PERFORMANCE OF ISO CERTIFIED GRAM PANCHAYAT - A CASE STUDY ON PAPPARAMBAKKAM GRAM PANCHAYAT IN TAMIL NADU

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Abstract

Good governance intends protection of human rights, maintaining rule of law, strengthening of democracy, promoting transparency and improving the capacity of administration. The responsiveness of the government and its institutions to the needs and aspirations of the people and inclusive development are imperative to good governance and participatory democracy. It focuses on the equality among people, right to participate in political developmental decision making and to live in dignity. Panchayat Raj is a system which paves ways and means towards achieving good governance. In the Country few panchayats were obtained ISO certification focusing on bringing e-office which will gradually get transformed into online administration through paperless communication. The study documented the initiatives and effects of ISO certification on the services delivery in Papparambakkam Village Panchayat in Tamil Nadu.

I. INTRODUCTION

Good governance intends protection of human rights, maintaining rule of law, strengthening of democracy, promoting transparency and improving the capacity of administration. The responsiveness of the government and its institutions to the needs and aspirations of the people and inclusive development are imperative to good governance and participatory democracy. It focuses on the equality among people, right to participate in political developmental decision making and to live in dignity. Panchayat Raj is a system which paves ways and means towards achieving good governance. Panchayats are meant to be autonomous institutions of Local Self-Government however they are treated as subordinate institutions. It is found wide variations in devolution of powers to the panchayats across the states in India

As per the 73rd amendment, 29 subjects were earmarked under the Eleventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution. It is mandate that the state government has to devolve functions, functionaries and funds to the Panchayati Raj Institutions for fair planning and implementation of various welfare
and development schemes pertaining to the gram panchayat. Few states have made commendable efforts in encouraging the panchayats to function effectively by devolving powers and funds as per the provisions in the act.

In Tamil Nadu few panchayats obtained ISO certification focusing on bringing e-office which will gradually get transformed into on-line administration through paperless communication. Computerization of records for quick references and online correspondences are part of the ISO acquisition. The people are the most important beneficiaries as addressing of grievances redressal and receiving essential services as quick as possible even without physical presence. The study documented the initiatives and effects of ISO certification on the services delivery in Papparambakkam Village Panchayat in Tamil Nadu. The Papparambakkam gram panchayat received ISO certification on its own efforts through the effective leadership of a woman President of the village panchayat with the cooperation of the people. In the case of Chotanikkara gram panchayat, the state Department of Local Self-Government has announced monetary support for bringing at least 100 panchayats under the ISO standard with the aim of creating ‘less-paper office’. Therefore, studying the service delivery of self-motivated and incentive motivated gram panchayats to understand the performance in delivery of development works after the ISO certification will bring interesting outcome for wider dissemination.

II. OBJECTIVES
1) To study the process and strategies followed to achieve ISO certification
2) To analyze the performance of Panchayat in delivery of basic services after ISO certification
3) To identify the strategies of peoples mobilization for participatory decision making.
4) To identify the factors contributed for the success and sustainability of performance

Profile of the Gram Panchayat
Papparambakkam is a panchayat located in Kadambathur block, Thiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu. It is located 8 KM towards south from district headquarter and 49 KM from state capital Chennai. The GP is spread over in 6.25 Square Kilometers having 329 households with the population of 1028, including 268 Scheduled Castes. It has two Government Schools and an Anganwadi Center, Noon Meal Center, Primary Health Centre and a Sub Center. This Gram Panchayat has 6 wards covering 5 hamlets. It made adequate arrangements to fulfill the supply of adequate drinking water as well as water for irrigation. It has a traditional water bodies which serves as a source of water. The drinking water supply is done through 5 OHTs, 12 mini portable tanks and 4 hand pumps. Water is distributed in 65 stand posts. The entire panchayat has 125 CFL bulbs and 10 solar lights. The habitations of the panchayat are well connected internally and externally with 16 gravel roads, 13 concrete roads, 6 metal roads and 15 mud roads. It also has supporting social infrastructures - 2 play grounds, 2 libraries, and one community hall to each habitations, Sanitary Complex, SHG training centre, PDS centre, veterinary hospital and walking lawn with water pool with effective use by the people.

The corporate companies having ISO certification located in this panchayat motivated the President to get the international standard certification for her panchayat. She fulfilled the distribution of quality service delivery, conduct of periodical meeting with adequate quorum, quick redressal of citizen’s grievances and
computerizations of all data and documents with up-to-date on-line uploading, etc. Through this effective process, the Gram Panchayat has got an international standard certification in the year 2012 with the validity up to 2015. Again renewal of ISO 9001:2008 was done by December 2015 for another 3 years i.e. up to the year 2018.

Awards and Recognition

In appreciation of the good works by the panchayat the state and central government have given number of awards. It received four awards. In addition, the president has also received awards from private institutions in recognition of her efforts. Nirmal Gram Puraskar by the President of India (2011), Abolition of Un-touchability Award (2013), Zero Plastic Village Award (2013-14), Clean Village Campaign Award (2014) by the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu are some of the worth mentioning awards received by the panchayat.

Performance and Functions of the GP after ISO Certification

The President of the Gram Panchayat (GP) has been assisted by the Panchayat Secretary and six ward members in all the achievements of the panchayat. The office records are well maintained by the GP. The works are delivered as per the plan without any willful delay. The President and members were reelected to a second term, which enabled them to contribute more for further delivery of services in better, since they are more experienced and acquainted with the functioning of the GP; it received strong support from the people for its all innovative efforts and appropriate decisions. The district officials appreciated the transparent administration and accountable practices of the panchayat.

- Panchayat Meetings: Panchayat conducts periodical meetings and all the members including women attended without fail. The meetings serve as important platform for discussion of local issues, participatory decision making, approval and verification of progress of various schemes, etc. In general, the meetings are organised on the first Wednesday of every month and minutes are circulated among the members. Special meetings are also organised subject to the emergency need with adequate prior intimation by the President. Till today planned meetings are organised without any cancellation or postponement. Therefore, the people have positive attitude towards participatory democracy.

- Gram Sabha: The Panchayat conducts Gram Sabha as per the scheduled dates with vigor and enthusiasm with adequate quorum. During gram sabha meeting, people do participate in social audit, discussion of social issues, creating of awareness and planning for the panchayat development works. The standing committees have been formed and meet as per the need. Local officials also participate and share their views and submit work progress for review by the people. The annual plans and budgets are presented in the Gram Sabha and incorporate the feedbacks. Well appreciable initiatives were taken by the panchayat for mobilization of financial resources. The Gram Sabha also puts better efforts to identify shelves of projects under the MGNREGS. The beneficiaries selection of all the centrally and state sponsored schemes were done at gram sabha.

- Standing Committees: Standing committees were formed for different subjects namely Education, Watershed, Water and Sanitation, Development of the panchayat and quality management. Standing committee meetings are organised according to the need. Quality
management committee was specially formed as ISO pre-requisite, specially to maintain the quality in service delivery and proper maintenance of records.

- Planning and Budget: The annual plan of the village panchayat has been prepared by discussing with various stakeholders, CBOs, NGOs and present in the Gram Sabha for approval. The needs and priorities of the people were identified by the gram sabha through better interaction. The Village Development Committee helps in preparing the annual plan & budget.

- Income Generation: Only taxes are the source of income to the panchayat, house tax, water tax and property tax are collected 100 percent. Four corporate companies are located in the panchayat extends financial assistance under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which are utilized for the development of the panchayat.

- Implementation of schemes: The Gram Panchayat has successfully implemented all the schemes allotted by both the central and state governments and utilized the 100% funds allocated under each scheme within the stipulated time. All the houseless Scheduled Caste people have got patta land on their own name and facilitated for house construction. The benefits under each scheme were reached the needy people without any diversion.

- Educational Improvement: The children have to walk more than 8KMs for secondary schooling which leads to high dropout especially among girl children after primary education. To improve the education, the panchayat made tremendous efforts and succeeded in bringing a Secondary School in the panchayat which motivated many parents to encourage their children to continue secondary education. The panchayat provided land and adequate infrastructures like additional class rooms, supply of drinking water, sanitation facilities and play ground through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). This effort was highly appreciated by the parents and children of the panchayat.

- Development of Animal Husbandry: Livestocks are the important supplementary source of livelihood in the panchayat. Due to non-availability of veterinary clinic, people have to take their animals to faraway places which resulted in loss of livestock in many occasions and affected the livelihood status severely. With the intervention of the panchayat along with the Animal Husbandry Department established a veterinary centre with full time doctor. This initiative created impact on the economic conditions of the people which developed very good rapport between the panchayat and people.

- Effective functioning of Health Centre: In the series development efforts, the panchayat established fully equipped Health Sub-Centre in the village. Regular visit of a full time doctor and a nurse helped the village patients in getting timely treatment. Periodical check on the health status and assured ANM and NNM services boosted the village people's knowledge on the preventive and curative health care.

- Public Distribution System (PDS): The Public Distribution System is functioning efficiently under the guidance and leadership of the elected representatives of the panchayat. The unique features of the system are allotment of PDS cards based on the entitlement were demarcated properly; different type of consumers were given different time frame to access the services. It helps to regularize the
services and avoid the unnecessary conflicts among the people and between the distributors. Proper dissemination of information on the available commodities and date of distribution have been maintained properly.

- Better delivery of Civic functions: A number of innovative ideas of the panchayat were transformed into action in the villages for the purpose of uplifting the rural community. Series of schemes implemented by the panchayat on its own efforts, which are, supply of safe drinking water, street lighting to all the villages, water harvesting structures to all the households and government buildings, etc. Periodical campaign on the environment issues especially, safe disposal of wastes and successfully implemented the solid waste management with an objective to achieve plastic free panchayat.

- Accountability and Transparency: Another important achievement in the efficient administration is transparency, for which all the records are in the process of computerization. GP accounts are maintained in the prescribed format, updated and authenticated and have been placed before the Gram Sabha for its reference. High level of transparency and accountability maintained by the Panchayat has reduced the number of RTI applications and appropriately addressed the grievances. GP maintains 31 types of records which have been regularly updated for which it received the PEAIS award.

- Efforts on Capacity Building: The President attended a number of training programmes in NIRD and SIRD on the subjects’ relevance like PRIs roles and responsibilities in Rural Development. The ward members of the panchayat were also attended training programmes in SIRD and RIRD which improved the functional ability of the panchayat.

- People Participation: Various initiatives have been taken to strengthen the community and CBOs within the panchayat. SHGs Panchayat level Federation was given an office building with required amenities like water, electricity and sanitary facilities which were effectively utilized and appreciated by the members of Self-Help Groups in the region. Thus, the GP has been making better initiatives to mobilize and empower the community, which facilitated the democratic participation of the people in democratic decision making. It helped the public, aware of their rights and provisions under various schemes. The people, irrespective of rich and poor, men and women educated even illiterates were encouraged to express their views on designing of various development and welfare projects and also participatory decision making on addressing the problems encountered on the lives of the people.

- Special Initiatives: The GP has organised a number of awareness campaigns on various issues such as protection against sexual abuses, causes of spread of HIV/AIDS, consequences of alcoholism and drug addiction, safety and security of women, in collaboration with local NGOs and activists.

- Development programmes: The panchayat implements various SSP and CSS, namely Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme, Indira AwasYojana, National Rural Health Mission, National Social Assistance programme, Rashtriya Krishi Vigyan Kendra, PMGSY, National Social Assistance Programme, Scholarships to School Students, Tamil Nadu Village Habitation Improvement Scheme (THAI),
Chief Minister Solar Powered Green House Scheme (CMSPGHS), Energisation of Street Lights with Solar Energy, Comprehensive School Infrastructure Development Scheme (CSIDS), Self Sufficiency Scheme (SSS), Rural Buildings Maintenance and Renovation Scheme (RBMRS), Rural Infrastructure Scheme (RIS), Solid Waste Management System (SWMS), Member of Legislative Assembly Constituency Development Scheme (MLACDS), Socio - Economic Development Programme (SEDP), Clean Village Campaign, Repair and Renovation of Anganwadi Centers and Renovation of Integrated Sanitary Complex for Women

Special Initiatives by the panchayat

- Frequent Gram Sabha meetings in different locations: Gram Sabha meetings are conducted periodically and frequently. The meetings are conducted in different habitations on rotation to ensure more people participation from all villages. It resulted in improved attendance at each meeting and increased awareness level among the public about the functions of the Panchayat.

- Enabling president and Ward Member Relationship: The president of the GP and ward members are maintaining cordial relationship among them which helps in fruitful decision making and better delivery of services. The president is aware of the needs and situation of different wards strengths and limitations. GP president puts personal attention on the issues presented by the individuals and makes immediate actions to resolve. Regular interactions play as a feedback mechanism for understanding the issues better and react appropriately.

- Planning and Prioritization of works: Selection of works and allocation of funds have been decided based on the urgency and priority needs of each ward with common consensus by the members of the gram sabha.

- Active Media Relationship: The GP administration maintains amicable relationship with the local journalists which helps in wide coverage and dissemination of activities and achievements, which further helps in resource mobilization, community support and government appreciation.

- Support from District Administration: The GP enjoys immense support with the block and district administration. Officials at all levels extend active support in better functioning of the GP. Officials regularly involve in the performance of the GP in terms of planning and execution of the schemes.

- Improving the sanitation condition of the Panchayat: As recognition, the Gram Panchayat was awarded Nirmal Gram Puraskar in the year 2012 for construction of 329 individual household toilets and made people to use. Being a resident of the Panchayat, the president noticed the practice of open defecation, especially those belonging to poorer economic groups. A strong motivation to end this practice led her to work hard on promoting sanitation facilities in the GP. To fulfill this objective, awareness campaigns were organized in different places of the GP for better sanitation. Later School-children were targeted and used as a medium of creating awareness and pursuing their parents to take toilet construction on priority basis. In order to facilitate the construction of toilets, the GP assisted the interested households for obtaining loans with government subsidy from banks. The GP also accessed Non-Government Organisation (NGOs) and corporate agencies for assistance in building toilets and improve
the sanitation in the panchayat. Panchayat also helped in building of public complexes in the localities where the inhabitants found difficult to access the matching grant or subsidy. This effort created very good impact on elimination of open defecation.

- The GP has taken further steps in improving the sanitary conditions by establishing a Solid Waste Management Plant. It made arrangements for collection and segregation of waste from the households. The part time sanitary workers hired by the GP assist in this collection process and waste materials were dumped in a solid waste management plant established for the purpose.

III. CONCLUSION

The ISO 9001:2008 specifies requirements for a quality management system where an organization needs to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide product that meets customer and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements, and aims to enhance customer satisfaction through the effective application of the system, including processes for continual improvement of the system and the assurance of conformity to customer and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements. As it is mentioned the ISO certification is not directly aiming to mention the services of different organisations, it puts common yardsticks to measure the standard operating procedures. But, for obtaining this certification each organization has to put enormous efforts, innovative approaches and strategies to improve the performance level ultimately to satisfy the consumers at the maximum. The panchayats selected for the study made maximum effort to deliver basic services to satisfy the needs of the people living in the panchayats. The direct purpose of obtaining ISO certification by the panchayats was to get better name and fame among the people as well as state and central governments. This endeavours enable the panchayats to maintain transparency and accountability through participatory process by establishing a number of community based institutions and empowered them to act with autonomy and responsibility.

In the case of the Pappambakkam Gram Panchayat, the panchayat President’s efficient leadership and personal motivation played major role in obtaining the ISO certification without any compulsion from any higher level direction or inducement. The absence of motivation or individual leadership is a major drawback which will hurdle the process of quality management in the future. Overall performances of the ISO certified panchayats have improved the performance level in all aspects of quality management, transparency in administration, accountability in documentation, appropriate grievances redressal and timely delivery of services. Therefore the state government has to make appropriate strategies to encourage the elected representatives at various levels of PRIs to achieve quality improvement in the services delivery and obtained ISO certification to fulfil the needs of the local community.