirable). The physical facilities are categorized into two – facilities for public and facilities for officials; the former comprised of 14 (9 essential and 5 desirable) and the latter comprised of 12. However these are further split up by the Researcher as Information Boards 12 (8 essential and 4 desirable), Physical facilities to public 15 (10 essential and 5 desirable), and facilities to officials 19.
 6. As per G.O (M.S) No. 123/2009, four out of eight components of information boards and nine out of 14 components of physical facilities are suggested as essential and the rest as desirable.
 7. SEVATTOM denotes give Uttam Seva to public means the services provided by the government to citizen must have quality. SEVATTOM guideline issued by the Government of India during 2007 to ensure quality services to citizens.
 8. The Researcher has further split one of the indicators [item 4] into two; the logic being it comprised of two components seating facilities and writing desk, while some of the GPs may have only one of the facilities.
 9. Section 272A (2) of KPRA, 1994, and KPR Citizen Charter Preparation Rules 2004 (Format includes Details of services, conditions to be fulfilled, time limit for the service).

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