

Determinants of Quality Participation of Elected Gram Panchayat Representatives' in Their Dynamic Involvement in the Functioning of Women Component Plan at Gram Panchayat in Kerala

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Abstract

The local government (LG) initiative is essential to empowering women. The Women Component Plan (WCP) is one such initiative introduced by the Government of Kerala in 1996 at the local level to achieve gender equality and mainstreaming. While a mandatory budgetary share for WCP in the LG is imperative for the journey towards women's development and inclusive growth, the dynamic role of elected Gram Panchayat representatives (EGPRs) in the women's development exercise is also a key factor. The present study seeks to identify the determinants of quality involvement of EGPRs at different stages of WCP in selected GPs in Kerala, which represent the highest, average, and lowest utilisation of GP funds during the 12th five-year plan period. The study is carried out based on information gathered from primary and secondary sources. The present study addresses the following queries: the socio-economic conditions and political-institutional environment of elected representatives; determinants and the knowledge status of EGPRs on WCP during the terms of office 2010-15 and 2015-20; determinants and the rate of involvement of EGPRs in the functioning of WCP at GPs in Kerala. The study identifies several key areas that require immediate attention at the grassroots and policy levels.

Keywords: Elected Gram Panchayat Representatives, Kerala, Local Government, Women Component Plan.

Introduction

A vibrant local government (LG) is a vital part of rural development. Its elementary functions are executing development plans, mobilising, and using local assets (1). Local representatives perform as a connecting element in the implementation of development schemes (2). The vital components of successful local development (LD) schemes are recognised as social inclusion, involvement, a supportive environment, and sustainability (3). Local leaders who represent their communities are among the primary change-makers in rural development projects. They must participate in every stage of any rural development project to achieve optimal results. Efficient leadership is a prerequisite for meeting beneficiaries' requirements to sustain projects (4). The post-independence period entrusted LG with the role of facilitating the expansion of the local economy in India (5). The LG is referred to as local

self-government in India (6). The idea of LG is incorporated in Article 40 of the Indian Constitution (7). In India, the inclusion of women representatives in LG was ensured by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1993, which reserved 33% of seats for women in rural LG. Following the 73rd Amendment Act, the Kerala Legislature passed the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994, to guarantee 33% reservation for women in rural LG in the state (8, 9). Democratic decentralisation through LGs to usher in socio-economic transformation among marginalised women in Kerala has been accepted as state policy. The government of Kerala launched the Women Component Plan (WCP) in 1996 at the local level to achieve gender equality and gender mainstreaming by addressing the specific needs of rural women. WCP provides exclusive space for women in the Gram Panchayat (GP) through a mandatory

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allocation of at least 10 percent of the development fund to women-specific schemes.

The incorporation of WCP as an essential part of grassroots planning is one of the significant features of Kerala's decentralised planning, and this is unmatched in the country. It is through the WCP that women's development becomes a priority and the goal of every GP for the first time at the grassroots level in Kerala. WCP targets a tectonic shift in nature and kind of women's development projects in GPs by promoting the planning and implementation of development projects that challenge traditional gender stereotypes about women (10, 11). Kerala revolutionised the concept of local planning by envisaging greater women's participation through 50% reservation in LG bodies and by giving preference to projects that address strategic gender needs by institutionalising WCP (12, 13).

The elected Gram Panchayat representatives (EGPRs) are accountable for effectively participating in local bodies as the voice of the voiceless through deliberative democracy, especially for impoverished rural women (9). LG elected officials are more responsible for the progress of their respective localities and the utilisation of local funds. However, the capacity to influence socio-economic outcomes is limited, as LGs have only limited potential to deliver basic amenities (14-16). The effective functioning of LG at the grassroots level has attracted attention in political theory due to its characteristics, including autonomy, efficiency, manageability, and accountability (17). LG also aims to ensure the efficient and effective distribution of "public goods and services" at the grassroots level (18, 19). Endogenous development theories highlight the significance of local institutions in the LD process. It provides a novel perspective on the relevance of local institutions in generating the essential requirements for local area development, as well as the local institutional structure and its functioning, which play a vital role in the development of a locality (20-22).

Decentralisation is the most effective way to implement LG efficiently. Decentralised LG facilitates the hearing of the vulnerable, particularly women, and enables them to participate in prioritising their specific needs and selecting what they need (23). Moreover, it envisages justice and equity in the distribution of

funds and permits local people to participate in local planning. It follows a "bottom to top" approach in the identification, design, framing, planning, and implementation of policies and projects (24-26). The uniqueness of decentralised planning in Kerala is that local-level planning involves greater participation by people (8, 9). EGPRs should primarily protect national and local interests, as they represent their constituents and lead the country (27-29). Effective representation depends on both the representative's understanding of their role and the active performance of their responsibilities (30). However, the degree of participation of elected representatives comprises different elements such as age, education, social status, economic status, social norms, customs, religious beliefs, and place of the elected representatives. The success of a representative is determined by their ability to translate heterogeneous interests into a homogenous outcome (27, 31, 32).

This study is grounded in democratic decentralisation, participatory governance, representative theory, and endogenous development. Democratic decentralisation argues that devolving powers to LGs improves responsiveness and accountability (24, 33). Kerala's decentralised planning and the WCP provide institutional space for EGPRs to participate in LD. Participatory governance emphasises active involvement of local actors in decision-making (34, 35). Representative theory views EGPRs as agents responsible for addressing women's development needs through the WCP (27). Endogenous development theory highlights the role of local institutions and actors in development outcomes (36, 37). Accordingly, the knowledge, experience, and institutional capacity of EGPRs influence the effectiveness of LD initiatives and the quality of participation in the WCP.

The existing literature focuses on the determinants of political participation of EGPRs. However, it needs to be further examined with respect to the determinants and dimensions of EGPRs' involvement in WCP's functioning. In this context, the study addresses the following queries: the socio-economic and political-institutional environment of EGPRs; the knowledge status of WCP and its determinants; and the degree of participation in

WCP functioning and its determinants. The objectives of this paper are to:

- a) find determinants and the knowledge level of EGPRs on WCP,
- b) to assess determinants and the rate of involvement of the EGPRs in the functioning of WCP at GPs in Kerala.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional research design to examine the determinants of quality participation among EGPRs in the functioning of WCP. The study population comprised approximately 21,000 EGPRs across 941 GPs in Kerala during the 2010–15 and 2015–20 terms. To capture Kerala's geographical and socio-economic diversity, three districts representing the lowland (Alappuzha), midland (Kottayam), and highland (Idukki) regions were selected. Using KSPB data on WCP fund utilisation during the Twelfth Five-Year Plan, GPs in each district were classified into high, average, and low-utilisation (HU, AU, and LU) categories based on tertiles. One GP from each category in every district was purposively selected, yielding nine GPs. All 286 elected representatives from these GPs constituted the study sample. Although purposive sampling limits statistical generalisation, it enabled an in-depth comparison of participation across varying levels of WCP implementation.

Primary data were collected through face-to-face interviews using a structured questionnaire, achieving a 98% response rate. The instrument was developed through an extensive literature review, validated by subject experts, and pilot-tested among 30 elected representatives. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.87 confirmed good internal consistency (38). The questionnaire covered socio-economic and demographic characteristics, political-institutional background, knowledge of WCP (10-item Likert scale; score: 0–40), and involvement in WCP (18-item Likert scale assessing elementary and functional participation; score: 0–72). Secondary data were obtained from KSPB annual reports (2010–20), Kerala Panchayat Raj Act guidelines, and the 2011 Census. Ethical standards were maintained through informed consent and assurance of anonymity.

The dependent variables were knowledge of WCP and involvement in WCP, measured using

composite scores. The independent variables included socio-economic (age, gender, education, income, marital status) and political-institutional factors (party experience, term of office, position, training, GP category, political alliance, ward type, and ruling/opposition status), while term of office (2010–15 and 2015–20) was included as a control variable. Descriptive statistics and ordinary least squares regression were employed using SPSS version 25. Model assumptions were assessed through variance inflation factors ($VIF < 5$), the Breusch-Pagan test ($P > 0.05$), the Shapiro-Wilk test, and Levene's test. No influential outliers were detected, and statistical significance was set at $P < 0.05$. Descriptive statistics were used to identify any unusual observations; however, no extreme values were found that significantly influenced the results.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Economic and Political-Institutional

Status: The political involvement of women has always been lower than that of men due to their political alienation and lack of confidence in their ability to drive socio-economic and political transformation (39, 40). It leads to less involvement of females in political parties and legislative bodies (41), and this, in turn, not only limits females' political opportunities but also aggravates their sense of relegation. However, the reservation of seats and the position for women in GPs have increased women's presence in the local public sphere and ensured equal representation of males and females in local bodies in India. Often, in a conventional society, the beliefs and customs restrict public life not only to widows but also to unmarried women. Also, young people do not find opportunities in elected councils, and their aversion to political matters, as well as to political parties' activities, reduces their presence in political and legislative bodies (42, 43). However, there is a positive correlation between income and an individual's political involvement. High economic status creates impetus not only for involvement in the political party but also engagement in the elected council (44, 45). On the other hand, higher income inequality limits the political participation of deprived classes (46, 47). The view that education has a causal influence on political involvement is widely discussed in studies of political behaviour. Highly educated people

participate more in political activities than less educated people (48, 49). Education increases involvement directly by developing capabilities and skills pertinent to the political journey (50). Therefore, education enhances knowledge and skills, which may also increase an individual's political awareness, interest, and efficiency. The males hold higher levels of knowledge; that is, a gender gap exists in knowledge, but when various socio-economic and demographic variables are included alongside gender, the gender effect on knowledge disappears (51). The educated individual is not only knowledgeable but also participatory (52, 53). Education is one of the fundamental factors that determine knowledge levels, but access to knowledge is highly determined by an individual's economic status (54). Knowledge is a long-term product and a crystallised capability (55), but the efficiency of cognitive processes diminishes as age increases (56). The socio-economic diversity of localities within the same regions not only shapes political orientations but also influences people's political involvement (41). Socio-economically deprived communities find it difficult to engage in political matters because they lack basic amenities; therefore, they are reluctant to participate in non-income-generating political discourses, which limits their political careers as well. But the 73rd Amendment Act guarantees seats for marginalised groups to ensure the presence of all sections of the population in rural LG bodies in India. The quota system in electoral bodies to ensure the "political presence" of the underprivileged is fundamentally a "top-down" model, while empowerment is fundamentally a "bottom-up" model. Yet, there is also a strong association between the models (57). The coalition government is a new normal not only in Indian politics but also in Kerala politics. The major political alliances in the state are the "National Democratic Alliance", a centre-right political union led by the "Bharatiya Janata Party"; the "Left Democratic Front", a coalition of communist parties; and the Indian National Congress-led United Democratic Front, a coalition of right-wing parties. These political alliances have formed coalition governments in rural LG bodies for the past three decades, and, irrespective of ideology, aim to enhance the well-being of the people. Studies state that access to power and a

leadership position in LG, coupled with years of experience in the political party and LG bodies, create strong linkages in terms of EGPR capabilities (58). The KSPB collaborates with the Kerala Institute of Local Administration to conduct systematic training and capacity-building programmes for elected representatives of LG to ensure quality participation in LD. It also provides exclusively gender training to improve the functioning of WCP at GPs.

Table 1 presents the socio-economic, political, and institutional characteristics of EGPRs in the sample GPs. The study explores the fact that, irrespective of the institutional category of GP, representation of women is higher than that of men in GP elected councils through 50% reservation of seats for females at GPs in Kerala, and that almost all EGPRs are married. Moreover, most of the EGPRs from the LU GPs are young, the AU GPs are early middle age, and the HU GPs are late middle age. However, there are significant socio-economic disparities among GP categories. The study finds that more than half of the seats in GP elected councils are occupied by marginalised groups through reserved seats in LG elections. Furthermore, in the HU GPs, around three-fifths of EGPRs are first-time elected to the office, and the remaining two-fifths are re-elected for the second or third time. At the same time, among the LU and AU GPs, 7 out of 8 EGPRs are novices, and only 1 out of 8 has represented their ward for the second or third time. Overall, in the elected council, approximately three-fourths of the EGPRs are in their first term, and the remaining one-fourth are in their second or third term. The participation of EGPRs in capacity-building programs differs across GP categories, with the lowest recorded in the LU, followed by the AU and HU. Likewise, the political experience of EGPRs varies both among representatives and across different GP categories, and nearly half have less than a decade of association with political parties. Normally, the leaders of the majority political party in the elected council hold the President and Vice President positions in the GP for a term of 5 years. Nevertheless, sharing the leadership post within a tenure between members of the political alliance is a new normal in rural local bodies in Kerala. This trend is more prevalent in the HU GP, in the name of the friendly political alliance, and to encourage the entry of second-generation leaders.

Table 1: Socio-Economic, Political and Institutional Status of EGPRs*

		Classification of Gram Panchayat			Total
Variable		Lowest Utilization N=112	Average Utilization N=79	Highest Utilization N=95	N=286
Gender	Male	53(47.32)	34 (43.04)	44 (46.32)	131 (45.80)
	Female	59 (52.68)	45 (56.96)	51 (53.68)	155 (54.20)
Marital status	Single	5 (4.46)	4 (5.06)	3 (3.16)	12 (4.20)
	Married	103(91.96)	73 (92.41)	90 (94.74)	266 (93.01)
Age group	Separated	4 (3.57)	2 (2.53)	2 (2.11)	8 (2.80)
	20-35	46(41.07)	16 (20.25)	10(10.53)	72 (25.17)
	35-60	50(44.64)	39 (49.36)	38 (40.00)	127(44.41)
	60 -75	16(14.29)	24 (30.38)	47 (49.47)	87 (30.42)
Economic status*	Very poor income	45 (40.18)	8 (10.13)	0 (0.00)	53 (18.53)
	Poor income	19 (16.96)	5 (6.33)	8 (8.42)	32 (11.19)
	Middle income	43 (38.39)	52 (65.82)	55 (57.89)	150 (52.45)
	High income	5 (4.46)	14 (17.72)	32 (33.68)	51 (17.83)
Education	Primary	31 (27.68)	0 (0.00)	2 (2.11)	33 (11.54)
	High school	33 (29.46)	8 (10.13)	3 (3.16)	44 (15.38)
	Higher secondary	22 (19.64)	14 (17.72)	10 (10.53)	46 (16.08)
	Degree	21 (18.75)	41 (51.90)	40 (42.11)	102 (35.66)
	Professional	5 (4.46)	16 (20.25)	31 (32.63)	52 (18.18)
	Postgraduate	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	9 (9.47)	9 (3.15)
Ward Type	Unreserved	46 (41.07)	35 (44.30)	38 (40.00)	119 (41.61)
	Reserved	66 (58.93)	44 (55.70)	57 (60.00)	167 (58.39)
Political Party	UDF	41 (36.61)	30 (37.97)	37 (38.95)	108 (37.76)
	BJP	13 (11.61)	7 (8.86)	8 (8.42)	28 (9.79)
	LDF	49 (43.75)	40 (50.63)	45 (47.37)	134 (46.85)
	Independent	9 (8.04)	2 (2.53)	5 (5.26)	16 (5.59)
Number of years of experience in a political party	0-5	55 (49.11)	33 (41.77)	19 (20.00)	107 (37.41)
	5-10	11 (9.82)	9 (11.39)	17 (17.89)	37 (12.94)
	10-15	32 (28.57)	22 (27.85)	31 (32.63)	85 (29.72)
	15-20	8 (7.14)	7 (8.86)	17 (17.89)	32 (11.19)
	20-25	6 (5.36)	8 (10.13)	11 (11.58)	25 (8.74)
Position	Member	99 (88.39)	62 (78.48)	72 (75.79)	233 (81.47)
	President	13 (11.60)	17 (21.52)	23 (24.21)	53 (18.53)
Training	One	47 (41.96)	5 (6.33)	2 (2.11)	54 (18.88)
	Two	21 (18.75)	5 (6.33)	1 (1.05)	27 (9.44)
	Three	15 (13.39)	15 (18.99)	8 (8.42)	38 (13.29)
	Four	23 (20.54)	43 (54.43)	43 (45.26)	109 (38.11)
	Five	6 (5.36)	11 (13.92)	41 (43.16)	58 (20.28)
Number of terms	One	96 (85.71)	68 (86.08)	56 (58.95)	220 (76.92)
	More than one	16 (14.29)	11 (13.92)	39 (41.05)	66 (23.08)
Power Front	Ruling	73 (65.18)	57 (72.15)	66 (69.47)	196 (68.53)
	Opposition	39 (34.82)	22 (27.85)	29 (30.53)	90 (31.47)

Note: Units in Number (Percentage in brackets), EGPRs=Elected Gram Panchayat Representative. *Income group stratification as per the Government of Kerala.

Elected Gram Panchayat Representatives' Knowledge on WCP: The decentralised local planning is intended to contribute not only to “good governance” but also to “effective development”. Quality participation of elected representatives is a prerequisite for achieving the intended targets of decentralised local planning.

The quality involvement in decision-making bodies' needs “intensive knowledge and skill” (59). Therefore, the EGPRs require adequate knowledge of the WCP concept and the guidelines for actively participating in the rural LG planning exercise for deprived rural women.

Table 2: ANOVA Results of EGPR's Knowledge on WCP In Various Types of GP

Dimensions of Knowledge	Type of Gram Panchayats								ANOVA	
	Lowest Utilization N = 112		Average Utilization N = 79		Highest Utilization N = 95		Total N =286		F	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Concept	3.72	1.25	4.86	0.42	4.97	0.31	4.45	1.01	71.20	.000
Guideline	0.41	1.10	1.18	1.29	3.08	1.57	1.51	1.75	108.72	.000
WCP Sub-Plan	2.07	0.98	3.02	0.74	4.03	0.83	2.98	1.20	131.41	.000

Note: EGPR=Elected Gram Panchayat Representative, GP=Gram Panchayat, SD=Standard Deviation, F=F statistic, Sig.=Significance(p-value).

WCP knowledge includes the concepts and guidelines for planning and executing budgeting projects under the WCP Sub Plan. Inadequate knowledge of the concept and its guidelines will discourage the EGPR's involvement in WCP's functioning. Therefore, EGPRs must have an adequate understanding of WCP to effectively discharge their responsibilities to the deprived women's community in their respective localities. Table 2 presents the knowledge status of EGPRs across different GP categories. EGPRs from the AU and HU GPs have an excellent understanding of the concept, whereas those from the LU GPs have only moderate knowledge. Besides, the representatives from HU GPs have a more appreciable understanding of WCP guidelines than their counterparts in the other two types of GPs; that is, the representatives from AU and LU have only a moderate and feeble idea, respectively. The ANOVA results for the knowledge score indicate statistically significant differences (P-values < 0.05) in the mean knowledge scores of EGPRs, not only for the concept but also for the WCP Sub-Plan guidelines, by GP type. The study indicates that the EGPRs have good knowledge of the concept of WCP, but this is not reflected in their understanding of the guidelines for WCP budget allocation and project planning. Their ignorance indicates the need for appropriate measures to increase their participation in capacity-building programs, especially in the LU GPs, as well as immediate actions to revise the curriculum for gender budgeting training at the local level.

Determinants of Knowledge of Elected Representatives on WCP: The study finds that age group, educational degree and income class determine the elected representative's knowledge status on WCP. It also explores not only the outstanding level of knowledge among highly educated EGPRs but also the extremely poor understanding among school dropouts and the impoverished. However, neither gender nor marital status determined it. In addition, the representative's position in the elected council, term of office, experience with the political party, participation in capacity-building training, and the GP category determine the EGPRs' knowledge status regarding WCP. However, their political alliance, ward category and power front did not determine it. The study explains that awareness of WCP is high in categories such as quarter-century involvement in political parties, higher participation in capacity-building programs, representing the constituency for the second time, and being elected from the HU GPs. It is excellent among presidents of GP elected councils. It also explores the prevalence of unawareness amongst representatives who receive fewer opportunities to participate in capacity-building programs and emphasises the necessity and role of such programs in developing efficient public servants. Moreover, it identifies that EGPRs from the LU GPs are less educated about WCP than their counterparts in the AU and HU GPs. The political experience and institutional environment of EGPRs affect their knowledge of WCP, as shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Independent t Results of EGPRs Knowledge on WCP

Variable		Mean	N = 286	SD	Independent t-test	
					t	Sig.
Gender	Male	3.01	131	1.26	0.496	0.620
	Female	2.95	155	1.15		
Ward type	Unreserved	2.93	119	1.17	0.570	0.569
	Reserved	3.02	167	1.23		

Position	Member	2.62	233	1.00	-13.857	0.000
	President	4.58	53	0.45		
Number of terms	First	2.64	220	1.07	-10.116	0.000
	Second	4.11	66	0.90		
Power front	Ruling	3.01	196	1.23	0.559	0.577
	Opposition	2.92	90	1.13		

Note: EGPR=Elected Gram Panchayat Representative, WCP=Women Component Plan, Sig.=Significance(p-value).

Table 4: ANOVA Results of EGPRs Knowledge on WCP

Variable		Mean	N = 286	SD	ANOVA	
					F	Sig.
Marital Status	Single	3.38	12	1.28	0.75	0.473
	Married	2.96	266	1.20		
	Separated	3.13	8	1.16		
Age Group	20-35	2.46	72	1.17	12.76	0.000
	35-50	3.00	127	1.19		
	50-65	3.39	87	1.08		
Economic Status	Very poor income	1.62	53	0.55	70.97	0.000
	Poor income	2.13	32	1.13		
	Middle income	3.37	150	0.97		
	High income	3.77	51	0.88		
Education	Upper primary	1.47	33	0.60	89.80	.000
	High school	1.82	44	0.79		
	Higher secondary	2.58	46	0.63		
	Degree	3.46	102	0.85		
	Professional	4.04	52	0.73		
	Postgraduation	4.78	9	0.26		
Political Party	UDF	3.05	108	1.21	0.312	0.816
	BJP	2.82	28	1.39		
	LDF	2.97	134	1.14		
	Independent	2.91	16	1.33		
Number of Years of Experience in Party	0-5	2.60	107	1.07	7.129	0.000
	5-10	3.16	37	1.05		
	10-15	2.98	85	1.26		
	15-20	3.47	32	1.15		
	20-25	3.72	25	1.25		
Training	One	1.44	54	0.61	128.352	0.000
	Two	2.17	27	0.68		
	Three	2.7	38	0.75		
	Four	3.32	109	0.79		
	Five	4.32	58	0.67		
Utilisation of GPF	Lowest utilization	2.07	112	0.98	131.41	0.000
	Average utilization	3.02	79	0.74		
	Highest utilization	4.03	95	0.83		

Note: *Income group stratification as per the Government of Kerala. EGPR = Elected Gram Panchayat Representative, WCP = Women Component Plan, F=F statistic, Sig.= Significance(p-value).

Table 5: Results of the Multiple Linear Regression: Knowledge of EGPR on WCP

Independent Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Collinearity		
	B	SE	B	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	-0.803**	0.137		-5.879	0.000		
Age	-0.005	0.043	-0.003	-0.124	0.901	0.851	1.176
Education	0.147**	0.040	0.165	3.655	0.000	0.292	3.425
Economic Status	0.048	0.046	0.039	1.039	0.300	0.423	2.361
Years In Politics	0.048*	0.023	0.053	2.093	0.037	0.919	1.088
Term Of Office	0.355**	0.080	0.125	4.430	0.000	0.749	1.334
Position	0.867**	0.089	0.281	9.749	0.000	0.715	1.399

Training	0.280**	0.039	0.326	7.148	0.000	0.286	3.500
Category of GP	0.335**	0.047	0.238	7.144	0.000	0.538	1.859
Model				ANOVA			
R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	SE	DW	df	F	Sig
0.914 ^a	0.835	0.830	0.49	1.69	8, 277, 285	175.51	0.000 ^b

Note: EGPR = Elected Gram Panchayat Representative, GP = Gram Panchayat, F = F-statistic; B = Unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = Standard Error; t = t-statistic; VIF = Variance Inflation Factor; R = Multiple Correlation Coefficient; R² = Coefficient of Determination; DW = Durbin-Watson statistic; df = Degrees of Freedom; Sig. = Significance (p-value); a = Predictors: (Constant), Age, Education, Economic Status, Years in Politics, Term of Office, Position, Training, Category of Gram Panchayat; b = Dependent Variable: Knowledge of EGPR on Women Component Plan (WCP). * Significant at 95 %, ** significant at 99%.

Equation [1] presents the multiple linear regression model used to estimate the factors that determine EGPR knowledge on the WCP Sub-Plan.

$$K = -0.803\alpha - 0.005X_1 + 0.147X_2 + 0.048X_3 + 0.048X_4 + 0.355X_5 + 0.867X_6 + 0.280X_7 + 0.335X_8 + \mu \quad [1]$$

Where, K = Knowledge status of EGPR on WCP, α = Intercept, X₁ = Age of the EGPR, X₂ = Education of the EGPR, X₃ = Economic status of the EGPR, X₄ = Years of political experience of EGPR, X₅ = Number of times elected as GP representative, X₆ = Position of EGPR in GP, X₇ = Number of training programs attended by EGPR, X₈ = Category of GP EGPR belongs to, μ = Error term in Equation [1].

Table 5 shows that the adjusted R² value is 0.830; therefore, the independent variables explain 83 per cent of the variation in the dependent variable, which is overall sufficient for the model. The F-test statistics show an F value of 175.517 and a probability value of 0.000, which is significant at the 1% level. It indicates that the model is the overall fit. The standardised coefficients are included in the model because the measurement scales differ across independent variables. The explanatory variables and residuals are tested for multicollinearity using VIF and for heteroscedasticity through the B-P test, respectively. The study reveals that education, years of political experience, number of times elected, position in GP, number of training programs attended, and GP category are positive determinants of the level of understanding of the EGPR regarding the concept of WCP and its guidelines. The analysis also shows that age and economic status are insignificant. The EGPRs must play an inevitable role in the planning exercise for the development of the deprived rural women in the GP (58). "Quality of participation" includes not only substantive debates in planning exercises but also genuine efforts to recognise the needs of local people and to ensure the effective spending of devolved

resources by local government (9). An earlier study found that female EGPRs lacked collective bargaining to ensure the proper allocation of the WCP's budgetary share within the GP budget. It also states that female representatives are not showing extra initiative in planning and implementing meaningful schemes to meet the needs of women under WCP; instead, they emphasise schemes that address the general needs of the locality. Besides, it observes that schemes under WCP are hardly debated in the GP Committee. The female representative faces a struggle between representing the GP's general concerns and the specific concerns of females, which forces them to emphasise the former rather than the latter. In effect, the increased representation of females in GPs' electoral bodies through reservation neither improved the living conditions of underprivileged rural women nor increased female labour participation rates. It also shows a tendency to shift the responsibility for planning and executing WCP schemes onto Kudumbasree leaders, leading to an increase in financial assistance schemes for self-help groups rather than worthwhile schemes capable of transforming the lives of impoverished rural women (58, 60).

Table 6: ANOVA Results of EGPRs Elementary and Functional Involvement in WCP: Institutional Categorisation

Types of Involvement	Type of Gram Panchayat								ANOVA	
	Lowest Utilization N = 112		Average Utilization N = 79		Highest Utilization N = 95		Total N = 286		F	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Identification	2.85	1.29	4.39	0.69	4.75	0.46	3.91	1.26	123.94	.000
Planning	2.88	1.33	4.43	0.63	4.87	0.36	3.97	1.28	132.76	.000
Allocation	2.80	1.33	4.18	0.71	4.82	0.44	3.85	1.29	123.35	.000
Monitoring	2.33	1.40	3.99	0.79	4.72	0.54	3.58	1.46	148.92	.000
Evaluation	2.27	1.38	3.94	0.84	4.64	0.58	3.52	1.46	147.44	.000
Resolving	2.20	1.37	3.89	0.91	4.56	0.60	3.45	1.47	142.68	.000
Involvement	2.56	1.28	4.14	0.69	4.73	0.42	3.71	1.32	157.80	.000

Note: EGPR = Elected Gram Panchayat Representative, WCP = Women Component Plan, F = F statistic, Sig. = Significance(p-value), SD = Standard Deviation.

Dimensions of Elected Representatives' Involvement in WCP:

Representative involvement in WCP spans multiple dimensions. Firstly, the representative's involvement in identifying the practical and strategic needs of women in their respective localities. Secondly, the representative's involvement in incorporating the needs of women into the GP development plan, specifically under WCP, through proposing and planning schemes within the GP committee's local resources and environment. Thirdly, the representative's involvement in the timely distribution of the allocated funds for various proposed schemes. Fourthly, the representatives' involvement in monitoring and evaluating schemes to ensure their effective operation. Fifthly, the representative's involvement in the form of positive intervention for potential outcomes. Finally, the representative's involvement in resolving challenges through quick action or in settling the problem without the usual bureaucratic delay. The study coined the term elementary involvement for the first three dimensions of involvement among EGPRs and functional involvement for the last three. Elementary involvement translates resources for women into meaningful development projects. At the same time, the women beneficiaries of all the running projects unanimously reported the active functional involvement of their EGPR. Therefore, the scheme's success is due to EGPR's active involvement at both the elementary and functional levels.

Table 6 presents ANOVA results for EGPR involvement in WCP by GP category. The study identifies very poor involvement in WCP functioning by representatives from the LU GPs and relatively lesser functional involvement by

representatives from the AU GPs. The involvement of representatives, as responsible elected leaders for wards in general and women in particular, is only noticeable in the HU GPs. The ANOVA results show that EGPRs' participation in different stages of WCP from HU, AU, and LU GPs is statistically significant ($P\text{-value} < 0.05$) in both their elementary and functional involvement across the GP categories they represent. EGPRs are leaders of their constituencies, with the highest calling to serve the government in general and the people in particular. Therefore, they should translate the development needs of their constituency, particularly the concerns of marginalised classes, into reality in their given capacity at the GP.

Determinants of Elected Representatives' Involvement in WCP:

Representation and involvement in political decision-making bodies are closely linked to an individual's socio-economic background (61). The economic vulnerabilities of EGPRs limit their active and dynamic involvement in political decision-making bodies. It also forces elected representatives to be more involved in income-generating activities rather than fulfilling their functions and responsibilities. Education is a fundamental factor in determining the degree of involvement in EGPR, as highly educated people are more likely to participate in political activities than less educated people (48, 49). The rate of political involvement differs across age groups, including young people, adults, and older people. Age is a good predictor of the elected representative's political and policy involvement (62) because older generations show a higher degree of political involvement than younger generations (63). Marital status is considered a milestone in the life cycle and in the political involvement of elected representatives

(64), and it affects their involvement. Often, women have different policy interests from those of men, and increased representation of women

creates space for them to be involved in planning and policy decisions within local bodies (65).

Table 7: Independent t Results of EGPRs Involvement in WCP: Socio-political Factors

Variable		Mean	N	SD	Independent t t	Sig.
Gender	Male	3.713	131	1.37	0.012	0.990
	Female	3.711	155	1.28		
Ward type	Unreserved	3.71	119	1.28	0.002	0.998
	Reserved	3.71	167	1.34		
Position	Member	3.42	233	1.29	-8.764	0.000
	President	4.98	53	0.055		
Number of terms	One	3.43	220	1.32	-7.075	0.000
	Two	4.64	66	.76		
Power front	Ruling	3.74	196	1.32	0.592	0.554

Note: EGPR = Elected Gram Panchayat Representative, WCP = Women Component Plan, N = Number of Participants, SD = Standard Deviation, t = t statistic, Sig. = Significance(p-value).

Table 8: ANOVA Results of EGPRs Involvement in WCP: Socio-Economic Categorisation

Variable		Mean	N	SD	ANOVA F	Sig.
Marital status	Single	3.90	12	1.47	0.281	0.755
	Married	3.69	266	1.32		
	Separated	3.95	8	1.104		
Age group	20-35	2.97	72	1.39	21.824	0.000
	35-50	3.75	127	1.22		
	50-65	4.26	87	1.10		
Economic status	Very poor income	1.82	53	.85	146.194	0.000
	Poor income	2.80	32	1.36		
	Middle income	4.27	150	0.75		
	High income	4.58	51	0.52		
Education	Upper primary	1.58	33	-.94	131.612	0.000
	High school	2.38	44	1.00		
	Higher secondary	3.53	46	0.90		
	Degree	4.41	102	0.56		
	Professional	4.73	52	0.37		
	Postgraduate	5.00	9	0.00		
Political party	UDF	3.80	108	1.29	1.293	0.277
	BJP	3.36	28	1.58		
	LDF	3.75	134	1.25		
	Independent	3.34	16	1.46		
Number of years of experience in the party	0-5	3.39	107	1.28	4.177	0.003
	5-10	4.00	37	1.03		
	10-15	3.66	85	1.46		
	15-20	4.21	32	1.21		
	20-25	4.16	25	1.12		
Training	One	1.67	54	0.85	217.466	0.000
	Two	2.69	27	1.06		
	Three	3.69	38	0.74		
	Four	4.36	109	0.51		
	Five	4.86	58	0.25		
Utilisation of GP fund	Lowest	2.55	112	1.27	157.803	0.000
	Average	4.13	79	0.68		
	Highest	4.72	95	0.41		
Level of understanding of WCP	Very low	1.12	4	0.25	382.189	0.000
	Low	1.88	72	0.82		
	Average	3.65	48	0.50		
	High	4.15	69	0.41		
	Very high	4.93	93	0.20		

Note: EGPR = Elected Gram Panchayat Representative, WCP = Women Component Plan, N = Number of Participants, SD = Standard Deviation, Sig. = Significance(p-value), F = F statistic.

Tables 7 and 8 state that education, income, and age determine the participation of representatives in WCP functioning; however, the influence of gender and marital status on participation is almost absent. Participation figures show greater involvement of EGPRs from the HU GPs than their counterparts in the AU and LU GPs, and more participation by experienced political leaders and representatives than by those comparatively new to the political party and the GP elected bodies. It also shows a higher participation of representatives who hold the office of GP than mere representatives in GP-elected bodies. Besides, lesser involvement is noticeable among those who attended fewer capacity-building workshops exclusively for gender planning than among their counterparts who participated in more training sessions. Higher participation is observed among EGPRs with a better understanding of WCP than among those with less knowledge. However, the involvement rate remains roughly the same among representatives representing different political ideologies, constituency types, and power fronts in GP elected bodies. The study finds that representatives' position in the GP governing body, the term of office, experience in the political party,

participation in capacity building training programs, and the category of GP determine their participation in the WCP functioning at GP; however, their political alliance, ward category and power front did not determine it.

Nexus between elected Gram Panchayat representatives' knowledge and involvement in WCP:

Earlier political theories have identified a nexus between knowledge and political participation. Table 9 shows the Pearson correlation between EGPR involvement in the WCP Sub-Plan and their knowledge of the WCP. It indicates that broad-based involvement of EGPRs is positively correlated with their knowledge of WCP. The EGPR's knowledge about WCP positively influences the representative's involvement in WCP functioning. At the same time, participation in these processes may itself enhance representatives' knowledge and understanding of the WCP, suggesting a mutually reinforcing relationship between knowledge and participation. Though it sheds light on how knowledge of the WCP is associated with EGPR involvement in WCP work at rural LGs, it lacks a complete picture of the determinants of involvement.

Table 9: Correlation between EGPR Knowledge Status on WCP and their Involvement in the Functioning of WCP at GP

Dimensions of Involvement in WCP	Knowledge Status on WCP		
	Concept	Guideline	Total
Identifying	822**	620**	800**
Planning	807**	640**	808**
Allocation	778**	680**	825**
Monitoring	798**	728**	868**
Evaluation	789**	731**	867**
Resolving	782**	732**	865**
Involvement	825**	717**	872**

Note: ** significant at 99%. EGPR = Elected Gram Panchayat Representative, WCP = Women Component Plan.

Table 10: Results of the Multiple Linear Regression: Involvement of EGPR in WCP

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	Collinearity	
	B	SE	B				Tolerance	VIF
Constant	-.061	0.146			-.419	0.675		
Age	0.129	0.046	0.073		2.829	0.005	0.851	1.176
Education	.175	0.043	0.178		4.062	0.000	0.292	3.425
Economic status	0.232	0.050	0.171		4.679	0.000	0.423	2.361
Years in politics	-0.008	0.025	-0.008		-0.310	0.757	0.919	1.088
Term of office	0.034	0.086	0.011		.394	0.694	0.749	1.334
Position	0.290	0.095	0.086		3.046	0.003	0.715	1.399
Training	0.397	0.042	0.420		9.458	0.000	0.286	3.500
Category of GP	0.309	0.050	0.199		6.143	0.000	0.538	1.859

Model					ANOVA		
R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	SE	DW	df	F	Sig
0.919 ^a	0.844	0.839	0.52	1.77	8, 277, 285	187.19	0.000 ^b

Note: EGPR = Elected Gram Panchayat Representative, WCP = Women Component Plan, F = F-statistic; B = Unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = Standard Error; t = t-statistic; VIF = Variance Inflation Factor; R = Multiple Correlation Coefficient; R² = Coefficient of Determination; DW = Durbin-Watson statistic; df = Degrees of Freedom; Sig. = Significance (p-value); a = Predictors: (Constant), Age, Education, Economic Status, Years in Politics, Term of Office, Position, Training, Category of Gram Panchayat; b = Dependent Variable: Involvement of EGPR in the Women Component Plan (WCP). * significant at 95 %, ** significant at 99%.

Equation [2] presents the multiple linear regression model used to estimate the determinants of EGPR's level of involvement in the WCP Sub-Plan.

$$I = -0.061 \alpha + 0.129X_1 + 0.175X_2 + 0.232X_3 + 0.008X_4 + 0.034X_5 + 0.290X_6 + .397X_7 + 0.309X_8 + \mu \quad [2]$$

Where, I = Involvement of EGPR in WCP Sub-Plan, α = Intercept, X₁ = Age of the EGPR, X₂ = Education of the EGPR, X₃ = Economic status of the EGPR, X₄ = Years of political experience of EGPR, X₅ = Number of times elected as GP representative, X₆ = Position of EGPR in GP, X₇ = Number of training programs attended by EGPR, X₈ = Category of GP EGPR belongs to, μ = Error term in Equation [2].

Table 10 shows that the adjusted R² value is 0.852; therefore, the independent variables explain 85.20 per cent of the variation in the dependent variable, which is sufficient overall for the model. The F-test statistics show an F value of 183.044 and a probability value of 0.000, which is significant at the 1% level. It indicates that the model is the overall fit. The standardised coefficients are included in the model because the measurement scales differ across independent variables. The explanatory variables and residuals are tested for multicollinearity using VIF and for heteroscedasticity through the B-P test, respectively. The regression results reveal that age, education and economic status, position in GP, number of training programs attended, and GP category are positive determinants of the EGPR's level of involvement in WCP functioning. The analysis also shows that years of political experience and the number of times they have been elected are not significant in determining the level of involvement in the WCP.

Findings of the Study

The institutional category of the EGPRs is a significant factor influencing their level of involvement and functional participation in WCP functioning at the GP level; however, gender is not. The significant socio-economic determinants of EGPRs' involvement in WCP include educational qualifications, age group, and economic status, whereas marital status and gender are not significant. The significant political-institutional determinants of EGPRs' involvement in WCP are experience in political parties, term of office, position in the elected council, the GP category they represent, and participation in capacity-building training programmes. In contrast,

political alliance, ruling or opposition status, and ward category are not significant determinants. The interaction effect between the institutional category and gender of EGPRs on participation in WCP is insignificant. Furthermore, a strong positive correlation exists between EGPRs' involvement in WCP-related activities and their knowledge of WCP. EGPRs' involvement in WCP is positively influenced by demographic, social, economic, administrative, capacity-building, and institutional factors. However, the quality of EGPRs involvement at different stages of the WCP Sub-Plan at the local level is constrained by domestic, mobility, political, knowledge-related, financial, administrative, psychological, and gender-related factors. Administrative bottlenecks constitute the greatest obstacle, followed by psychological challenges, whereas gender-related constraints are the least significant obstacle, both overall and across different categories of GPs. The degree of constraints faced by EGPRs is very low in HU GPs, moderate in AU GPs, and very high in LU GPs.

The findings of the present study are consistent with earlier research on political participation and local governance. Previous studies have shown that education enhances political awareness, knowledge, and participation, while socio-economic status and political experience positively influence engagement in decision-making processes (44-50). Similarly, the present study identifies education, political experience, institutional position, and participation in training programmes as significant determinants of elected representatives' knowledge and involvement in the functioning of the WCP. Further, studies on decentralisation have emphasised that effective local governance depends on active participation,

accountability, and responsiveness to local needs (23-26). The positive association between knowledge and involvement observed in the present study supports these arguments and highlights the importance of capacity-building initiatives in strengthening participatory governance. While earlier studies have largely focused on political participation, representation, and decentralisation in local governance (23-26, 48-50), the present study extends the literature by specifically examining the determinants of elected representatives' knowledge and quality participation in the functioning of the WCP, a unique gender-responsive budgeting initiative within Kerala's decentralised planning framework.

Conclusion

To conclude, demographic, political, economic, social, capacity-building, and institutional factors determine the quality of EGPRs' involvement in the functioning of WCP. However, it is essential to recognise that there are still many constraints that hinder the quality of EGPR involvement in the functioning of WCP at GP. The LG bodies are likely to be influenced by powers that not only discourage but also discourage the participation of economically and socially weaker sections in society, leading to lesser involvement of marginalised elected representatives in decision-making bodies in GPs. A higher socio-economic environment provides a better platform for elected representatives representing the HU GPs. In contrast, a lower socio-economic environment creates hurdles for elected representatives from the LU GPs to fulfil their entrusted responsibilities regarding WCP functioning at rural local bodies.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to selected GPs from three districts of Kerala and focused exclusively on EGPRs. Although the selected districts represented diverse geographical and socio-economic contexts, the findings should be interpreted within the scope of the study. Nevertheless, the study provides useful insights into the factors influencing elected representatives' knowledge and participation in the WCP's functioning. Further, as the study is based on cross-sectional data, the observed relationships should be interpreted as associations rather than definitive causal relationships. While greater knowledge may encourage active participation in the WCP, participation in

programme planning and implementation enhances knowledge and understanding of the programme.

Future Scope of Research

Future studies may extend the analysis to other districts and different tiers of local self-government institutions. Comparative studies across states and longitudinal investigations could further enhance understanding of the factors influencing effective participation in gender-responsive local governance initiatives.

Abbreviations

EGPR: Elected Gram Panchayat Representative, GP: Gram Panchayat, LD: Local Development, LG: Local Government, WCP: Women Component Plan, KSPB: Kerala State Planning Board, VIF: Variance Inflation Factor.

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Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to this study. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Data Availability

Data are available from the corresponding author upon request for academic and research purposes

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Grammarly to improve the language, grammar, and readability of the text.

Ethics Approval

Ethics Approval Ethical clearance for this study was based on the provision of informed consent from all participants, ensuring their voluntary

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