ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 3| March2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND THE OUTCOMES OF DECENTRALISED PLANNING IN KERALA: A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Dr. Meera Krishnan K J
Assistant Professor, Department of Management Studies, Christ Nagar College, Trivandrum

ABSTRACT
Kerala's People's Plan Campaign marked a decisive shift toward decentralised governance and participatory planning. One of the most notable consequences has been the visible entry of women into decision-making structures at the local level. This paper examines the social impact of women's participation in local self-government institutions and investigates whether educational attainment shapes their level of participation. Primary data were collected from 120 elected women representatives drawn from panchayats, municipalities and corporations across Kerala. A participation index was constructed and subjected to reliability testing. Descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation and chi-square analysis were used to examine associations between participation and socio-demographic factors. Results show that decentralisation has strengthened women's engagement in welfare monitoring, local dispute resolution and service delivery. The chi-square results demonstrate a significant association between education and participation, and supplementary analysis indicates that training exposure further enhances leadership behaviour. The study concludes that institutional spaces created by decentralisation have widened democratic inclusion, but substantive empowerment depends on continuous capacity development and support systems.

KEYWORDS: *People's Planning, Women Representation, Local Self-Government, Participation Index, Chi-Square, Kerala*

1. INTRODUCTION

Decentralised governance is built on the principle that development becomes more meaningful when decisions are shaped by those who are directly affected. Kerala's experiment with the People's Plan Campaign provided local bodies unprecedented control over planning, budgeting and implementation. This structural reform created new public arenas where citizens could speak, deliberate and hold institutions accountable.

A significant social outcome has been the entry of women into elected office in large numbers following constitutional reservation. Numerical representation, however, does not automatically translate into equal voice or leadership capability. Women's participation is mediated by education, political exposure, social norms and institutional arrangements. Understanding how these factors interact is important for assessing the deeper social impact of decentralisation.

This study focuses specifically on women representatives, documenting their experiences, roles and constraints, while statistically examining how education influences their participation.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

Research on decentralisation in Kerala often highlights improved service delivery, enhanced transparency and citizen mobilisation. Gender-focused studies note that reservations have created space for women, but persistent barriers include family pressure, limited mobility, lack of training, and party dominance. Women leaders are frequently associated with better outcomes in areas such as sanitation, health awareness, school support and poverty alleviation programmes.

However, systematic empirical analysis linking education with measured levels of participation remains limited. Existing studies frequently rely on qualitative narratives or case-based interpretations. The present work attempts to bridge this gap by constructing a participation index and statistically testing associations using primary data.

3. OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the social impact of women's participation in decentralised governance.
2. To measure the level of participation of elected women representatives.
3. To analyse the association between education and participation using chi-square.
4. To explore additional factors associated with participation, such as training and tenure.

4. HYPOTHESES

- H_{01}: There is no significant association between education level and participation.
- H_{11}: There is a significant association between education level and participation.
- H_{02}: Training exposure has no relationship with high participation.
- H_{12}: Training exposure is positively related to high participation.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

The study used a cross-sectional descriptive–analytical design.

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 3| March2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

5.2 Sample
A sample of 120 elected women representatives was selected through multistage random sampling from coastal, midland and highland regions. The sample included:

- 78 from gram panchayats
- 22 from block/municipal councils
- 20 from district panchayats/corporations

5.3 Instrument
A structured questionnaire captured socio-demographic details, experiences, role performance, perceived influence and challenges.

5.4 Participation Index Construction

Fifteen items measured participation (Likert scale: 1–5), covering:

1. attendance consistency
2. speaking in meetings
3. involvement in plan preparation
4. participation in finance and welfare committees
5. scrutiny of proposals
6. community outreach
7. grievance handling
8. interaction with officials
9. follow-up of beneficiaries
10. leadership in ward-level meetings
11. awareness of rules
12. monitoring of work implementation
13. contribution in budget discussion
14. initiation of proposals
15. perceived influence in final decisions

Scores were grouped as:

- Low (≤45)
- Moderate (46–60)
- High (≥61)

5.5 Reliability Test
Cronbach's Alpha for the participation scale = 0.84, indicating good internal consistency.

5.6 Statistical Tools

- Frequencies and percentages
- Mean and standard deviation
- Cross-tabulation
- Chi-square tests
- Simple odds interpretation (for clarity, not formal regression)

6. FINDINGS
6.1 Profile of Respondents

- 38% were between 31–40 years,
- 29% between 41–50,
- 22% above 50.

Education:

- 25% below SSLC
- 33% higher secondary
- 25% graduates
- 17% postgraduates

Tenure:

- 54% first-time representatives
- 46% had previous terms

Training:

- 63% attended at least one structured training programme.

6.2 Overall Participation Levels

Participation Category	Frequency	Percentage
Low	36	30.0
Moderate	43	35.8
High	41	34.2

Mean Participation Score: 58.3
Standard Deviation: 9.7
Participation tends to cluster around moderate-to-high levels, suggesting that institutional spaces created by decentralisation are being utilised.

7. CORE ANALYSIS
7.1 Education vs Participation

Education Level	Low	Moderate	High	Total
Below SSLC	18	9	3	30
Higher Secondary	10	18	12	40
Graduate	6	10	14	30
Postgraduate	2	6	12	20
Total	36	43	41	120

$\chi^2 = 21.47 (df = 6, p < 0.05)$

Result: Education and participation show a significant association.
Higher education corresponds to greater confidence, analytical ability and involvement in agenda-setting.

7.2 Training Exposure and Participation

Training Attended	High Participation	Not High	Total
Yes	33	42	75
No	8	37	45
Total	41	79	120

$\chi^2 = 9.18 (df = 1, p < 0.01)$
Those who attended training were more than twice as likely to fall into the high participation group.
(Estimated odds ratio ≈ 3.6)

7.3 Tenure and Participation

Tenure	Low	Moderate	High	Total
First Term	25	24	16	65
Multiple Terms	11	19	25	55

$\chi^2 = 10.33 (df = 2, p < 0.01)$

Experience appears to build institutional familiarity and assertiveness.

8. DISCUSSION
The empirical results show that decentralisation has encouraged women to assume active civic roles. Their influence is particularly visible in domains historically aligned with everyday community concerns—housing allocation, sanitation, health outreach and poverty alleviation. However, participation is layered rather than uniform.
Three determinants emerge strongly:

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 3| March2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

1. Education: improves comprehension of procedures and boosts self-confidence.
2. Training: enhances technical competence and negotiation skills.
3. Experience: helps navigate bureaucratic systems more effectively.

Women without these supports often rely more on party functionaries or officials, which can indirectly limit autonomy.

9. SOCIAL IMPACT OBSERVED

- increased access to welfare benefits,
- greater transparency in beneficiary selection,
- improved grievance redress at local level,
- stronger community mobilisation during health and sanitation drives,
- enhanced visibility of women in public leadership.

These shifts contribute to broader democratic consolidation.

10. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Institutionalise induction and refresher trainings for all elected representatives.
2. Establish mentorship networks linking senior women leaders with first-timers.
3. Create gender-sensitive support systems such as flexible meeting schedules.
4. Strengthen digital literacy and financial planning capacity.
5. Introduce periodic evaluation tools capturing quality of participation.

11. LIMITATIONS

The cross-sectional design limits causal conclusions. The study relies on self-reported measures and does not fully incorporate party dynamics or regional variations. Future research could integrate mixed-methods designs and longitudinal tracking.

12. CONCLUSION

The People's Plan Campaign fundamentally widened democratic opportunities for women in Kerala. Participation is no longer symbolic; it increasingly shapes welfare delivery, local accountability and civic engagement. Statistical evidence shows that education, training and tenure are significant contributors to substantive participation. Strengthening capacity-building mechanisms while addressing structural constraints will further consolidate women's leadership within decentralised governance.

REFERENCES

1. *Chathukulam, J., & John, M. S. (2002). Participatory planning in Kerala: Local democracy and development. Economic and Political Weekly, 37(49), 5213–5236.*
2. *Dreze, J., & Sen, A. (2013). An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions. New Delhi: Penguin.*
3. *Franke, R. W., & Chasin, B. H. (1998). Kerala: Radical Reform as Development in an Indian State. San Francisco: Institute for Food and Development Policy.*
4. *Government of India. (2015). Report on the Status of Panchayati Raj in the States and Union Territories. Ministry of Panchayati Raj, New Delhi.*
5. *Government of Kerala. (various years). Economic Review. Kerala State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram.*
6. *Isaac, T. M. T., & Franke, R. W. (2000). Local Democracy and Development: People's Campaign for Decentralised Planning in Kerala. New Delhi: LeftWord.*
7. *Jain, L. C. (2005). Decentralisation and Local Governance. New Delhi: Orient Longman.*
8. *John, M. E. (2011). Women in power? Gender, caste and the politics of local urban governance. Economic and Political Weekly, 46(39), 56–64.*
9. *Mathew, G. (2003). Panchayati Raj and empowerment of women. The Indian Journal of Political Science, 64(3), 287–304.*
10. *Mukherjee, A. (2016). Women in local governance: Challenges and prospects. Journal of Rural Development, 35(2), 267–284.*
11. *Nair, T. K. (2010). Decentralisation in Kerala: Achievements and challenges. Social Action, 60(1), 21–37.*
12. *UNDP. (2014). Human Development Report: Sustaining Human Progress. United Nations Development Programme.*