

**STRENGTHENING LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENTS IN KERALA
THROUGH
INGENIOUS USE OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION
TECHNOLOGIES**



A CASE STUDY

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1. Executive Summary

Kerala state is undoubtedly the fore runner among the Indian States in building up new and innovative systems and methods for decentralisation and local democracy. It is more than a decade, since the historic constitutional amendments, declaring local governments as a statutory third stratum of governments was approved by the Indian Parliament. Kerala was first among the Indian States to take full advantage of the opportunities opened up by adopting a “big bang” approach to democratic decentralisation. *Vijayalakshmi, V (2003)*. The strategy was to devolve more than a quarter of the State’s development budget to local governmentsⁱ and then learn by doingⁱⁱ.

The necessary conditions for decentralisation had been substantially laid down in the state with the great strides made in literacy, especially that of women, and in the process of surmounting caste and class barriers through social reform movements, land reforms, the wide public distribution of essential commodities through fair price shops and a host of public action measures. Decentralisation in Kerala was looked upon as a practical measure for administrative reforms to improve delivery of public services sensitive to the local needs. *Isaac, Thomas, T.M (2000), Vijayanand, S.M (2001)*. The achievements of Kerala in decentralisation have been acknowledged, with the Government of India, declaring that the Kerala State has the best Panchayati Raj System in the country for which the first ever national award for decentralisation was awarded to the stateⁱⁱⁱ.

The decentralisation experiments in Kerala had been a massive action research programme. Information Kerala Mission (IKM)^{iv} a sequel to it was grown from within this mass campaign with the participation of multiple stakeholders consisting of academicians, local government leaders, planners, professionals, administrators, development practitioners and voluntary workers.

The object of the mission was to computerise all local governments in the state, which now counts to 1223. This holistic and human centred Information Communication Technology project aimed at strengthening decentralised planning and local democracy through good governance, improved service delivery, sharing of best practices and building up community knowledge bases for decentralised planning and local area development. Participatory software development, developing learner centred, locale specific training and handholding strategies, and networking of local level small and medium enterprises for employment generation and sustenance are components of the project. Today, the IKM provides the much required database support for better decision making in development projects, offers improved public services and responsive local administration and imparts necessary skills to the community to use Information Communication Technologies (ICT) for transparency, participation and judicious decision-making in several local governments.