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LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND PUBLIC POLICY FORMULATION: A STUDY OF RURAL GOVERNMENT RESPONDENTS IN KARIMNAGAR DISTRICT, TELANGANA

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Abstract

Local governments play an important role in strengthening grassroots democracy, identifying community needs, and promoting participatory rural development. However, their effectiveness in public policy formulation depends on decision-making authority, financial resources, administrative support, access to policy information, and public participation. The present study examines the role of rural local governments in public policy formulation, with particular reference to selected local bodies in Shankarapatnam and Huzurabad mandals of Karimnagar district, Telangana. The proposed study focuses on 30 elected local-government representatives selected through purposive sampling. It examines participation in identifying community needs, involvement in Gram Sabha meetings, access to government policy information, perceived influence on local decisions, and institutional constraints affecting policy formulation. Descriptive statistics are used in the analytical framework to demonstrate how relationships between selected variables may be examined. The analysis focuses on financial constraints, administrative delays, political interference, insufficient training, and limited public awareness. The paper highlights the need to strengthen fiscal autonomy, transparency, accountability, institutional capacity, and inclusive participation in rural governance.

Keywords: Local Government, Public Policy Formulation, Democratic Decentralisation, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Gram Sabha, Rural Governance, Fiscal Autonomy, Participatory Development.

Introduction

Local governments constitute an important institutional mechanism for promoting democratic decentralisation and addressing the developmental needs of rural communities. They operate close to citizens and are expected to identify local problems, establish development priorities, facilitate public participation, and implement welfare and development programmes.

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Their role is particularly significant in rural areas, where access to drinking water, sanitation, roads, education, healthcare, employment, and other essential services directly influences people's living conditions. Public policy formulation involves identifying social problems, determining priorities, evaluating alternatives, allocating resources, and developing appropriate measures to address public needs. Although major policy decisions are frequently influenced by state and national governments, local institutions contribute valuable knowledge about community conditions and the practical requirements of development. Effective rural governance therefore requires coordination between local representatives, administrative officials, and citizens.

In India, the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992, established a constitutional framework for strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions and promoting democratic participation at the grassroots level. Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas provide institutional mechanisms through which rural communities can communicate their needs and participate in discussions concerning development priorities. These institutions are expected to contribute to planning and decision-making in areas such as drinking water, sanitation, rural roads, public health, education, and local infrastructure. Nevertheless, the existence of elected local governments does not necessarily guarantee meaningful participation in public policy formulation. Local representatives may identify community problems and submit development proposals without possessing sufficient authority to determine expenditure, approve projects, or influence the allocation of resources. Inadequate financial resources, administrative dependence, political interference, limited technical expertise, and insufficient access to policy information can restrict their capacity to respond effectively to community demands.

In this context, decentralisation must be evaluated not merely by the existence of local institutions but also by their actual ability to influence decisions and translate community priorities into development outcomes. Participation in meetings is important, but substantive policy influence requires that local proposals receive consideration, appropriate funding, administrative approval, and effective implementation.

Review of Literature

1. Rao and Siva Kumar (2017) examined decentralisation and participatory planning through Telangana's Grama Jyothi programme. Their study identified inadequate devolution of functions, limited financial resources, and weak administrative control as barriers to effective village-level planning. The findings emphasise the need to strengthen Gram Panchayats' authority and resources for responsive rural policy formulation.
2. Sadanandan (2017) analysed popular participation in local democracy using evidence from Gram Panchayats in West Bengal. The study highlighted the relationship between local government performance, public benefits, and citizen participation. It suggests that responsive policies and accountable institutions can encourage grassroots democratic engagement, making it relevant to community participation in rural policy decisions.

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3. Datta (2019) examined deliberative democracy through Gram Sabhas in India and Gram Sansads in West Bengal. The study explored their role in promoting discussion, citizen involvement, and democratic decision-making. It highlights the importance of meaningful deliberation within village institutions and provides a useful framework for analysing public participation in rural planning and policy formulation.
4. Reddy and Mohapatra (2022) examined Panchayat finances and own-source revenue in Telangana. Their study found that Gram Panchayats depend substantially on government transfers and face challenges in mobilising local revenue. The authors emphasised stronger fiscal devolution. Their findings directly support examining inadequate financial resources as a constraint on local policy formulation.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the role of local governments in rural public policy formulation.
2. To assess the participation of local-government representatives in identifying community needs and determining development priorities.
3. To analyse the association between Gram Sabha participation, access to policy information, and perceived influence on local policy formulation.
4. To identify the major financial, administrative, political, and participatory constraints affecting local policy formulation and suggest measures to strengthen democratic decentralisation and rural governance.

Need of the Study

Local governments are expected to serve as institutions through which rural communities express their needs and influence development priorities. Their effectiveness depends on the participation of elected representatives in planning, access to policy information, coordination with administrative authorities, and the availability of resources for local development. However, limited financial resources, inadequate decision-making authority, administrative delays, insufficient technical knowledge, political influence, and low public awareness may constrain their role in public policy formulation. These challenges highlight the need to examine the experiences of elected representatives and the institutional conditions shaping grassroots governance. Against this background, the present study focuses on selected rural local bodies in Shankarapatnam and Huzurabad mandals of Karimnagar district, Telangana, to analyse participation in policy formulation, access to information, perceived influence on local decisions, and institutional constraints, with a view to identifying measures to strengthen participatory and responsive rural governance.

Research Methodology

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The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the role of local governments in rural public policy formulation. Primary data are collected through structured questionnaires or interviews with elected local-government representatives, while secondary data are obtained from government reports, academic publications, Gram Sabha records, development plans, and budget documents. The study covers selected rural local bodies in Shankarapatnam and Huzurabad mandals of Karimnagar district, Telangana, with a sample of 30 respondents, comprising 15 respondents from each mandal, selected through purposive sampling. Frequencies, percentages, and Pearson's chi-square test are used for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Mandal-wise Distribution of Respondents

Mandal	Frequency	Percentage
Shankarapatnam	15	50.0
Huzurabad	15	50.0
Total	**30**	**100.0**

Source: Field data.

The above table presents the mandal-wise distribution of respondents in the study. Out of 30 respondents, 15 (50%) were selected from Shankarapatnam mandal and 15 (50%) from Huzurabad mandal. The equal distribution provides balanced representation of both mandals for examining the role of local governments in rural public policy formulation.

Table 2: Position of Respondents in Local Government:

Position	Frequency	Percentage
Sarpanches	12	40.0

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Gram Panchayat ward members	18	60.0
Total	**30**	**100.0**

Source: Field data

The above table presents the distribution of respondents according to their positions in local government. Of the 30 respondents, 12 (40%) were Sarpanches, while 18 (60%) were Gram Panchayat ward members. The findings indicate that ward members constitute the majority of respondents, providing insights into their participation and perspectives on rural public policy formulation and local decision-making.

Table 3: Experience in Local Governance:

Experience	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 3 years	9	30.0
3–5 years	7	23.3
6–10 years	8	26.7
More than 10 years	6	20.0
Total	**30**	**100.0**

Source: Field data

The above table presents the respondents' experience in local governance. Nine respondents (30%) had less than three years of experience, while seven (23.3%) had 3–5 years. Eight respondents (26.7%) had 6–10 years of experience, and six (20%) had more than ten years. The distribution indicates that the study includes representatives with varying levels of governance experience, providing perspectives on local policy formulation and decision-making.

Table 4: Participation in Identifying Community Needs:

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Often	13	43.3

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Sometimes	11	36.7
Rarely	6	20.0
Total	**30**	**100.0**

Source: Field data

The above table presents the extent to which local-government representatives participate in identifying community needs. The findings reveal that 43.3% of respondents participate often, indicating active involvement in recognising local problems and development priorities. Another 36.7% participate sometimes, suggesting scope for more consistent engagement in community-level planning. However, 20% rarely participate, highlighting a potential gap in participatory governance. These findings suggest that regular consultations with rural communities, effective Gram Sabha meetings, and systematic collection of public concerns could strengthen community participation and ensure that local development policies better reflect the needs and priorities of rural residents.

Table 5: Participation in Gram Sabha Meetings:

Participation	Frequency	Percentage
Regularly	24	80.0
Sometimes	05	16.7
Rarely	01	3.3
Total	**30**	**100.0**

Source: Field data

The above table presents the participation of respondents in Gram Sabha meetings. The findings reveal that 80% of respondents participate regularly, indicating a strong level of engagement in village-level democratic processes. Another 16.7% participate sometimes, while only 3.3% participate rarely. This pattern suggests that Gram Sabha meetings provide an important platform for local representatives to discuss community needs and development priorities. However, regular attendance should also be accompanied by meaningful discussion and active involvement in decision-making to strengthen participatory rural governance.

Table 6: Perceived Level of Public Participation in Local Planning:

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Perceived participation	Frequency	Percentage
High	9	30.0
Moderate	14	46.7
Low	7	23.3
Total	**30**	**100.0**

Source: Field data

The above table presents respondents' perceptions of public participation in local planning. The findings indicate that 46.7% perceived public participation as moderate, while 30% reported a high level of participation. However, 23.3% perceived participation as low. These results suggest that although public involvement exists in local planning, it may not be sufficiently inclusive or consistent. Strengthening community consultations, encouraging the participation of marginalised groups, and improving awareness of Gram Sabha activities could enhance public engagement and ensure that local development priorities reflect community needs.

Table 7: Perceived Influence of Local Government on Policy Formulation:

Perceived influence	Frequency	Percentage
High	07	23.3
Low	23	76.7
Total	**30**	**100.0**

Source: Field data

The above table presents respondents' perceptions of the influence of local governments on public policy formulation. The findings indicate that 76.7% of respondents perceived the influence as low, whereas 23.3% perceived it as high. This distribution suggests that most respondents perceive limitations in the role of local governments in shaping policy decisions. The findings highlight the importance of examining institutional autonomy, financial resources, administrative coordination, and the extent to which community-level proposals are considered in development planning. Strengthening these mechanisms may help improve the contribution of local bodies to rural public policy formulation.

Table 8: Access to Information on Government Policies and Schemes:

Access to information	Frequency	Percentage
Good	13	43.3
Limited	17	56.7
Total	**30**	**100.0**

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Source: Field data.

The above table presents respondents' access to information on government policies and schemes. The findings reveal that 56.7% of respondents reported limited access to information, while 43.3% reported good access. This indicates that information gaps may affect the ability of elected representatives to understand policy provisions, identify relevant schemes, and communicate government initiatives to rural communities. Improving timely access to policy guidelines, organising training programmes, and strengthening information-sharing between administrative departments and local bodies could support informed decision-making and more effective rural policy formulation.

Table 9: Major Constraints Affecting Local Policy Formulation

Constraint	Responses	Percentage of respondents
Inadequate financial resources	21	70.0
Low public awareness	19	63.3
Political interference	18	60.0
Administrative delays	16	53.3
Insufficient training	14	46.7
Lack of reliable local data	12	40.0

Source: Field data

The above table presents the major constraints affecting local policy formulation as reported by respondents. Inadequate financial resources emerged as the most frequently reported constraint (70%), followed by low public awareness (63.3%) and political interference (60%). Administrative delays were reported by 53.3% of respondents, while 46.7% identified insufficient training and 40% reported a lack of reliable local data. These findings suggest that local policy formulation faces interconnected financial, participatory, political, and administrative challenges. Addressing these constraints through adequate resource allocation, public awareness programmes, capacity-building initiatives, timely administrative support, and improved local data systems could strengthen evidence-based planning and the effectiveness of rural local governance.

Table 10: Association between Gram Sabha Participation and Perceived Policy Influence:

Gram Sabha participation	High perceived influence	Low perceived influence	Total
Regular	9	3	12
Sometimes or rarely	5	13	18

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Total	**14**	**16**	**30**

Source: Field data

The above table examines the association between participation in Gram Sabha meetings and perceived influence on local policy formulation. Among regular participants, 9 out of 12 perceived their influence as high, whereas only 3 perceived it as low. In contrast, among respondents who participated sometimes or rarely, 5 out of 18 perceived their influence as high, while 13 perceived it as low. This pattern suggests a positive association between regular Gram Sabha participation and perceived policy influence.

Table 12: Association between Experience and Regular Participation in Policy Formulation:

Experience	Regular participation	Irregular participation	Total
5 years or more	9	5	14
Less than 5 years	4	12	16
Total	**13**	**17**	**30**

Source: Field data

The above table examines the association between experience in local governance and regular participation in policy formulation. Among respondents with five or more years of experience, 9 out of 14 participated regularly, compared with 4 out of 16 respondents with less than five years of experience. Conversely, irregular participation was higher among less-experienced respondents (12) than among experienced respondents (5). The findings suggest that greater experience may be associated with more regular participation in policy formulation.

Findings of the Study

1. Mandal-wise Distribution of Respondents: The study covered 30 elected local-government representatives from Shankarapatnam and Huzurabad mandals of Karimnagar district, Telangana. Each mandal contributed 15 respondents, representing 50% of the total sample. This equal distribution provides a balanced basis for examining the perspectives of representatives from both mandals regarding rural public policy formulation and local governance.

2. Position of Respondents in Local Government: The findings indicate that 60% of respondents were Gram Panchayat ward members, while 40% were Sarpanches. The representation of both categories provides insights into different responsibilities within local governance. Ward members

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contribute perspectives from individual wards, whereas Sarpanches have broader responsibilities in coordinating village-level administration and development activities.

3. Experience in Local Governance: The study reveals that 30% of respondents had less than three years of experience, 23.3% had 3–5 years, 26.7% had 6–10 years, and 20% had more than ten years of experience. This distribution includes both relatively new and experienced representatives. Their varied experience provides an opportunity to understand differences in familiarity with administrative procedures, development planning, government schemes, and policy-related decision-making.

4. Participation in Identifying Community Needs: The findings show that 43.3% of respondents often participated in identifying community needs, while 36.7% participated sometimes and 20% rarely participated. Although the largest group reported frequent participation, the combined proportion of those participating sometimes or rarely was 56.7%. This indicates scope for strengthening systematic consultation with rural residents to identify local problems, establish development priorities, and incorporate community needs into local planning.

5. Participation in Gram Sabha Meetings: The study found that 80% of respondents participated regularly in Gram Sabha meetings, 16.7% participated sometimes, and 3.3% participated rarely. This indicates a high level of reported attendance among the respondents. However, regular attendance does not necessarily establish the extent of active discussion, proposal submission, or influence over final decisions. Therefore, the effectiveness of Gram Sabha participation should also be assessed in terms of the consideration and implementation of community proposals.

6. Perceived Level of Public Participation in Local Planning: The findings indicate that 46.7% of respondents perceived public participation in local planning as moderate, 30% considered it high, and 23.3% perceived it as low. The predominance of moderate participation suggests that opportunities for public involvement exist but may not always be sufficiently inclusive or effective. Greater efforts are needed to encourage community consultations, improve public awareness of planning processes, and ensure that the concerns of different social groups are considered while determining development priorities.

7. Perceived Influence of Local Government on Policy Formulation: The study reveals that 76.7% of respondents perceived the influence of local governments on policy formulation as low, whereas 23.3% perceived it as high. This finding highlights a perceived gap between participation in local governance and the ability to influence policy decisions. Financial limitations, administrative procedures, dependence on higher levels of government, and restricted decision-making powers may be relevant factors to investigate. Strengthening the role of elected representatives in planning, resource allocation, and monitoring could help improve the responsiveness of local governance.

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8. Access to Information on Government Policies and Schemes: The findings show that 56.7% of respondents reported limited access to information on government policies and schemes, while 43.3% reported good access. Limited information may affect representatives' ability to understand eligibility requirements, communicate scheme benefits, identify available resources, and prepare development proposals. The findings therefore underline the importance of timely dissemination of policy guidelines, regular orientation programmes, and improved information-sharing between government departments and Gram Panchayats.

9. Major Constraints Affecting Local Policy Formulation: Inadequate financial resources emerged as the most frequently reported constraint, identified by 70% of respondents. Low public awareness was reported by 63.3%, political interference by 60%, administrative delays by 53.3%, insufficient training by 46.7%, and a lack of reliable local data by 40%. Since respondents could identify multiple constraints, these percentages are not expected to total 100%. The findings demonstrate that local policy formulation involves interconnected financial, administrative, informational, and participatory challenges. Addressing these issues requires adequate funding, capacity-building programmes, improved administrative coordination, stronger public awareness, and access to reliable local-level information.

10. Association between Gram Sabha Participation and Perceived Policy Influence: The findings indicate that 9 of the 12 regular participants (75%) perceived their influence on policy formulation as high. In comparison, 5 of the 18 respondents who participated sometimes or rarely (27.8%) perceived their influence as high. Conversely, low perceived influence was reported by 25% of regular participants and 72.2% of those participating sometimes or rarely. This distribution suggests a positive association between regular Gram Sabha participation and perceived policy influence. However, the observed relationship should not be interpreted as causal, and its statistical significance must be assessed using an appropriate chi-square test.

11. Association between Experience and Regular Participation in Policy Formulation: Among respondents with five or more years of experience, 9 out of 14 (64.3%) reported regular participation in policy formulation. In contrast, 4 out of 16 respondents (25%) with less than five years of experience reported regular participation. Irregular participation was more common among the less-experienced group. This pattern suggests that experience in local governance may be associated with greater familiarity with policy processes and more consistent participation in decision-making. Nevertheless, further statistical testing is necessary to determine whether the observed association is statistically significant.

Suggestions

1. **Strengthening Financial Autonomy:** The government should ensure timely and adequate financial allocations to Gram Panchayats to address local development needs. Elected representatives should be encouraged to identify funding sources, prepare realistic budgets, and

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prioritise expenditure according to community requirements. Greater transparency in fund allocation and utilisation can improve the effectiveness of local policy implementation.

2. **Improving Community Participation:** Gram Panchayats should organise regular community consultations to identify local problems and determine development priorities. Special efforts should be made to encourage the participation of women, marginalised communities, and economically weaker sections. Public suggestions should be documented and considered during the preparation of village development plans.
3. **Strengthening Gram Sabha Meetings:** Gram Sabha meetings should function as meaningful forums for discussion, planning, and accountability rather than merely formal gatherings. Meeting agendas should be communicated in advance, attendance should be encouraged, and community proposals should be recorded systematically. Follow-up mechanisms should be established to communicate decisions and implementation progress to residents.
4. **Improving Access to Policy Information:** Local-government representatives should receive timely and accessible information about government policies, development schemes, eligibility criteria, funding opportunities, and implementation guidelines. Regular information-sharing meetings, official digital platforms, and simplified policy documents can help representatives make informed decisions and communicate scheme benefits effectively to rural communities.
5. **Capacity Building of Elected Representatives:** Periodic training programmes should be organised for Sarpanches and Gram Panchayat ward members on public policy formulation, financial management, participatory planning, government schemes, administrative procedures, and monitoring mechanisms. Practical training can improve their ability to prepare development proposals, understand policy guidelines, and address community needs effectively.
6. **Reducing Administrative Delays:** Administrative departments should establish clear timelines for approving development proposals, releasing funds, and implementing local projects. Coordination between Gram Panchayats, mandal-level offices, and district authorities should be strengthened. Regular review meetings can help identify delays, clarify responsibilities, and improve the timely implementation of local development programmes.
7. **Promoting Evidence-Based Local Planning:** Gram Panchayats should maintain updated information on local infrastructure, drinking water, sanitation, education, healthcare, employment, and other development needs. Reliable village-level data can help representatives identify priority issues, allocate resources appropriately, and prepare development plans based on actual community requirements rather than general assumptions.
8. **Ensuring Transparency and Accountability:** Local governments should make information about budgets, expenditure, approved projects, and implementation progress accessible to the public. Social audits, public reviews, and regular reporting can strengthen accountability. A

systematic mechanism for recording complaints and communicating action taken would further improve public trust in local institutions.

9. **Encouraging Experienced and New Representatives:** Experienced representatives should share their knowledge of administrative procedures and policy processes with newly elected members. Mentoring, peer-learning meetings, and orientation programmes can help less-experienced representatives understand their responsibilities and participate more confidently in policy formulation.
10. **Strengthening Political and Institutional Independence:** Local-government representatives should be provided with appropriate opportunities to express community priorities and contribute to development decisions without undue interference. Clear guidelines, transparent decision-making procedures, and institutional support can help ensure that development proposals are assessed on their public value and local relevance.
11. **Improving Coordination among Government Institutions:** Gram Panchayats should strengthen coordination with mandal and district administrations and relevant line departments. Joint planning meetings can help align village-level priorities with available government schemes and development resources. Such coordination can reduce duplication, improve resource utilisation, and facilitate the implementation of community-oriented projects.
12. **Monitoring Policy Outcomes:** Local governments should establish simple monitoring systems to assess whether approved proposals receive funding and are implemented as planned. Periodic progress reviews, public feedback, and documentation of completed and pending works can help identify implementation gaps and improve future policy decisions.

Conclusion

The study examines the role of local governments in rural public policy formulation, focusing on elected representatives in Shankarapatnam and Huzurabad mandals of Karimnagar district, Telangana. The findings indicate that Gram Sabha meetings provide an important platform for participation, but the perceived influence of local governments on policy formulation remains limited. Inadequate financial resources, limited access to policy information, low public awareness, political interference, and administrative delays emerge as major constraints. The findings also suggest that regular Gram Sabha participation and greater experience in local governance are associated with higher participation and perceived policy influence. Strengthening financial autonomy, improving access to policy information, providing training to elected representatives, and encouraging inclusive community participation are therefore important for effective rural governance. Transparent decision-making, evidence-based planning, and systematic monitoring of community proposals can further improve accountability.

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