

THE DISTRIBUTIVE INTENT OF THE  
STATE AND THE POLITICS OF IMPLEMENTATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

by

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THE DISTRIBUTIVE INTENT OF THE STATE  
AND THE POLITICS OF IMPLEMENTATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL  
The Poor, Politics, and, Shelter Policy in Kerala

by

Meenu Tewari

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**ABSTRACT**

This study is an attempt to understand the limits and potential of the public-sector in the provision of distributional services to the poor. The intention is to understand what does work in public-sector interventions and why; what does not work, and why not; and to emphasize the nuanced nature of "success" or "failure"--it is perhaps more instructive to understand the inadvertent as well as the direct outcomes of programme implementation rather than to normatively categorize outcomes as "successes" or "failures". The study examines a "successful" example of state-government intervention in the shelter sector in the state of Kerala, India, to facilitate this understanding.

Questioning the dominant view that "planning from below" is a better alternative to "planning from above", the central argument of the study is that "planning from below" (bottom-up development), is not necessarily an alternative to "planning from above" (top-down development). Rather than being considered as being oppositions, the two styles of development should coexist.

The study of the One lakh Housing Scheme (OLHS), in Kerala, is used to illustrate this argument. It was found that despite attributes that would seem "failures", if seen normatively, the programme performed exceptionally well, and remains the state's most popular and "successful" programme. This was possible precisely because an enlightened "top-down" approach, as well as a committed "bottom-up" style coexisted.

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To, Amma and Baba...

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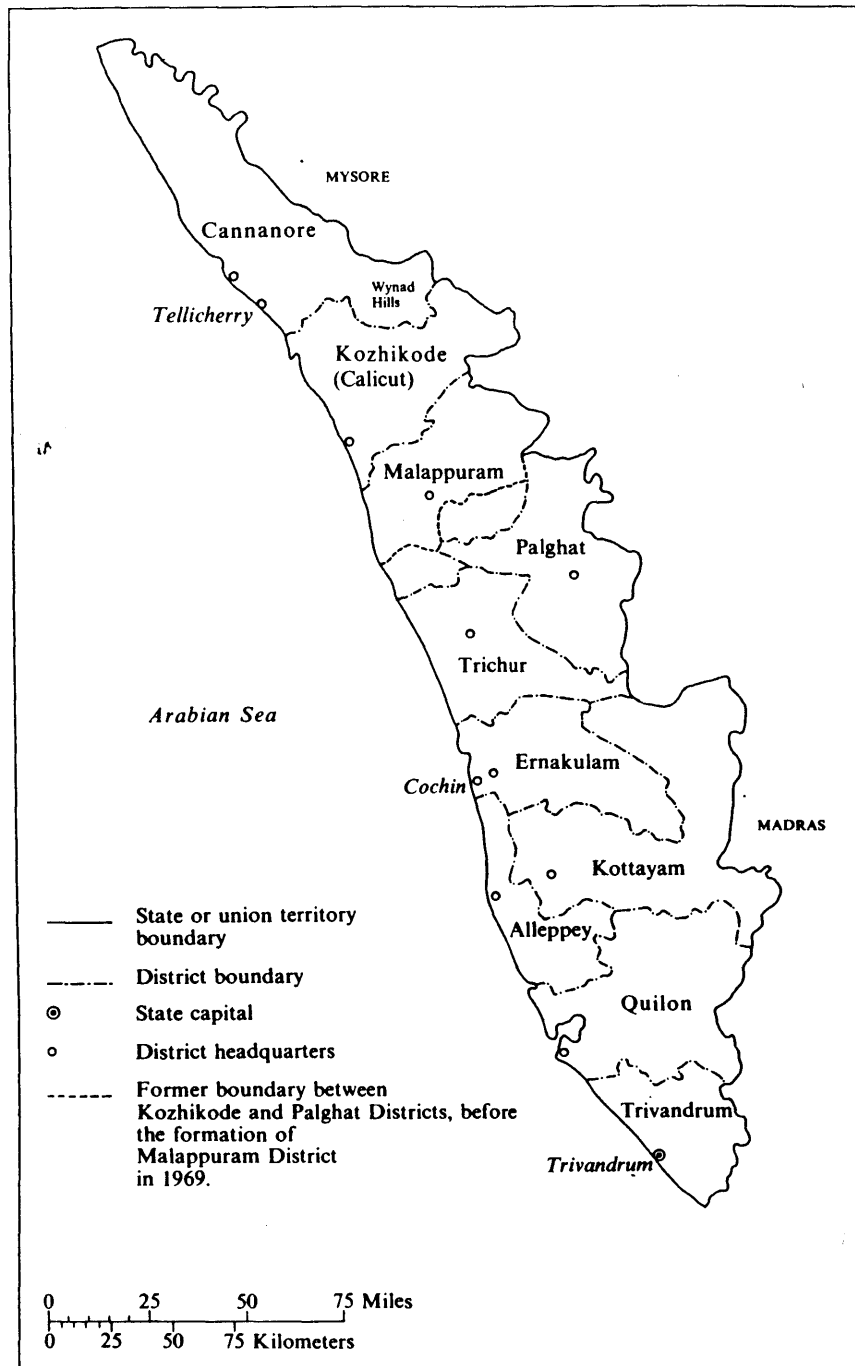
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Kerala

MAP of KERALA, INDIA.

Source: Hardgrave, Robert.L., 1973, "The Kerala Communists".

Overview: This study is an attempt to understand the limits and potential of the public sector in the provision of distributional services--such as housing--to the poor. It does so by examining a "successful" example of state-government intervention in the shelter sector in the state of Kerala, India.

The concern with examining a "success-story" is to focus attention on what does work in public sector interventions, and why; what does not work, and why not. In addition, the intention is to emphasize the nuanced nature of "success" or "failure"--understanding the process of programme implementation, and its inadvertant, as well as direct outcomes is perhaps more instructive than rigid, normative categorization of programme outcomes into "successes" or "failures".

In particular, focussing on public-sector shelter programmes that have worked well, provides the opportunity to understand what makes for good performance in a sector where the benefits are of a divisible nature.<sup>1</sup> Understanding what makes such projects work well is important because conflicts and competition is usually heightened over their distribution, making programme implementation, as designed, difficult.

The state of Kerala offers a good example of a case where the performance of the government in the provision of social and

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1           <sup>1</sup>By divisible benefits I refer to the distribution of private goods. Goods such as housing, unlike those of other distributional services such as health-clinics, roads, infrastructure, public education, cannot be shared by more than one beneficiary at the same time.

distributional services has been fairly distinguished, not in a single, exceptional sector, but rather over an impressive array of sectoral activities--such as health, education, housing and so forth. Furthermore, there has been a continuity in this focus on distribution across the tenure of a series of state government regimes--both communist and non-communist.

**The argument.**

The central objective of this study is to question the current way of thinking about distribution, development and the public sector. Proponents of the prevalent view about development posit that "planning from below" (bottom-up development) is a better alternative to "planning from above" (top-down development). Critics of the "top-down" approach argue that state interventions targeted towards the poor do not work very well because they create inefficiencies and cost-burdens due to the nature of public sector bureaucracies--these bureaucracies have a propensity to be large, overstaffed, ineffective and expensive to maintain. At the same time they provide scope for corruption and graft. Poverty-oriented state interventions, moreover, are rigid and therefore do not allow contextual variations to be taken into account. Furthermore, they spread short-term "relief" or "welfare" through the deep subsidies they invariably carry, instead of fostering development that can be sustained.

This argument against the avoidable "costs" of many types of distribution-oriented public-sector interventions, implicitly supports the prevalent policy-shift away from considering the

state as an appropriate vehicle for undertaking poverty-alleviation measures--a view that has gained currency in response to the severe debt-burdens faced by third-world governments in the last decade. Proponents of this view assert that the role of the public sector must be minimized, its distributional services cutback and economic indicators improved instead, if the fiscal viability of most third-world nations is to recoup sufficiently to make poverty alleviation possible and affordable. The public-sector stands discredited in both perspectives.

Even while the public sector stands discredited in the thinking of several mainstream development "experts", scholars such as Atul Kohli, Jonathan Fox, Peter Evans, and, Theda Skocpol have focussed renewed attention on the potentialities of the state as a distributional and developmental actor. For example, Kohli (1987) and Fox (1988) have used empirical evidence to inductively support their arguments that we need to reassess the role of the public-sector by expanding our understanding of how public sector interventions actually work. They show that rather than write off the state or the public sector as inefficient and cumbersome beurrucracies, it is necessary to examine cases where public sector programmes have been successful, in order to understand what conditions make for good performance, and explore the linkages between the "top" and "bottom" that facilitate such outcomes.

Drawing upon the arguments of researchers such as Kohli and Fox, and upon empirical material from my own case study of

the Kerala governemnt, I will argue that "planning from below" or, "bottom-up development", if you will, is not neccessarily an alternative to "planning from above". The two paths to development (seen here in terms of distribution, and poverty-alleviation) are not mutually exclusive, nor ought they to be seen that way. Developemnt is served most appropriately when the "top-down" and "bottom-up" styles of development, work together, not one at the cost of the other. When both approaches are present, not only does each compensate for the inherent weaknesses of the other, but indeed augments the other's strengths. This study is an attempt to illustrate this argument.

Using the relatively good performance of Kerala in distributional services--as manifested in the particular programme I have studied--I will suggest that this has been possible because elements of both styles were present--an enlightened "top-down" approach to development--strong control centrallized in the government, coexisted with a committed "bottom-up" style--active public participation, public "monitoring" of government projects, and demand making by organized groups. It is significant, moreover, that not only did these two contrasting styles coexist, but they were not competitive. Each, the state-government, and the local "grass-roots" groups seemed to be doing what they were best at, suggesting that together, these groups can achieve more than either would alone.

Political parties, and a long history of social

mobilization that has rendered the electorate highly politically conscious have played a central role in this "success". I will show that the notion of dichotomy is not inherent in the "top-down" and "bottom-up" styles of development. Rather, the seeming contrast lies in our own categorization of programme outcomes against normative notions of "good" or "bad", "success" or "failure".

Here I refer to the observation that several scholars (Hirschman, Tendler) have made about the "burden of success". Given that the criteria used to distinguish "success" from "failure" are often so subjective, or contextual, or time bound, it is rarely that the same criteria will apply universally. Moreover, even the most successful of projects or programmes have their own pitfalls, false-starts and setbacks. Therefore in classifying public sector programmes as "failures", we may be looking at the wrong culprits, and in the process overlooking some of the more significant linkages and relationships between events, actors, state and society. Having based much of our present disenchantment with the public sector on studies that in the past have documented "failure", it is important that we focus more closely on some instances where public sector programmes have performed well, before making assertions about the superiority of the "bottom-up style" versus the rigidity of the "top-down approach".

Specifically, I examine the One Lakh Housing Scheme (OLHS), a public sector low-income shelter programme undertaken

by the state government of Kerala, as an example of a "top-down" intervention. The OLHS had several attributes we commonly associate with failure, yet it performed well. Indeed, it is regarded as the state's most popular public-housing programme, not only by government officials, but also by the people of the state, including the non-beneficiaries--even today, more than 15 years after it was introduced. I ask the questions why this is so; how did it get onto the government agenda; what worked well, what did not, why; and what do the beneficiaries think about it. I show that the good performance of the programme is in part because elements of top-down control coexisted with those of the opposite or bottom-up style.

But why is it that unlike most other states in the country we find a coexistence of this nature in Kerala alone? Several scholars argue that this combination of planning from above and below is a function of the leftist regimes that have governed Kerala. However, my own field work and interviews with several informants, suggest that the roots of much of what we see as the "successful" outcome of the programmes such as the one this study discusses, have earlier origins than the rise of communist political parties in the state. Therefore, at the outset I attempt an explanation of what underlies the political awareness of the people in the state, and the leftist tendencies among successive incumbents to government office.

The questions of relevance here are: why did the government take certain decisions regarding development and not



others? Why are the people of the state so politically aware, and why do they tend to respond the way they do? The answers to these questions in part lie in the salient features of the history of social change in Kerala, and the significance of the sequence of events that, in large part, are responsible for the state's relatively good distributional performance.

The sequence of historical events has, in my view, provided the following features to the social and political structure of the state to which much of its distributional achievements can be attributed: A committed set of responsive governments--ie, elected members of political parties--at the apex of the "pyramid". A wide network of highly motivated and committed grass-roots organizations--which typically, and significantly, include workers of political parties, both ruling and opposition; religious and sectarian organizations that have traditionally played a major role in the history of development in the state; and now increasingly include highly placed and qualified scientists, professionals--doctors, engineers, teachers, professors, economists, high ranking bureaucrats and technocrats. Finally at the bottom of the "pyramid" is a politically aware, literate, and well organized electorate. The overall system is one where demand-making from various interest groups is an accepted strategy for dissatisfied groups to get their demands on the government agenda. Elements of this "system" are evident in the relatively successful implementation of the OLHS--the programme around which

this study is organized.

## **PART I**

### **Introduction.**

Even as scholars and policy analysts debated about the need for governments to reconcile growth policies with redistribution in the late 1970s, Kerala was pointed out as a unique "model" of development. The literature on Kerala (Morris: 1979, Scott: 1979, CDS studies) described it as being an exceptional instance of "success" where "without a radical revolution, or a major increase in industrialization, or even productivity, important gains had been made in improving the quality of life of the common people" (cf. Mencher, 1980). The indicators of social success in this story were high levels of literacy (70.4% compared to the national average of 36.2%), a fairly low birth rate (24.9/1000 persons compared to 35.3 in India), a decreasing death rate (6.7/1000 persons compared to an average of 11.9/1000 persons in the rest of the country), declining infant mortality (40/1000 births relative to an average of 114/1000 births in the country, an increased expectancy of life at birth (66 years versus 54 years at the all India level),

noteworthy success in the implementation of land reforms (of the 4.07 million households in the state only 6.7% are landless) and more recently, innovative shelter programmes for the poor (according to the 1981 census, the housing shortfall in Kerala was roughly 10% of its housing stock compared to about 20.3% for the country as a whole<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, Kerala is the first state in the country where the government works in partnership with voluntary agencies to provide shelter to the poor).

Most scholars attribute this success of Kerala to the relatively radical social policies that its successive state governments have followed. Most of these governments had strong leftist tendencies, mass support at the local level, and, a highly politicized and aware electorate. It may be true, as Kohli has shown in his comparative analysis of the three Indian states of West Bengal, Karnataka, and, Uttar Pradesh, that left-of-center regimes are often more capable of undertaking distributional measures that actually benefit the poor. But when such left-of-center regimes operate within a democratic framework, rather than an authoritarian one, it becomes important to ask why is it that the electorate in certain states has chosen to elect leftist governments? It would seem to me that in such cases the key to understanding the effectiveness of distributional policies adopted by these governments, lies in the nature of the social environment, rather than, merely, in the fact that the

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<sup>2</sup> Both figures are exclusive of dilapidated housing stock that needs replacement.

government is a leftist one.

In the Kerala case this point becomes clear when we consider that in every state government election, since the state was constituted in 1956, the communist parties as well as the non-communist Congress party, have maintained roughly one-third of the popular vote, each (Hardgrave, 1973: 143). Moreover, while non-communist alliances have held state power at least thrice, the communist regimes, although elected to office four times, have never completed a full tenure, except for the Achutha Menon-headed coalition (1970-1975) which again was a center-left (Congress-CPI) coalition.<sup>3</sup> Yet, despite frequent shifts in the composition of the alliances that have governed Kerala, there has been a continuity in the emphasis on social and distributional policies across all regimes. It is clear, therefore, that the distributional success evident in diverse sectors such as health, education, public welfare, subsidized food, and land, has roots that pre-date the emergence of communism in the state.

In order to understand the origins of these distributional trends--trends that are now embodied in the social structure of Kerala--it will be necessary to understand the history of development of Kerala, in particular, the history of its social movements. An endeavour of this nature would of necessity be a substantial project in its own right, and is outside the scope of

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<sup>3</sup> Each tenure of the communist parties (CPM or CPI) has lasted not more than 18 months. Each time the communist government has either resigned due to internal differences, or have been dismissed by the Center on grounds of pushing "unconstitutional policies".

the present study. I will therefore, only briefly summarize below some of the salient points that I consider have contributed to the impressive developmental gains made by Kerala. These points also provide a pertinent background to the OLHS story.

(1) First, a significant exogenous factor that has helped guide development in Kerala is its unique geographical and topographical structure. The state, a long and narrow sliver of land, bounded by the Arabian Sea on the west and the ranges of the Western Ghats on the East, has the smallest geographical area in the country. Yet, it supports among the largest populations, as a result of which, Kerala has (and has had even in the past) the highest population density in the country (currently 655 persons/sq.km, compared to the average of 216 persons/sq.km at the all India level). Being in the coastal and tropical belt, the state also has highly fertile soil. Therefore, eventhough, due to high pressure on land, the average size of holding in the state is small--only 0.49 Ha. compared to 2.0 Ha.in India--the value of output per hectare from agriculture is Rs. 3731 in Kerala compared to Rs. 1823 in the rest of the country.

Fertile soil, and potable quality surface water, moreover, are abundantly available throughout the state. These conditions have traditionally supported a dispersed settlement pattern that has two unique features: first, people have settled fairly densely every where, so that the demographic distinctions between rural and urban that we are used to, are practically absent here. Second, given an urban-rural continuum, and a long-narrow

topographical structure, transportation networks linking most parts of the state developed fairly early on. There is, therefore, no region that is really "remote" in Kerala. This has facilitated communication, which is one reason why the state--even its rural hinterland--lends itself effectively to mobilization efforts. Unlike other states where the rural population is too meager, or too scattered to provide the "critical mass" that is necessary to form a substantial force, when organized, most of the political and social mass movements in Kerala have been rural based (or at least have had rural origins).

(2) Secondly, Travancore<sup>4</sup>, one of the three major regions of present-day Kerala, is distinguished as being the oldest "welfare state" in the country. The welfare policies of its 19th century ruler, Martand Varma, were indeed, precursors of the social and distributional emphasis evident in the development policies of contemporary governments. In particular, Martand Varma (1) laid the basis for a highly developed transportation and infrastructural network. (2) Introduced the first progressive agrarian (tenancy) reform in the state in 1865. (3) Established schools and clinics for the study and practice of traditional and non-traditional health-care. Thus, he generated an early concern

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<sup>4</sup> Travancore remained a sovereign state throughout the colonial era in India, although it was under British tutelage.

for health care among the common people.<sup>5</sup> (4) And was responsible for the early spread of state-sponsored, school education. He also encouraged christian missionaries to propagate the western system of learning.

This last point is significant because the early spread of education contributed to the early development of class consciousness in the state. The basis for viewing education, as a means of attaining access to prestige, and social position was thus laid in the mid-19th century. Furthermore, because features of "town" and "country" existed throughout the state, and no region was "isolated" or "cut-off", the provision of services was not confined to privileged centers. In more recent times this socio-spatial aspect of Kerala has led to the distribution of so-called "urban" facilities, all across the state--even though by technical census definitions, 80% of the population continues to live in "rural" areas.

(3) This rural population therefore, forms a significant, and numerically powerful, constituency in the state. The rural population--which is heterogenous along class and caste lines--then, would also represent a critical force in any social or political movement.

Kerala has known several such movements. The most significant of these are the "teachers movement" of the 1930s (one school in every village); the "library movement" (a library

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<sup>5</sup> See Joan Mencher in "Lessons and Non-lessons of Kerala" in Economic and Political Weekly, 1980, for a discussion on the early origins of health-consciousness in Kerala.

in every village), and most significantly, the Moplah (as muslims in Kerala are called) rebellion of 1836, and the social reform movement among the Ezhavas in 1903.

The Moplah uprisings were part of an unsuccessful tenancy reform movement among the muslims of Malabar, that, despite its failure, "gave the peasants the first elements of class consciousness"<sup>6</sup>. The movement among the Ezhavas<sup>7</sup>--a numerically dominant backward caste of cultivators and laborers--was led by their spiritual leader Narayana Guru, who urged them to break out of stigmatized caste barriers and attain social-economic upward mobility through education (and prestigious public service positions). A caste based organization that soon became politicized as the SNDP, was formed to bring about social revolution among this backward caste. As E.M.S. argues, "it was organization of the oppressed and untouchable castes that..for the first time in the history of Kerala [mobilized] the overwhelming majority of the peasantry against the prevailing social order which was oppressive to the entire people of Kerala..This is why the saintly leader of the Ezhavas must be considered the first inspirer and organizer of the cultivating

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<sup>6</sup> E.M.S. Namboodripad--a powerful veteran leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M), who was the first communist chief minister of Kerala, and is currently the general secretary of the party--as quoted in Hardgrave, "The Kerala Communists" in Radical Politics in South Asia, edited by Brass and Franda, 1973: 135.

<sup>7</sup> This movement, which is regarded as the most significant in Kerala, was led by an Ezhava saint--Narayana Guru--in 1903, under the slogan--"One Caste, One God, One Religion".



and landless peasant masses in Kerala" (cf. Hardgrave, 1973: 136). Ezhavas today form the politically most powerful constituency in the state, and although their support is crucial for any party that aspires to obtain state power, the mass support of the communist movement is drawn predominantly from this community.

The SNDP also set a precedent for the formation of similar social and political associations among other castes--these associations today form the basis of the regional political parties of Kerala. Therefore, social movements in Kerala are significant because they have stirred the various communal groups to social and political consciousness.

This consciousness and political awareness has also been fostered by the "constructive competition" among the major communities in the state, by virtue of the social structure of Kerala which is characterized by a lack of hegemony of any one class or community. Unlike other states in the country where Hindu dominance typically prevails--socially and numerically, the minority communities in Kerala are hardly "minor". The christians and muslims together constitute more than 40% of the population, compared to their national strength of less than 5%. The Hindus, numbering nearly 60% of the population, are also divided along caste lines--the Ezhavas number 25% of the population, followed by the politically powerful Nair community, which forms nearly 18-20% of the population.

As noted above, caste and communal-based associations have

developed through which each group competes to consolidate its access to economic resources and social position. Furthermore, to the extent that in the post-independence period there has been a tendency toward an alignment of major communities with political parties (for example, the Congress became a party of christian domination; the Praja Socialist Party was regarded as a virtual Nair preserve; the Muslim league commanded the allegiance of the muslims of Kerala, and the communist parties have drawn strength from the Ezhava and untouchable castes), these social groups have also competed for political power. Yet none commands numerical majority.

Therefore, even while the unique social composition of Kerala has led to caste-based political and social "competition", which has sharpened the political consciousness of the electorate, it has also meant that no party can rule with the support of one community alone. Coalition governments therefore have become a typical feature of Keralan politics. (This aspect of Keralan politics is of direct significance to the implementation of the OLHS, as we will see later). The point being made here is that the communists do not by themselves dominate the politics of Kerala nor have their policies alone set the distributional trend we see in the state today.

In sum therefore, the unique geographical structure of Kerala which has minimized rural urban differences, provided the basis for a socio-spatial structure that was conducive to the

development of communication networks throughout the state. These conditions made mobilization of the rural peasantry relatively easier, and effective. They also enabled the ruler of Travancore to spread the benefits of education, health and other welfare policies throughout the (Travancore) state. This early spread of education and the social and political consciousness generated by the long history of social movements in Kerala, led to high levels of political awareness among the people. This awareness, along with the sense of competition among the caste-based social groups that reflected a "superimposition of ritual rank, social status, and economic position", in fact, represented an early differentiation along class lines.<sup>8</sup> Thus a relatively early process of class formation, high levels of political literacy and a growing force of the "educated unemployed" on the one hand, and the persistence of "feudal land relations" generated a political environment that facilitated the rise of communism in the state in the post-independence period.

Furthermore, in a society where social movements and past policy precedents have led to social status being attached to being civic-minded, a continued emphasis on welfare and distribution, as well as policies aimed towards improving the standard of living of the common people, has come to be expected of successive elected regimes--communist or non-communist.<sup>9</sup>

This sequence of events has played a critical role in

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<sup>8</sup> See Hardgrave, op.cit. pp. 138.

<sup>9</sup> Discussions with B.Kuriakose.

shaping the nature of relationship between the "state government" (that for the most part remains "committed" to an agenda of structural reform and progressive distributional and social policies), and its, highly politically aware and literate electorate. How this relationship between the state and civil society bears on the co-existence of "top-down" control and "bottom-up" participation, we will examine through the OLHS case, in the following sections.

## **PART II**

### Origins of a "Top-down" Approach.

#### Introduction.

We have seen that distributional policies have traditionally played a central role in the development strategies adopted by successive state governments in Kerala. Although the government first intervened directly in the shelter sector only in the 1970s, its past redistributive efforts in other sectors--such as public services, infrastructure and land--indirectly stimulated shelter related activity.

The extensive land reforms undertaken by the state-government in 1970, are one example of the state government's redistributive efforts, that indirectly led to an upsurge in housing activity in the 1970s. The provision of land-ownership rights to over 0.3 million formerly landless laborers (Kudikidappukars) and transfer of title to over 2.4 million tenant farmers (Kudiyirippu and other tenants), in eliminating the threat of eviction, provided them with the incentive to engage in home building. If title to land provided the incentive, then to some, it also afforded the means, through potential access to credit from institutional and non-institutional sources. Access to credit enabled them to participate in a variety of productive and day-to-day activities (for example the marriage of a daughter, purchase of cattle, fodder and so forth), including, house-building. Although institutional finance is scarce and not readily available to poorer clients, and, non-

institutional credit carries with it high interest rates, the indirect impact of land reforms on shelter processes, was one factor that contributed to the "housing boom" of the 1970s.

If this example illustrates how a redistributive intervention in the agricultural sector--restructuring land relations through an agrarian reform--can produce spill-over effects in another, related sector--shelter, the present chapter illustrates the effect of a direct intervention by the government in the shelter sector. We specifically examine the One Lakh Housing Scheme (OLHS)<sup>10</sup>. The OLHS is significant, because it constitutes an important event in the sequence of developments that led government policy to focus on low-income shelter issues. It represents the turning point in the history of housing in Kerala, after which housing for the first time became a matter of public attention. Furthermore, in contrast to the notion of failure that is frequently associated with low-income shelter programmes undertaken by the government in much of the literature on public-sector interventions in the third world, the OLHS provides an uncommon, therefore instructive, instance of a "successful" public sector programme.

The dominant view that emerges from the literature on public interventions is that such interventions are "top-down", rigid, and, non-participatory approaches to poverty alleviation. The propensity of the public sector to generate large, inefficient bureaucracies that encourage corruption and

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<sup>10</sup>. One Lakh is a measure equivalent to a hundred thousand.

cooptation of benefits by dominant social and economic classes, according to the "critique", makes it difficult for public sector programmes to reach the poorest. Moreover, because of these inefficiencies in the public sector, and because the government often operates at large scales, its poverty programmes are costly. These programmes also involve heavy subsidies. Subsidies amount to spreading short-term relief instead of development that can be sustained, and at costs clearly unaffordable in present times of austerity. In sum therefore, public programmes do not work very well--especially in the housing sector where the divisible nature of shelter benefits<sup>11</sup> exacerbate conflict and competition over their distribution, making their implementation as intended, more difficult (Grindle, 1980).

The OLHS, by contrast, represents an unusual case. Even while it contains several features commonly associated with the elements of "failure" singled out above, the programme has been acknowledged as a success, not only by government officials and politicians, but also by the people of the state. In fact, its pitfalls and drawbacks, are also regarded by the supporters and critics of the programme, as part of its achievement, as they have provided valuable lessons to those engaged in shelter provision (as we shall see below) of what does or does not work

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<sup>11</sup> Housing is a private good, where there is a one-to-one correlation between the good and the beneficiary, as opposed to say, a community park which is a public good, where one person's use of it will not preclude another person drawing similar benefits from it.

in public housing programmes.

A word about the features of the OLHS that if viewed normatively would ostensibly suggest "failure":

(1) In institutional terms, the state government conceived of the OLHS, and it was implemented entirely by the state apparatus. (2) Programmatically, it had an unusually large scale and scope--it envisaged the provision of one lakh, fully constructed houses--just what a section of scholars in the low-income shelter field have been arguing against since the late 1960s. Scholars advocate against the provision of fully constructed units because they are usually stereotypical, and do not allow the user sufficient scope for making decisions about the type and timing of the house. (3) The prospective beneficiaries were not selected well enough in advance to allow direct user-input, again a point that is associated with the "top-down", rigid approach of the government; it was conceived of as a welfare measure--the land and housing were to be provided at virtually no cost to the prospective beneficiaries. In other words it carried a deep subsidy. (4) In terms of performance, it finally met less than 50% of its physical target. Moreover, it started out as a one year programme but extended to more than three.

Despite these apparent flaws, the programme has performed exceptionally well in several ways, and on closer examination, the "failures" are not as drastic as they might seem if assessed normatively or in isolation.

In this chapter we take a closer look at the OLHS



programme, to understand the potential, capacity and limitations of the public sector in undertaking redistribution programmes, and implementing them in ways that ensure the allocation of their benefits to the actual groups targeted. In other words we examine the outcome of a "top-down" approach to distribution. In so doing, my intention is to set up a case from which to argue that it is spurious to deem "top-down" approaches and "bottom-up" approaches as being mutually exclusive categories. It is just as misleading to consider that the merits of one can only be enhanced by detracting from those of the other, as it is to focus on debates about growth augmenting policies versus social welfare oriented policies as if they are oppositions and each approach necessarily demands the exclusion of the other<sup>1 2</sup>.

In the next section I will briefly introduce how and why the OLHS is perceived as a successful programme by government officials and the people. This is followed by an elaboration of the historical significance of the programme to shelter provision in Kerala. I then explore the factors that, in my perception, have significant bearing on the origin of the OLHS. In the subsequent sections I isolate and examine in detail some of the key aspects of the programme. Specifically, these aspects relate to the design and formulation of the programme, its unique financial arrangements, land acquisition mechanism, and finally execution procedures and the administrative chain of command.

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<sup>1 2</sup>. A parallel theme has been explored by Amartya Sen in "Levels of Poverty: Policy and change", 1980. Staff Working Paper No. 401. Washington.

Through this discussion I will show that the government made both, popular participation and centralized control, both, the central themes of the OLHS, which, for the most part, were responsible for its good performance.

1. The OLHS: perceptions of "success" and historical significance.

The One Lakh Housing Scheme (OLHS), carried out by the Kerala state government between 1972 and 1976 has been noted by many central and state level officials, politicians, analysts in the shelter sector, and in some of the literature on shelter processes in Kerala, as an important, innovative national model in the public housing sector. It is commonly identified in official circles as being important because it represents the first major attempt by any state government to address the issue of shelter for the poor in a substantial and effective way. The outcome of the OLHS is called "substantial" because through it the state government, of its own initiative, sought for the first time, to provide land, tenure and housing (as opposed to rental tenements, that are more usual) to one lakh rural landless laborer households as part of a single, though regionally disaggregated, non-phased government intervention--a programme unparalleled in the country. It is seen to have been "effective" because, despite meager financial assistance from the central level, and without any funds from other institutional sources in the housing field, the government succeeded in providing tenured

land to a lakh landless households, with houses for nearly 50% of them.

The programme is also seen to exemplify the commitment and "political will" necessary for the government to carry out major redistributive programmes. One senior official in the Housing and Urban Development Corporation of India (HUDCO) illustrated to me the need for "political will and motivation from the top" by pointing out how other states such as Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka that are "now attempting to do what Kerala tried 10-15 years ago in the OLHS" are finding it difficult to replicate its results, in particular, the wide-spread public enthusiasm it generated.

If the OLHS is seen as an important programme nationally, it also has a significant place in the history of housing in Kerala. Prior to the conception and implementation of the OLHS in the fourth plan period (1969-1974), shelter in general, and shelter for the poor, in particular, had not been a major state sector activity. A few, standard programmes<sup>13</sup> formulated and funded by the central government, had been implemented by the regional engineers of the Public Works Department (PWD), a central agency responsible for undertaking centrally sponsored capital and public infrastructure programmes, and the state government's Revenue Board Machinery through its hierarchy of

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<sup>13</sup>. These programmes included a few standardized schemes such as industrial workers housing, plantation workers housing, but mostly the more general Low income group (LIG), middle and high income group (MIG, HIG) programmes, with the bulk of these latter efforts focussed on middle and high income groups.

revenue, block and village level officials. Together these agencies provided less than 3% of the state's housing stock. The bulk of housing activity was left to private initiative. This left the poor and the landless, those most in need of affordable shelter, on the fringes of the private market, on government land or dependent on the beneficence of landlords and landowners, living in constant fear of eviction<sup>14</sup>. As one informant noted, "before housing became a public concern in the 1970s, shelter was either a private issue, or a feudal issue<sup>15</sup>.

The OLHS popularized the notion of, and need for low-income housing in the state for the first time. It increased public awareness of the shelter issue, and as a result, public attention became focussed on government housing policy. With public attention, public criticism followed, inducing an element of responsiveness on the part of the government to public opinion on shelter issues. This trend has been maintained and is one factor underlying the trends of innovation in Kerala's approach to low-income shelter evident in the subsequent efforts of the government and non-governmental sectors. The formal partnership of the government with the NGO sector in shelter provision, is one manifestation of these efforts.

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<sup>14</sup>. The poor, in addition to being at the lowest end of the economic spectrum are also at the bottom of the social hierarchy, being mostly untouchables or from other low-castes.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with B. Kuriakose, consultant to non-governmental organizations involved with shelter and rural development; active designer of low-cost shelter, and worker at the grass-roots level.

The OLHS also marked a shift in the structure of public redistributive programmes, the funding of which was reorganized to include allocation of monies in favor of low-income housing. The state sector did not have a separate budget for shelter until the third plan period (1960-1966), when Rs. 31 million (roughly US\$ 3.1 million in 1972 currencies) was provided for the first time. That only 59% of this amount was spent by the government, attests to the low priority given to housing until as late as 1966. It is also no coincidence that in the fourth plan period (1969-1974), the time during which the OLHS was initiated, the state sector expenditure increased two and a half times, to over Rs. 46.3 million, against an outlay of Rs. 23 million<sup>5</sup>.

As the first major, experimental, shelter programme for the poor taken up by the state government, the OLHS set the stage for the involvement of public institutions in the shelter sector. Even as the OLHS was awaiting formal passage, two new quasi-government agencies were formed--The Kerala State Housing Board (KSHB), and the Kerala State Housing-Cooperative Federation (KSHCF)--both mandated to provide shelter related assistance, with state-wide jurisdiction. Neither of these new agencies were involved in the implementation of the OLHS (we shall see why later), but took on separate programmes at more modest scales. These programmes added considerably to the housing stock in the

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<sup>5</sup>. All outlays in current rupees. See "Facts and Figures On Housing in Kerala", 1979. Government Of Kerala. Government Press, Trivandrum; and "Statistics for Planning", 1983. State Planning Board, Government of Kerala. Trivandrum.

state during the decade of the seventies.

Further, in providing an example, through its merits and pitfalls, of what worked well, and what did not in public housing interventions, the OLHS served as a major learning experience not only for the government and its public institutions engaged in shelter provision, but also for other non-governmental agencies involved with housing.

## 2. A break with tradition: coalition governments, the origin and timing of a "welfare measure".

The perceived success of the OLHS noted above is all the more striking for two reasons--the break from past practice that the OLHS signified, and its timing.

It is evident that as an experimental programme through which the state government initiated its involvement in the production of low-income shelter, the scale of the OLHS is hardly one that is commonly associated with an "experimental, initial attempt". If the programme was motivated by nothing more than a concern for the housing condition of the poor, we would expect the government to have made a more modest beginning, gradually increasing its involvement with the accumulation of experience or the formulation of a specialist public sector housing agency. Why then, did it break with its past tradition of remaining at the fringe of shelter provision, and undertake a programme of such ambitious scale and scope, in a relatively untried sector which lacked a competent state level institution or agency to

which responsibility for implementation could be assigned?

Similarly, the timing of the OLHS also raises questions about how the programme got onto the government agenda. The state government conceived of the OLHS in 1971, as a distribution programme targeted towards a section of the poorest 10-15% of the income spectrum. Its introduction followed very closely the land reforms, another redistribution programme whose implementation had just begun in 1970. Widespread conflicts were taking place throughout the state because of restructuring of land rights and the consequent shifts in the relative power of social groups that an agrarian reform inherently implies.<sup>6</sup> The chaos that this reorganization of power brought about is clearly does not provide the stable environment usually considered necessary for the implementation of a massive programme such as the OLHS. Why did the government then choose to introduce the OLHS at such an unsettled period?

In sum, what brought about the birth of the OLHS at this particular historical moment and not another?

The significance of the "success" of the OLHS, in part, lies in the details of its process and outcome. However, the key

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<sup>6</sup> See Herring, Ronald, J. 1983, "land to the Tiller", Yale University Press for a discussion on the nature of social tension and change the reform engendered. Of particular significance is the coexistence of agrarian violence--clashes between landlords and laborer groups, as well as laborers and the political parties opposed to the reform, with the tendency of individual reform beneficiaries--laborers, small, marginal and middle tenants--to avoid alienating powerful elites on the grounds that reformist regimes often prove ephemeral, or, its opposite, that subsequent land distribution attempts may be contrary to their interests.

to the elements that made those processes and achievements possible lie in the manner and moment in which the programme was conceived.

In the discussion below, I show that the origins of the programme lie in more than the government's need to preserve its own legitimacy in response to successful demand making from an important political constituency. In addition, the government also had its own concerns (which we will discuss later) in undertaking such a visible programme, and structuring it the way it did. Indeed it turned to its own advantage the conflict that overtly led to the formulation of the OLHS. This "advantage" was not merely political survival, nor, aggrandizement of its power, but stemmed also from the government's commitment to the conditions of the rural underclass. The government set the programme up so that its good performance became a political necessity--tantamount to its credibility. The programme was therefore designed so as to compel it to be successful.

### 2.1 Past redistributive activity and the inadvertent generation of a new demand making group: conflict and excluded groups as new clients.

Just as large, high profile, distributive programmes often originate out of political necessity, ostensibly the conception of the OLHS is closely linked to the state government's need to mitigate some of the unintentional, though not wholly unlikely, outcomes of the land reforms. On the opposite side of the same



coin, to the extent that the OLHS was a response to successful demand making from a politically powerful constituency, it was also a response to pressure from below; attesting to the presence of a system where organized demand making by various sections of society to elicit distributional favors from the government is an accepted strategy.

The land reforms benefitted two classes among the poor--small farmers (Kudiyirippu) and landless agricultural laborers (Kudikidappukarans). Both these classes had historical interests in land--the former (mostly ezhavas, and other backward castes) as tenants of small holdings, 71% of which were less than an acre, and the latter (mostly the untouchable or scheduled castes, such as pulayas and parayas) as serf or slave-like classes, who did not own or rent land, but were granted the right by large landowners to live on their land as free-tenants in return for their services as farm guards.

The Kudikidappukars who gained title to their house-sites and upto 400 sq. yards (40 cents) of land around the sites, however, formed less than half of the agricultural laborers in the state who were landless at the eve of the land reform legislation in 1970. The remainder, which included laborers living on government owned (puramboke) land or those living on rent, were not only excluded from benefits of the agrarian reform, but in fact faced a worsened housing situation, because of the reforms.

This is because after the state government passed the land

reform legislation in 1970, in the early phases of its implementation landowners were still quite unclear as to how the reforms would actually affect them. Unlike in the past, no landowner would permit a landless laborer to live in rentable quarters on his premises, lest this might become the basis of a claim by the laborer for ownership later<sup>7</sup>. In particular, landowners kept laborers who were members of unions or labor-associations, at a distance. As a result of this difficulty in finding cheap accommodation after the land reform, sections of the excluded landless agricultural laborers resorted to protests and demonstrations, demanding concessions and compensation from the government, similar to those gained by the reform beneficiaries. Agricultural labor associations and sections of the opposition seized the opportunity to launch attacks against the government, alleging exclusionary behavior. Those newspapers, over which opposition groups had influence, published these allegations, generating adverse publicity against the newly elected government and its policies. This further fuelled the conflict between those included and excluded from land reform benefits. To the excluded landless laborers the Kudikidappukars appeared to have been treated as a "privileged" class--because despite being in the same economic category, they had gained from the reform merely by virtue of their historical interests in land. They were now viewed by the landless as the new landed

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<sup>7</sup> Reported in "A Good Cause for Contractors", in the "Economic and Political Weekly", 1972, an article on the OLHS.

"elite" among the agricultural laborer class who sought to maintain their distance from the rest. There was also bitterness among the landless over the growing propensity of this new "elite" to collude with other small and middle peasants, against the interests of those excluded, by refusing to share their gains economically or to support their cause politically<sup>8</sup>.

In addition, the unrest among the excluded landless laborers over housing and land ownership, was exacerbated by the deteriorating employment conditions they faced during the early 1970s. This period witnessed a significant growth in the supply of rural labor (figs. in Alexander) due to several reasons<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Based on talks with B. Kuriakose, V. Gnanamony, political survey reports on Kerala in the "Economic and Political Weekly" July 4 1970, Nov 7 1970. See Herring op cit. footnote 49: 214 for a opinions expressed by non-beneficiary agricultural laborers in a survey conducted in 1980. Also see E.M.S. Namboodripad, "Peasants and Laborers: Allies in a Common Struggle," in Peasant and Labor 3, no. 1 (January-February 1974). Namboodripad, currently general secretary of the CPI(M), and former chief minister of Kerala (1957-1959 and 1967-1969), admits that conflict between the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries among agricultural laborers has been one outcome of the agrarian reform that has served to divide this class along lines of landowning small peasants and landless laborers. In an attempt to mitigate dissension among the "rural proletariat" that has traditionally formed the communist mass-base, he has felt compelled to argue that there continues to be common platform for both these groups, in several articles, including the one referred to above.

<sup>9</sup> For example, as an indirect outcome of increase in the capitalization of large farms as a means adopted by large farmers for hedging against the ceiling law provision of the land reform which excluded mechanized farms from its purview; subdivision of land into smaller holdings due to the reform; a growing propensity of small farmers to switch from paddy cultivation to commercial and tree crop cultivation, especially coconut, which contracted labor requirements; the general depression of traditional industries such as coir, and cashew processing that had thrown other workers into agriculture; steady immigration of "cheap labor from neighboring states who were under-cutting

Although the prevailing wage were not depressed by this increase in labor supply, and in fact continued to rise due to trade union agitations, the number of days in a year that agricultural laborers could find employment declined measurably. Thus despite higher minimum wages, household incomes of the laborers remained low. On the other hand, with rising wages, prices rose. While the Kudikidappukars had access to modest "fixed" income through the sale of marginal produce from their garden sites, and to credit against their land title, the landless laborers faced a slack labor market, shrinking incomes, higher prices and a worsened housing condition. Therefore, even while these landless laborers were being organized by trade and labor unions to secure gains from the government, unrest among the landless laborers was on the increase (Raj and Tharakan, 1983: 72).

At the same time, agricultural laborers are an important political constituency and have traditionally formed the mass base of the communists. It would not be in the interest of the communist faction in the coalition government to allow unrest among its own constituency to build up. Moreover, active labor union mobilization renders unrest among agricultural laborers very visible. This visibility can easily cause localized unrest to spread into wider agitation.

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organized local labor; natural population growth of Ag. households and a significant increase in the entry of women from these households into the labourforce (Mencher, 1980, Herring 1979, Raj and Tharakan, 1983, interview with K.K.Subramaniam, observations during field trip, conversations with ag. lab. households.)

The congress-CPI led coalition government (The United Front) that took office in 1970, saw the potential lines of conflict that could arise if this unrest over land, housing and employment became exacerbated, and the threat that such escalated conflict could pose to the stability of the new coalition. If the government had to maintain its legitimacy and ensure its full term of tenure in office, it would have to act rapidly to prevent the growing discontent that had emerged so early in its tenure, from becoming a crisis, leading to broader disenchantment among the rest of the people. Given the nature of the electorate in the state, where a majority measure a government's competence, in part, by what it has done for the poor, the government needed immediate evidence on the ground to demonstrate its concern for the agitating and disgruntled landless laborers.

Therefore, breaking with past tradition, the state government announced the OLHS in 1971 in response to pressure from labor unions, and demand making by a politically significant group among which unrest was inadvertently fostered by the government's own redistributive activity. It was designed to provide land and housing, the two issues over which conflict had built up, to those landless agricultural households who had not derived benefits from the land reform<sup>10</sup>. For reasons mentioned above the government could not afford the OLHS to be a failure,

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<sup>10</sup> That the OLHS was expressly targeted towards a single client group--the rural landless agricultural laborers who had been left out of the land reform benefits--was brought up by all my informants. Also see Nalapat. M.D., " One Lakh Houses Scheme" in Economic and Political Weekly, April 17, 1976: 2268.

politically.

## 2.2 Beyond the legitimacy question: the government's own hierarchy of goals, and the turning of a problem into an opportunity.

The OLHS first emerged as the government's response to demand making by a dissatisfied, though vocal, constituency. However, there was something more than pressure from this important political group that led to the OLHS being taken up at such a large and unprecedented scale. This "something more" relates to the government's own goals in implementing the OLHS, which are linked with 3 factors--two endogenous to the institutional entity that a state government is, and one exogenous, outside this institutional entity: (1) the newness of the government; (2) the fact that it was a coalition government and, (3) the nature of agrarian reform and the sluggish pace at which the land reform was proceeding since the government commenced its implementation in 1970<sup>11</sup>.

### 2.2.1 Coalition governments: goals, speed, success and spill-over benefits of large, visible programmes.

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<sup>11</sup> Regarding factors that lead to certain decisions being taken by institutions or organizations at certain points in time, Herbert Simon, in his discourse on a somewhat different issue of rational philosophy, and rationality in administrative behavior, provides a clue. He suggests that an institution or organization, in choosing to make certain decisions, may often have an hierarchical structure of goals, where attainment of an end at each level, progressively becomes a means to broader or more distant ends (1961: Ch.4). The OLHS, similarly, was more than a mere means to an immediate end, as we see below.

Non-authoritarian, representative governments worry about their legitimacy. They will usually act to prevent conflict among social groups from building up to a crisis, particularly if conflicts surface in the government's early years in office. More so if they come from relatively well organized groups who carry political weight due either to numerical strength, economic dominance or powerful social status, or some combination of each. How the government chooses to act, how soon it acts, and the scale of its action, will depend on the conception of state power that groups within the particular society share, the relative influence of the various social groups, and, the extent to which dissatisfied sections of society can effectively mobilize support and public attention. For example often, announcing the "intention" of action or having a programme "on the anvil" will be sufficient for the government to buy time to actually implement when it is ready, rather than when demands are made on it.

The Congress-CPI led coalition, in whose tenure the OLHS was formulated, could not expect to satisfy its electorate by announcing its "intention" to do something for the laborers. Due to the rather different historical path the state government as an institution has traversed, and the particular social structure in Kerala that I briefly mentioned in the Introduction, conceptions of state capacity, and expectations by the people of government response to pressures from "below" in Kerala, are closely related to the perceived character of political parties

whose members are the incumbents in office--ministers. At the same time, political parties elected to state power themselves have specific notions of development which have led to a sustained focus on redistributive policies and an active attempt to reach the poor.

Trends established by the very first communist government in 1957 which politicized and publicized its commitment to using "state power as an instrument in the struggle of the people", and built its mass base among the poorest, have become virtual yardsticks against which the performance of subsequent governments is measured. Since 1957, however, several different parties, and alliances have come to power in the state. The subsequent communist fronts have also been varied in nature and in their cast of characters. For example the communist party split up in 1964 into the more "rightist" CPI and the more "radical" CPM. But the most significant trend has been that coalition governments, as an institutional form, have become a typical feature.

In 1970 the coalition that came to power was led by the former communist faction (CPI), in conjunction with the Congress--precisely the party traditionally regarded as the "main enemy" of the communist movement by left sympathizers, and one that the CPI had been accused of "falling in line with" during the split. As a result, skepticism about the robustness of this first ever center-left coalition, and fears of a "revisionist cooptation" of the CPI's agenda of "structural reform" by the Congress were rife



among the coalition's opponents. They argued that a coalition which depended on the support of parties ideologically opposed to the left, and with landed, industrial interests, could not possibly carry out "radical redistribution policies". The CPI, at the head of the coalition was therefore, under pressure to demonstrate, relatively quickly, its commitment to radical reform, and concern for the poor peasantry, that it claimed was its constituency. An image of stability, that had been the central theme of the coalition's electoral promise, had to be combined with visible evidence of reform. As some members of the coalition noted, "There is a powerful radical group among the politically conscious people in the state. This group will not be satisfied with just an honest administration. It will demand positive results in the field of radical reform" (Karunakaran, 1970: 1774). This they saw could be achieved "...if substantial good work could be done by the new government", quickly (Nair, 1970).

The discontent among the landless agricultural laborers over the outcome of the agrarian reform, and their demand for land and shelter, provided the new coalition with an opportunity to do "some good work". A large programme that would provide land and shelter to one lakh of the poorest households, would certainly be regarded as a progressive effort by the new government.

Providing housing as part of the OLHS was important in several ways. First, it would provide visibility to the

programme. Unlike most other distributional services such as community development, credit assistance, health, and, education, the physical nature of shelter programmes renders them visible. Large shelter programmes not only reach a greater number of beneficiaries, which both helps the poor, as well as, affords greater political rewards, but they make programme benefits even more visible. Large shelter programmes, if successful, therefore, not only become large and visible, "achievements", benefitting a large number of clients, even if from a selected target group. Secondly, large construction projects provide spill-over benefits. Shelter programmes have spread effects that get transmitted more broadly throughout the economy--such as generating unskilled and skilled employment in the construction industry. While the creation of unskilled employment helps spread gains further among the poor, skilled employment and the generation of demand in the construction inputs sectors (that such projects entail) disseminates programme benefits, indirectly, to societal groups other than the immediate programme beneficiaries, (including small and large contractors), even while stimulating the economy through the forward and backward linkages of the building industry. A large scale programme, such as the OLHS possessed the potential to provide all of these additional spill-over benefits.

Therefore, in addition to providing benefits that would ameliorate, in a modest way, the unemployment problem in the state, a large programme if successful, and if completed rapidly,

would furnish the new government with visible and concrete evidence of its commitment and stability that it sought. Hence it was in the interest of the government to ensure that the OLHS was implemented with speed, and that it perform well.

2.2.2 Coalition dynamics: seeking a counterfoil for sluggishness and protracted turbulence of landreform implementation, publicity and a welfare measure.

We have noted the ostensible reason that led to the birth of the OLHS--the government wanted to ward off potential unrest among a section of an important political constituency--landless laborers--over being excluded from benefits of the landreforms. Being a center-left coalition government whose commitment towards the poor, and institutional capacity was questioned by its opponents, the government saw in the OLHS an opportunity to demonstrate its stability and responsible governance. The large scale of the OLHS, and its visible housing component would help the government do so.

The perception of stability that the OLHS could implicitly provide was important to the new coalition government for another reason. It could divert attention away from the government's sluggish performance in the ongoing agrarian reform.

As yet, the coalition government had been in office for less than a year, and had barely consolidated its own internal position--portfolio sharing and division of ministries among the 8-party coalition, much less have enough "progressive" measures

on the ground to demonstrate to the electorate its stated commitment towards structural change and reform. The one, major progressive measure it had acted with speed to commence implementation of, was the agrarian reform. But even that had a slow start, and many within the government along with opposition parties and the social classes committed to the reform, were uniformly critical of implementation procedures. One reason for tardy implementation, as we will briefly see later, lies in the inherent nature of an agrarian reform itself. The other reason lay in the nature of the United Front coalition government, and the class character of its member parties.

As is common with coalition governments, the precarious inter-party balance of power can be easily destabilized even by ordinary pressures of disagreement among the members--for example lack of agreement over agenda setting, regional or location specificity of programme benefits, inclusion or exclusion of members from decision making, relationship of new ministers with the established underlying bureaucracy, consensus generation and so forth. Agreement over the issue of agrarian reform, which by definition, envisages a drastic redistribution of land-ownership and privilege, shakes up the relative power of social groups and most importantly, from the perspective of political parties, produces clear losers and winners among their constituencies, is likely to be even more problematic. The 8 member-parties of the United Front alliance had distinctly different constituencies. (just as the leaders themselves were drawn from different classes

of society):

The CPI and some of the socialist parties whose mass support was drawn from the poor peasantry, were the only two parties that stood ideologically committed to the reform. Although the earlier leaders of the CPI were drawn from landed, even formerly aristocratic classes, the new crop of leaders are socially and economically much closer to the lower classes that they represent. The coalition had both types of leaders, but was led by the former, who favoured programmes that would benefit the poor more directly, such as the landreforms.

The congress member of the coalition, despite its links with middle and large farmers, pro-capitalist stance, and upper class leaders, also favored the reform, if only in principle, and mostly for future political gains. After the split in the congress at the national level in the late 1960s, the more dominant faction which was now part of the United Front Coalition, sought to shift its "rightist" image to a "left-of-center" one. The growing agrarian unrest in the wake of the Naxalbari uprisings of 1967 in Bengal and Bihar, that had in part influenced the party's crushing defeat in some states in the 1969 midterm elections, had underscored the need to shift its mass base in rural areas to small and middle farmers. Support for the reform would provide the "progressive" character it was seeking. At the same time it would convince the "large left vote" in Kerala of its "radical" leanings, and pave the way for making future inroads into the mass base of both, the CPI and the CPM.

All the other parties, including the Muslim League, were sectarian or regional parties with landed, communal constituencies and leaders, that stood to lose the most from the reform. The Muslim League had on previous occasion been charged with "opportunism ..and lack of commitment to the United Front's left programme, in particular the land reform" and there is recorded evidence that these charges were accurate (cf. Herring, 1983: 193; footnote 16). Similarly, the Kerala Congress, a politically significant, Syrian Christian splinter party, representing powerful land-owners, industrial and commercial elite interests, stood opposed to the reform in practice, even while lending it verbal support. Although not part of the formal alliance, this party's implicit support was crucial for the coalition<sup>1 2</sup>, therefore, its position on the reform became important.

With a mixed group such as the above, and the opposed interests of their constituencies, the coalition was bound to face internal pressures from its members and supporters, for modifications or at least delay in landreform implementation. At the same time, even the dissenters from within the 8-party alliance realized that subverting a reform, for which widespread popular support and public involvement had not only been

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<sup>1 2</sup> As we saw in chapter one, the Kerala congress and the Muslim League, although parties with regionally specific constituencies, have been critical to the making or breaking of coalitions in Kerala. Except for the present Left Democratic Front elected to power in the state no other government has survived for long without their support.

mobilized, but kept alive for over a decade, would be political lunacy. Even extensive foot-dragging they recognized, was likely to be, and in fact was being, interpreted by the supporters of the reform as ineptitude and insincerity on the part of an uncommitted government. A coalition seeking to project an image of stability, cohesion and institutional capacity could hardly afford such a view.

Therefore, a mutually acceptable informal criteria evolved as to which provision of the reform would be implemented first<sup>13</sup>: The transference of title to the Kudikidappukars was taken up first. Implementation of this provision required no physical redistribution of land, and involved very little land "loss" for the landowners: the liability of every landowner worked out to a mean area of only 0.08 acres per valid case. Simultaneously applications from tenant farmers for transfer of title were invited, to assure the people that tenancy transfer for which there was the largest lobby among small and middle farmers, was underway. The most contentious provision--the enforcing of the land ceiling law, which involved the actual expropriation and redistribution of surplus land from large

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<sup>13</sup> This, of course, has not been explicitly admitted to by government officials, or stated in the literature I have read, and only speculated upon by some of my informants. However, events as recorded in the journals published in the early 1970s clearly suggest a strong possibility that this indeed could be the case. For example see Economic and Political Weekly, July 4 1970, Special Number, July 1970, Sept. 26, 1970, November 7, 1970, July 17, 1971; The Hindu, (February-November 1970, 1971), Herring op.cit., Hardgrave, "The Kerala Communists: Contradictions of Power", in Radical Politics in South Asia, 1973, MIT Press. Cambridge.

farmers--from which the landed stood to lose heavily, and the one most likely to have the powerful Muslim League, Congress, and, Kerala Congress supporters up in arms, was put off for later.

Since the gains to the Kudikidappukars of obtaining title to their house-sites came early in the implementation sequence of the reform, these gains were also the most visible. Frictions between them, and the landless agricultural laborers, who despite belonging to the same economic category, found themselves excluded from the benefits of the reforms due to their lack of historical interests in land, were bound to arise. Especially because coalition dynamics had led to the postponement of the expropriation of surplus land for redistribution, the one provision under the reform that could potentially have benefited the excluded group.

In seeking to maintain internal cohesion, over the handling of one of its own redistribution programmes, therefore, the coalition government inadvertently created an external problem. The resolution of this new problem, a by-product of a progressive, but partial measure and internal politics within the government, eventually required the formulation of yet another distribution programme, the OLHS. Akin to what Scokpol terms the "dialectic between state and society", political mobilization, and awareness had led to further demand making by the excluded group along lines of the benefits from which it had been excluded (1985: 25).



2.2.3 Nature of an activity as determinant: turbulence, surrogate counterfoil and the features of the OLHS.

Apart from the intra-coalition dissensions discussed above, there were exogenous reasons, outside the direct control of the government that delayed implementation procedures, and in part led to decisions about certain features that became important in the design of the OLHS.

It is in the nature of agrarian reform that implementation often takes time to be realized. The operationalization process of such reforms is commonly a slow and chaotic one. The pace of implementation is hindered especially if the process demands constant constitutional ratification from the Central level, and if the judicial system with its procedural rules, and, precedent-based methodology plays a central role. At the local level, setting up an effective implementation machinery, and getting it to work takes time. Problems emerge in assigning tasks to various levels of government involved with the reform, collecting, scrutinising, processing and confirming the validity of each case over which there may be claims and counter-claims. This often runs into controversies and legal disputes involving court-room procedures that may take weeks, even months to be resolved. Meanwhile, widespread class confrontation is typical. Conflicts develop between landowners who stand to lose and thus, seek informal and extra-legal ways and means of resisting the new laws, and tenants, who, finding their staying power implicitly strengthened by these new laws, are eager to gain immediate

access to what they think they now rightfully own--recognizing that delay often means denial of rights in a land reform. Petty bureaucrats and lawyers see in this process opportunities for windfall gains. The actual functioning of some field officers and tribunals may be at variance with stipulated procedures, either deliberately, because they disfavor the reform, or inadvertently, for reasons of expediency, or due to pressure from influential elites who seek to mitigate their losses.

All of these features were present in the Kerala case. Despite widespread public support for the reform that we noted above, and commitment from key legislators in the government, the Planning Commission observed that "among the officials incharge of the legislative, judicial, and, executive processes there were some who had never really accepted the policy of the reform. Their words were at variance with their deeds", and dilatory attitudes were common (EPW, 1977). On the other hand an atmosphere of militancy, confrontation and severe partisan antagonism had built up due to protracted confrontation between the supporters of the reform and the landed and their representative political parties. Threats of organizing a "land grab" movement from CPM supporters aggravated the situation. This charged atmosphere was further exacerbated by publication of reports on major incidences of violence by the media. (: in one district alone (Alleppy), 25,000 activists were accused in cases of agitation in the first five months of 1970.) Attacks by landowners and the laborers on each other were constantly in the

news (cf. Herring, 1983). Public disclosures by labor associations of known cases of graft and corruption among reform implementation officials were also an embarrassment to the government. In the midst of this turmoil, the discontent among the excluded agricultural laborers was gaining attention from opposition parties and the public.

Quick action on the part of the government, as we discussed earlier, was imperative. Even while the government sought to make rapid revisions to speed up implementation procedures, and address the demands of the landless agricultural laborers through the OLHS, it saw in the latter, and its massive scale, an opportunity to provide a counterfoil to the turbulence sluggish reform implementation had generated. This could be possible if the unusual and unprecedented nature of the OLHS could be sufficiently publicized, to capture public attention. The same media that had projected chaos in the case of land reform implementation could be used to politicize a large programme that sought "only" to distribute considerable benefits to a section of the rural poor rather than to extract anything from other better off sections. This could potentially divert some of the attention focussed on the government's performance in the land reform issue, towards a high profile and visible, distributional measure, in a sector that had hitherto received little attention from the state government. In a socio-political context where high levels of political awareness and literacy among a "radically oriented" electorate have traditionally served

to focus public attention on government policy, initiation of state-sector activity in a new sector, in a big way, would certainly attract attention.

It was also important that the programme be designed as a "welfare measure" that did not detract from its distributional image by expecting the poor, who were to be its beneficiaries, to pay for their houses. Moreover, since the prospective target group, the excluded landless laborers, were measuring their losses against the gains of the Kudikidappukars, who had paid practically nothing for obtaining land title, it would be politically difficult for the government to now charge the former.

Embarking on a programme of this nature would not only ward off discontent among those who had been most visibly excluded from the land reform, but if adequate public interest and attention could be mobilized, the opposition would be forced to support a measure so directly targeted towards the poorest, rural underclass. This could not only help diffuse potential antagonism towards the OLHS, but would make accusations about the government's lack of commitment to the poor and structural change, difficult.

The key features of the OLHS, that emerge from the above analysis<sup>14</sup>, therefore are: speed, which was necessary to pacify

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<sup>14</sup> It must be noted that this analysis is my own interpretation of the sequence of events that led to the formulation of the OLHS, based on the literature and discussions with informants, therefore it will not necessarily be synonymous with what official accounts of the government claim.

the agitating group, drawing public attention at a critical time towards a positive move by the government; scale, the programme had to be sufficiently large to generate the impact the government was seeking, and achieve other spill-over benefits that would spread through the economy, even if in a modest way; visibility, the programme would ideally require a component that was concrete, visible and not diffuse. The provision of fully constructed housing, which was also what was demanded, would meet this "criterion"; publicity, the programme had to be projected as more than just "a government response", which some sections could attack. Rather it had to, as far as possible, involve the active support of people throughout the state, and not merely the beneficiaries, if the opposition were not to jeopardize it through organizing negative support against it; a "welfare" nature or nearly one, which rather than pull the programme down would help the government obtain support from an electorate that considered it the government's responsibility to provide relief to a constituency that was too poor to pay for the benefits of distributional programmes; and finally, most important was that it had to be a success. All of the above goals would only be met if the programme turned out successful. As it was, the government was taking a major risk in entering a sector it had little experience with, while the state apparatus was busy with the implementation of the land reform that in itself was drawing criticism. It was now adding to it the burden of another large programme. If the OLHS failed the government would have on its

hands a large, highly visible, highly publicized failure; on the contrary if it succeeded, the government would have an equally large and visible "success".<sup>15</sup> That the programme indeed perform well, was, therefore crucial. One way the government could achieve this was by assigning the OLHS high priority, and by taking the responsibility of implementation in its own hands, rather than entrusting it to other agencies, such as the central PWD, or even the new state level agencies that were being simultaneously formulated, the KSHB and the KSHCF.

Thus several features of the OLHS emerged due to the manner and moment in which it was conceived.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Some of the senior officers involved with the OLHS, that I spoke with reported this pressure of implementing the programme with speed, while ensuring that it performed well.

<sup>16</sup> I emphasize the above points because in my perception they are central to the birth of the idea of the OLHS and impart it with characteristics that subsequently play an important role in its performance. But I also emphasize the above sequence of events to show, as I noted in the Introduction, that a "communist-led regime" in a parliamentary democracy, like other regimes faces certain constraints, if you will, to its autonomy. National concerns will often impact state-level political alliances. The power of the Center vis-a-vis the state-government will also have implications on the institutional potential of a state government. These will explicitly, or implicitly delimit the framework or define the range of possibilities within which the latter must operate. More important, the particular social setting in which a state-government operates--the setting from which its own members are drawn, or have links with--will make specific programme choices more viable, necessary or more appropriate than others. So that the leftist orientation of a state government will not by itself, deterministically, suggest a given set of options that will normatively hold true. This, of course, is a well known fact, but it is useful to understand what other factors will influence government decision, and how, if understanding the limits of public-sector potential is the intention.

### 2.3 Beyond political survival: communist regimes and commitment.

If this is the political background against which the idea of the OLHS was conceived, there was also genuine support for the idea of targeting distributive efforts to the poorest of rural laborers on the part of the CPI Chief Minister and his party members in the coalition. As Shivanandan, the Special Secretary (Revenues and Agriculture) to the government noted, despite political compromises "commitment to doing good work, is the personal creed of the communist leadership. The problems come when they have to confront the power of the Center.. constitution.. or then sections of their own bureaucracy.."

According to him, the CPI leaders of the coalition in fact exploited the opportunity to provide early in the life of the coalition, some serious relief measures for the poor peasantry, and at the same time be able to exploit their partnership with the Congress, (which was also at power at the center,) to secure more finances from the "powers-that-be" at Delhi. Moreover, the specific design of the programme and the momentum generated to implement the OLHS with speed is in large part attributable to the commitment and personality of the then minister of housing in Kerala (M.N. Govindan Nair), who was made responsible for its implementation. The minister was known for his concern for the housing conditions of the rural poor and had long argued for the government to structure a coherent housing policy and set up a viable state-wide shelter related administrative machinery. That overall charge of implementing the OLHS was invested in the

housing minister who had more than mere political interest in the issue of low-income shelter, turned out to be crucial for the performance of the programme, as we will see.

But, another issue becomes important. Even while the coalition government had members such as the CPI, who were genuinely committed to using the opportunity offered by the OLHS to push through a major relief measure for the poor who were their constituency, there were other interest groups within and outside the government might question why one large redistribution programme (land reform) should be so closely followed by another distribution measure (the OLHS), where again the lowest classes would be the prime beneficiaries<sup>17</sup>. How important are these other groups to limit the scope of redistribution services targeted specifically towards a single constituency? Historical precedence indicates that these interest groups are not unimportant. For example, the previous CPM led government (1967-1969) had fallen precisely on charges of favoritism, politicization of distributional benefits, propensity to reward its supporters and constituency (predominantly the poor), and on grounds of partisanship. By contrast, the United Front coalition needed to acquire just the opposite image if it

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<sup>17</sup> Although it is well documented by several analysts who have studied the outcomes of land reform in Kerala, that net quantitative benefits of the reform accrued far more to "richer farmers", than to the poor, especially the landless, and that land never really went to the "tillers", senior officials and bureaucrats as well as some of the political parties representing landed interests have consistently maintained that the poor were the primary beneficiaries of the reform.



was to remedy the political damage done to it by slow land reform implementation, pull off the OLHS successfully and yet not appear to have indulged in a zero-sum game, where benefits could accrue to one section of society only at the cost of some other.

It is significant therefore that the Coalition's visible move in favor of the poor through the OLHS, soon after the land reforms, (which in theory were also aimed at benefitting the poor), was accompanied by conciliatory gestures towards the industrial, landed elite and the middle classes.

At the same time as the OLHS was formulated, the government announced a "Ten Thousand Industries Scheme"<sup>18</sup>. In keeping with the government's electoral agenda of "developing Kerala industrially", public finance was to be made more readily available to local industrialists planning to start up firms, and similar incentives were offered to those from outside seeking plant locations in Kerala. The image of stability would only add to the environment necessary to convince businesses to locate in the state<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Shivanandan, IAS officer who is currently Special Secretary for Revenues and Agriculture, and was Deputy District Commissioner in the field during the conceptualization and implementation of the OLHS.

<sup>19</sup> This attention towards the industrial elite, or economically dominant classes is noteworthy. As we saw in chapter one, successive state governments in Kerala, even the most radical left governments such as the first undivided communist regime led by E.M.S. Namboodripad, have been very careful in their relationship with this class. One reason, of course, is that traditionally it has been the minority communities, such as the christians, who have controlled industry and commerce. These communities both, enjoy special constitutional protections that in effect are "supra-state governmental", and therefore

Simultaneously, the compensation price for expropriated land was increased, and the ceiling raised, in order to appease large land-owners. (Early exemption of land belonging to religious, charitable and educational institutions from the ceiling provision had already removed the earlier ambivalence over the future of such property.) Surplus land obtained through the nationalization of private forests in 1971, was to be redistributed to displaced laborers and, significantly, the educated unemployed<sup>20</sup>.

Nationalization of banks by the center was exploited to divert credit to middle income groups--the small and middle

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relatively outside the control of the state government, and are represented by political parties that play a powerful local role in making or breaking coalition governments that have become typical in Kerala. Another reason, which is reflective of the limits of power of leftist state governments in a federal political structure, is their ideological focus on distributional issues in the face of deep financial dependence on the center. These regimes recognize the importance of industry in this context, realizing the limits of agricultural growth potential to generate enough resources (employment, income) in the state to meet future demands for economic prosperity and its redistribution. To that extent the attention towards economically significant elite is not purely a question of their influence over the state, but the latter's own interest in them, as well. Leftist regimes are also conscious of their ideological commitment to upholding relatively high statutory wages of labor and are aware of the impact of high labor costs, as well as of the militant potential of organized labor, on industry. Therefore, given their concern about the development of economic forces, they will not indiscriminately alienate industrial elite as they will feudal interests. This is a curious position, and requires further study elsewhere.

<sup>20</sup> Herring, op.cit.: 200. High levels of unemployment among the educated (matriculates and above) unemployed has been an unusual, but acute problem in Kerala that has led to significant outmigration.

peasantry in the rural areas and small-scale entrepreneurs and the self-employed in urban areas. Following the footsteps of the Center, the proposal to raise the wages of white-collar employees of banks and government employees was another measure aimed at winning a section of the middle-income group.

Therefore, even if in moves unrelated to the OLHS, or moves that were temporally close to the OLHS only incidentally, the government had acted to elicit the support of other significant interest groups; So that at the time the OLHS was taken up there was no cause for other interest groups to allege partisanship, or express active opposition to it. It is clear, that if the state government's typical bias towards capital is missing in Kerala, it is not without pressures from elite influence which it must deal with. (This, as much of the above analysis, might seem to reduce regime-motivations in making certain decisions and not others to their perceived vested interest of maintaining political power--a caveat raised by authors such as Kohli, in a different context (1987). But it is important to appreciate that in addition to political survival and an ideological commitment towards social change, elected communist regimes are also "state-managers" mandated to maintain a healthy economy. This requires not ideological dogmatism, but working with all interest groups in the society.)

#### 2.4 Conclusion.

Thus, what would seem to be the opposite of the conditions considered necessary for the implementation of a major

distribution programme in an untried sector--precarious balance of coalition governments, turbulence due to the land reforms, and lack of previous experience with shelter programmes--turned out to be just the conditions that made OLHS a politically viable programme. The turbulence of the reform period--from which the government sought to divert public attention by formulating the OLHS as a large and prestigious distribution programme--and successful demand making from a prominent excluded group, were precisely the conditions that turned the OLHS into a high profile, high priority programme, that had to be implemented with speed. Therefore, we see that although the OLHS originated in response to pressure from below, the coalition government turned it around to achieve some of its own goals that went beyond the interest group that would directly benefit from it. This political interest of the government in ensuring the "success" of the programme invested it with the one feature essential for most programmes that perform well--commitment from those at the very top of the state administrative hierarchy, the powerful decision makers.

Yet several studies have shown that despite a government's "intention" of making a programme successful, implementation results may turn out quite differently on the ground. Commitment from the "top" is a crucial feature of programmes that have worked well, but conversely, does not by-itself suffice or serve as guarantor of potential good performance. Moreover the danger in an approach where the government ambitiously takes on the

simultaneous implementation of two difficult and large programmes, despite its attractive political rationale, is that the performance of both might suffer from the state apparatus being overburdened, or from rivalries between departments implementing them. That this did not happen with the OLHS, is evident from the perceptions of its "success" noted earlier. How did the government convert its ambitious goals into a programme that could be implemented? How did the programme actually work out in practice? What are the features responsible for the areas in which it performed well, what were the problems? What do the beneficiaries think of the outcomes of the OLHS? Did it remain a one-time dead-end programme, we examine below.

## **PART III**

### 3. Formulation and Implementation of a "Top-Down" welfare measure: the power of popular support.

That the leaders at the top of the state administrative hierarchy support a programme, we have noted, is important for the programme's "successful" implementation. Yet, eventhough state government leaders in Kerala supported the OLHS, the implementation of the programme faced one important constraint. In the federal structure of parliamentary democracy in India, state governments are dependent on the Center for financing major distribution measures. Most states are therefore constrained from undertaking large programmes, that do not meet central government approval, for want of adequate funding from the latter. How then, does a state government, which is dependent on the Center for finances, translate the seemingly ambitious goals of undertaking a "welfare" programme of massive scale targeted towards a single, low-status constituency, with speed and efficiency, into an implementable programme that can win Central approval and justify an early release of funds?

The coalition government did so by taking advantage of a programme that the Center itself had recently announced.

#### 3.1 From ambitious goals to an implementable programme: linking state interests with national concerns.

In 1971, even while the idea of the OLHS was taking official shape in Kerala, the Central Government had announced an

extension to its Minimum Needs Programme (MNP), under which it was willing to meet upto half the cost incurred by the various state governments to acquire, develop and distribute 100 sq. yds. of land per household, free of cost, to landless rural laborers in each state. In formulating the OLHS the Housing Minister was quick to grasp this opportunity provided by the Center, but bargained with the latter to secure three significant modifications consistent with the state's local and political needs of the moment:

1) The state government would commence work on the OLHS in all districts of the state simultaneously, instead of the phased district-by-district implementation sequence suggested by the MNP. This would generate considerable employment during construction--at least 6.7 million man-days were projected; it would stimulate the economy by generating activity in the construction sector; allow some economies of scale to be realized by enabling the government to procure building materials in bulk; and would provide the visible impact the government was looking for, without forcing it to make the politically difficult choice of selecting one district over another as is inevitable in a phased programme.

2) The state government doubled the area allotted to each laborer household to 200 sq.yds, and along with the site, took the responsibility of providing fully constructed houses on each site--an aspect that was not part of the original MNP plan. It is noteworthy that doubling the area, made the land allotted to

each potential beneficiary household roughly equivalent to the amount obtained by the kudikidappukars in municipal areas, under the land reforms. Fully constructed houses, further, provided the programme with its visible component and potential to generate the employment estimated above.

Further, in keeping with the conception of the programme as a welfare measure, the prospective beneficiaries would make a token contribution of only Rs. 110, or, 9% of the total estimated construction costs, in eleven equal monthly installments payable in the first year of occupation. This contribution was "intended to provide the beneficiaries with a sense of participation without imposing a heavy financial burden on them", but indeed, was never seriously enforced by the government (Nalapat, 1976: 588)<sup>2 1</sup>.

3) The programme in the first instance would cover about a third of the over 0.3 million households considered eligible, within a period of one year. This would provide the scale and speed the government sought, while spreading benefits to a fairly large number of beneficiaries. But how could it be programmatically ensured that, in a state where the intense pressure on land (655 persons per sq. km.) makes acquiring both rural and urban land difficult, acquiring land is difficult, land for one lakh houses could be acquired early enough so that a hundred thousand units, could indeed be constructed within twelve months? This assumption

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<sup>2 1</sup> Interview with Thomas Poullose. See also, Nalapat M.D. "One Lakh Houses" Scheme in Economic and Political Weekly, April 17, 1976.



seems ambitious when seen against the fact that hitherto the state government had barely managed to provide less than half this amount in each of its five year plan periods.

The key to this lay in the first modification noted above: work was spread across all the districts of the state. The OLHS was not a project concentrated in space. The target of one lakh units and house-sites was disaggregated into components of a hundred units each, to be provided in each of the 960 panchayats in the state. In each panchayat, the government would acquire 5 acres of land in 5 separate parcels, in five different villages, and provide 20 semi-detached, clustered dwellings on each one acre parcel. Therefore, even while the programme was popularized as a "massive" one, in terms of implementation it was analogous to several small projects dispersed throughout the state--but overlapping in time. Although the regional distribution of the targeted one lakh houses did not correspond with the relative proportion of landless rural laborers in each district, as one might expect an "equitable" distribution to be, it did not draw challenge from areas of high labor pressure. On the contrary, this uniform dispersion of the OLHS units, prevented the government from appearing to favor some districts as opposed to others and, from over-burdening some districts more than others. Moreover, managing the construction of 20, rather than 200 units, and ensuring their timely completion, is easier (a point I will

return to later)<sup>2 2</sup>. In formulating the OLHS, the government therefore, took care to design the programme in such a way that theoretically, it would provide both the grand "scale", and yet be manageable enough to provide the "speed", the government was seeking.

Thus, having started out with a clear idea of what the Coalition wanted to achieve through the programme, the Housing Minister succeeded as a first step, in incorporating specific changes into the structure of a standard central programme with "common rules", to both, suit local needs and at the same time acquire funds from the center to ensure an early start. But what made such well tailored modifications possible?

It is infrequently that a central government will impair the implementation of one of its own new programmes that it wants taken seriously, by setting a precedent of being rigid and

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<sup>2 2</sup> It is much more usual for public housing agencies, and city managers to prefer large, spatially concentrated projects to capture the economies of scale they offer, especially, in the provision of infrastructure and services--such as transport, drainage, health, education and so forth. By contrast, as we saw in chapter one, Kerala already has a well developed network of such services dispersed through out its rural and urban areas so that additional development costs are considerably reduced. Moreover, potable water, even if not piped, is abundant--a large proportion of urban and rural houses use hand-pumps, standpipes or private wells for water supply, and leach-pit or soak-pit latrines for waste disposal. These latter, furthermore, are the responsibility of a different agency, the Kerala Water Authority, with its own separate budget.

uncompromising over regional modifications<sup>2 3</sup>. Kerala was the first state to implement the "spirit" of the land distribution programme under the MNP, therefore its experience would set the "precedent" for other states. This was one reason that made it easier for the minister to bargain with the central government for changes. At the same time, a central government will also not want to set a precedent of being too easily manipulated by giving in too much. In this regard the leverage of the Congress partner of the coalition, also in power at the center, worked to the state-government's advantage. Not only did this intra-party influence add to the Housing Minister's bargaining power, but enabled the center to be prevailed upon to bear not half but the full cost--an estimated 8 crores--of providing land to a hundred thousand landless laborers. Not a mean achievement given India's federal political structure where center-state relations have traditionally been strained due to the tight financial control the center has over the state-governments.

Linking up with a programme whose implementation was important to the central government, as well as using the

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<sup>2 3</sup> The Prime Minister had herself expressed concern to the chief ministers on several occasions about the growing discontent among the rural poor, and the threat it posed not only to progress in agricultural production, but also to the existing political power-structure. As an incentive to get the states to take this problem seriously, a Central Land Reforms Committee was formed in 1970, to "look into the problems relating to the financing of land reform measures" and the "distribution of land to the landless" ("Chief Ministers' 'No' to Land Reform", in Economic and Political Weekly, October 3, 1970). The programme under the MNP that the Kerala government used was one outcome of the Committee's recommendations.

presence of the congress in the coalition--the very party that was accused of "diluting the CPI's radical agenda", to "secure more from Delhi", enabled the state government to surmount the traditional rivalry between the Center and the states, especially, opposition-led ones, over questions of finance. This tactical move by the coalition government that worked well for the OLHS, stemmed from the power that a state-governments possesses by virtue of its strategic location in the political and administrative hierarchy of a federal system. Such power also results from the attitudes that political parties have towards each other at the national level, and the way they influence political alliances at the state level.<sup>24</sup>.

It is noteworthy that such power, of linking up with the Center directly, or manipulating national and local political relationships to bargain for concessions, is not typically available to the same extent to individual, semi-autonomous public sector agencies, such as the KSHB. It is even less commonly available to agencies operating in the non-governmental sector who are usually small, have local or regional constituencies and often appear to be, or claim to be, working against the government. The NGO's also often seek to portray the

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<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the Prime Minister had gone on record saying that some aspects of the Kerala pattern of the CPI-Congress alliance might be repeated at the national scale in the 1972 general elections (Karunakaran, "Kerala's New Coalition", in Economic and Political Weekly, October 24, 1970. pp. 1775). Therefore, it would be in its interest to nurture the alliance by being responsive to local political conditions faced by the center-left coalition, rather than drive a wedge between them by being rigid about the OLHS.

image of being "objective and non-partisan" by attempting to remain "outside the political game". As a consequence their locus of power often remains limited, unless of course, they have connections with the government, direct access to external (foreign, donor) financing for which the governments also compete; or work in a "politicized" sector or activity, closely with constituencies that are politically important to state, local, even national governments. For example, church missionaries (in Kerala) working with the poorest classes who form the mass-base of the non-communist parties such as the congress, and even some of the communist parties. Nevertheless it is noteworthy that a large programme, whose successful implementation depends upon bargaining and negotiations with the center, might be more effectively implemented directly through state level ministers and their departments, rather than by quasi-government or non-government organizations.

### 3.2 Implementation, public housing and popular support.

In essence, the OLHS, as it was formulated, introduced the notion of direct public sector intervention in the provision of fully constructed units for the poor, through deep subsidy,<sup>2 5</sup> into the structure of the state's redistributive policies for the first time. Each of these attributes of the OLHS--direct

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<sup>2 5</sup> The subsidy came from the programme being designed as a welfare measure with the government bearing over 56% of the construction costs.

intervention by the government, provision of fully constructed units, and a heavy government subsidy--are just the characteristics that housing experts, through long and thorough analysis of public housing projects, have advocated viable shelter programmes for the poor should avoid. What then, was it about the OLHS, that converted these characteristics that have been the bane of public housing into benefits?

The more usual public housing projects are typically urban<sup>26</sup>. They involve the production of rental units--tenements or walk-ups--that the government constructs en-masse and subsequently manages. These projects are undertaken routinely as just another aspect of urban management. When constructed they become that many numbers by which the low-income housing stock is augmented in official records. When occupied they exist silently as segregated urban anomalies to which the rest of the population learns to be indifferent. If they are poorly maintained or crime-ridden, they are seen to be the concern of the low-income residents and the particular public agency charged with managing them. The rest of the government bureaucracy, and the rest of the better-off population cares little about what goes on within these "dismal" settlements, unless the tenants themselves organize and find the initiative to demand, and in some instances

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<sup>26</sup> The housing problem is seen to be far less severe in rural areas and "experts" argue that government projects in rural areas do not work very well because the poor do not really want them. See Indira Hirway, "Housing for the Rural Poor" in Economic and Political Weekly, August 22, 1987.

receive, control over at least the management of their tenements. Then we say, successful co-ops have formed or we eulogize the notion of tenant control. But for the most part, they exist at the fringe of our consciousness, except if we happen to be "tenant action groups" or "enlightened, socially conscious outsiders"--academics, researchers or so forth. On the other hand, we might take notice of public housing when their problems worsen to such an extent that their destruction captures public attention--Pruit Igo, is one instance, there might be many more local ones. Then we call it the demise of another misguided attempt by the government at doing what it does poorly. Another failure gets added to the growing list of the public sector. Public housing as we commonly know it, therefore, rarely impacts the day-to-day thinking of those who have no stake in it.

The OLHS, by contrast, was different from other public housing programmes in two central ways:

(1) It did not begin and end quietly as just another low-income public housing project. Instead, it was made a high profile, prestigious public event from the very start. It captured the attention of the people throughout the state. Ironically, better-off non-beneficiaries participated much more actively in the programme than the actual client group. (2) Instead of the more usual rental housing, the OLHS provided ownership. Not merely of the units, but most importantly, of land.

Both these differences, whose origins can be traced back to the reasons that brought the OLHS on to the government agenda,

are central to the good performance of the OLHS and to its image of being a "success". I take up the first mentioned point, next, and will return to the second one in a separate section later.

### 3.2.1 Publicity, participation, "movements" and "spreading of responsibility".

There is ample evidence that focusing public attention on government programmes is not unusual. Eckstein for example tells a vivid story about the influence public attention had in compelling a vacillating government to provide housing to earthquake victims in an urban colony in Mexico. But most such examples are cases where attempts at obtaining publicity usually come from the would-be beneficiaries, demand-making social groups or, non-governmental institutions that organize them. These attempts then, are a means of pressuring a relatively less responsive regime to provide a service or access to a service that the demand-making groups perceive is denied to them by the status quo. By contrast, in the case of the OLHS, it was the government itself that sought to focus public attention on the programme rather than the opposite. Why?

We have already identified two reasons why the coalition government wanted to publicize the OLHS from the very outset. First, because in doing so, the government was focussing attention on a progressive programme that would provide evidence of its institutional capacity and commitment to the poor. In a social setting where the majority of the population will rarely



object to programmes aimed at benefitting underprivileged classes, the government could obtain widespread public support for the OLHS by publicizing the intent of a programme targeted so directly to the poor. This support would not only divert some attention from sectors where the government was lagging in performance (such as the land reforms), but would also provide an image of stability, and in the process, fetch political rewards. Second, once substantial public support for the programme could be mobilized, it would be difficult for the government's opponents to be publicly antagonistic to the programme. In addition, there was also the tradition established by past communist governments of actively mobilizing popular support and participation "to keep a check on the administration and..help in the implementation of policy" (Lieten, 1979: 31). Although administrative structures have not been made a "mass issue" and in practice bureaucracies remain entrenched, efforts by left governments to "take the people into confidence" have been sustained. They have even come to be expected by the electorate.<sup>27</sup> The CPI member of the coalition was no exception,

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<sup>27</sup> As B. Kuriakose mentioned, inefficiencies, corruption and nepotism from non-communist governments is tolerated to a greater degree by the people, than from the Left Front. Past precedent has led to the view that "..the other parties are inherently power mongers and elitist. Why should they be expected to suddenly change? ..but E.M.S. [Namboodripad] and the communist parties have shown their commitment to the people and the "masses". They have generally been honest and principled..at least the older leaders and the intellectuals in the Party have taken this ideology to the people. So all others are judged by their standards. But the marginal difference may be that some ministers..the new ones may want to share from the spoils of office; others may have greater courage to oversee justly and to

it was also expected to do so.

If then, the government realized that public involvement was crucial for the programme, it did not leave mobilizing this involvement to chance, but rather made it the central theme of the OLHS. Once it was ensured that finances from the Center for land acquisition would indeed be forthcoming, the programme was widely publicized through advertisements in the media under the slogan "housing is a right--shelter for the landless our social responsibility". Pamphlets and posters distributed through village and block-level offices focussed on the scale and intent of the programme. If the scale of the OLHS captured public attention, the slogan under which it was politicized (with its emphasis on "our social responsibility") sought to evoke enthusiasm not only among the prospective beneficiaries, but among people throughout the state. That every panchayat in the state was to participate in the programme, helped carry this message beyond single localized constituencies, reinforcing the projected image that the entire state was being mobilized. As one informant noted, "when the people are taken into confidence by the government, events become politicized here. Once they are politicized, and public involvement is sustained for long enough, they become virtual 'movements'."<sup>28</sup> The government sought to do precisely this--convert what would normally have been a mere

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also ensure that officials under them, as well, do not take cuts..corruption [and ostentation] among left ministers is not expected. It will rarely be tolerated.."

<sup>28</sup> Discussion with B. Kuriakose.

distributional effort, another public housing programme, into a "movement".

In addition to widespread, and early publicity, it deliberately designed public participation into the implementation process in such a way that the burden of the "success" or good performance of the OLHS was made not only the government's own responsibility, but was in part transferred to the people themselves. This spreading of responsibility to the people is most explicitly evidenced in the arrangements made for financing the construction component of the OLHS. The means used to spread this responsibility to the people was centered around the notion of "participation".

### 3.2.2 Finance, welfare and "public participation".

So far we have seen that the attempts of the government to publicize the OLHS had a broad coverage--indeed, a state-wide focus, aimed at the people. If one objective of this publicity was mobilization of "public participation", then who were the "people" whose participation the government sought? In what form was this "participation" expected?

The total cost of the OLHS was estimated at a little over 125 million (in 1971 rupees). Over one half of this cost was to be borne by the state government<sup>29</sup>. The rest was to be financed

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<sup>29</sup> This included the provision of Rs 700 worth of building materials (56% of construction cost per unit)--cement and tiles--free to every panchayat, timber from state forests at nominal rates, a grant component of Rs. 75 per dwelling, and the initial provision of the loan component of Rs 110 per unit to be

through voluntary donations of cash, services and unskilled labor from the public.

The "participation" that the government wanted was, therefore, more than symbolic support. The participation it wanted involved contributions of cash, kind, and labor time. The "people" whose participation the government wanted, included most centrally, the better-off non-beneficiaries who had the capacity to provide the cash and "kind"--hardware, sundry materials, transport. It involved socially oriented groups, (also non-beneficiaries,) who could provide voluntary services, and part of the unskilled labor. Finally, it included the prospective beneficiaries, and other non-beneficiary laborers, who would provide most of the unskilled labor. These people to whom the call for involvement was addressed, then, were, the wealthy elites, businesses with interests in the construction and transportation industries (apart from others), non-governmental voluntary organizations, religious and philanthropic institutions--organizations in the business of social service, college student associations, communal organizations (Nair Service Society, the Ezhava Association, and so forth), agricultural and non-farm laborers, perhaps unemployed labor, and finally, the prospective beneficiaries--landless agricultural laborers--themselves.

It is clear, then, that the actual beneficiaries, who, the

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recovered from the beneficiaries later.

literature on low-income housing says should be the center-piece in project "participation", were only one small segment of those whose involvement the government required for the OLHS to work. Indeed they were not even selected until after construction had commenced (with some exceptions, where they were selected soon after land was acquired). This is because the programme was designed that way--it depended on the voluntary participation of non-beneficiaries for its good performance. Thus, if the OLHS was a "welfare measure" it was not designed as one where the government came in with a massive subsidy, and unobtrusively carried out construction, with or without user-input. Rather, part of the cost of this "welfare measure" was to be shared by the upper and lower class non-beneficiaries through donations of cash and labor. Consequently, part of the responsibility for the "success" of the OLHS was spread on to the people themselves. As an informant noted, with such a large component of public involvement, in a state where most people are usually not indifferent to government programmes or to the poor, if the programme did not perform well, despite government effort, it could easily mean that the "people did not care enough for the poor..". But how was the government to ensure that this participation would be forthcoming? Was it actually obtained?

### 3.2.3 "Voluntarism", patronage, public pressure and the media.

Therefore, the resources required for the execution of the OLHS--a public-sector distributional programme with divisible

(private good as opposed to public good) benefits targeted narrowly towards a single, low-status client group--were in part tied to the active "participation" of just the opposite social group--wealthier non-beneficiary elite. This is in striking contrast with what we commonly understand about elite vs low-income behavior, especially in the context of large distributional government programmes. That the government relied on "voluntary" donations to obtain this participation (on which the feasibility of the programme depended), is even more striking. Before proceeding with the question of how the government ensured participation from non-beneficiaries it is important to understand why it chose to rely on voluntary donations.

"Voluntary" action--which leaves the option of acting or not acting upto the individual--inherently introduces an element of uncertainty. Should the wealthier elite decide not to respond, or participate, such a strategy could cripple the programme. Why then, did the government deliberately build in this uncertainty into the design of a programme whose "success" was politically important to it?

This is where three aspects of Keralan society are worth stressing:<sup>30</sup> (1) the notion of patronage, (2) the other to the power of public pressure, (3) the role of the media.

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<sup>30</sup> Interviews with Thomas Poullose, ex-housing secretary to the Kerala state government and ex-officio Secretary of the KHSB, who subsequently evaluated the OLHS, and is currently the Director of the Trivandrum Development Authority; M.S. Matthews, Deputy Director of the Loans Department, KHSB.

Poulose notes that egalitarianism and philanthropy have played a central role in the rise of voluntary services in Kerala (as is the case in most other parts of the country). In fact, the Act under which voluntary organizations are registered, is called the "...Charitable Societies Act" along the lines of welfare, and financial assistance traditionally rendered by prosperous families to lower classes within the locus of their religion-bound communities. Such philanthropic service is, indeed, tantamount to status in the social hierarchy, evoking notions of patronage and, hence, social power. This trend continues even today, though in a more diffuse and secular form (despite the "class-consciousness" that has radicalized sections of Keralan society). For example, apart from the landed and erstwhile aristocratic families, even poorer families who have acquired wealth through remittances from out-migrant kin in the Middle-East, "have tried to help friends and acquaintances who cut across caste lines. They have become almost philanthropic, and are looked up to by others for occasional assistance and monetary help"<sup>3 1</sup>. However, the political aspirations of upper class leaders of communal Societies have led them to expand the reach of their social services in search of a larger mass-base, for example, the Thangals--muslim religious leaders, Syrian Christian leaders of the Kerala Congress (who are also the industrial and business elite in the state), powerful Nair families of the Nair

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<sup>3 1</sup> Interview with M.S. Matthews.

Service Societies, and so forth<sup>3 2</sup>. The Coalition government, whose members were also drawn from the same social setting, and some even had links with the groups mentioned above, relied on the traditional ideas of patronage and philanthropy that the "voluntary" contribution component of the OLHS invoked. Therefore, the government did not act in abstraction, but rather with a recognition of the features of the social structure within which it operated.

If recognition of the social and cultural features of the society led the government to introduce voluntarism into the structure of the OLHS, the government also realized that the "voluntary" donations were required early, if the programme was to proceed with the speed that it sought. And, the contributions, in terms of the amount expected, would not necessarily be forthcoming on their own. As Matthews noted "there has to be enough of a cause, and prestige in the cause, for people to come out and make donations of the magnitude the UDF [the coalition government] was expecting." Mere publicity was, therefore, not enough--we are used to worrying about active opposition from non-beneficiary groups, especially the "elite", that might undermine the performance of a programme targeted towards the poor. But in a case such as this, where the success

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<sup>3 2</sup> The prominent examples are: the Nair Service Societies, Church-based Syrian Christian organizations, Muslim associations headed by the Thangals (religious priests), the SNDP--an organization started in 1903 for the social and spiritual advancement of the backward Ezhava community and the Yogakshema Sabha of the Namboodri Brahmins.



of the OLHS depended on the participation of non-beneficiaries as potential donors, even their indifference would be sufficient to disable programme implementation. The programme, had to be made a "public issue"; and enough political weight accorded to it if the egalitarianism and notions of patronage mentioned above were to be evoked. It was therefore necessary for the government to actively mobilize support and participation from the potential non-beneficiary donors. Broad based publicity aimed at evoking the interest of the entire state--rather than merely the immediate recipients, politicization of the programme, and attempts by the government to project it as a "movement" were means that the government used to make the programme a "public issue". A visible programme, in which people were taking active interest, would attract donors: in making their "voluntary" contributions visible, it could carry rewards of "status" for them. Therefore, indirectly, without coercion or compulsion from the government, "public pressure" and potential status could provide the incentive for the better-off non-beneficiaries to contribute, early. Awareness of the potentials inherent in given political conditions, understanding of the features of the particular social environment, along with conscious efforts by a government, if coordinated, can perhaps achieve what an authoritarian "directive" may well not.

The media (especially that over which members of the coalition had influence), in addition, reinforced this notion of "public pressure". By publishing constant updates on programme

performance, tracing the geographic distribution of its progress and carrying statements/messages from the ministers involved, the media created "a sense of competition" between the various districts. Tardy performance was linked to a lack of concern by the people for the poor, and elitism. The media also published criticisms of the programme, which served to heighten the debate over the programme, thus further adding to the attention it received. It is little wonder then that the programme is commonly remembered today as the "much-publicized, much-criticized", though "most popular" programme of the state. Thus, even if compulsion was precluded, the media played an important role in keeping up the pressure on the people to contribute and participate.

The government also acted to underscore the official priority assigned to the OLHS. Appeals for public involvement came from the highest elected officials--the Chief Minister and the Housing Minister, adding political weight to the programme that was already advertised as a prestigious event. Arrangements were made at all levels of government--state, district and local, to raise funds and solicit donations. A Chief Minister's housing fund was created for collecting money to purchase building materials, and fixtures such as doors and windows. Government employees contributed one day's salary to the Chief Minister's fund (although this can hardly be called "voluntary", as circulars were passed to the employees by their department heads to authorize the government to deduct a day's salary. Peer

pressure, and appeals from senior officers caused most employees to authorize the transfer); every schoolchild donated one rupee to it. Appeals were also made to philanthropic organizations, schools, colleges, religious institutions, ethnic organizations and to those private individuals who could afford it, to make voluntary contributions of upto the cost of one house (Rs.1250 in 1971 prices). The ex-maharajah of Travancore donated Rs.3 Lakhs (US\$ 30,000 in 1972 currencies). As an incentive some of the OLHS segments were named after those who donated more than Rs. 10-20,000. Besides the Chief Minister's housing fund, district collectors, incharge of implementation at the local level, were authorized to receive contributions to meet transport costs and to assist the financially weak panchayats with cash. In addition, panchayat presidents themselves, who are elected officials, were expected to urge their constituencies to contribute. Voluntary student and youth organizations organized themselves to assist in the fund-raising process (EPW, 1972: 2268).

During the course of implementation over Rs. 20 million (roughly 16-18% of the construction costs) was collected through this process, in addition to voluntary transport facilities in several districts, some materials and services (a total of 6% of construction costs). The unskilled voluntary labor that the programme managed to receive was however less than 20% of the total amount expected (15-16% of the construction costs were to be met through free unskilled labor. Only 3% of construction costs was finally met through this method). (We will see why, in

a subsequent section below.)

That without coercion, regulation, or compulsion, the government succeeded in collecting over Rs 20 million, through "voluntary public donations" and "participation", in a programme targeted towards a single client group, is remarkable, even if it was about half of what the government had originally expected.

We have seen that the "participation" was not arbitrary, but, carefully planned by the government on the basis of an understanding of what it could do, and what public support could or could not do in the particular social and political context of the state. Moreover, eliciting the kind of participation it wanted, was not left to chance, instead it was structured into the design of the programme. In ensuring that this participation would indeed be obtained, at least in part, the government relied upon its knowledge of the social and cultural characteristics of the electorate, an astute understanding of the political conditions, the media, and energetic recruitment efforts of its own. Finally, the government was selective about the groups towards whom it targeted its appeals for participation. Clearly, the wealthier non-recipients of the programme were of prime importance because of the capital they would provide. The actual beneficiaries of the programme were on the periphery of the government's recruitment efforts--they were not even selected in advance. The outcome, is reflective of this prioritization by the government, signifying that participation is not necessarily forthcoming on its own. It need not, in fact, involve the

participation of the targeted beneficiaries, nor will it be forthcoming from them on its own. Yet we have also seen that the government alone could not have forced the involvement of those groups whose participation it did require--wealthier elite and other non-beneficiaries. It could create the conditions to which the latter could potentially respond; but the response had to finally come from them out of choice, not compulsion--even in a "top-down" programme.

### 3.3.3 Participation: when elite interests coincide with programme interests, and when they do not.

There is another dimension that will make non-recipient "elites" contribute to a programme in which only a section of the poor will benefit. This is likely when the elites may themselves indirectly benefit from the gains accruing to the poor through the programme. It will be in their interest, then, to ensure that the programme performs well. In the OLHS case there are three distinct examples of the relationship between interested donors and good programme performance. The donors involved were plantation owners, some large landowners in areas where the communist party had a stronghold, and some relatively new contractors, who were just getting into the business of government contracts. In each case good programme outcome was consistent with their interests.

In the factory-like, capitalist conditions of plantation operation, Zagoria has noted, the availability of communications

and organization have facilitated an early and strong tradition of communist mobilization plantation workers(cf. Hardgrave, 1973: 141). This background of (primarily) labor union organization has provided plantation workers with a strong voice.

These workers have traditionally lived in tenements provided by the Public Works Department (PWD), or by the plantation owners on plantation land itself. This precludes the ownership of this property by the workers. The land reform Act, in the form in which it was implemented, excluded all plantations from its purview. Plantation laborers therefore were also excluded from the gains of the land reform, just as the other landless agricultural laborers were. However, given the plantation workers' location specific organizations and strong links with communist labor unions, their demand for land ownership from plantation owners (for whom they worked), carried with it threats of militancy. Militancy on plantations has normally taken the form of strikes, destruction of the crop, or disruption of work.

This fear of militancy and the potential loss of revenue through work disruption would not at all be what the owners as businessmen would want to perpetuate. The OLHS provided them with a perfect opportunity to mitigate the agitation of their labourforce, without having to bear too much of the burden themselves. They could let the government come in with the lion's share of finances, effort, and land, to provide the laborers with what the latter demanded from the them--the owners. The voluntary

donations of cash that the programme required were a small price to pay for the peace with labor it might bring. It is striking that Idukki, where plantations are most concentrated, was the only district that not only met its full target under the OLHS, but indeed exceeded it by 13.3%.<sup>33</sup> It was also one of the districts where cash contributions, mainly from the plantation owners, were substantial; and unskilled labor input from prospective beneficiaries--plantation workers--was above the state average.<sup>34</sup>

At the same time, the district is really an outlier--it has the lowest population in the state, but the second largest area (after Canannore), and hence the lowest density (in 1971, when the OLHS was conceived, it had 150 persons/sq.km, compared to the state average of 549/sq.km). It also has fewer, panchayats and villages, though with a larger administrative jurisdiction (whose structure is spatially dictated by the large plantations, unlike the proliferation of small holdings in other areas). Consequently its physical target under the OLHS was the smallest--1,500 units and sites, compared to the largest target of 12,200 units in Cannanore<sup>35</sup>. The small target, therefore, might have further facilitated the "benevolence" of the plantation owners,

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<sup>33</sup> Source: Results of an official survey carried out in March 1976 to assess the status of the OLHS. Reported in Nalapat M.D., op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with M.S. Matthews.

<sup>35</sup> Nalapat M.D., op. cit.; and Statistics For Planning 1983, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Kerala. Table 1.9, pp. 6.

accounting for excess-of-target performance of the programme. The greater gains to the landless workers that this implies were, in sum, certainly not in conflict with the interest of the plantation-owner elite, who sought to use the OLHS as an opportunity to diffuse the unrest among their own workforce. Their "participation" through voluntary donations of cash that the government wanted, was therefore, forthcoming.

Similarly, some of the landowners in Palghat also had interests that made them act in ways that improved the performance of the OLHS in that district. Upto the end of 1974, the performance of the OLHS in this district was poor. It had achieved only 12.3% of the physical target set for it (1,120 units out of the expected total of 9,100). But by the time the programme was officially declared closed in March 1976, its performance ranked third after Idukki and Trivandrum, and 61.8% of the target had been achieved<sup>3 6</sup>. What accounted for this impressive improvement in a little over a year?

Palghat district, formerly part of the Malabar area, is one of the main rice regions of the state. It has the highest percentage of agricultural workers to total workers (48.42% in 1971, compared to the state average of 30.69%), has a large proportion of scheduled castes in the population, and until the landreforms in the early 1970s had the largest proportion of tenants among cultivators. Traditionally, there has existed a

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<sup>3 6</sup> Nalapat M.D. op. cit.



"cordial", though exploitative relationship between land-owners and agricultural laborers--cultivation has been carried out by "permanent laborers" who see themselves as informally attached to certain landowners and landholdings. Despite some labor-union activity by the communists (CPM), unions became a force in the district only in the mid-1970s.<sup>37</sup> Primarily this was an outcome of the interests focussed on organizing labor by other parties such as the Congress, CPI, and smaller socialist parties, after alliances within the ruling coalition began to shift in the early-mid-1970s. As in other parts of the state, there was resentment among landless laborers against the "new tenants", (many of whom were marxist workers) after the land-reform was introduced in 1970. This resentment, that had thus far been mitigated by the "security of patron-client relations", was exploited by the new union organizers. The introduction of a new Act in 1975 for registering permanent workers at the panchayat, against higher minimum wages, became a tool that the new labor unions used to mobilize the laborers, especially the landless casual workers. Work stoppages, demand for higher wages, and longer hours were rampant in this period, fuelled by the "competition among each political party" to recruit union membership. However, farmer and landowner associations, which have been dominant in this district, did manage to get the

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<sup>37</sup> For example the daily wage of a field laborer in 1970-1971, was the lowest in the state (Rs. 4.05, compared to the state average of Rs.5.09), despite Palghat being a CPM "stronghold". Figures from Statistics for Planning 1983 op. cit.

panchayats to "go slow on the Act". But, indirectly, this focused union attention on the tardy performance of the OLHS. Increased contributions to improve its implementation became a "concession won by the unions to not look so bad", especially in those pockets where marxist landowners dominated.<sup>38</sup> For the land owners this would have been a worthwhile price for an end to union-led work stoppages.

Although this account seems to illustrate how little the "participation" of the landed elite was indeed "voluntary", it does show that extra-governmental pressure, in this particular case had a greater potential for eliciting participation by elites in a programme whose benefits they would not share. In other words, regulatory compulsion by the government may not always achieve, what pressure from other political actors, such as the unions in this case, could. But finally, "concessions" were obtained because the landed elite saw in it a compromise to end work stoppages while pacifying the labor and unions.<sup>39</sup> Good outcome in a "top-down" approach, therefore, need not be without elements of "bottom-up" processes. In fact, "bottom-up" processes can be built into a "top-down" approach.

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<sup>38</sup> Based on account by M.R. Nair; talks with B.Kuriakose. Also see Alexander, K.C. "Emergence of Peasant Organization in South India", in Economic and Political Weekly, June 1980.

<sup>39</sup> Certainly, there might be other reasons for the improvement of programme performance which should be investigated: Were there administrative changes at the panchayat, village or district level? and so forth.

The third example concerns some construction firms who were in early stages of business and had an eye on lucrative government contracts. Construction firms in Kerala, as in most other parts of the country, find state government contracts attractive.

First, the government tends to rely on contractors with whom it has built a good working relationship. Once contractors develop contacts within the bureaucracy on the basis of consistent early performance, they are usually favored when contract bids are floated<sup>40</sup>. This means that there is some degree of continuity and stability in working with the government. Second, government contracts are usually large, which means that the returns to the contractors per project, are also substantial. Third, there is "security" in working with the public-sector--the government will rarely renege on payments. Moreover, payments will normally come on time. Finally, there is also much to be made by the contractors from arbitrations and "other leakages"--bribes, and so forth<sup>41</sup>. Therefore, contractors usually vie for government contracts.

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<sup>40</sup> M.S. Matthews, Kerala State Housing Board.

<sup>41</sup> It is surprising that almost all informants who discussed contractors complained about the "arbitration problem"ie, contractors "do work worth one lakh, and over some reason which is usually petty, go in for arbitration for say, 6 lakhs. And they manage to win it" (Babu Jacob). Yet none of the officials reported that this has made the government discard such contractors or prefer smaller ones. They explain by saying that there are few contractors in the state who are large enough or experienced enough to undertake government contracts "on a regular basis". Therefore the government is forced to put up with those that they have, or can find. Arbitrations notwithstanding.

Those contractors who vied for government contracts saw in the OLHS an opportunity for establishing a good track record and demonstrating their capacity to complete projects on time. For the government, as well, the programme, with its disaggregated components, objectives of speed, and good performance, became the testing ground for new construction firms. Thus it would be in the interest of the contractors seeking to impress the government, to ensure successful and timely implementation of portions of the OLHS entrusted to them. Poulouse and Matthews point out several such cases in various districts where interested contractors helped out with cash, or at least with labor and services.

But there was more than simply the interest of contractors themselves, that played a role in this good performance. Local language dailies carried articles that urged contractors to contribute liberally (Matrabhoomi, a leftist daily; Malayala Manorama, a Kerala Congress controlled daily). Reports of this nature from supporters of the programme also appeared in newspapers and journals over which the government had no influence. (These reports were also targeted to a different class of people--middle and upper income groups). Two examples of such newspapers and journals are, The Hindu (a popular english daily), and the Economic and Political Weekly, as is evidenced by an article on the OLHS in the latter: "...here is an opportunity for the private contractors who have grown fat on government contract work to help a good cause...they can help to strengthen the

`voluntary' services for construction work at the panchayat level with their resources of men and materials. Who knows that some such expectation is not behind the robust optimism of the Housing Minister.." (EPW, "A Good Cause for Contractors", 1972: 2269). Once again we note that the media played a significant role in getting the "elite" or the well-off to contribute.

The programme segments in Trivandrum and Ernakulam stand out as two prominent examples of these cases. Trivandrum, after Idukki had the highest number of completions under the OLHS-- 79.7% of the target, while Ernakulam was fourth after Palghat, with 61.6% of its original target met<sup>42</sup>.

The good performance of the OLHS in Trivandrum and Ernakulam can however, also be assigned to other reasons; reasons that have to do with the importance of these two districts. Trivandrum is the administrative capital of the state, and hence the seat of the state government. Powerful bureaucrats are based here. Political elite from the more important political parties have their headquarters here. Most significantly, the government officials and ministers, many of them deeply involved in the OLHS, were located here. The physical presence of such bureaucrats, politicians, and ministers who wanted the programme to succeed, would certainly help ensure its good performance. Being the state capital, Trivandrum also has a large number of other private and public offices/institutions that often require construction services. Private contractors working on the OLHS in

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<sup>42</sup> Source Nalapat M.D. op.cit.

this district, therefore, would be particularly interested to perform well.

Ernakulam is the commercial capital of the state, where most businesses are located. As in Trivandrum, but for different reasons, public and private sector construction projects are concentrated here; a fact that would provide the contractors of the OLHS with an incentive to show good results. In addition, important businessmen are located here. Businessmen who need to deal with the government (regarding permits, licenses etc.) often maintain formal and informal contact with key officials, bureaucrats and politicians to bypass bureaucratic red-tapism. They will rarely alienate important government officials with whom they maintain such contacts by appearing to oppose a high priority, prestigious, and much publicized government programme. Instead it is likely that they will regard such a programme as an opportunity to reinforce their ties to the government. By the same reasoning it would be in the interest of prominent businessmen in Ernakulam to contribute to the success of the OLHS.

Non-beneficiary elite, then, participate in programmes from which they do not benefit directly, particularly, if it serves their own interest in some way. Powerful exogenous factors, such as the media in this case, pressurize the elite by creating expectations among the people about the contribution of the better-off--expectations that are often tantamount to imposing pressure. The good performance of the OLHS in the

districts discussed above illustrates the point that even in a "top-down" approach, the government need not turn repressive, or appear to be "imposing". Public pressure does this for them. do this for them.

Having seen the "potential" of such participation we now examine its limits. The government, we noted, received nearly half of the voluntary cash contributions it had expected. In contrast to this participation by wealthier elite, the government received less than 20% of the expected unskilled labor "voluntarily". Why?

#### 3.3.4. The Myth of Voluntary Labor

The literature on low-income public housing is replete with case studies of projects that failed because they lacked beneficiary participation. Participation of the poor that has come to be advocated as desirable by several evaluators based on the critique of such "failures", includes participatory decision-making, and beneficiary involvement in project implementation<sup>43</sup>. In projects for the poor that involve construction, participation of low-income beneficiaries typically takes the form of voluntary labor--the poor can give little else in terms of cash or

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<sup>43</sup> At the same time there is a growing body of literature by researchers who have looked at the notion of "participation" far more critically. Going beyond normative wisdom which says that participation is always "good", they have discussed several cases where participation has worked less well or regressively, even in "successful", participatory projects. See Tendler, J. Turning Private Voluntary Organizations into Development Agencies: Questions for Evaluation, A.I.D. Program Evaluation Discussion Paper No. 12, U.S.A.I.D., 1982.

materials. The underlying assumption in such cases usually is that voluntary labor is participatory, it is desirable because beneficiary involvement helps reach benefits to the target group, and that the beneficiaries want such participation.<sup>44</sup>

The OLHS, by contrast illustrates that voluntary labor from the poor is not necessarily participatory, especially when it is expected free; that beneficiaries are not necessarily interested in such "participation"--beneficiary labor may not always be forthcoming on its own; and that even without beneficiary participation, it is possible for benefits to reach the intended target group.

Just as the government had expected to meet 36% of the construction costs of the OLHS through voluntary donations of cash and services, it expected the entire unskilled labor requirement (12-15% of total construction costs) of the OLHS to be financed through free and voluntary contributions of labor, presumably from the potential beneficiaries, and other "volunteers" at the village level. The primary, stated objective underlying this expectation was to lower unit costs.

In its budgetary estimates for the OLHS, therefore, the government made no provisions to pay unskilled labor. The assumption that voluntary unskilled labor would be forthcoming, however, proved unrealistic. According to a post-OLHS survey

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<sup>44</sup> See Tendler J., (ibid.) for a discussion on how little voluntary labor from the poor may be participatory in practice. Indeed, often it may be regressive, if in addition to being voluntary, it is expected to be free.



carried out for Trivandrum district only 18%--(about 3% of construction costs)--of unskilled labor was procured free and "voluntarily"<sup>45</sup>. If we assume this proportion is representative of other districts in the state, then contrary to its original assumptions, the government finally bore 80% of the unskilled labor costs. The resultant cost squeeze was one reason why only 44,000 houses were completed when the programme closed in 1976, even though land was distributed to all the targeted one lakh landless laborer households.<sup>46</sup> In the process, however, an additional 1.6 million man-days of unskilled employment were generated, costing the government 9% of total construction costs. Therefore we note that even though participatory procedures in the form of voluntary labor were built into the programme, it was not forthcoming voluntarily.

More significantly, there appear to be several contradictions in the way participatory procedures related to labor were designed into the programme by the government. First, as we have seen in the example above, if one of the official goals of the OLHS was to generate temporary employment among the poor during construction, why did the government expect free unskilled labor from them? Moreover, is the expectation of

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<sup>45</sup> See Nalapat, M.D. op.cit.

<sup>46</sup> Although this figure, of 44,000 units, is reported in an official survey carried out by the state government in 1976, most, in fact all officials I met, said "about 60,000" units were finally completed under the OLHS. They explain the increase as those units that were "under construction when the OLHS was frozen", and were completed later the same year.

free labor from those at the bottom of the income distribution not regressive and exploitative? In particular, why would a left government want to impose hardship on the poor by choosing this option? Second, if the government did want free unskilled labor, beneficiary participation would seem the most logical, and the least regressive. But it is clear that beneficiary participation was not a major concern of the government. Beneficiaries were not even selected in advance to allow this to happen.

Indeed, we find that given the weight that capital carried in making the OLHS work, the government's eagerness to elicit cash donations and support from the richer elite dictated the design of its participatory procedures. The prestige, broad-based publicity, and indirect pressure generated by the media, which served to project the OLHS as a state-wide "public issue", gave the elite "enough of a cause" to contribute to. But the visibility and the status of this "publicity" did not provide the poor with similar incentive to provide free labor. Why did the poor not "participate"? How did the seeming contradictions noted above actually turn out?

The issues embodied in these questions can be seen to have worked in three ways. First, the obvious reason why the publicity did not provide the poor with the same incentive to donate their labor is an economic one. Given their poor economic condition, working without wages serves as a hardship which poor households will not take on voluntarily, as we will see below.

Second, it is noteworthy that in all the government's

appeals to the "public" to donate cash, services and labor, the beneficiaries were never singled out as an exclusive group from whom contribution of free and voluntary labor was urged. Despite the image of public participation, or in fact precisely because of it, the government did not actively focus efforts to identify or involve the prospective beneficiaries in the production of their own units. If, then, the government expected free unskilled labor it was not specifically from the beneficiaries. To the extent that the prospective beneficiaries were reasonable candidates for providing free labor, it was left to them to volunteer. No coercion was used to obtain their "participation"--for example programme benefits were not made contingent to their contribution of labor. Therefore, despite the seeming mismatch between the government's concern for the poor, and its requirement of free labor from them, they were not forced to volunteer without wages. Indeed, the government finally paid for the unskilled labor as is evidenced by the extra cost burden, we noted, it had to bear.

From another perspective, the mismatch mentioned above, in fact did not exist to begin with. The implementation of the OLHS coincided with the peak period of the migration of skilled workers to the Middle-East. This left a virtual vacuum in sectors such as construction. Although this opened up opportunities for the less skilled and the unskilled to obtain skills, exploit the market, and come into the field, training them was necessary. Individual, exclusive training programmes are capital, time, and

personnel intensive. The OLHS, therefore, provided an ideal opportunity for the government to train large proportions of the unskilled "on the job", with no additional public spending, even while lowering unit costs for the OLHS. If the labor time invested by voluntary unskilled laborers is seen as an investment in developing skills that would allow a future transition from being contingency or secondary labor into the mainstream, free labor from them during the "training" is not as regressive as it might appear. Indeed it would seem a clever strategy on the part of the government. Not identifying the beneficiaries early, then, would make perfect sense, as it would bring more laborers in, allowing a larger proportion to be "trained". To the extent that the government finally ended up paying for unskilled labor, the "strategy" can be seen not to have worked as well as it could have from the perspective of the government, but just the reverse from the point of view of the "trainees".<sup>47</sup>

Third, the media played an inadvertent role in dissuading voluntary beneficiary participation. We have noted that the mechanism of "publicity", and the projection of the OLHS as a "public effort" and "welfare measure" by the government through the media, that was so vital in eliciting finance from the elite worked contrary to the government's expectations in acquiring

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<sup>47</sup> This reasoning is speculative in that none of my informants explicitly stated the connections, although the flight of skilled construction labor during the OLHS, its impact on the local construction industry and the government's intention to train the unskilled were mentioned by several of them. Particularly M.S. Matthews.

voluntary labor. The same media led the prospective beneficiaries to believe that the entire state was being mobilized to contribute to their cause. They knew they would benefit anyway, and saw no need to contribute their labor free of cost. Further, in the media tardy performance was linked with the people's "lack of concern for the poor", "lack of involvement of the people", and "elitism". But the potential beneficiaries, or the poor were never singled out for their lack of participation.

Why then would the potential beneficiaries--landless agricultural workers--who are among the poorest in the social hierarchy, contribute their labor for free? As it is, their economic hardship often compels them to engage in multiple short-term jobs, placing a premium on their labor time. As one group of OLHS beneficiaries in Trivandrum district acknowledged that they did not care for "participation" that involved work without wages. They had to worry about earning enough to last through the week. They would rather allocate their time earning a livelihood, seeking jobs that at least fetched the minimum daily wage, than be in a position, of relative luxury, to "donate" their labor.

Furthermore, although the programme was in progress in each district, and the local landless laborers in the selected villages knew at least some of them would benefit, there was ambiguity about which households would indeed be picked. Moreover, the project locations were often distant, making it unrealistic for laborers who were not even sure if they would benefit, to travel to these sites to donate their labor.

From the above discussion it is clear that, given the choice, the prospective beneficiaries would not contribute their labor free. Other poor non-beneficiaries e.g., the unemployed or the underemployed laborers would have even less of an incentive to work for free. As it turned out, those who did work for the programme, were paid the minimum daily wage in most cases. Therefore, the handling of unskilled labor by the government was not as regressive or contradictory as the government's initial intention might imply. Indeed, the distribution of the cost burden, was far more progressive than is usual--in the end the richer elite contributed more than the poor, to a programme where the latter were the sole beneficiaries.

Finally, the government's focus on wide, public-based, as opposed to, beneficiary-based participation, helped ensure that programme benefits indeed reach the intended target group. In addition to the fact that the target group was politically important, and that the programme proponents within the government were committed to reaching the benefits to the poor, mobilizing public support from the start, and making public the target group, helped keep a check on local discrepancies. Care was taken to publicly display the names of all applicants (for example at the panchayat office, village office and fair price shops) to allow the people to eliminate cases that they felt were ineligible. Despite the lack of beneficiary participation, therefore, programme benefits were not coopted by the less poor, as is often the case in projects such as sites and services, and

others where elites play an active role.

Having seen that voluntary labor is not necessarily participatory, nor will it always come from the beneficiaries, and that lack of such involvement need not skew the benefits away from the targeted group, we now examine more closely why voluntary labor was not forthcoming in this particular case, and under what conditions it may be received.

Just as the government relied on the longstanding tradition of patronage to introduce voluntarism to procure cash donations from the elite, it relied on the "enthusiasm of the beneficiaries", the "ideal" of "community self-help" to obtain unskilled labor.<sup>48</sup> However, this assumption of spontaneous enthusiasm and "self-help" is not consistent with existing trends. Despite Kerala's history of social movements and trends of "collective action" that are evident when groups organize to make political demands, cooperative efforts, even at the village level have rarely been spontaneous.<sup>49</sup> Rather, they are usually

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<sup>48</sup> <sup>48</sup> No other explicit reason was given by any of the officials I spoke with for the government's reliance on voluntary contributions of unskilled labor. Evidently it was taken for granted that there would be "enthusiastic participation by the prospective beneficiaries and others at the village level".

<sup>49</sup> According to professor K.K.Subramaniam, even the social movements are organized with political party support, but they have been caste, religion and communal based, despite the "secular intentions of those who organize them". .."between loyalty to the community, in the communal and religious sense, and loyalty to the political party, there is a strong individualistic trait in the typical malayali.." " Cooperatives in the sense of societies, for example building societies, are such a major phenomenon is states like Gujarat--Ahmedabad for example. In Kerala this aspect is almost entirely absent. Any cooperative movement, in general, has not been very successful here."

organized by "enlightened", upper class, "outsiders", such as political activists or reformist organizations. In other words there is little evidence of a tradition of "community self-help" that would motivate the poor to donate labor voluntarily. Community participation would not be forthcoming without active organization and recruitment efforts by local implementors. In the implementation of the OLHS, this did not happen for at least two reasons.

First, the government's own objective of speed worked against it. As one official pointed out, despite the portrayal of the programme as a "public effort", execution and monitoring was under tight control of district collectors. The District Collectors had overall charge of implementation at the local level and were directly answerable to the Housing Minister for the progress of the OLHS. Conscious of pressure from the latter to act with speed, very few district collectors or the special "works" committees set up under them at the panchayat level, spent time recruiting local voluntary labor. As it was, not many "volunteers" could be found who were willing to work for free. Therefore, if initial surveys by the works committee did not reveal sufficient "voluntary" workers, district collectors often authorized the committee to hire workers on minimum or negotiated wages. This is one reason why the government ended up paying for over 80% of the unskilled labor, bearing an unenvisaged 9% of total construction costs, but at the same time creating 1.6



million additional man-days of labor<sup>50</sup>.

Furthermore, the works committee, that was officially charged to recruit voluntary services and labor, operated at the panchayat level, rather than the village level<sup>51</sup>. Many of its members, hence, were not familiar with the laborer households--potential providers of voluntary labor--in the selected villages. Their occasional trips to the villages, where construction was in progress, were clearly inadequate to organize sufficient voluntary help. It is surprising that the village extension officers, who have closer contact with village residents, and therefore are better placed to mobilize voluntary labor by virtue of their long-standing relationship with them, were not made officially responsible for the task. The district collectors' concern for speed, and the distance between the officials mandated to organize voluntary labor and the potential providers of labor, thus served to slacken recruitment efforts.

The second reason why extensive efforts at recruiting voluntary labor were lacking relates to the "impatience" of contractors--not an uncommon problem in construction projects where speed is made a criteria by the project sponsors. If the chain of command at the sub-state level began with the district collectors, it ended with the contractor at the project site level. Many contractors, who shared the district collectors'

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<sup>50</sup> Adapted from Nalapat M.D., op. cit. and Statistics for Planning 1983, op. cit.

<sup>51</sup> A Panchayat is an administrative unit that has at an average, 40-50 rural towns and villages under its jurisdiction.

concern with speed, preferred not to work with "volunteers". They found an uncoordinated and unpredictable flow of voluntary workers more a hinderance than a help. Rather than invest time allocating tasks to voluntary help that would "come one day and not the next", they found it more "productive" to work with their own, more familiar, contract labor--skilled and unskilled. In particular, they complained about the difficulty of "disciplining" and managing voluntary workers who regarded their contribution as charity, instead of regular work. As a result, often, either the contractor concerned would discourage voluntary laborers, or as a response to frictions with the contractors, the labor themselves would discontinue their services. Contractors desirous of "getting on with the job", therefore, were another factor that dissuaded energetic recruitment efforts of voluntary labor.

Unfamiliarity with construction techniques is usually not a problem for unskilled workers who lack experience in construction work. In the case of the OLHS, however, an exogenous condition made it one. As noted earlier, the implementation of the OLHS coincided with the peak period of the outmigration of the "best among the skilled" construction workers to the Middle-East. This flight of skilled masons and carpenters led to a shortage of good-quality workers in the construction industry;<sup>5 2</sup> which in turn, caused contractors to rely on unskilled labor to perform relatively more skilled tasks. For example, splicing and

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<sup>5 2</sup> Interview with M.S. Matthews.

fixing of joints, installation of purlins, and so forth. Unskilled workers, usually drawn from among agricultural laborers, or head-load bearers, who had little experience with such techniques found it difficult to cope--often to the point of leaving or being asked to leave. This implies that even if voluntary unskilled workers were found, they did not necessarily stay with the project for long. It is also possible that such workers were not willing to perform "skilled" tasks without remuneration, when formal skilled labor was being paid. Another impact of this reliance on second-class skilled workers and inexperienced unskilled workers by several contractors, was the relatively poor quality of construction of the OLHS units. This outcome led to indirect social repercussions, as we will see later.

Apart from the quality of work expected from unskilled labor, there is also the duration of time that such laborers are expected to work without returns, that will determine their willingness to work for free. This works in two opposing ways in building construction programmes. First, building construction requires sustained, relatively long-term work that passes through many sequential, time-bound stages. For example once foundation work is initiated, all mortar work must be finished relatively quickly before it sets; plastering once started must be completed within a fixed time period; similarly the brick-work must be cured well for the requisite time period, for it to gain strength, before plastering, or roofing can begin. All of these

tasks are labor-intensive, and time-bound. Disruption in the supply of labor is detrimental to the quality and integrity of the work, unlike, say the digging of an irrigation canal. In the latter case, an intermittent labor supply will not effect the work at hand.

Therefore, from the perspective of the contractor or the building agency, long continued, and predictable stretches of labor time are preferable. They will prefer workers on whom training time has been initially invested--such workers gradually get more familiar with the work, and hence better at it, requiring less supervision. From the perspective of the laborers involved, this is unrealistic, if expected free, unless they have other income-earners in the household. The very poor, which is what the unskilled laborers inevitably are, obviously do not fit this description. It is not surprising therefore, that free voluntary labor for the OLHS, was not forthcoming in large measure from the poor. Instead, one social category that did fit the above description, included youth wings of political parties, college student organizations, and social service groups--religious, ethnic or secular. (Their economic opportunity cost of providing voluntary labor free are, relatively less: political parties, and social service organizations have their own sources of finance; the former stand to reap political rewards, while the latter are in the field of rendering social service because of a shared motivation for the notion of social justice underlying voluntary work. College student groups are also similarly

motivated, in part. They are also often affiliated with political parties. They are not financially burdened. Kerala, akin to the rest of the country, they are dependent on family and kin networks.) It was precisely this group that contributed a substantial proportion of the 18% of the voluntary labor that the government did manage to receive for the OLHS.<sup>53</sup>

This is not to say that voluntary labor from the poor was entirely absent. If it was received, however, it was not from potential beneficiaries, nor out of the government's "ideal of community participation". Rather, local circumstances in some cases helped overcome the general constraints I have discussed above. Local political parties, local elite, and village (as opposed to panchayat) officers played a major role in such recruiting of non-beneficiary voluntary labor, as is illustrated by the three examples discussed below.

Panchayat presidents are elected officials at the local level, with a constituency of their own. Political parties whose members are elected to these positions often wield considerable influence over decisions made by their party members at the sub-district level. At the time when the OLHS was implemented, panchayat elections had not been held since 1963 as a result of which most panchayats were not "representative". However, some local governments did remain more responsive than others, particularly where panchayat officials came from the political party with the strongest local base in the jurisdiction of that

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<sup>53</sup> Interview P.K.Shivanandan, Thomas Poullose.

panchayat. A communist led panchayat in Trichur district was one such example. The coming together of several factors facilitated the recruitment of voluntary labor here. These factors included: a strong left lobby for the "rights" of the landless among the upper caste communist party members; the efforts of the local party workers committed to making the OLHS segment in the panchayat a success so that benefits could reach at least a proportion of the landless; and the active involvement of the panchayat president.<sup>54</sup> This evidently led to the successful recruitment of members from several laborer households (some of whom were potential beneficiaries) who were party members, sharing a common ideology with the communist leaders who organized them, and hence were easier to recruit. But it is noteworthy that, most of the "volunteers" thus recruited, were not heads of households or the primary income-earners in their respective families--they were dependent members. This reiterates the point made by a section of the OLHS beneficiaries in Trivandrum district, noted earlier, that the poor rarely donate their labor free, if doing so displaces their potential to otherwise earn a living. Forced voluntary labor, therefore, is not participatory--the poor cannot economically afford such participation. Nor will they always want it.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Talks with a senior official of the local district cooperative bank.

<sup>55</sup> Even in the particular case discussed above, the recruitment efforts were not uniform in all the selected villages under this panchayat. Yet, local conditions, in some of them did help surmount the more usual problems noted earlier.

The second example comes from a village where a section of unskilled, unemployed laborers worked on the OLHS because they hoped to later solicit potential jobs from the panchayat president. A local NGO, and youth congress workers in the district, urged them to "first show their ability, then ask for work."<sup>5 6</sup> Here the incentive for voluntary work, therefore, was the expectation of a potential reward--in the form of remunerative employment--that might be forthcoming if credibility and hard work was demonstrated. Short-term work without wages, then, can at times be viewed by non-beneficiary voluntary workers as a possible means for gaining access to longer-term economic security.

The third example illustrates when local conditions can come close to evoking community participation. The case involves a village in Thalore panchayat, Trichur district, where a local contractor was hired for implementing the 20 houses under the OLHS in the village. Being from the village itself, social ties existed between the contractor and the potential target group, as well as non-beneficiary laborer households. Although nominal wages were paid by the contractor to secure unskilled labor, his

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<sup>5 6</sup> Matthews pointed out that this is not uncommon in cases where relatively small but labor-intensive projects are sponsored by influential communal-based Societies. He cited an example of an extension to a school-building owned by the Nair Service Society in Ouilon district. A number of the unskilled laborers who worked without wages or at nominal wages on the project, later sought posts as peons, sweepers, or guards for themselves or other family members from the much wealthier, and influential owners of the school.

familiarity with laborer households helped obtain several hours of free voluntary labor. Furthermore, the village extension officer also took interest, actively organizing local workers to facilitate participation. The fact that a prestigious contract was obtained by a village resident, in contrast to the involvement of larger contractors and the Block Development Committee that was more usual in other places, instilled a shared incentive within the community to ensure its success. Converting a "massive" state-wide programme into a "local affair", where the credit for success would be retained by the village residents, rather than be appropriated by an external implementation agency, therefore encouraged greater local involvement.

Local conditions, however, can also create just the reverse conditions--contrary to those that encourage the involvement of labor. For example, influential local non-governmental groups may resent a one-time, but highly publicized, large, government intervention targeted towards the constituency they have been working with in more modest ways for a much longer period of time. If they perceive such programmes as threats to their control over the constituencies they work with, they may indeed discourage local participation necessary to make the programmes work. Stronger exogenous factors may become important to elicit the involvement of the poor in such cases.

An informant in Trivandrum reported a similar instance from his "memory" of the implementation of the OLHS in his home village in Alleppy district. The programme, there, faced immense



opposition as an outcome of conflict between a pro-congress church group, which was in favor of the OLHS idea, and another splinter church-based pro-liberation theology NGO. The latter had a history of mobilizing local laborers and fisherfolk around issues of employment and income generation. Although in agreement with the idea behind the programme it disagreed with the concept of free labor, and sought to use the OLHS to express its opposition to the rival NGO. The group therefore campaigned against the local laborers working for free, arguing that the government was "exploitative"; it should generate employment for the poor rather than extract surplus from those who might not even accrue benefits. This campaign was initially successful. But there was an upsurge in voluntary contributions of cash as well as of labor in this village in the "latter half of the programme", presumably due to the sense of "competition between districts" that the media created by publishing reports on the progress of the OLHS. Official survey results also show that Alleppy added to its OLHS stock by 20.9 percentage points between 1974 and 1976.<sup>57</sup> (However, none of my other official informants corroborated such incidents, nor linked the increase to anything but "better management" by the implementation committees.) Despite the increase--from 13.1% of the total target in 1974, to 34.0% in 1976--Alleppy district remains among the poorest performers among all districts.

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<sup>57</sup> Nalapat M.D., op. cit.

### 3.3 Conclusion.

The common theme in the above examples is that "voluntary" labor from beneficiary and non-beneficiary laborers may be forthcoming if an incentive is provided to elicit it. The most effective of incentives for the poor is usually a material one--either an immediate monetary gain such as wages, or a potential one such as future employment. Local conditions, such as a shared purpose, interest in the success of the programme and extensive recruitment efforts by local authorities and institutions, can also encourage "voluntary" labor. But local conditions may also produce the opposite effect--they may be non-conducive to the involvement of labor. To the extent however, that labor from the poor must be "elicited" against incentive mechanisms, "voluntary" labor is more myth than reality; and it is rarely "participatory".

So far we have seen how the government made public participation the central theme of the OLHS. The nature of this participation, in conjunction with the pivotal role played by the media--both in terms of the strategic way in which it was used by the government, and the media's own reaction to government strategy--helped popularize and politicize the OLHS. These latter attributes facilitated public support from below, which, along with the prestige bestowed by the involvement of key ministers at the highest level in the state-government, from above, succeeded in converting a programme targeted towards a single, low-status

client group into a virtual, state-wide "movement". Popular support and involvement not only helped the government elicit finance from the elite, but it also ensured that the benefits indeed reached the target group. At the same time, however, popular support and attention from the media, served to undermine beneficiary participation and the contribution of free voluntary labor. Yet, the broad-based publicity successfully provided the government with the support and stability it sought through the OLHS. The "public nature" of the OLHS is also one reason why the programme is remembered today as the state's most popular housing programme, whose success is associated with the "stability" of the Achutha Menon regime.<sup>58</sup>

But even while public participation served as an effective bridge between the state government and the people in this "top-down" programme, the actual implementation and execution of the OLHS remained tightly controlled in the hands of government officials, throughout. This is clearly evidenced in the procurement of land and the actual execution process, as we see below.

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<sup>58</sup> Achutha Menon was the CPI Chief Minister of the United Front coalition government.

## PART IV

### 4. Innovation in Land Acquisition: centralization, discretion, and accountability in a "Top-down" approach.

Delays in land acquisition, which are often caused by high land costs and tedious regulatory procedures governing land transactions, are commonly regarded as factors that retard the implementation of public shelter programmes. We noted earlier that the high population density, and consequently, the high pressure on land in Kerala makes it difficult to acquire both, urban and rural land--there is little land to spare, costs are high and speculation rampant. Therefore, in theory, acquiring 5,000 acres of land for the OLHS (@ one acre per 20 units, for 100,000 units) would be particularly difficult. The government's decision to disaggregate the scale of the programme by dispersing OLHS segments throughout the state, partly eased this problem as it was necessary to acquire only one acre of land in each participant village.

An early release of funds from the Center for acquiring land also enabled land procurement to move rapidly. Land for the entire programme, in all districts, was acquired within 8-9 months<sup>59</sup>--an unusual achievement given that lengthy, and tightly regulated land acquisition procedures are usually the bane of governmental agencies engaged in programmes that involve construction. The availability of finance from the center was an important step in the relatively quick procurement of land by the

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<sup>59</sup> See "A Good Cause for Contractors" op. cit.

government, but only the first one. Under pressure to act with speed, the Housing Minister pursued three policies to expedite the procurement process: (1) He centralized land acquisition functions in the hands of a single department, (2) For purposes of expediency good locations were traded off for ease of acquisition, and, (3) He used governmental discretion to digress from the usual but time-consuming procedures of acquiring land. Instead, an unorthodox method--of obtaining land at negotiated prices--was opted for.

#### 4.1. Centralization: opting for a single department approach.

Land acquisition was centralized at the level of the state government. A single government department--the Board of Revenue--was placed in charge of all acquisition procedures. The Board, with the assistance of its various geographical units was given the authority to take all relevant decisions from assessment to negotiation, compensation and subsequent appropriation of land. This was a task the department was good at, since land assessment and processing land transactions were its routine responsibilities. More significantly, the Board was already engaged as the key entity in a major land reassessment process as part of the on going land reforms. Data on land prices and information on most private land holdings were already being compiled by the Board. Getting another agency--for example the entity that managed the execution of the OLHS--to handle land matters at this stage would have been an intrusion into the Board's established style of

working that the latter might have resented. Furthermore, bypassing the Board would have caused confusion, as the final approval for every potential land purchase would still have to come from it. If resentful, the Board could drag its feet over granting clearance, causing avoidable delays in the implementation of the OLHS--just what the government wanted to avoid. Therefore, it was important that the government did not devolve the responsibility of acquiring land to the respective local agencies incharge of implementation, but rather, centralized this function in the Board of Revenues--a department that otherwise had little to do with the execution of the OLHS. But even while this move expedited land acquisition by minimizing problems of coordination between the Board and entities at various levels of government--we will see in (3) below, that the method used to procure land was a significant departure from conventional procedures the Board was used to. In addition, contrary to existing norms, public participation was built into the process. These changes were introduced by the Housing Minister, and they worked well (as we will see) because of the strong control he maintained over the functioning of the Board officials assigned with the task of procuring land for the OLHS.

#### 4.2. Expediency and trade-offs

To expedite land acquisition several tradeoffs were made by the Board. The Board avoided all land that had high market value, land that involved lengthy legal procedures, or was likely

to be held up in ownership controversies. Such land was avoided despite other attractive attributes it might possess--for example, central locations within the villages, proximity to public amenities and transportation routes. The Board (with the acquiescence of the Housing Minister) therefore, traded off good location against a pragmatic concern for ease in acquisition. This factor became one of the variables that determined which five villages were selected from each panchayat for inclusion in the project. While this preference for expediency speeded up land procurement, it also became one of the weaknesses of the programme, from the beneficiaries point of view. Upon completion of the OLHS it was found that houses in many villages, where the OLHS sites were located on the fringes of the settlement or away from public amenities, were not occupied by the allottees for several months.<sup>60</sup> Distance, and inconvenient locations were one deterrent. Another more important reason reported by some of the beneficiaries, was the social segregation that resulted from the OLHS dwellings being clustered together, and some of them even located outside the mainstream village settlement.

In Kerala, it is common to find that social groups who seek, or attain "status" (through wealth or education and hence prestigious white-collar jobs) tend to become "elites" within

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<sup>60</sup> This was reported by Mr. P.K. Shivanandan, who observed this phenomenon while in the field during the implementation of the OLHS.

their own caste or community.<sup>6 1</sup> They seek to distance themselves from others in the community, leading to a stratification along lines of class in every caste and communal group. Although this phenomenon is peculiar to all social groups, it is much more pronounced among the lower castes who are far more conscious of their stigmatized social position, and seek ways to transcend it. Given this quest to mitigate caste-stigmas, lower castes will often prefer not to remain segregated, or stay grouped with others of their own caste.<sup>6 2</sup> Agricultural labourers--the beneficiaries of the OLHS--are mostly from backward or scheduled castes and tribes (SC-ST). Many of them therefore, did not want to live clustered together with other scheduled castes and tribes, in several of the more "isolated" OLHS units that were already labeled as "SC-ST colonies". According to one field officer,<sup>6 3</sup> eventhough all the OLHS units were eventually occupied by the selected beneficiaries,<sup>6 4</sup> the children of several of the

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<sup>6 1</sup> Discussion with Professor K.K. Subramaniam, and Gopikuttan.

<sup>6 2</sup> Discussion with Professor K.K. Subramaniam of the Center for Development Studies, Trivandrum.

<sup>6 3</sup> P.K. Shivanandan.

<sup>6 4</sup> The resale of these units was curtailed because of a 12 year legal limit before which such property could be alienated. In any case there is not much of a market for these units. By the late 1970's over 86.7% of agricultural workers owned land. The economic condition of the remaining landless was too poor to allow purchase the OLHS units without government aid. Moreover, several of the beneficiary families, despite their complaints about segregation, prefer to retain ownership of the units since title to land and durable property such as the house is an important means of access to institutional credit.



original beneficiaries have tended to settle outside such colonies. Significantly, this tendency was found to be far more pronounced in the scheduled castes and tribes-dominated segments of the OLHS, rather than among other backward castes who were also beneficiaries of the OLHS.<sup>65</sup>

An important social characteristic of the beneficiary group that was overlooked in planning the OLHS, therefore, unintentionally caused social problems later. Inadvertently, scope for caste-based frictions among the beneficiaries was generated through a government programme--ironically, one that was aimed at benefiting them, and was backed by a party (the CPI), that was ideologically opposed to caste-based social divisions.<sup>66</sup> This unanticipated outcome suggests that the "poor" are not undifferentiated. Hence, while designing a programme targeted towards the "poor"--even if it is a trade-bound group such as agricultural labourers--it is important to ask what are

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<sup>65</sup> Discussion with Gopikuttan. The Scheduled castes and Tribes, unlike the other backward castes are "untouchables". They are particularly vulnerable to social stigmatization because their backward status has been institutionalized by the government as a means to help them attain access to economic, educational and professional opportunities that were till recent times denied to them. But other non-SC-ST groups who are also economically (but not socially) depressed resent such "reservation" towards a group by virtue of its caste. They argue that this does not diffuse caste distinctions, rather, perpetuates them.

<sup>66</sup> At the same time, it is surprising that despite provisions for the expression of public opinion made by the government, no one seriously questioned the clustered and "segregated" nature of the OLHS housing, until it became a problem in some villages later.

the specific social traits that distinguish one low-income beneficiary group from another, and how can these differences be realistically incorporated into the design public programmes.

Often it may be difficult to ascertain beforehand what social problems will arise later in the life of a project or programme. Therefore, spending time evaluating them subsequently is important. However, while there is agreement that subsequent evaluation is important, who does the evaluation and when it is done will also be critical to what is eventually learnt from the evaluation. For example, it is significant that my informants, who held different governmental positions during the implementation of the OLHS, had very different observations to make. For example, the informants who pointed out the vacancy problem noted above, were those who were field-level officers at the time the OLHS was implemented, and had observed the programme in its early stages. Therefore, unlike the informant who had officially evaluated the programme later, the field officers expressed much more of a concern that "in a programme where the beneficiaries wanted land (and housing), the fact that so many units were lying vacant initially indicates a flaw in the design of the programme and in the distribution of its benefits. This in itself forms an important research question.." <sup>67</sup>. By contrast, the official evaluator, who found all the sample houses fully occupied by the selected beneficiaries at the time of evaluation, considered it far less important that in several of these cases

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<sup>67</sup> P.K. Shivanandan.

initial vacancy had been a problem. On being questioned about it, the informant dismissed it as a "marginal problem that sorted itself out--as the results show". Since, at the time of the "official" evaluation, all units were found to be inhabited, the surveyors perhaps did not realize or know that many households had been reluctant to move in initially, and that reasons for this phenomenon might be important to probe.

What this suggests is that, while detailed evaluation of a project or programme after it has been in operation long enough, is important, it is also worthwhile to draw attention to the significance of recording the observations of "un-official" evaluators who have seen the programme through its implementation stages. These evaluators could be officials such as "implementors" or field level officials like the district collectors in this case. They can maintain a formal record of smaller, temporal, and localized details that tend to be missed or forgotten later, but are crucial for understanding the heterogeneity among programme beneficiaries and the indirect effects and outcomes of designing or implementing programmes in one way and not another. Evaluations by such officials during the implementation stage may also help mitigate some of the problems that arise during the course of execution.

In sum therefore, the policy of trading off location for ease in acquisition expedited land acquisition. This allowed construction to begin early, while public attention was still focussed on the "newness" of the programme, but was not without

its social costs.

#### 4.3. Using discretion to set aside regulation; ensuring accountability.

Finally, realizing that procuring land in each district under the procedures laid down in the Land Acquisition Act (1894) would take a long time, the Housing Minister suggested a bold step: all non-governmental land was to be acquired at negotiated prices.<sup>68</sup> Governments usually avoid this method for fear of public criticism, given the possibilities for graft, corruption and nepotism it opens up (for example, collusion with speculative real estate interests, or negotiating higher prices with those on whom the officials incharge wish to bestow a favor). But the cabinet of ministers permitted this unorthodox deviation, presumably, appreciating its implications for speed. However, to avoid public criticism, panchayat presidents were required to, and did, display all information about the plots selected and their negotiated prices prominently in their local offices, village office, and at public places (for example, fair price shops). Through the panchayat presidents, block development officers, and, the village extension officers, the government clarified to the people that any member of the public who had reservations about any site, or thought the price too high, had the option to suggest a better site at a lower price. Similarly,

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<sup>68</sup> Shivanandan. Also see, "A Good Cause For Contractors" in Economic and Political Weekly, 1972, pp. 2268.

the names of the applicants were also displayed publicly at the village office for scrutiny by the people and elimination of ineligible persons, if any were found. Therefore, despite the overall responsibility assigned to the Board of Revenues, the government made specific provisions for public input in land acquisition and in the selection of potential beneficiaries.<sup>69</sup> The allotment of land and houses was subsequently made on the basis of lots drawn by each panchayat president.<sup>70</sup>

Two issues stand out as striking in the above account. First, the government did not expropriate land through eminent domain, but rather purchased it. Given the low compensation

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<sup>69</sup> Further empirical research will be necessary to evaluate the exact impact of such participatory procedures. For example, one needs to ask, to what extent did participation actually occur? To what extent did it occur as a result of the "control" devolved by the government to the people, and to what extent was this "control" more important for its symbolic significance? I do not have further details on this point, but the general response of several informants indicates that there was a positive correlation between the degree to which the laborers were organized, and to their proportion in the local population.

<sup>70</sup> It is noteworthy that, consistent with the government's efforts at according prestige to the programme, the dates for various inaugurations were carefully picked for their symbolic significance. For example, after land acquisition procedures were completed, and lots drawn in several panchayats, the Prime Minister laid the foundation stone of the first OLHS house on October 2, (1972)--the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation. On that day, the housing minister announced that all completed units would be allotted to the beneficiaries on January 26,--Republic Day--the following year. This association with memorable days of national importance is not an uncommon tactic used by politicians in programmes of political significance. The OLHS, which was the government's first major housing programme also acquired special public significance in a similar way. (Source for dates: "A Good Cause for Contractors", 1972, op. cit.)

prices for expropriated land, and the convoluted process of involving a series of assessors to fix the price, appropriation of land through this method might have alienated the land-owners whose land was to be expropriated. Instead, land was bought at negotiated prices--a method that sellers of land would rarely object to.

The negotiated price method adopted by the state government to purchase land, further, represents an instance of uncommon departure from the rigidity with which governments usually adhere to procedural rules. It is this rigidity with which public-sector agencies and departments follow, or have to follow, stipulated procedures--even when these procedures are cumbersome, complex or outdated--that often results in the inefficiencies and delays, that have come to characterize most public sector programmes. Unlike state-governments are rarely willing to simplify existing rules for single projects even if efficiency lies in modifying or overriding them, the Kerala government not only set aside a procedure it realized would interfere with its goal of speed, but boldly adopted an unconventional alternative. In adopting an unorthodox method to expedite land acquisition, then, the government behaved less like the usual entrenched public-sector bureaucracy. Rather, recognizing the drawbacks of one of its own regulatory procedures--that usual land acquisition procedures prescribed for the public-sector in the Land Act were too time-consuming--the government used another of its powers--of discretion--to

circumvent them by deciding to acquire land at negotiated prices.

To the extent that the suggestion for procuring land at negotiated prices came from the Housing Minister (who headed the implementation hierarchy of the OLHS) and cabinet approval for it was successfully won, it is evident that access to, or influence over, key decision makers is critical for obtaining such procedural flexibility. Not only was the Housing Minister a part of the powerful cabinet that had the discretionary power to grant such flexibility, but he also wielded significant influence in the cabinet. The Housing Minister was a powerful politician. As a popular peasant leader since his early days in the CPI, and a politician known for his capability and commitment to the poor, he commanded respect from his colleagues as well as from the electorate. His vanguard role in affordable shelter, and reputation of integrity, further added weight to his suggestions regarding the OLHS. Thus, knowing that the leadership of the OLHS was in the hands of a minister capable of curtailing corruption, it was perhaps easier for the cabinet to approve a procedure that is normally avoided because it opens up avenues for corruption and can draw politically damaging criticism from the public.<sup>71</sup>

Typically, housing boards or building authorities, that are semi-autonomous public agencies, lack the kind of discretion

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<sup>71</sup> All the officials I interviewed, reiterated the popularity, integrity and commitment of M.N. Govindan Nair, then Housing Minister. They emphasized the significance of the respect he commanded not only within political and official circles, but even among the people. As one official noted "such a bold step was probably allowed because of the faith people had that a man like Nair would not allow corruption.."

in their leadership that we have seen the Housing Minister possessed. For example, an agency such as the Kerala State Housing Board (KSHB) could not have taken a decision to bypass established rules, on its own. Unlike the state government cabinet, which itself was the apex decision making body at the state level, the KSHB would have to depend on the discretion of a higher authority, such as the cabinet of ministers, to set aside stipulated procedures in a similar way.

Apart from the question of an agency's dependence on the government for permission to digress from established rules, it is unlikely that the cabinet (which is composed of elected ministers) will always be in agreement with the concerned agency (which is usually headed by bureaucrats or technocrats) over the importance or need for such digression, and therefore may not allow it.<sup>72</sup> Even if allowed in selected cases, departures from prescribed rules granted to one agency are likely to set a precedent for other agencies to make similar demands--demands that a government cabinet will not want to encourage because frequent relaxation of established rules can undermine its

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<sup>72</sup> Even though public agencies finally implement programmes and projects that realize government policy, differences between the leadership of the agency and members of the cabinet, may lead to rivalry that might prevent agreement over implementation procedures, precluding concessions of this nature. Since the credit for a programme implemented successfully by a semi-autonomous agency cannot be directly appropriated by the government, competition between the agency and government departments, if both are implementing programmes in the same policy area--say low-income housing--can also inhibit such allowances.



control over its agencies. Unless procedural flexibility is built into the operational framework of the public sector, in a way that allows control from the top, arbitrary, case-by-case changes will only confound public administration. Without coherent monitoring and control from above (e.g., control by ministerial executives, legislatures) individual agencies may use deviations from stipulated procedures for their own ends--as a means of aggrandizement of their power, for example--rather than in the service of the programmes they are charged to implement. It is less likely therefore, that a government will, as a norm, easily allow procedural deviations by public sector agencies, even if disallowing the deviation (or simplification) is often to the detriment of the programmes.<sup>7 3</sup>

The point I am making here is that, it was precisely because the government took the implementation of the OLHS in its own hands, rather than entrust it to a separate agency, that cumbersome land acquisition procedures could be sidestepped and an unorthodox method adopted to expedite the land acquisition process. Acquiring land quickly was essential for construction to be carried out with speed. Not only was speed important, but land

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<sup>7 3</sup> The adoption of the negotiated price method, even by the state government, was a temporary digression, that remained confined to the OLHS. It was not an attempt at a general reform of bureaucratic procedures. Rather, it can be seen as a one-time move by a government that recognized some of the weaknesses (lengthy regulatory procedures) and strengths (the power of discretion) inherent in governmental practice, and used the latter to mitigate the former in order to facilitate the good performance of a programme whose success was politically important to it.

in all districts had to be acquired simultaneously to actualize the impact of the "massive" and grand scale of the OLHS. The discretion of the government enabled it to adopt the negotiated price method, which helped acquire land early. Centralizing land procurement functions in a single department with state-wide jurisdiction, facilitated land acquisition in all districts simultaneously. Both were decisions that the state-government had the power to take more easily than would a separate agency. Both were decisions critical to the "success" of the OLHS.

The second point that is striking about the government's handling of land acquisition procedures in the OLHS, is that in order for the unorthodox, negotiated price method to work, it was necessary for the government to combine highly centralized implementation (by the Board of Revenue), with provisions for public scrutiny and "democratic" participatory procedures at the local level.

The government's decision to provide public scrutiny of its land procurement process, was significant in at least three ways. First, an "open" process, where the people were kept informed of the details of the land being acquired, made corruption or misuse of the negotiated price method by executing officials, difficult. If a strong, incorrupt leadership in the form of the Housing Minister, maintained vigilance against corruption from above, public surveillance at the local level, exerted pressure against corruption and mismanagement, from below This reciprocal arrangement, thus ensured that even a

controversial method fetched little public criticism on account of charges of graft.<sup>74</sup>

Second, even while control over land acquisition was centralized at the level of the Board of Revenues, local residents were not only kept informed about what was being acquired, but were given an avenue for participation--a say in the process, in that they were free to suggest alternative sites. Public scrutiny of the details of potential land purchases and the freedom to suggest alternative sites (irrespective of the extent to which alternative sites were actually proposed, or not), thus, provided the people with a sense of control over what, indeed, was a highly centralized process controlled tightly by officials of the Board of Revenues.

Thirdly, apart from public involvement in the land acquisition process, public scrutiny in the distribution of this acquired land by panchayat level officials, also allowed the state government to leave part of the monitoring of the performance of local officials to the people. Public pressure would make local level administrators accountable to the people,

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<sup>74</sup> Indeed, in all my interviews with various governmental and non-governmental informants, corruption in land acquisition was consistently ruled out. This is in sharp contrast with the "underhand dealings" of some of the large contractors, who made vast amounts of money through arbitration. As Mr. Babu Jacob reported, in a process as open as the OLHS, especially the land acquisition processes, corruption was difficult for government officials. This did not hold for "some of these large, private contractors. For example, several of the arbitration cases were contrived. They would complete work worth Rs 1000 (roughly US \$ 100 in 1972 rates) and go in for an arbitration, demanding a compensation of Rs 6000 (US \$600 in 1972 rates)...and then manage to win these cases legally.

prevent foot-dragging on their part, and, make the diversion of benefits to ineligible interest groups more difficult (we will examine this last point in more detail below). Lower level officials were compelled to act with speed and adhere to mechanisms that had already been made explicit. Thus, in sum, the government's introduction of participatory provisions such as the above reinforced the confidence of the people in the government's commitment to making the OLHS work, and thereby added to public support for the programme.

Providing scope for, indeed, taking advantage of public vigilance in processes where money can potentially be made by local implementors, is in sharp contrast with the way in which public sector programmes are usually carried out in other states. It is not surprising then, that several of the southern states which are now attempting to emulate Kerala by introducing shelter programmes that have the scale of the OLHS, but not the other more consequential processes such as the above, find public involvement hard to generate.

Similar to this lack of public involvement, several state-governments also complain about the ineffectiveness of "decentralization" mechanisms in programme implementation. By contrast, the land acquisition and allotment procedures adopted by the government in the OLHS, represent an instance of relatively successful, though "controlled", decentralization.<sup>7 5</sup>

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<sup>7 5</sup> See Susan Hadden, "Controlled Decentralization and Policy Implementation: The Case of Rural Electrification in Rajasthan", in Politics and Policy Implementation in the Third World, edited

As we saw above, even though the Board acquired the land, local residents had the option to review, critique and suggest alternative sites; even though the Board controlled land acquisition, the power to select beneficiaries was devolved to the respective panchayat presidents, who were required to use a politically neutral method of picking lots publicly. (Similarly, eventhough the housing minister and district collectors controlled the execution of the OLHS units, construction was very localized.) The element of "control" in this decentralization is evidenced by the fact that the panchayat presidents were required to pick lots to delimit the beneficiary households. The method of picking lots, rather than being arbitrary, appears to be a conscious response by the government to the existing political and organizational structure at the local level, and to its own objective of ensuring that the target group was reached:

Reaching the actual target group was as important for the government, as was the timely completion of the OLHS houses. For a government that wanted to demonstrate to the electorate its commitment to the poor, and ward off discontent among the landless--the constituency that was targeted in the OLHS-- political rewards would accrue only if benefits actually reached the landless labourers. Thus the government had to ensure that benefits of the OLHS were not coopted by the less poor.

In devolving the power to select beneficiaries to the

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by Merilee S.Grindle, 1980, Princeton University Press, U.K., pp. 170-191, for an extended discussion of this concept.

panchayat level, it is significant, then, that the state government did not leave the choice of the method by which beneficiaries would be selected to the panchayat presidents. Instead a politically neutral method of picking lots in public was specified by the Housing Minister. This control maintained by the Minister over lower level officers is easily understood if we link it with the fact that panchayat elections had not been held in the state since the past 8 years. As we noted earlier, the panchayats, as local government bodies, were therefore no longer "representative". It was necessary for the state government to ensure that programme benefits were not diverted for political reasons by panchayat presidents who might seek to favour a constituency different from the targeted landless laborer households. An a-political method of picking lots locally would preclude partisanship in the selection of beneficiaries. At the same time, picking lots in public, would allow local residents to ensure that the land and houses were indeed allocated to only those whose names were picked.

#### 4.4 Conclusion.

It is evident, then, that for a government committed to reaching the target group for which the programme was intended, making provisions for public scrutiny of its procedures became essential. At the same time, higher level officials established "enforceable criteria"<sup>76</sup> to channelize public-participation in ways that would help the government to maintain some control over

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<sup>76</sup> Susan G. Hadden, op. cit. pp. 172.

the outcome of this participation. Thus, greater and more directed, rather than less control was necessary to ensure that "decentralization" helped achieve programme goals.

Therefore, once again we note that elements of "top-down" control coexisted with "bottom-up" procedures in the implementation of the OLHS. Significantly, elements of these two styles were consciously incorporated in the implementation of the programme, so that they operated in compliment rather than in opposition. In contrast to the way we usually think about public participation and governmental control, it was the interaction between control and participation, that enabled bold deviations from existing governmental norms as well as "democratic" participatory procedures to work well. For example, public pressure from below reinforced the control maintained by the housing minister from the top, to ensure that local level officials would not misuse the power bestowed on them, and that benefits indeed reached the target group. Control and participation, centralization and decentralization, together, facilitated the good performance of the OLHS in the acquisition and distribution of land.

A strong administrative hierarchy, and carefully laid out lines of control, helped achieve a similar "balance" between centralized control and popular participation, in the construction of the OLHS units as well. In the section below we examine more closely some key aspects of this administrative hierarchy.

## **PART V**

### 5. Execution: clarity of the lines of control.

Unlike public programmes that are implemented through a specific agency, or a single government department, there was no standard agency incharge of implementing the OLHS. Rather, a "conglomerate" arrangement was structured out of the existing hierarchy of the state's decentralized development administration. The administrative structure for the OLHS was essentially a hierarchy of officials, and special committees put together at various levels of government, operating under the tight, overall control of the Housing Minister. This is evident from the "chain of command" outlined below.

#### 5.1. The chain of command.

The chain of command in the administrative hierarchy of the OLHS began at the level of the state government with the Housing Minister in overall charge of the programme. At the district level responsibility for implementation was placed in the hands of district collectors--officers drawn from the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), a distinguished corps of development administrators. Under them, block level committees, composed of the block development officer and field level officials from the Rural Development Department, supervised the performance of the panchayats in each block. Finally, the actual construction of the OLHS units was entrusted to a special Works Committee set up at the panchayat level.



The advantages of this carefully laid out chain of command were twofold: first, without establishing a whole new administrative system, it effectively assembled a bureaucratic structure parallel to the more entrenched, department or agency-based bureaucracy. This parallel structure, helped avoid some of the inefficiencies and delays that result from following the routine administrative protocol common in most public sector departments.

Second, we have seen that despite the massive of the OLHS, execution remained disaggregated and localized. This made construction management easier, but it also segmented the responsibility of project execution in such a way that locally based entities--such as the Works Committee--could be exploited to manage construction. At the same time, because construction was highly localized; the physical target per village small, and the chain of command was not governed by the set procedures of a given department or agency, procedural flexibility--for building in local variations in construction arrangements--could be obtained (we will examine this more closely below).

In, this administrative arrangement, the role of the Works Committee, the authority invested in the district collectors and the powerful, overall control maintained by the Housing Minister are of particular significance to the way the OLHS finally turned out.

5.2. The Works Committee: decentralization, flexibility, participation and control.

The Works Committee (henceforth called Committee), as the execution arm of the OLHS based at the panchayat level, was unusual in its composition. It comprised of the panchayat president, selected panchayat members, additional officials appointed by the government, and, significantly, a group of voluntary non-official members drawn from amongst the local residents. The local residents who served on these committees typically included influential elites such as representatives of religious institutions or prominent communal organizations, political party workers and contractors.<sup>77</sup>

The primary function of the Committee was to coordinate the construction of the OLHS units in the panchayat under its jurisdiction. In addition, it was responsible for procuring construction materials (such as bricks) that were not provided directly by the state government; for organizing voluntary services, unskilled labor and meeting all skilled labor costs. Towards this end, the Committee was authorized by the government to raise funds locally. It was also empowered to receive Rs.50 per unit (4% of the construction cost of each house) from panchayat funds to meet part of the materials and labor costs.

Although the panchayat president was incharge of handling funds and authorizing expenditures, the leadership of the Committee was not restricted to him. The participant members of

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with Mr. P.K. Shivanandan.

the Committee elected its primary coordinator. The leader of the Committee, therefore, could easily be a non-official member from the public. This procedure gave significant authority to non-governmental members of Committee in making decisions about construction.

The Committee, however, was more than a supervisory body at the local level. Even though construction in most cases, was carried out by contractors hired by the state government, the Committee had the authority to recommend alternative arrangements construction management that suited local conditions prevailing in the villages under its jurisdiction--for example, external contractors were not hired if there was sufficient potential in a given panchayat to recruit a local organizer or contractor who had the ability to construct the units efficiently and with speed. The adoption of these alternative arrangements, however, was contingent to the approval of the district collector incharge of the panchayat, and the Housing Minister.<sup>78</sup> In some cases for instance, the coordinator of the Committee himself (if he was a non-official member with interests or contacts in the construction industry) volunteered to take on the responsibility for organizing construction locally.<sup>79</sup> This tendency was especially strong in the early stages of the programme when

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<sup>78</sup> The relationship between the district collectors and panchayats is that the latter is a sub-district unit composed of 50-60 towns or villages. Every district collector--or the key official incharge at the district level, therefore has, at an average, 50-60 (or more) panchayats under him.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, see footnote above.

enthusiasm was at its highest.

The most striking example of the success of such instances is recorded by Mr. Kocchakoshi, then special secretary to the Housing minister, in his account of the OLHS.<sup>80</sup> The example comes from two panchayats noted for being the first to complete the 100 houses in the five respective villages under them. In both cases the non-governmental Committee-coordinators took charge of construction. One of these coordinators was a private contractor (in Kalammacherry panchayat) while the other was a CPM party worker. As word of these efforts spread through the media, competition emerged between these two panchayats over who would claim the distinction of completing the first 100 houses of the OLHS. "Substantial local effort, in terms of cash, materials and labor, was invested in both panchayats to complete construction in record time. Construction was completed within months. Both panchayats reached their physical target at around the same time so that the Prime Minister--who was invited to inaugurate the OLHS houses--had to inaugurate the units in both panchayats on the same day." The OLHS segment in one village from each panchayat was named after the respective Committee coordinators responsible for the exemplary speed in project execution.<sup>81</sup>

The exceptional speed of construction illustrated in this example was facilitated by two factors. The first was the

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<sup>80</sup> Kocchakoshi, Looking into the Hour Glass, St. Joseph's Press, Trivandrum.

<sup>81</sup> From Mr. Kocchakoshi's account, as related by Mr. P.K. Shivanandan.

breaking down of the scale of the OLHS so that each Committee was responsible for the management of only 100 units spread over 5 villages. This disaggregation made construction management easier and allowed speed in project execution. The second factor was the composition of the decentralized "works" committee. The composition of the Committee provided scope for involving strong, local non-beneficiary groups in decision making. Influential, local non-beneficiaries who usually have little to do with the management of programmes from which they will not benefit, were inducted into the implementation efforts. If left out of active implementation, as is more usual, they could potentially have ignored, if not opposed the OLHS; but as part of the local implementation body, they carried as much responsibility for the good performance of the programme, as did the government officials. To the extent that the actions of the Committee were open to public scrutiny and hence accountable to the people, the "elites" were compelled (in theory) to take their responsibility seriously.

At the same time, the prestige attached to being civic-minded may have provided an added incentive to perform well: If they contributed to the success of the local programme segment, they would earn rewards of status, as did the two coordinators in the above story.

This arrangement of involving local residents and local elite, also had the potential to prevent standard procedures of execution from being uniformly imposed on all panchayats. Local

residents are far more aware of local potentials and pitfalls that might help or hamper implementation. Their being on the committee allowed this knowledge to be exploited. By contrast, single agencies, when in charge of implementing large and dispersed projects, rarely have this flexibility to provide similar potential for local variation in procedures of execution.

At the same time, even though decentralized implementation provides flexibility at the local (village or panchayat) level, it can also make overall programme management at a more aggregated level (the district and state), difficult. This is because of the various implementing entities involved and their varying degree of competence. In the case of the OLHS, moreover, the "success" of the programme depended on the good performance of all the local subunits. In other words, some level of overall control was necessary to prevent subunits from lagging in implementation.

In the OLHS this control was achieved, first through public participation and public pressure from below, which made committee members accountable to the people. If members of the Committee vacillated, local demonstrations, in several cases, compelled them to act with speed. Second, even though each panchayat (of which there are 960) had a separate execution or Works Committee, these several committees were not structurally different in their composition. Each was built around the panchayat level leadership. There were hence some common rules and a degree of institutional uniformity that governed its

operation. Similarly, Block level Committees which supervised the functioning of the works committee also operated on prescribed rules. The significance of this point lies in the fact that to manage flexibility at the local level (panchayat and village in this case), in a programme where implementation is highly dispersed, it might be necessary to retain some uniformity in the functional and organizational structure of those who will be held accountable for the performance of those below them. The third method by which control was maintained by the Housing Minister was through the authority invested in the district collectors to oversee the performance of the Committee from the "top". In fact the role of the district collectors is central to the "successful" implementation of the OLHS. How? and why? we examine below.

### 5.3. The district collector: an elite corps of administrators and setting up a parallel bureaucratic structure.

We have seen that, even while the "works" committee sounds like a participatory body, its performance was directly monitored by the Block level Committees and closely controlled by the respective district collectors. The district collectors, indeed, were the key personnel responsible for coordinating implementation in all subunits of the district (panchayats and villages) under their command. They were directly answerable to the Housing Minister for the progress of the OLHS in the 50-60 panchayats (or the 200-250 villages participating in the

programme) that they controlled, at an average. It was in their interest, therefore, to elicit good performance from the block and panchayat level committees.

Their specific responsibilities included organizing cash donations, coordinating the provision of subsidized cement and roof-tiles from centralized outlets selected by the government to each panchayat, assisting the "poorer" panchayats with cash, and, assessing and approving recommendations made by the Works Committee with regard to execution procedures.

District collectors are powerful bureaucrats. Unlike other administrators they are highly trained generalists drawn from the elitist cadres of the Indian Administrative Service. They are not part of the routine bureaucracy attached to specific government departments, but rather, as a special corps of development administrators are located in the field. Most important however, unlike other bureaucrats in the field, they have direct access to state level ministers. It is significant, then, that the government made the district collectors, rather than any other type of senior official, responsible for the performance of the OLHS in all the subunits of the state. The other officials on whom the government could have entrusted this responsibility were, for example, the regional engineers of the PWD who had hitherto looked after shelter provision; the panchayat presidents; or any other set of senior officials appointed by the state-government from its own departmental bureaucracy.

In bypassing the regional engineers--appointees of the



central government--the state government essentially understated the role of technocrats in a position which called for an ability to manage local conflict. Technocrats are hardly suited for this role. District collectors, as generalists, have greater experience and expertise at managing political conflict, and therefore, made better candidates for such a position. In addition, the government's decision to bypass the regional engineers of the PWD ruled out ambiguity in the answerability of such officials that could result from making central government employees responsible for coordinating a politically important state government programme. At the same time, it shut out a potential avenue of interference by the Center in the implementation of the OLHS.

Similarly, panchayat presidents were also excluded from being made "second in command" after the Housing Minister. The panchayat is too disaggregated a unit (there are 960 panchayats in Kerala) at which to centralize vast amounts of supervisory control over a programme whose smallest unit is the village and the largest the entire state. The district, of which there are 11 in the state, as an alternative, forms a more reasonable regional unit from which an intermediate level of authority can coordinate the state-wide execution of a programme as dispersed as the OLHS. Further, in granting greater authority to district collectors vis-a-vis panchayat presidents, the government was also presumably responding to the "unrepresentative" nature of most panchayats due to the long gap in local government elections.

Without strong administrative control over the panchayat presidents it might have been presumptuous to expect all panchayats to fall in line with directives from the Housing Minister.

Panchayat presidents, moreover, were already part of the Works Committee. Even in this role, some level of local accountability had been built in from below by making provisions for public participation. Control from above was thus, introduced by making the panchayat presidents answerable to the district collectors, who in turn were directly accountable to the Housing Minister.

Finally, in sidestepping its own departmental bureaucracy, the government sought to prevent the delays, loss of information and distortion of commands that result from decisions being channelized through an entrenched, routine-based administrative hierarchy. In the Secretariat, as in other public sector agencies, "any case has to go to a minimum of three departments and to the council of ministers for a decision. Very often party and community interests get over-riding priority over the merits of the case. If the case has to go to more than one department headed by ministers from different parties, the problem becomes more complicated. To get a decision, one has therefore to befriend a party-man and please officers at all levels" (EPW, 1972: 2183). Against this background of how the bureaucracy works in Kerala, it is not surprising that the ministerial proponents of the OLHS decided to bypass its own departments.

As it was, none of the state-government departments were adequately equipped in terms of staff and skills to handle the OLHS given its scale, scope and the government's goal of speed in programme realization. For example, the two departments that could potentially have been made responsible for the OLHS were the Housing Department and the Rural Development Department. The former, was too sparsely staffed, limited in institutional infrastructure and outreach, since the state government had barely been involved with shelter provision so far--most of it having been carried out by the central Public Works Department. The Rural Development Department had several of its own programmes to handle, and neither land acquisition, nor shelter construction were its routine tasks. Implementing or even managing the execution of the OLHS was beyond its institutional capacity.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, it would be difficult for the Housing minister, who was one of the key figures behind the conceptualization of the OLHS, to bypass the Rural Development Minister and retain control over the staff of a department other than his own, for a single programme. At the same time, given the Housing Minister's motivation and deep personal involvement in ensuring the success of the OLHS (he had long been arguing for a

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<sup>82</sup> In any case bestowing importance and visibility to either department by making them responsible for executing the OLHS when both were equally ill-equipped to implement it, may have caused inter-departmental rivalries over the sudden prominence the chosen department would receive. At the same time, project realization may have suffered due to lack of enough personnel and bureaucratic delays.

role for the public sector in housing provision for the poor and now had the opportunity to demonstrate how well it could work) it was perhaps important to the government that, he, rather than any other minister remain incharge of implementing the OLHS. Assembling a separate chain of command, with district collectors, rather than senior officials of a specific state-level department, as "second in command" allowed the Housing Minister to remain in charge.

To recapitulate the above discussion, the government's decision to choose district collectors as key officials responsible for implementation at the regional level is significant because, first, as members of an elite bureaucratic corps (the accredited Indian Administrative Service--IAS), they are highly trained development administrators with control over a wide range of administrative functions. District collectors, whom Robertson calls the "...near-omnipotent local political officer[s]" have the authority to assume "almost any official role in [their] area of jurisdiction" (1984: 154). Therefore, in the case of the OLHS, unlike narrowly specialized technocrats, they were well suited to cope with regional or local conflict, if it arose, and were empowered to take situational decisions when necessary.

Secondly, unlike other bureaucrats, district collectors bear a distinguished status that comes from their being a part of the "exclusive" IAS tradition. This "exclusivity", in part, dates back to the IAS being modelled after the prestigious Indian Civil

Service under the British Raj; but it also derives from the ideology of competence and good performance that the Service has come to embody. Even in recent times, upward mobility of IAS officers, most of whom begin their careers by serving as field officers or collectors, is linked with their demonstrated ability to perform well. Placing such officials in charge of implementing the OLHS at the district level not only allowed the government to draw upon their tradition of good performance, but career prospects could be effectively linked with the collectors' performance in the OLHS. As one officer noted, the political stake of the government in the success of the OLHS and the personal involvement of the housing minister, kept most district collectors and local officers who were concerned about their careers, "on their feet". Career prospects were practically synonymous with speed in project realization and good performance. "Good performance was not only expected from the district collectors themselves, but they were also expected to get similar performance from those below them."<sup>83</sup> Thus, in investing substantial discretion in the hands of the district collectors, and in making them responsible for the performance of those under them, the government set up an implicit mechanism to maintain a check on the misuse of flexibility accorded to lower level officials (such as members of the Works Committee). It is noteworthy, that the district collectors of the worst performing districts--Alleppy (34% of original target), Kottayam (27% of

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<sup>83</sup> M.S. Matthews.

original target), Cannanore (21.3% of original target) and Mallapuram (20.9%),<sup>84</sup> "...were on the average only one-and-a-half years away from retirement by end-1974, and perhaps had no career interests in the successful implementation of the scheme" (Nalapat, 1972: 590). It is clear therefore, that implicitly, or explicitly, the government linked the career prospects of district collectors with their performance in the OLHS. In most cases this worked to the advantage of the OLHS.

However, it must also be noted that the government could effectively exploit this linkage between performance and promotion primarily because upward mobility is closely linked to an officer's track record in the Indian Administrative Service. It is especially important for those district collectors who are just starting out to demonstrate good performance. The need to build a good track record is less of a concern for ordinary bureaucrats who often do not have far to rise, and for whom promotion is in any case, on the basis of seniority or success public service examinations. This is not to suggest that the government entrusted major responsibilities on the district collectors, consciously, on the basis of such reasoning; But that it is important to realize under what conditions a given strategy is likely to work, or not: If the government had used its own departmental officials to implement the OLHS, perhaps linking performance with career prospects, that worked in the case of district collectors, would have been far less effective.

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<sup>84</sup> Source for figures: Nalapat M.D. op.cit.

Finally, district collectors, as part of the development administration system, have direct access to the ministry. As one officer who evaluated the OLHS noted, the collectors' direct access to the Minister, permitted close coordination between them, so that the collectors were "on the inside of decision making". The district collectors acquired prestige and influence from being part of the topmost decision-making body of the OLHS, and being taken into confidence by the Housing Minister. This influence, however, brought special responsibilities and high expectations regarding their performance. These expectations, in addition to the close contact with the Minister, generated implicit pressure on the collectors to measure upto the confidence placed in them. To the extent that the Minister conferred with the collectors, and sought their opinion on various aspects of the programme, it is likely that overt opposition to the OLHS from any of the collectors was also diffused. At the same time, this proximity between the collectors and the Minister, prevented sanitization of local level information because there were fewer intermediate levels at which it could stop, or be manipulated, as it moved up the system. By the same reasoning, the Minister was better able to maintain control over his immediate subordinates, and thereby, the entire hierarchy.

Therefore, even while the district collectors were involved in decisions made at the "top", and given substantial powers of discretion, their performance was closely monitored by

the Housing Minister. This control was important. As a senior officer pointed out, this control was necessary because, despite the tradition of good performance, IAS officers (district collectors in this case) like other bureaucrats everywhere, are also varied in their abilities, and have their own political preferences or opinions on policy. Even though the ostensibly "non-partisan" creed of bureaucrats precludes their expressing such views publicly, it is often the opposition of powerful or entrenched bureaucrats to a programme that, in part, lies behind its poor performance. Furthermore, powerful bureaucrats, especially those in the field, inevitably play a political role when they use the powers invested in them to take local decisions during programme implementation. If they are not made accountable for their actions, or if they know senior officials do not care enough to check on what happens, it is likely that their personal favour or disfavor for the programme will impact its performance.

Therefore, on the one hand, devolving discretionary power by ministers to subordinate officials is desirable because it bestows influence as well as responsibility on officials who might otherwise be less motivated to produce good results because they regard themselves as mere subordinates in a bureaucratic chain of command. On the other hand, it is crucial that sufficient control be maintained by higher level officials to obtain performance consistent with the goals of the programme..

Most of the mechanisms of control used by the government



that we have seen so far were implicit, rather than authoritarian--linking career prospects with performance, the personal care taken by the Minister to elicit details from districts where progress was tardy, face to face contact between the Minister and the Collectors. But the one critical feature that enabled the minister to remain aware of what went on at the district and panchayat level to monitor the actions of his subordinates effectively, was his access to information. If close contact between the minister and the subordinate officials, prevented loss of information through "official" channels, the minister also relied on informal sources to keep himself informed. As Shivanandan pointed out, "if something goes wrong in the field, the ministers learn about it the very next day. This is because they maintain several channels of information." One such source is the party. The ideologically bound, local level workers of the ruling political party (CPI and the workers of the Youth Congress) played a significant role in keeping the minister informed. Although their presence is resented by non-communist panchayat heads, and effectively resisted where political parties of the latter have a mass-base, in the case of the OLHS, the influence of the 8 party coalition was considerable. Between them, the geographic dispersion of their control covered several parts of the state, making such surveillance more feasible.

However, despite these factors, which in theory should have elicited exceptional performance of the OLHS, only about 50% of the physical target was eventually met. It is clear that there

are several other factors that play a role in programme implementation that must be adequately researched. However, one such factor that impacted the performance of the OLHS was an exogenous one. In 1973, soon after land was acquired and construction began, large parts of Kerala were struck by famine. Nearly 187 panchayats were declared famine effected, and food grain prices (especially of rice) more than doubled, even in some of the government recognized distribution centers (EPW, 1973: 1407). Popular protests, work-stoppages, and, demonstrations were organized by the opposition (in which even the CPI-controlled unions participated), which demanded to know "what prevented the state government, which claims to set models in many things for other states to follow, from procuring the entire marketable surplus, if necessary at a higher price?" (EPW, 1973: 1408). This demand for the distribution of subsidized grain diverted popular and official attention towards food, compelling the government to cutback on other sectoral outlays--including the OLHS--in order to alleviate the shortage of grain in the state.

Dealing with what was practically the first crisis faced by the coalition government also caused mutual discord among the partners of the alliance. The Congress held the "unpopular" portfolios of home and food, while the communist and socialist parties between them controlled social services, revenue, public works and local administration. It was imperative that the progress of the OLHS, which was managed by a CPI minister, would be measured against allegations of mismanagement in food by the

Congress. It is no co-incidence then, that in some of the Congress dominated districts (including Ouilon, Alleppy and Kottayam), where the mutual infighting between it and the CPI subsequently became exacerbated, were also amongst the worst performing districts in the OLHS, Alleppy and Kottayam having met 34% and 27% of their targets respectively (EPW, 1973: 1408).

#### 5.4 Conclusion.

Even though less than 50% of the physical target was met in the OLHS, both due to exogenous reasons such as the above, and slack performance on the part of some district collectors and local officials in certain panchayats, the execution arrangement of the OLHS worked well. Indeed, several lessons can be learnt from this experience.

Decentralization is desirable in principle, but often needs to be "controlled" in order to ensure that the existing political, organizational and other local variables are taken into account. Rothenberg's study of administrative decentralization of housing policy in Colombia illustrates how mere devolution of power to lower level officials is not enough to elicit representativeness in decision making (1980). As Hadden has argued, some control will be necessary make decentralization work (1980). These measures of "control" work best when they combine pressure and accountability from below with firm management and coordination from above. In the OLHS, the most striking of such arrangements was the participatory nature of the Works Committee and the strong role played by the district

collectors. The significance of assigning a central role to the latter in the cast of characters is succinctly captured by a discussion by Evans and Rueschmyer on mechanisms that have the potential to make decentralization effective and coherent. They argue that:

..a distinctive esprit de corps among higher civil servants can function as a fluid form of coordination combining relative autonomy for officials with a shared sense of purpose, which is reinforced by identification with the group. This distinctive sense of identity, especially when it coalesces with the emergence of civil servants as a status group, can further act as a barrier to outside influence (1985: 56).

The IAS background that district collectors have in common, provided the "esprit de corps" the authors mention. The broad discretionary powers invested in them, provided "relative autonomy", but the linking of performance with career prospects made this autonomy a tool through which the government obtained good performance, not only from them, but also from the officials below them.

This role of the district collectors, along with the participatory nature of the Works Committee fostered accountability and ensured monitoring by the people. The disaggregation of the scale of the OLHS facilitated construction management and flexibility. The strong control maintained by the Housing Minister, provided institutional coherence to what was an assembled, surrogate chain of command. Together, all of these elements successfully substituted for a well worked out administrative hierarchy within a single agency.

## **PART VI**

### 6. Conclusion.

The OLHS represents an unusual case of a public shelter programme which has worked well. It is considered "successful" not only by government officials and politicians, but by people throughout the state. Its drawbacks are considered as much a part of its "success", as its achievements, because they have provided important lessons for the design and implementation of future shelter programmes in the public sector. Through the programme, the state government of Kerala provided one lakh landless laborer households, who had been excluded from the benefits of the government's ongoing agrarian reform, with land. Of these, 44,000 households (eventually 60,000) were provided fully constructed houses in addition to the land.

#### 6.1 Good performance: constraints become opportunities

The good performance of the OLHS is especially noteworthy because it was achieved despite the presence of what would seem to be the opposite conditions considered necessary to implement a major programme in a new sector--a turbulent period due to the social conflicts generated by the state government's ongoing agrarian reform; criticism from the supporters of the reform over its slow implementation; the precarious balance of a newly elected coalition government; and the government's lack of previous experience with shelter. But it turned out that these were just the conditions that led the government to design the OLHS in a way that became conducive to its good performance.

Even while the government designed the OLHS, primarily, to ward off discontent among the excluded landless laborers, it converted the potential threat posed by this discontent among a politically important and well organized constituency over the outcome of one of its redistributive programmes, into an opportunity to further some of its own goals. The government designed the OLHS as a large, visible, subsidized programme that had to be implemented with speed. A large and visible programme, if implemented with speed, would help mitigate the unrest among the targeted constituency. It would also demonstrate the coalition's institutional capacity and commitment to the poor. At the same time it would provide a surrogate counterfoil to government's sluggish performance in the land reform. But the programme had to turn out a "success" to meet these goals. The success of the OLHS therefore became a political necessity for the government. This political interest in the good performance of the OLHS invested it with prestige, government-priority and commitment from those at the very top of the state level administrative hierarchy.

## 6.2 good performance: what is "success" what is "failure".

The good performance of the programme is also of significance because it was obtained despite the presence of several features that we conventionally associate with "failure"-  
-(1) direct intervention by the public sector, (2) provision of fully constructed units, (3) lack of user participation, and (4) a deep subsidy incurred by the government. These elements of

"failure" however were not as drastic as normative assessments would make them appear. Indeed in several cases they helped elicit good programme performance. This implies that in assigning "culprits" for failure, and "candidates" for success, we may often be looking at wrong variables, or, more importantly missing the relationship between the sequence of events, existing circumstances at a particular historical moment, and the nature of the actors involved, that might come together in ways that make a programme work well despite the presence of features that have led to poor performance in other cases.

(1) The "direct" intervention of the government, in fact helped, rather than hindered programme implementation. Firstly, unlike an agency such as the Housing Board, the state-government possessed the financial and human infrastructure, and strong discretionary powers invested in the elected ministers, that enabled it to implement a programme of such large scale and state-wide scope as the OLHS, efficiently.

By virtue of the strong discretionary powers invested in a state-government, the Kerala government was able to use its influence, and take several decisions that semi-autonomous public agencies cannot. For example, it used its discretion to bypass some of its own cumbersome rules to expedite the land acquisition process--a move that turned out to be critical for the good performance of the OLHS, because it allowed construction to start early. The government officials incharge of the programme also made serious efforts to elicit public (as opposed to beneficiary)

participation, and succeeded in mobilizing public support at a scale that is difficult for a single agency to manage. The involvement of ministers at the apex of the state level hierarchy was central to the government's obtaining this support.

The involvement of cabinet level ministers gave the programme its "high profile". That such senior officials and politicians were involved in the programme, accorded prestige and authority to the programme. This was particularly instrumental in eliciting finances from the non-beneficiary elite, which were critical in obtaining the resources necessary for execution. An independent agency would perhaps lack the authority to introduce such an unconventional method--of calling for voluntary donations--to finance its programmes. In any case, such an agency would require the backing of the government to make its programmes as much of a public event as the OLHS became, to make it rewarding enough for potential donors to contribute liberally.

Furthermore, a public agency might not be trusted by the people to the same extent as the government was, for state-wide fund-raising of the nature we saw in the OLHS, to be successful. This is primarily because politicians elected to state office, and their political parties, are far better known to the people, than are agency heads. The importance of this point is illustrated by the fact that the government chose a popular, highly respected, veteran leader of the CPI, who was known for his integrity, to head the implementation of the OLHS. By contrast, public agencies, such as Housing Boards, are often



headed by bureaucrats or technocrats. These officials may be honest and committed, but they are rarely public figures. Not only do the people not know them because these officials have no direct contact with the public, but they get transferred so often, that there is not much scope for the development of a public image. Thus it was important for the OLHS that the government implemented the programme directly.

Secondly, because the government was directly incharge, it was able to link up with the central government and its programmes much more easily. For example, it successfully manipulated national level political alliances to make changes in a standard central programme (MNP) to suit local needs. It also exploited these same national level relationships to obtain additional finances from the center. In this regard the Kerala government's being a coalition was of special significance.

We usually tend to assume that sharing political power undermines a government's performance and institutional capacity, because it introduces uncertainty about the coalition's stability. This uncertainty is assumed to be particularly detrimental to the successful implementation of programmes that require control and coordination at various levels of government, and agreement between ministers from different political parties. The performance of the OLHS, shows that this need not always be the case.

The OLHS-case shows that, on the contrary, it was precisely because the Kerala government was a coalition, that it

could obtain support and funds from the center for a much expanded programme, that opposition-led state governments usually find difficult to obtain. However, the Kerala government obtained this support not because it was a coalition per se, but because of the particular composition of the coalition. It was the presence of the congress--the party that was also in power at the center--in the center-left coalition of Kerala, that gave the alliance clout with the center. Any other type of coalition, in which the congress did not feature, would have been far less potent, if at all. Another reason why the coalition managed to obtain significant concessions from New Delhi, is attributable to the change that the congress party at the national level, itself was going through at the particular historical moment when the OLHS was conceived. As a result of a string of recent electoral disasters in several states, and a split in its own ranks, the congress at that time, was actively seeking a left-of-center image, and hoped to repeat the congress-CPI alliance that had worked well in Kerala, in the imminent national elections. It was in its interest therefore to make the Kerala alliance look good by helping make one of its major programmes to turn out successful--even if the programme was conceived and managed by left ministers.

Thirdly, even at the state level, to the extent that there were 8 members in the coalition, and each would be hurt politically if the OLHS did not work out well, the OLHS benefited from obtaining the support of 8 parties and their respective

constituencies, rather than only one. Sharing political power, will not always undermine performance, as we tend to assume.

Therefore, it is important that we reconsider our view that coalitions invariably suggest weak governments with doubtful capacity to implement major programmes. But at the same time we need to be wary of falling into the trap at the opposite extreme--that coalition governments can work well regardless of their configuration, vis-a-vis the pattern of political power at the next higher level.

This then, feeds back to the point that, in several ways, the fact that the government (at the ministerial level) directly took on the responsibility of implementing the OLHS, rather than entrust it to a separate agency, facilitated the success of a programme of such massive scope as the OLHS.

(2) The fully constructed units were important because they provided visibility to the programme--visibility became one of the factors that motivated the government to ensure that the programme performed well.

(3) User participation, as it turned out, was of marginal importance to the success of the programme. (Nor was it forthcoming on its own. Yet this lack of beneficiary participation did not divert benefits to a different constituency, as is often the case in low-income shelter programmes.

Eventhough only marginal efforts were made at obtaining beneficiary participation, the constituency targeted in the OLHS

was made public from the very start. More than making identity of the target group public, the fact that the programme was explicitly targeted towards a group that had been excluded from benefits of the agrarian reform, helped the government obtain public support for the OLHS.

This made diversion of benefits away from them, difficult, for two main reasons. One the one hand, the people in the state are, for the most part, highly politically and socially conscious--a trait that can be traced to the history of social development in Kerala. Because it was public knowledge that the OLHS was targeted towards the landless, the people could, in essence, monitor the distribution of its benefits. Widespread resentment against the government could develop among the people, if it was found that the government had reneged, or was lax in distributing programme benefits to those targeted. The active role of the media also played a significant part in keeping up this pressure from below.

On the other hand, powerholders at the state level in Kerala, have also traditionally derived political legitimacy, in part, by emphasizing their commitment to the lower classes, to reform and structural change. It would be in their own interests to ensure that the benefits of the OLHS reached the target group. It was, therefore, this common concern at the top and bottom that prevented benefits from being appropriated by other, non-targeted, low-income groups. Beneficiary participation was not necessary to achieve this.

(4) Finally, the subsidy incurred by the government was not unusually heavy, as it managed to spread part of the financial burden to the better-off, non-beneficiary elite. The financial arrangements, as they finally turned out, were far more progressive than is the case even in the more usual "participatory" or "self-help" programmes.

This suggests that by categorizing programme outcomes, normatively into "successes" or "failures", we may be looking at the wrong variables. In doing so, we may often fail to understand why some programmes work exceptionally well despite possessing the culprits associated with "failure", because we miss out the key relationships between events and actors that are not evident on the surface but indeed, make for good performance.

### 6.3 Setting up a programme to compel good performance: prominence and public support.

Apart from conditional factors, the approach of the government towards the OLHS was also instrumental in the programme's relatively good performance. In striking contrast to the way in which most state governments approach public shelter programmes, the coalition government deliberately set up the OLHS so as to compel good performance: It made the programme and its implementation very visible. Good performance would bring political rewards--of institutional capacity and stability. But if the programme failed, the visibility of the failure could cost the government its credibility at a time when it could least afford to do so. This bold move, also, inadvertently, or perhaps

deliberately, projected an image of "confidence"--that the government had the institutional capacity to pull off the OLHS successfully, or it would not be taking such a risk. The government was therefore compelled to carefully establish implementation procedures and an administrative hierarchy that would indeed ensure that the OLHS perform well.

Making the programme's good performance a political necessity also helped diffuse potential opposition to the large state-level outlay for the OLHS from those member-parties of the coalition (and their affiliates) whose constituencies would have little to gain from it. The key to good performance, then, lay in mobilizing public support and involvement, which the government consciously worked towards obtaining, primarily by bestowing prominence to the programme.

The prominence that the government bestowed on the OLHS came from (1) the massive scale of the programme, (2) its politicization through slogans, the visible involvement of the highest of the state government officials, (3) broad-based, state-wide publicity through skillful use of the media, and (4) focussing on public rather than beneficiary participation. All of these factors, together, converted a public shelter programme targeted towards a single, low-status client group into a virtual state-wide "movement".

The large scale of the programme captured public attention--a "hundred thousand" units sound more impressive than do a "thousand" or two thousand. But significantly, while the

programme was projected as one of massive scale, its implementation was decentralized. At an aggregate level the "massiveness" generated the desired impact, but breaking down the programme into smaller components of 20 units dispersed across participant villages throughout the state, kept execution very localized. This decentralization made construction management easier. It also provided a sense of involvement to people in all parts of the state--the OLHS was not something people just heard about, rather they saw it being implemented in their own respective panchayats. For this reason, participation from local residents was forthcoming in several villages. It is thus the large scale but decentralized implementation of the programme that enabled the programme to work well.

#### 6.4 The power of the media.

The significance of using the media to both, popularize and monitor/evaluate government programmes is now receiving increasing attention from researchers as evidenced by the recent literature on the subject. The OLHS stands out as a relatively effective, and instructive early attempt by a government to use the media to publicize as well as monitor a programme whose success was of major political importance to it.

The proponents of the programme in the government evidently understood, and exploited, the potency of using the media in a state where there are 44 local language dailies in addition to others, where the typical middle-class household buys at least two newspapers (usually a "leftist" or "rightist" daily

and a more "objective" one to "keep track of what is actually going on.." <sup>85</sup>), and, high literacy levels have produced a class of "newspaper reading laborers". The government exploited this broad audience by regularly publishing messages and statements about the OLHS from prominent ministers in newspapers over which it had influence.

At the same time the media itself aided in focussing public attention on the programme by responding to the government's statements on the OLHS. It reported public opinion, criticism, and debates on the merits and drawbacks of the programme. It published updates on the spatial distribution of the progress of the OLHS that implicitly created a sense of competition between the various districts. Since every district and panchayat in the state participated in the OLHS, and localized execution provided a shared sense of public responsibility, in several instances this constructive "competition" generated by the media helped speed up tardy progress.

The lesson suggested by this outcome is that in contrast to the constant problems faced during implementation, of getting a government programme to do its own monitoring and evaluation (which can often be biased depending upon who carries out the evaluation versus who wields the power and what the "powerholders" want to hear), the media and the implicit "public pressure" it generates can play an important role in eliciting

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<sup>85</sup> Discussion with B. Kuriakose.



good performance in a public programme, effectively. It is obvious that if a regime is authoritarian, it may not be in its interest to allow such "public monitoring", especially if it implies foregoing some of its control over what may be published. Similarly, if much of the media is "captured" by the government, then it may be used to portray what the government considers important to its implementation strategy, or what it wants the public to see and hear. In either case, it is evident that the media is a powerful (and therefore also a dangerous) monitoring tool through which public attention can be focussed on the implementation of government programmes--to the benefit or detriment of its performance as originally designed.

#### 6.4.1 The media, public pressure and elite participation.

The effectiveness of using the media is also evidenced by the relative success with which the government transferred part of the burden of financing the OLHS to the non-beneficiary elite. Contrary to our usual understanding of "welfare" programmes, where the government comes in with a deep subsidy, the Kerala government expected upto 48% of the construction cost of the OLHS to be borne by the public. This was expected through voluntary donations of cash, services and unskilled labor. Since capital was more important to ensure the financial feasibility of the OLHS, and non-beneficiary elite were the potential "donors" of this capital, the government focussed most of its efforts to obtain the active support and participation of such elite.

The public-based, rather than beneficiary-based publicity

was one means by which the government sought to elicit elite participation. Generating pressure through the media was another. In a social environment where status is attached to being egalitarian and socially conscious, using the media to create pressure as well as provide the incentive of publicizing the donors and their donations, proved to be an effective strategy.

Central to this strategy was the fact that the donations called for by the government were voluntary. If in doing so the government exploited the tradition of "patronage" that still exists between the better-off and the poor, in Kerala, it also consciously provided incentives that would make it socially rewarding for the elite to contribute voluntarily. The government bestowed public prominence on elite donors by naming some of the OLHS colonies after those who donated more than Rs.10-20,000 (roughly US \$1-2000 at 1972 exchange rates). The media provided similar incentives by publishing the names of prominent non-beneficiary donors, and by exerting negative pressure against regions where donations were meager. In part, as a result of appeals from the government for the well-off to participate, and the "pressure from below" generated by the media, the government succeeded in obtaining nearly half the voluntary cash donations it expected from the elite, without resorting to coercion, regulation, or, compulsion.

Non-beneficiary elite also contributed to the programme--from which they did not directly accrue benefits--if by helping the programme they also helped themselves in some way. This is

evidenced by the stories of the contractors who wanted government contracts, plantation workers and some large landlords.

It is noteworthy, however, that publicizing a programme widely will not secure similar responses of voluntary participation from different socio-economic classes. For example, the mechanism of publicity through the media that was so vital in eliciting finance from the elite, worked contrary to the government's expectations in acquiring free voluntary labor. The same media that successfully pressured the elite to donate cash, led the beneficiaries--also potential providers of voluntary labor--to believe that the entire state was being mobilized for their cause and that they--the poorest, who would rather spend their time earning a living, than donating their labor free--need not pay in any form to obtain the benefits of the OLHS. With the government politically committed to making the programme work, they would obtain its benefits anyway--moreover, as it was the programme was publicized as a "welfare" or relief measure. To the beneficiaries this meant that they were not required, or expected to pay.

However, to the extent that the non-beneficiary, better-off elite contributed more towards funding the OLHS, (through their donations of cash), than did the actual beneficiaries (through donations of unskilled labor), the financial arrangements of the OLHS finally turned out more progressive than is the case in the more usual public programmes for the poor. It

is nevertheless clear that expectations of free voluntary labor from poorer clients is unrealistic and exploitative; and will not necessarily be forthcoming on its own.

But, at the same time, good programme performance need not be contingent on beneficiary involvement, just as the lack of beneficiary participation does not, in itself, imply that programme benefits will be appropriated by the less poor. If sufficient scope is built into the programme for public scrutiny and involvement, as was the case in the OLHS, then, even without user participation, benefits can reach the original target group. Lack of user-participation, then, is not always a sign of poor programme performance. But it is also important to note that this lack of user input may, in some cases, result in problems later by virtue of programme designers having overlooked important social traits and heterogeneity among the "poor" who are beneficiaries. This drawback was evident in the OLHS in one aspect of project design--the provision of housing in clustered arrangements--that led to social problems later.

#### 6.5 Participation, control and the administrative hierarchy.

Along with provisions for public participation, some degree of centralization of control will usually be necessary to ensure that programme goals are indeed met, as designed. This combination of participation and control is clearly manifested in the execution procedures of the OLHS, particularly in the chain of command set-up by the government. In lieu of a highly sophisticated institutional arrangement in a single agency, the

government assembled a "hybrid" structure. It created separate, decentralized implementation agencies at the panchayat level, to which considerable powers were devolved. These decentralized units operated under the strong overall authority centralized in the Housing Minister.

Most significantly, this structure was outside the procedure-based mainstream hierarchy of government departments. This kept the operation of the subunits insulated from the state's departmental bureaucracy, thus minimizing bureaucratic red-tapism and inefficiencies often seen in public agencies and governmental departments. This "parallel" structure, in addition, allowed decentralized execution and local level participation, even while it enabled the Minister to maintain tight, overall control of the programme.

Of particular significance to this arrangement was the composition of the Works Committee--included prominent local residents, and the choice of district collectors as "second in command" after the Housing minister. In the case of the former, specific provisions for public scrutiny, made lower level implementors accountable to the people. These measures prevented "footdragging" on their part and made diversion of benefits away from the target group difficult. In the case of the latter, linking the performance of the district collectors--officials of the distinguished IAS corps--with prospects of career advancement, and making them answerable for the performance of officials below them, the government successfully established an

effective but implicit mechanism of top-down control on local implementors. This was possible because unlike most bureaucrats, upward mobility for these officials is governed by their track record. Moreover, the "esprit de corps" that binds the members of the IAS, provides officials such as the district collectors with a sense of purpose and achievement, which makes their cooptation by external interests difficult.

Therefore, in sum, bottom-up processes and top-down control were combined to ensure that the established goals of the government in the OLHS--speed in project realization and ensuring that benefits reach the actual target group--were met. Even though the original physical target of the OLHS was not fully realized, and the programme took more time than the initial estimate of one year, we have seen this was due to exogenous factors, as well as slack performance in some districts.

The programme, however, did make one hundred thousand landless agricultural laborers, who are at the lowest end of the income distribution, owners of land. It also made 44,000 (a total of 60,000, ultimately) beneficiary households owners of finished houses. This in itself is a noteworthy achievement because in contrast to the several voluntary agencies in the field whose shelter programmes usually exclude the lowest income groups because they are "chronic" cases of poverty and too poor to reach, the benefits of the OLHS indeed, accrued to the "poorest

of the poor"<sup>86</sup>.

6.6 When elements of "top-down" development coexist with "bottom-up" pressure.

Finally the programme performed well not only because there were leaders at the top committed to making the OLHS successful, but also because there was powerful pressure, and "monitoring" by the people--both as part of government strategy, and in response to it--that compelled good performance. For example, there are several instances in other states where senior bureaucrats or ministers are committed to the success of government programmes targeted towards the poor. Similarly there are as many cases where people--even socially motivated elites in some cases--have organized from below to pressure a reluctant government to respond to the demands of the poor. But so far we

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<sup>86</sup> The OLHS we noted, provided tenure of land and ownership of individual houses to the programme beneficiaries. Considering that the landless agricultural workers are at the bottom of the income spectrum, title to land and ownership of a fixed asset, such as a "pucca" (brick and plaster, rather than mud and thatch) house, has provided them access to institutional credit. This access to credit has helped them, in however modest a way, to alleviate their poor economic condition in small ways. The most common example of a secondary source of income that access to credit has allowed the beneficiaries to obtain, is through marginal poultry "farms"--households consume as well as sell eggs in the neighborhood; some sell meat. In one case in Ouilon district, land title was used as the "security" by an OLHS beneficiary household to purchase an auto-rickshaw, as part of a "hire-purchase" scheme introduced by a nationalized bank (State-bank of India). This particular household had 3 adults. While two of them worked as part agricultural laborers and part head-load coolies, the auto-rickshaw added considerably to their overall income, compared to the time when all three were field laborers. Similarly small shops have sprung up in many of the OLHS colonies, to start which some households borrowed low-interest loans from local Primary Service Societies.

have documented too few cases where both these forces--commitment from the top, and pressure from below, coexist to the degree we saw in the OLHS.

In the absence of either of these forces it is less likely that the programme would have worked out as well as it did. For example, if the government was not concerned about good results in the OLHS, it is unlikely that, even with demand-making and public pressure from below, it would have taken up a programme of such expanded and unprecedented scope--a mere gesture would perhaps have been considered enough of a compromise. Nor would it have gone out of its way to organize the funds and the manpower necessary to carry such an expanded programme successfully, as it did in the case of the OLHS. Similarly, without the enthusiastic response and support from the people, even highly motivated government officials would find it difficult to generate the kind of interest and public involvement that was instrumental in making the OLHS a "success-story", and a programme that even today remains the state's "most popular, much publicized and much criticized" shelter programme.

Thus the coexistence of "top-down" control and "bottom-up" pressure, and more significantly the constructive relationships between the "top" and the "bottom" were key factors that resulted in the good performance of the OLHS. But what is most impressive about the OLHS is that it was not a "one-time success" or a dead end programme, but has continued till the present time in more



modest and modified form.<sup>87</sup> Most of all, it has served as a valuable learning experience that has led to several innovations--innovations that provide shelter process in Kerala with a distinction that most other states in the country seek to emulate.

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<sup>87</sup> The land and shelter component of the MNP was devolved to the state-list in 1974. Since then the government of Kerala has modified the programme by splitting it into two components--under one programme land is acquired by the government and distributed to the landless through the district collectors. Under the second programme financial assistance (a loan and grant package provided out of state and central funds) is made available to those who have benefited from the first scheme, to enable them to construct their own houses, with or without the assistance of voluntary agencies.

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