

Rethinking the Role of Local Governments in a Post COVID-19 World

By Vijayalakshmi V.*

An International webinar on rethinking the role of local governments in a Post-COVID-19 world was organized by Centre for Gandhian Studies, Central University, Kasargod, Kerala and Centre for Rural management, Kottayam Kerala for five days (10th-14th December 2020). 15 countries participated. Various aspects of role of local governments, especially during the ongoing pandemic, their approaches and responses to fight the pandemic were covered in 11 sessions during the five day webinar. Over 75 professionals actively participated and presented papers in one of the 11 sessions.

The five day programme was effectively anchored by Dr. Uma Purushothaman, Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, Central University, Kasargod, Kerala. The Inaugural session (10th December) witnessed welcome address by Dr. John Moolakattu (Professor, Central University, Kasargod, Kerala), and Keynote address by Joseph Atsu Ayee (Department of Political science, University of Ghana, Ghana). In his Keynote address, Prof. Ayee discussed the challenges, opportunities and prospects. He

highlighted the inconclusive literature review related to link between local government and disaster management. He explained about restricted movements for local government. He emphasized on the need for a proper balance between centralized and decentralized approach. The Inaugural programme concluded with vote of thanks by Dr. Jos Chathukulam, Director, Centre for Rural management, Kootayam, Kerala.

The five day long programme, covering various aspects of role local government clearly indicated the efficient approach of many local governments handling the pandemic. Local governments in many cases have responded more effectively to prevent the spread of virus. In some cases, their intervention has been found to be more effective than interventions by provincial/central government. The speakers discussed the need for more clear statement of role of officials of local government, need for community participation, need for better public health care system, need for more autonomy for local governments and facilitations for better governance of local governments.

Financial deficit, limited autonomy were some of the major challenges identified and discussed by many of the speakers. The need for capacity building was emphasized by many speakers as well as in the Key note

address (at Inaugural programme, presidential address (valedictory programme) and as part of way forward. Dr. Vijayalakshmi Vadivelu (Senior evaluation Advisor, UNDP), Prof. John Moolakattu and Dr. Jos Chathukulam highlighted the need for redefining and implementing role of local governments.

Dr. Vijayalakshmi Vadivelu said that there is need for clarity about role of Local Government (who, what & when aspects to be clear), need for focusing on local governments' administrative responsibility and administrative capacity and need for better participation, importance of digital transformation and provide improved access (especially health); she also emphasized on the need for gender free deliverance. Prof. John Moolakattu and Dr. Jos Chathukulam highlighted the grass root level plan. Dr. Jos Chathukulam emphasized the need for the pivotal role to be played by local government and the special need for addressing health care issues. He also emphasized on capacity building exercise. He said higher education institutions need to develop effective models and modules to provide training on capacity building.

The whole programme was well organized and coordinated. The organizers (Dr. John Moolakattu & Dr. Jos Chathukulam and their team have to be applauded for the effective efficient conduct of this International webinar.

cont'd on pg 26

* Dr. Vijayalakshmi. V, Joint Editor, *Southern Economist*, Bangalore.

Inauguration – Key Note Address Prof. Joseph Ayee, University of Ghana

Session	Theme
1	Coping with the Pandemic: challenges for Local Government
2	Livelihood Issues & Local Government Response
3	Inclusion, Planning, Service delivery and Directions
4	COVID-19 & Local Government Response
5	Federalism, Recentralization, Participation & Local Government Response to COVID-19
6	Rethinking Decentralization During & After COVID-19
7	Issues of Leadership, Finance & Decentralization Reforms in Pandemic Era
8	Institutions, Ideas, and Models for Coping with disasters
9	Gandhian Insights, resilience & Decentralization Initiatives
10	Politics, women's Life & Community based initiatives
11	Local Government's Response in Covid-19 in Indian States
Valedictory Programme (14th Dec. 20)	Address by Vice Chancellor of Central University, Kasrgod, Kerala Presidential Address by Dr. Joy Elamon, Director General, Kerala Institute of Local Administration, Trissur, Kerala
Summary of Webinar Proceedings	Ms.Asha Buch, Retd.Bilingual Teacher & Social worker, United Kingdom Ms. Rekha, V, Associate Fellow, Central for Rural Management, Kottayam, Kerala Mr. Jhitin Matthew, PhD Scholar, Department of International relations, Central University, Kasargod, Kerala
Concluding Remarks	Dr. Ady.P.Carrera-Hernandez, Associate Professor, CIEAS of IPN, Mexico city Prof. Olle To"rnquist, Development Research, University of Oslo, Norway Dr. Pranab Kumar Pandey, Professor & Former Chair, Department of Public administration, University of Rajashali, Bangladesh □