

O.T. for book release 10/4/2021 in Trivandrum of Issac, Thomas T.M. and Franke, Richard W. 'People's Planning: Kerala, Local Democracy & Planning', LeftWord Books: New Delhi, 2021.

It is a pleasure and an honour to be part of this panel of more distinguished activists and scholars on democratic development.

In my view, there are three main reasons why it is so important that a thoroughly updated third version of the basic book on Kerala's decentralisation and people's planning is now published some 20 years later.

1st because the Kerala experiments in this regard are the most comprehensive and enduring in the world. So, knowledge of its pros and cons is crucial for anyone interested in moving on.

2nd because the new edition of the book is a major source of information of the Kerala experiences in the dual sense of offering both documentation of the developments and of how the leading actors perceive of them. Thus, one may also say that the book testifies to the transparent and democratic character of the campaign itself.

The 3rd and most important reason is that the book may be fundamental in the current efforts to implement the envisioned new strategy in Kerala of combining welfare and knowledge as a basis for sustainable development -- after the successful local polls and, we hope, equally successful state elections. These visions stand out as a beacon of hope not just in India but also in the world at large, where democracy is on the retreat.

In particular, it is crucial, then, to discuss how to combine development initiatives in villages and districts, and common state programmes, in an effective and democratic way. The Chinese communists failed to do that, relying instead on dictates and the market. And the previously most successful Scandinavian model of democratic partnership-governance has been undermined by neoliberalism. But if the citizen participation in local development, as we know it from the new book, can be combined with democratic design and implementation of state level programmes, Kerala may be a global pioneer for progressives.

So there are all reasons in the world to congratulate you, Isaac and Franke, and all of us, to the book.