Pre-Election Voters' Awareness Campaign

The Participation and Governance bulletin is now exclusively dedicated to the theme of Strengthening Local Self Governance, an area on which PRIA and its partners have been working intensively for the last five years. Our focus has been on awareness building and information dissemination as instruments of action for strengthening Local Self Governance. This new challenge involves sensitivity and competency in engaging a variety of stakeholders to value the centrality of “Participation” and “Good Governance”.

Elections to Local Self Governing bodies are an exercise in participatory democracy. It is the time wherein the citizens have the power to exercise their choice, voice and action in electing leaders who would be involved with issues of day-to-day functioning. But how far are the local citizens aware of their rights to participate at the village level?

The need to facilitate the engagement of fellow citizens in the process of electing Panchayats prompted PRIA and its partners to plan an awareness campaign. The second round of election to the Panchayats in the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana in the beginning of the year 2000, gave PRIA and its partners an opportunity to create awareness amongst the community members, with special emphasis on voters’ education, in order to motivate people towards action. This took the form of a Pre-Election Voters' Awareness Campaign (PEVAC).

PEVAC was conceived as an organized, scheduled set of activities in order to inform, motivate and promote action among local citizens. It was designed to share information about issues of significance and propose strategies to address these issues and to motivate the group(s) to take action to solve the problems.

Thus, the three basic purposes of campaigning were to:

- make people aware of and interested in a particular issue
- inform/educate them about it
- persuade and motivate them to take action - at both the personal and community levels.

Some of the issues taken up in PEVAC were: voter’s rights, participation of women and the weaker sections and creating an enabling environment for free and fair elections. The campaign was designed with respect for the beliefs and values of the contextual area. Accordingly, the methods and techniques employed during the campaign varied with each area. These initiatives comprised, on a large-
scale, of sensitization, motivation and awareness-building, in order to engage a variety of stakeholders to understand the central value of participation as a key element to – empowerment, ownership and eventually sustainable development.

This bulletin, henceforth, shares the extent to which PEVAC was carried out in the three states by PRIA and its partners. Field experiences in conducting such planned activities, the implementation and lessons learnt from the three states provide insights into the challenges that each state faced. The various trends that one got to see on the field from the increasing “unopposed” selection of representatives, to campaigning organized by women saw the pendulum of democracy swing both ways.

PRIA’s perspective, of course, is to strengthen participation in governance and therefore the activities it would undertake (or has started to undertake) focus on mobilising Gram Sabhas, in order to ensure greater transparency and accountability in the functioning of PRIs.

The experiences and the learning gained so far, have equipped PRIA and its partners to enter into the new phase of “Strengthening the functioning of PRIs”, posing new challenges for greater understanding and learning of the theory as well as practice of Participation and Governance.

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Letters and Contribution

The editors of the Participation and Governance would welcome comments, criticism or positive feedback relating to any material printed in this bulletin.

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The Bulletin

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Unopposed Gram Panchayat Representatives: 
A Rising Trend
Shalini Bijlani

Prior to the second round of elections to the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Haryana (held on March 12 and 16, 2000), PRIA undertook a Pre-election Voters' Awareness Campaign in 12 districts of Haryana (Fatehabad, Sirsa, Hissar, Rohtak, Jhajjar, Rewari, Sonepat, Jind, Bhiwani, Kurukshetra, Ambala and Mahendergarh). The underlying objective was to create awareness amongst the voters regarding their voting rights and to use it to elect the "suitable candidates" to PRIs. The trend of unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives was a major highlight during the campaign. This article attempts to analyse this rising trend of unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives and examines the arguments for and against its proliferation. This article is based on the author's experiences while working in the field, during the recently held Panchayat Elections in Haryana.

Background

The Panchayats are institutions of local self-governance in rural India. Here the people are organised into a system of self governance, whereby, according to the principles of democracy, they elect their own representatives to this form of governance, who work to further the development of their area, seeking the participation of the people within the said area. Panchayats have been a feature of Indian political history. However, with the enactment of the 73rd (Constitutional Amendment) Act, 1992, Panchayats thereby received formal constitutional recognition.

The Balwantrai Mehta Committee Report gave various recommendations for the functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and one of them pertained to elections of local self-governance bodies. It said, "The constitution of the Panchayat should purely be on an elective basis with the provision for co-option of two women members and one member each from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. No other special groups need to be given special representation.

Elections to Panchayati Raj bodies should be conducted by the Chief Electoral Officers of the States, in consultation with the Election Commission." E.M.S. Namboodiripad, a member of the committee, appended a note to the report in which he expressed the following views on elections: "I am purely for elected bodies at all levels of PR bodies." He was opposed to the suggestion of including candidates into any PRI tier by nomination or selection.

Thus, understanding the significance of elections that is stressed upon by the committees in their recommendations, we need to understand the phenomenon of emergence of unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives at the State level and its relevance, given this backdrop.

What is the process of electing unopposed Gram Panchayat Representatives?

Unopposed Gram Panchayat Representatives are increasingly becoming a common phenomenon, wherein the people do not elect, but nominate their representatives to the Panchayat. The village community comes together and selects certain people (the numbers vary) for a committee. This committee usually comprises of aged men. This committee of selected people represents the respective castes, or groupings (religions) of their community, and in turn gets entrusted with the responsibility to nominate people from their respective groupings as representatives to the Panchayat at the village level. This committee continues to wield power long after unopposed Gram Panchayat
representatives come into being. In this process, people stand to witness a skewed decision-making pattern in the village, where only a few “powerful” make decisions to nominate the people by virtue of getting chosen into the committee. It is not essential to consult everyone and the decision is binding for everyone. The question is how “participatory” and “democratic” is this process? We speak of “right to vote” guaranteed to every voter (right to exercise adult franchise), but this system of selecting representatives only violates the same.

**Case I: In Rozawali Gram Panchayat, Ratia Block, Fatehabad district, Panchayat elections have never taken place. The committee that was responsible for electing an unopposed Panchayat representative, comprises of 9 aged men and 1 retired lady teacher. The village community and the Panchayat have a feeling of reverence towards this committee. The Panchayat adheres to their word and refuses to go against them in any matter concerning the village’s development. As a principle, the Panchayat consults the committee in all the matters relating to the village’s development and is answerable to them for any actions taken. Therefore the Panchayat’s accountability in large, is to the committee that got them elected in the first place. Accountability to people in the village remains a serious question.**

**What is the composition of the Panchayats in such a case?**

With regard to composition of the unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives, in most of the cases, certain practices go against the 73rd Amendment Act, as they do not fulfill the condition of one-third reservations for women and dalits. In certain cases, the women and dalits are not fully represented. At times, the representatives are chosen from certain sections only and the weaker sections are not involved in decision making. To add to this, certain docile and shy women are nominated as against the aspiring, vocal and interested lot of women, as they offer no threat to the dominant class and the men in large. This affects the quality of leadership in addition to the participation and governance pattern. The same applies to young leaders who find no chance to claim their stake in power making structures. Thus, the system of unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives dissuades youth and women from coming forward to lead. The values of the community are biased towards aged people for governance, as they are considered wise and knowledgeable about the community.

**Case II: Chandokala Gram Panchayat, Ratia Block, Fatehabad district witnessed less than one-third women’s representation, as stipulated in the Act. In Ward Number 3 of the village Panchayat, the seat for the ward member or the panch was reserved for a woman belonging to the Scheduled Caste. Instead, a male ward member was made to fill the post. This violates the reservation policy as indicated by the legislation.**

**Why did unopposed Gram Panchayat Representatives come into being?**

The caste conflicts and various other divisions in the community were activated during the elections even in places where no such precedent existed. Unequal, unhealthy power-relations and power games gained prominence during the election period too. The rural governing structures were subjected to domination by economically or socially privileged sections of the society and facilitated the emergence of oligarchic forces yielding no benefits to weaker and poor sections. The spirit of the 73rd Amendment and introduction of the PRIs was with the purpose of bringing about a check on this “unequal power” through the mechanism of reservations for women and Dalits.

These amendments intimidated the “powerful” groups, who indulged in power dynamics by installing their own candidate with a majority and at times declaring them as sole candidates for the post thereby unanimously helping.
them to come to power. This trend followed suit in order to escape the repercussions in terms of fuelling further enmity, confrontations, conflicts and disparity. Having unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives came as an answer to end this and received unanimous support from the community in an effort to harmonise the environment.

The other factor influencing people to favour unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives is the incentives provided by the government in terms of prize money received by such Panchayats after the elections. The number of unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives is indirectly related to the income of Panchayats. It was observed that unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives were common and greater in number where the Panchayat income was low and vice-versa. According to people in the villages, Panchayats facing financial hardships favoured unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives, for they could not incur the cost of campaigning during the election and the expense reduced in this regard, finally giving up their right to vote. On the other hand, the government expenditure on polling is reduced. In addition, they received a good amount of finances from the government to help the developmental work of the community. There are many Panchayats who face a financial crunch and have no means to mobilise or generate their own resources and finally give up their right to vote.

**Case III: For instance, Malawi Gram Panchayat in Ratia Block, Fatehabad district, is a small Panchayat. In addition the majority (3/4th) of the population belongs to Scheduled Caste. Two days prior to elections, the village decided to forgo elections and opted for electing representatives unopposed. Their earlier experience of elections in 1995 of the elected representatives who are more interested in recovering the cost incurred prior to elections during campaigning and then the financial resources of the village being misused after elections, helped influence their decision. The alternative was to have unopposed Panchayat representatives and as a result of which they received 1,33,000/- from the government as prize money. This money was utilised for the construction of a bridge and 'Shamshan Ghat' (cremation ground). They chose to consolidate their economic position by having unopposed Gram Panchayat Representatives rather than waste the resources for elections.**

**Were Unopposed Gram Panchayat Representatives a choice or a compulsion for the community?**

Certain people in the community exercised their choice to have unopposed Panchayats for all the reasons cited above. These people usually belonged to the dominant caste in the community. They are in a position to influence and take decisions on behalf of the community, without resistance. A large number of people in the community, who belonged to a caste considered lower in the social hierarchy did not have a choice, rather it became a compulsion to accept the verdict pronounced by the people hailing from the dominant castes. Having unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives was an “imposed decision” in the perception of the people belonging to the lower order in the hierarchy of the society.

**Case IV: In Ladowas Gram Panchayat, Ratia Block, Fatehabad district, the decision for electing an unopposed Sarpanch from the general caste was imposed on people. The committee comprised of 22 people in all, out of which 11 were members of the local Mahila Mandal. In this Mahila Mandal, 8 women belonged to a general caste and 3 to Scheduled Caste. The rest of the members were aged men. In total there were 6-7 people who belonged to Scheduled Caste and the rest were from general caste. The decision was taken by a powerful lobby of**
people present in a subsequent meeting. As it turned out, the majority group in the committee (general caste) overpowered people in the minority (Schedule caste). Therefore the decision went in the favour of general caste group. The people in the minority group had to accept the decision imposed on them by the majority group.

It is expressed by the people especially from the dominant caste of the village community, that unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives are more responsible towards development in the village. In addition, a greater participation of village people in choosing or nominating the right candidate shows greater participation in village development.

We need to examine the truth of these statements. For this, an effort needs to be made in order to answer the following questions:

1. Whose needs gets articulated and met?

2. What are the implications of this nature of Panchayat?

3. With this backdrop, what kind of leadership do we stand to witness in this system and what are its effects on development, governance pattern and participation of the people in general?

Based on the above questions, an attempt has been made to analyse the implications of unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives.

In a democratic set-up, the undemocratic way of installing unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives is not only a challenge but also overrules the rights of special groups as stated by the 73rd Amendment Act. Some members of the scheduled caste community opined that in case of unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives, it is not always necessary to procure the unanimous support of all the sections of the village. Certain sections were not involved in the process of selecting the Panchayat members informally or seeking their sanction formally for the same, as it is obligatory for them to abide by the decision. This goes against the argument provided by the people, that such a Panchayat is pro-democracy and pro-participation for the community under consideration.

The reservation policy is violated when in this case of Unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives, women and dalits are not fully represented. Their needs remain unvocalised and unheeded. The needs of the members of the committee who exercised the choice of bringing unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives in power are met.

In this context, the traditional power structures and the "status quo" is maintained in the village community. The purpose of the 73rd amendment in terms of bringing about changes in the status quo by reserving seats and posts for women and dalits becomes invalid in this case. The institutional mechanisms as founded in the 73rd amendent are unable to bring desired changes in the "structure" of the society.

The role of the Gram Sabhas is questionable. Gram Sabha or the body of voters, is more or less defunct. The Gram Sabha members had given up on their right to vote and entrusted the same with this particular committee. In this way, they lost the right to raise voice against the Gram Panchayat if their work was found unsatisfactory. Questioning the Gram Panchayat members is expressing doubts about the capabilities of the committee, who usually are the elders of the community. The value pattern of the rural community in the Indian context is to accord unquestioning respect to the aged in the community. As such, the Gram Sabha loses its meaning and identity as an effective "opposition" to Gram Panchayat or local self-government. In such situations, the Gram Sabha offers no opposition, does not respect the democratic process and therefore provides "no checks" to the functioning of the Gram Panchayat.
The accountability of the Gram Panchayat is towards this committee who brought them to power by exercising their choice. The accountability of Gram Panchayat to the weaker sections of the society does not exist. Hence, this trend of accountability wherein certain people influence the decisions of the Panchayat and in turn the Panchayats are answerable to them. The representatives become “puppets” in the hands of certain village people and they serve that section of the society which selected them.

The understanding of development tends to become mostly stereotyped and it revolves around infrastructure building and maintenance. It is directly related to the pattern and the nature of governance that Unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives offer. The leadership in the Unopposed Panchayat does not favour young leaders taking charge nor is it too inclined towards women and dalits, the weaker sections of the society. This has a profound effect on the development initiatives undertaken. Hence the women’s and dalits’ needs or voices do not influence the development plans. Besides, most of the women are selected unopposed as against men in their community. The women may not willingly give their consent to being in the Panchayat in the first place and the irony is that they are expected to lead. How appropriate is this practice of nominating someone who is not interested in the post? There is no space given to the person to exercise their own choice.

Considering the above, certain concerns arise:

Does the trend of unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives subscribe to the purpose of legislation as desired? Does it subscribe to our understanding of democracy, participation and governance? How positively will this affect the concept of participatory development?

Considering the above discussion and experiences shared, do we still want to be a part of this system? Certain NGOs do support these Panchayats but we need to consider the long term effects and tackle the myths and misconceptions attached to the trend of Unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives. We do understand that in some measure, the unopposed Gram Panchayat representatives have an adverse effect on leadership of women and youth, their participation, developmental patterns, decision making and democracy amongst a gamut of many other features. The issues are posed as serious questions and need to be examined in the context of values underlying 73rd Amendment Act.

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- Kumar, P. and Jha, C. 1998; Panchayat Raj and Dynamics of Rural Development; Apex Books Publishers and Distributor, New Delhi.

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Pre-election Voters' Awareness Campaign
Malini Nambiar

The following presentation is based on the voter's awareness campaign recently conducted in Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. These states have been the first to go through the second round of Panchayat elections. It seeks to explain what, why and how to conduct a campaign. It also spells out the strategies, methodology and the various lessons learnt in the three states while conducting the campaign.

Campaign, is viewed as a means for disseminating information. It aims at bringing about awareness among people, their agreement/disagreement and hence involvement in the process. Today a campaign needs to be a structured event, with boundaries of time, money, place and people, for its effectiveness. So, the major questions that come to mind and need to be answered are:-

- What is a campaign?
- Campaign for whom?
- Why campaign?
- How to conduct a campaign?

What is a campaign?

Campaign traditionally was a means through which people voiced their problems, impediments and wrong happenings in society. It created a platform for people to speak and raise awareness among fellow citizens. It was informal, based on local means and used simple language. To some extent, it was interactive. But as “effectiveness” became the top priority and management (of the three major M’s-man, money and material) was introduced into this field, planning became the major agenda before conducting any form of campaign. Identifying target groups, their needs assessment, chalking out objectives, assumptions, proposing desired steps to be followed in conducting the campaign are some of the activities that were followed.

Why Campaigning?

As years passed by, campaigning was not limited to transferring ideas, information or with imparting knowledge. Campaigning, is now seen as a process of growth and discovery aimed not just at knowing more but at a behavioural shift. The focus is on building people's critical consciousness, examining their current situations, ideals, values, attitudes, by inducing alternative ideologies. It aims at building a more questioning attitude, re-thinking and following “rational” or democratic ideology. It aims at building a common understanding for common action towards a common goal. The objective of any campaign should revolve around people's needs and participation.

A pre-election voter's awareness campaign conducted in Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan was found to be an effective means of communication in rural India. The three main purposes of this campaign were:-

1. Inform them about the concerned issue
2. Make people aware and interested in current issues
3. Persuade and motivate them to take action—at both personal and community levels.

Information ➔ Awareness ➔ Motivation ➔ Action

Conducting campaign for Whom?

Eventually, we can call a campaign an awareness generating process for people, encouraging them to voice their ideas and to induce a questioning attitude towards their own reality. A major outcome of the initial dialogue process with the target groups was bringing out the necessary 'felt needs' of the group. For instance, in the pre-election awareness campaign conducted in Haryana, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, certain felt needs that came to the surface and accompanied the campaign, were the following:-
How to conduct Campaigns?

Various strategies were adopted in conducting a campaign in the three states (Haryana-PRIA, Madhya Pradesh—Samarthan and Rajasthan—PRIA and UNNATI). They fall into the following steps:-

a) Strategy  
b) Area of Intervention (Coverage)  
c) Networking  
d) Methods Used  
e) Lessons Learnt  

(Table on Page 10)

Learning during the campaign was a two way process. The challenges that were undertaken to incorporate the principle of learning and action in the campaign, helped development practitioners inculcate sensitivity and competency in engaging local people with the values of participation and development. Hence, pre-election voter’s awareness campaign (PEVAC) should not be seen as an end in itself, but a means of enhancing capacities and capabilities for action not only of the local people, but also for the organisation itself. Our abilities in utilising this opportunity of sharing the experiences, lessons learnt and scaling up, enable us to keep the cycle of information, awareness, motivation and action continuously turning.

References


Gajanayake, S. and Gajanayake, S. 1993; Community Empowerment: A Participatory Training Manual Community Project Development. Northern Illinois University, USA.

Malini Nambari is working in the Centre for Local Self-Governance, PRIA.
# Pre-Election Voters' Awareness Campaign in Three States

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<th>Haryana</th>
<th>Rajasthan</th>
<th>Madhya Pradesh</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Strategy</td>
<td>• The village / intervened districts were selected on the basis of the village composition in terms of minority groups (schedule caste), level of literacy and distances from the block office. • New districts were also included on the criteria of close proximity to former intervened district and for future scaling up of plans. • Choice of these areas were also discussed with state level NGOs, and institutions working on Panchayati Raj for effective coverage and spread.</td>
<td>• Worked with partner organisation - UNNATI and other state organisations. A meeting (Phalodi meeting/ Jodhpur meeting) was conducted in order to develop clarity/ common understanding about Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI), sensitise NGOs to initiate the programme on strengthening PRI, to develop a joint intervention plan for campaigning. • Areas were selected on the basis of proximity to district headquarters, previous work in the area, backward Panchayat and under-developed Panchayat.</td>
<td>• Conducted workshops in January and April with partner and voluntary agencies to formulate common strategies of intervention. • Intervention (intensive) was done in areas that the organisation (Samarthan) had already been working in, while extensive coverage (through material and information dissemination) was done in areas where Samarthan had not started work as yet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Area of Intervention</td>
<td>Intervened districts - 12 Total number of districts - 19 Intervened Gram Panchayats =600 Percentage covered - 10%</td>
<td>Intervened districts - 17 Total number of districts - 31 Intervened Gram Panchayats - 846 Percentage covered - 8%</td>
<td>Intervened districts - 33 Total number of districts - 62 Intervened Gram Panchayats - 3818 Percentage covered - 12%</td>
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<td>3. Networking</td>
<td>• At the State Level - Youth club/Anganwadi members, NGOs • PRIA’s partner organisations</td>
<td>• At the State Level partner organisations. • With Government officials • With media</td>
<td>• At the State Level (CASA) • With partner organisations • With Government and media</td>
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<td>4. Methods Used</td>
<td>• Community meetings • Distribution and pasting of posters and pamphlets • Playing of audio cassettes in public places • Mobile van playing audio cassettes • Cycle/ women/ tempo rally • Training volunteers • Electronic coverage • Slogan writing • Nukkad sathas (singing of folk songs with a particular message) • Padyatra</td>
<td>• Distribution and pasting posters and pamphlets • Slogan writing • Puppet show and Kala Jatha • Small and large village meetings • Distribution of Manual (Margdarshika on election procedures) and audio cassettes • Bicycle rally using audio cassettes • Electronic/ media coverage • Training volunteers • Padyatra</td>
<td>• Village / group meetings • Distribution of booklets &quot;Panchayat Sajha Vikas&quot;, and Information folders. • Pasting posters and pamphlets • Slogan writing • Panchayat Rath Yatra • Street plays • Media coverage</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Lessons Learnt</td>
<td>• Need to work in order to influence local media for extensive coverage of the pre election campaign. • Campaign should be conducted well in advance. • Follow election rules. • Appropriate production of communication material</td>
<td>• Permission needs to be taken from government authorities when using their premises. • Information about the campaign needs to be made available to the block officer before hand. • Observe election rules. • The team intervention must be sensitive and respect the cultural ideology prevalent in the state. • Campaign should be planned and conducted well in advance (before the nominations).</td>
<td>• Suggestions were given that the campaign should be conducted much before the election, atleast 3 months prior to the date. • The number of people in the village meeting was less, as they were involved in the election process. • Roles of different stakeholders must be clarified before conducting campaigns.</td>
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The following article critically analyses one of the provisions of the 74th Amendment Act, the Ward Committees. It brings out the unrealistic definition of the Ward Committee in the constitution that presently does not serve to cater to people's participation.

The 74th Amendment to the Constitution of India was passed in 1992. In keeping with the spirit of decentralised governance, this amendment known as the Nagar Palika Act has broken new ground in the governance of urban areas of the country. The amendment has provided an institutional framework for people to actively participate in their own development through a two tier system of local governance. The first tier is at the level of the municipality which consists of the elected representatives of the people (councillors) while the second tier is at the level of the ward through the provision of ward committees.

A significant feature of the Nagarpalika Act, the Ward Committee, provides, a unique opportunity to increase the participation of people in the development and governance of their areas. While this provides a platform to bring the local government closer to people, it is also an institutional device for local leadership to be accountable to its constituents. Similar decentralised structures in other parts of the world like Tokyo, Japan, have been observed to facilitate the active participation of citizens in civic affairs. The ward committees have considerable power and are responsible for a variety of services. In fact the majority of municipal staff in Tokyo are employed at the ward level. In India, however, these committees are by and large non-functional and continue to exist merely on paper. In order to make these effective mechanisms for citizen participation in self governance, the reasons for their non-functionality need to be examined and addressed.

The reasons are both at the level of policy and practice. To begin with, there are some drawbacks inherent in the Act itself, which create obstacles to the effective functioning of these committees as envisioned. These are to do primarily with Constitution and Composition of these committees. The Constitutional Amendment Act, gives total discretion to the state governments to decide on the composition, territorial area and manner in which the seats of the ward committees shall be filled. Thus, apart from elected members who represent the given ward, the nomination of other members on ward committees, is left to the decision of the state governments. It is argued that such nominations could result in the committees becoming state led and state controlled: these committees might become quasi expert committees instead of a peoples committee, thus defeating the very purpose for which they were created.

Secondly, Article 243S(1) of the Constitutional Amendment Act states that "There shall be constituted Ward Committees, consisting of one or more wards, within the territorial area of a Municipality having a population of three lakhs or more.” This is to say that this second tier of governance is mandatory only for municipal areas having a population of three lakhs or more. If these ward committees are to function as a mechanism for meaningful participation of all the people within the ward, then a smaller size committee would probably be more effective. In West Bengal, the West Bengal Municipal Act, 1993, has been amended to make room for Ward Committees in conformity with the 74th CAA with clearly
laid out rules and responsibilities like identification of problems and priorities of the ward, supervision of municipal work, planning and undertaking development activities, convening annual general meetings, along with submitting administrative and financial reports of the previous year and sending resolutions adopted to the municipality. However, recent studies by the Department of Municipal Affairs, Government of West Bengal, have shown that people’s participation in municipal governance through ward committees has not been satisfactory. Stating that ‘a body of smaller size is likely to be more effective for citizen’s participation’, recommendations for the creation of smaller committees and councils at the ward committee level have been given. Similar observations and recommendations have been made by PRIA and its partners in the context of the 73rd Amendment: a need for smaller ward committees was deemed necessary to enable greater participation of people. This was specifically desirable in states like Himachal Pradesh, Orrisa, Kerala, etc. where the size of the Panchayat and wards is very big, both demographically and geographically.

Another critical question linked to the constitution of ward committees is, why should this important second tier be only mandatory for municipalities with a population of three lakhs or more? At present, approximately 40-45% of urban centres in the country have a population of less than three lakhs. Due to rapid urbanisation, the management of these areas is increasingly becoming quite complex. Decentralised governance of even small and medium urban centres of this nature, cannot be effective in the absence of citizen participation. Institutional mechanisms like the ward committees could provide the space for public participation and municipal accountability to its constituents.

However, it is also necessary to keep in mind, that the constitution of ward committees cannot by themselves ensure active participation of all citizens within the area. Experiences from India and other parts of the world, underline the fact, that these committees are largely lacking in people’s participation and involvement. In order to make municipal constituency accountability operational, creation of opportunities for citizens involvement in decision-making is imperative. Lack of effective communication between the elected members and the community, disinterested local councillors, lack of awareness, absence of CBOs, NGOs, neighbourhood, mohalla committees, etc. are some of the important factors which contribute to non-participation of citizens and the community in the ward committees. Efforts at enhancing citizen participation by information sharing, upgrading skills of elected members to carry out a participatory assessment of community needs and building capacities of CBOs and community leaders to organise, prioritise and negotiate the needs of the community, are some important steps in this direction.

Last but not the least, creation of parallel structures at the ward level have been found to often result in ineffective and unrepresentative bodies. Projects, programmes and schemes for urban areas should work through and with the constitutionally ordained structures like the ward committee. Contradictions between these different institutional instrumentalities could prove to be counterproductive.

There have been several debates and micro initiatives to address both policy and practice. Some states like Karnataka, as a result of the collective lobbying by individuals and groups, have made provisions for NGOs participation in ward committees, mandatory. In Gujarat, the Report Card project was developed to assess the performance of municipal services for the poor in Ahmedabad and in Maharashtra, a Citizens Charter for the Mumbai Municipality was developed for citizens to play an active role in municipal affairs. Innovative efforts at developing mechanisms for a more transparent and
accountable local governance, like these and several others, need further sharing and strengthening. Ongoing dialogue and discussion on citizen participation in decision-making needs to be carried out for advocacy and policy change in the desired direction.

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Global Voices

Local Government in South Africa

The following presentation is based on the interviews with Mercia Andrews, President, South African National NGO Coalition (SANGOCO) and David Madurai, Project Manager, SANGOCO. The interviews, conducted by Sohini Paul reflect the status and functioning of local governance in South Africa.

Introduction

The people of South Africa have come a long way from slave trade during the colonial racist rule to a progressive democratic rule. The transfer of power was followed by an unprecedented series of positive changes. The adoption of a progressive Constitution, the repeal of apartheid laws and the abolition of racist and sexist policies are some of the unforgettable landmarks of their transition from apartheid.

The elections to the third tier of government in most of the local towns and country sides took place on 1st November 1995, leaving KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape without the three tier of democracy in place. The democratic process was thus initiated at all three levels: national, provincial and local. Rural local government or local authority is a relatively new experience for the vast majority of South Africans. In rural areas, the first formal elections to the local government bodies (under the progressive Constitution) will be held in November, 2000.

In the last four years, transitional local authority has been functional. The rural areas comprise of “small towns” that are mainly dominated by the white population, usually ranging from 1000 - 5000. Most of the services, i.e., industries, banks, etc. are available in these towns. These rural towns serve the commercial farming community, the Afrikaner whites. Besides these towns, are the rural villages, which are dominated by the African population. They comprise of tribal chiefs and African local authorities. These rural villages are largely underdeveloped.

Socio-economic and administrative set up in South Africa

Out of the total population of about 41 million of the country, 54% live in urban areas, whereas 46% live in non-urban areas. Bulk of the people living in non-urban areas are unemployed. Women constitute 52% of the total population. The country is divided into nine provinces. These are Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, Northern Province, North West and Western Cape. Out of these nine provinces, Gauteng and Western Cape are largely urban, while Northern Province, North West and Eastern Cape are largely non-urban.

The percentage of the population in South Africa as estimated by the population group - October 1996 is: African: 76.7%, Whites: 10.9%, Coloured: 8.9%, Indian: 2.6%, Others: 0.9%

Structure of local government in South Africa

The structure of the transitional local authority comprises a ward at the lowest level, which could be a rural town or a rural village. A few rural villages and a rural town comprise an electoral zone. Four or five electoral zones together constitute a rural transitional district council. Above this three tier system at the local level, are the provincial governments above which is the National Assembly. The percentage of women at each level is as follows:

National Assembly  25%
Provincial government  23%
Local government  19%

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What are the roles of NGOs in strengthening local government?

The old apartheid style of development, which was top down in nature, emphasised more on infrastructural development. Although the government (elected in 1995) has worked towards promoting a bottom up development, the earlier system of government departments is still in place. One of the initiatives of the present government has been to deliver development as directly to the community as possible by setting up the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). Under the RDP, major priority areas that have been undertaken are housing, sewage, better education, water, electricity, better health care and helping people start small businesses. The Special Presidential Lead Project has initiated these new programmes and currently 70 odd projects exist. President Mandela gave the initial impetus to two projects - education for children and free health care to women and children. Efforts to create a framework for development which will establish a partnership between the government sector, the NGOs, the business sector and the community are being made. Moreover, at the government level, there is an association of all the councillors at all three tiers - the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) that works towards development and strengthening local self-governance.

A major role of the NGOs working on local governance, is to act as a policy watch - analysing and simplifying government policies as well as challenging the government on major issues. Thus, an important role is lobbying and advocating for change with the community members. Most of them, including SANGOCO are working on the projects of RDP in the rural areas.

Apart from working on projects, NGOs also conduct programmes of capacity building. Under this, the NGOs mainly undertake training of the elected councillors, as well as of the community members and the

What are the problems being faced by the local government bodies?

- The war against poverty is one of the biggest obstacles to development that the local government is trying to fight along with gender equality.

- A major issue of concern for the rural local bodies is the lack of adequate financial resources. These bodies are on the verge of bankruptcy. The national budget indicates that while the yearly budget for education is about 44 billion Rands, that of local government bodies is only 1.7 billion Rands.

- The elected representatives at the local level lack experience and the necessary skills to carry out their roles and responsibilities.

- Lack of necessary resources, services and infrastructure are some factors that hamper the effective functioning of the elected members. Lack of proper transport, telephone and other services make it difficult for the members to serve their constituency.
electorate. Besides training, the NGOs also help in organising the community members into people’s organisations.

Information dissemination in the form of simplified educational materials that are published for the electorates and the councillors at various tiers, is another major activity which NGOs participate in.

**How has your organisation (SANGOCO) promoted people’s participation in local self governance and development?**

Since 1995, SANGOCO has become an umbrella body of about 4000 South African NGOs consisting of provincial and sectoral affiliates, working in a wide range of development areas in both rural and urban spheres. The overall objective of the Coalition is to create an environment in which the development sector can carry out its work with fewer obstacles, increased confidence and greater results at less cost. Various partners of their organisation have been involved in working towards strengthening local self governance. One of them is “Trust for community outreach and education” (TCOE), where Mercia is the Director. They work to strengthen local self governance through information dissemination, studying the local government’s balance sheet, working for greater participation of the people at the grassroots level and promoting micro-planning. Many of these organisation have also conducted Voter’s awareness campaigns with the use of popular communication materials -posters, pamphlets, songs, story telling, and use of media (radio). The organisation’s experience with the NGO community led to the conclusion, that they are willing to take risks, sacrifice, and resist parochialism in order to have a nation-wide impact on policies that would improve the circumstances of the poor and marginalised in their country.

**Reference:**

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Women's participation in Election of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Madhya Pradesh

Yogesh Kumar

The following article highlights the role of women in the recently held Panchayati election in Madhya Pradesh. It is based on the experience of "Samarthan" (an NGO in Bhopal) and its partner organisations, which have been working towards strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions in the State for the last five years, with a focus on women's participation.

Background

Madhya Pradesh is situated in the centre of India. Territorially, it is the largest Indian State. In the 1991 census, Madhya Pradesh's population stood at 66.2 million, out of which 34.3 million were males and 31.9 Million were females (12.5% of the country's population resides here). According to the Madhya Pradesh Human Development Report (MPHDR, 1995), the state female to male ratio has declined from the year 1901. The MPhDR 1995 explained that these low gender ratios are found in districts that have a social character of discrimination against women and a high degree of male domination, while better ratios are seen in districts with a higher population of tribes' (which is the majority population in Madhya Pradesh).

Women's Position

With the low sex ratio of women, low literacy rate also accompanies the census data for Madhya Pradesh. Women do not receive adequate education or learn about their rights under the law or the state initiatives to empower them. However, by 1994, Madhya Pradesh had earned the distinction of having implemented the 73rd and 74th Amendment to the constitution for the devolution of power to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI), with one-third reservation for women. This condition was seen as a great opening to promote women leadership at the grassroots and various examples of effective leadership at all three tiers of PRI can be seen in the country.

Election 2000

The Panchayat elections held in the month of January 2000 in Madhya Pradesh provided new insights as Panchayats went into the second round of elections. Gram sabha members, potential candidates, previous representatives having undergone the experience of the Panchayati Raj after the Amendment to the Constitution, were relatively well prepared to engage themselves with the upcoming elections.

Participation of Women in the Election Process

To increase the election polling percentage, as well as spread awareness about the upcoming election in Madhya Pradesh, Samarthan, a non-government organisation (NGO), worked to reach 4000 panchayats (approximately twelve percent of total panchayats) in the State with the help of local NGOs.

During and after the campaign, various observations were recorded with a special focus on women. A great enthusiasm was seen among the women to contest for reserved seats in these elections, a decision that they took independently. At the Gram Panchayat level, on an average, five candidates filed nomination for one seat. As compared to the last elections, preparations were made by the candidate well in advance. Performance of PRIs during the last five years has created a sense of confidence in the incumbent.
candidates that they can do better this time, and in the new comers that they can outperform the former.

Candidates from the backward communities and women candidates filed their nominations for general seats. Inspite of illiteracy, social barriers and a lack of exposure, women were able to file nomination forms on time, though there were cases of difficulties. The data collected by the voluntary organisations during the election campaign clearly reflected that women and other oppressed classes remained less informed. Such cases were reported in the district of Bhind, where feudal forces are strong. It was also found that in villages which were not accessible by road or unconnected to the main road, women were found indifferent to polling.

The election campaign this time found, that women family members were actively involved in canvassing for their candidates. Women were found going door-to-door giving information and asking people to vote. In many cases, families of candidates got together, even came from distant villages, just to support their member in the elections. But other cases did exist where women, unaided and unsupported by their families, could not stand for the elections.

Outcome

The election results have demonstrated that about 38% of women representatives have occupied various positions at the Gram Panchayat level, which is about 5% above the reservation. In other tiers, that is Janpad Panchayats and Zilla Panchayats, women have attained almost 33% seats.

Some Key Lessons Learnt

- Intensify as well as conduct extensive pre-election campaign in every village and Panchayat.

- The women candidates, especially the newly elected ones, need to be informed explicitly about their rights as a candidate. These candidates require support within the Panchayat, either from their family, senior village leaders or voluntary organisations working in those Panchayats, to deal with electoral dynamics, as well as withstand the pressure of vested interest groups.

- The government machinery involved in conducting elections needs to be sensitised to handle the cases of women carefully and take a proactive role in promoting them as they find it difficult to interact with the officials for information about election formalities.

- The voluntary organisations need to strengthen their capacities to specifically support a fair election process, encouraging independent, decision making women candidates.

In spite of the success or failure of women in these elections, women in Madhya Pradesh have demonstrated their leadership potential and a concern for better governance in their Panchayat, winning over more seats than those reserved for them. There is optimism that during this tenure of five years, women will be able to prove their capabilities and will occupy more important positions of decision making in the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Dr. Yogesh Kumar is the Director, Samarthan, Bhopal
Kalpana is a mother of four children. After intense prayers to Gods, repeated curses and getting a ‘son certificate’ from the ultrasound machine, the youngest child, a son, was born. He is eleven years old now. Except perhaps the eldest one, the two ‘unwanted’ daughters were born to her in the hope of begetting a son. Now at the age of 35 years, Kalpana is a (relatively) free woman. Her daughters have been deputed to take care of household work. Her husband and in-laws are no longer worried about Kalpana’s interactions with the outer world. With her new found freedom and constitutionally created opportunity in the form of reservation of seats to women in the three tiers of governance, Kalpana was eager to contest in the recently held Panchayat elections in Haryana, of course with prior permission from her family members.

The State government however did not permit her to contest the election as she did not fit in with the ‘two-child norm’ enforced by the State government. In states like Haryana, Rajasthan and now Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, persons with more than two children are debarred from contesting Panchayat elections. So, Kalpana can be an M.L.A.\(^1\) or an M.P.\(^2\) but not a PRI\(^3\) member. Kalpana is not the only one. A number of women in Haryana could not contest panchayat elections 2000, as they were mothers of more than two children.

Be it the two-child norm in the aforementioned states or ‘toilet-rule’ in Karnataka or even issues of reservation and delimitation in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, elections to Panchayats in many states have suffered because of executive eccentricities and biases. In the present write-up, an attempt has been made to discuss a few recent issues - like the two child norm, regularity of elections, State Election Commissions and the role of the executive (government) to resolve these issues.

1. Two-child Norm:

With the ever-increasing population of our country, it is a necessity to reduce our population growth. Agreed. However, evidence suggests that in no other democratic land, has any policy been successful if it did not have people’s support. So, the two-child norm is good as long as it is able to get people’s acceptance. In theory, this rule applies to both men and women equally. But does it have different implications for both the sexes? It seems so. Field experiences suggest that this rule goes against women. In the states of Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, where this rule has come into force, the average age of women as Panchayat members in the last Panchayat elections were found to be between 35-40 years. It means, that in majority of the cases, the women aged 35 years and above are potential contestants for PRI elections in these states. In rural India, a pattern of early child-bearing has been observed across the states, with total fertility rate being more than four. That means by the age of 35, almost all women become mothers of, as many children as (often) desired by their husband and in-
laws. Consequently, a majority of these women (who are socially eligible to contest PRI elections, as present trends suggest) get automatically excluded from the election arena because of the two-child norm. Then who is to be chosen for PRI seats? Naturally, either the younger generation (who do not fall prey to the two-child rule) or those who are above 35 years but do not have more than two kids. The former are more susceptible to be proxy representatives because their social freedom is restricted, while the latter may be indifferent to politics. Thus, the two-child norm whether it would be able to reduce population growth or not is a billion-dollar question, but this will certainly promote the case of proxy representatives.

2. Regularity of Elections:

As per article 243E of the Constitution, every Panchayat, unless sooner dissolved under any law for the time being in force, shall continue for five years from the date appointed and no longer. So, any executive action delaying or deferring these elections violates the Constitution. Thus, states of Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and some other states have violated the Constitution by deferring and delaying elections to the local bodies. Article 257 (also the infamous article 256) of the Constitution empowers the Central government to give directions to States to fulfil their Constitutional obligations. It implies that the Centre too has failed in showing political will in directing States to hold Panchayat elections.

The issues of revision of electoral rolls and delimitation of constituencies, raised by various state governments to defer Panchayat elections, are just excuses. The revision of electoral rolls and delimitation of constituencies based on population size and geographical continuity can be undertaken regularly and well before Panchayat elections are due, as has been done in many states. The States and Central governments have to be aware of and sensitive to the constitutional mandate of holding elections to Panchayats on time.

3. Election Process:

The responsibility and procedure for determining reservation requirements for SC/ST*, women and backward classes differ from state to state. In states like Kerala, Maharashtra and West Bengal, the State Election Commissions have this responsibility, whereas in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, the responsibility lies with the State government. The rotation of reserved constituencies has created problems in Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh and the matter was even raised in High Courts. In Haryana, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, a number of constituencies were reserved for SC/ST, while there was a negligible SC/ST population in those constituencies. Moreover, reservation of constituency for one term creates a sort of adhocism in the elected members. Many of women elected (from reserved seats) representatives in Madhya Pradesh, during informal conversations with the author, said that, “why should they worry about our performance, if the next time we cannot win against a man when our present constituency gets unreserved?”

These issues need to be resolved for healthy functioning of PRIs. The legislature can prescribe the principles and the government may provide clear and transparent guidelines,
but the ultimate responsibility of managing these issues (rotation, reservation, qualification of candidates and election expenses) should be entrusted to the State Election Commission.

**Ways Forward: Strengthening State Election Commission**

The Constitution of India (Article 243-K) empowers the State Election Commission (SEC) for the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of the elections to the Panchayats. However, subject to the provisions of the Constitution, the Legislature of a State may, by law, make provisions with respect to all matters relating to, or in connection with, elections to the Panchayats.

Thus, the SEC and State governments have to work together for strengthening the institutions of local self governance. The civil society can help SEC in making people aware of their roles and responsibilities as responsible voters/citizens. The SECs should be provided adequate support to handle the whole election process. The state resources can be put to the disposal of SEC during election time to provide the Commission more power and authority for conducting elections properly. The relationship between the Central government and Election Commission of India (ECI) can be a role model in this regard. The ECI can help SECs to eventually become principal state election machinery in each state, handling all elections in the states including elections to the Parliament and State Legislature.

1Member of the Legislative Assembly
2Member of Parliament
3Panchayati Raj Institution
4Scheduled Caste / Scheduled Tribe

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*People Casting Vote during Panchayat Election*
Strengthening Local Self Governance in India—PRIA and Partners

Sohini Paul

This article briefly describes the multi-sectoral strategic intervention in strengthening local self-governance in India that has been undertaken by PRIA and its partner organisations since 1995. The article mainly highlights the third phase of the intervention, which will deal with Local Self-Governance in the rural and urban areas.

(A) Intervention in Improving the Functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India

Background

PRIA’s involvement with Panchayati Raj Institutions dates back to 1994, the same year in which consultation meetings took place to explore the ramifications of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and the role of NGOs and Voluntary Agencies in its wake. During such consultations, PRIA saw an opportunity of working towards its broader objective of women’s empowerment and social justice while working within the Constitutional agenda of local self governance.

PRIA’s perspective

1. PRIs are to be viewed as institutions of local self governance, and not mere implementers of centrally determined development programmes.

2. Bottom-up comprehensive planning based on micro planning exercise, is to be the basis of self-governance. PRIs should not become the third tier of development administration.

3. Emphasis must be placed on active participation in decision making by women and other weaker sections

with a view to enhance their role, status and leadership in local self governance.

4. PRIs should assert their access to and control over local, natural and human resources, as well as other development resources available with state and national governments.

5. Strengthening PRIs will entail clarity of their roles, systems of governance, accountability, transparency and interlinkages.

PRIA along with its partners, the Network of Collaborating Regional Support Organisations (NCRSOs) formulated a joint action programme on multi-sectoral strategic intervention for strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India in 1995. Spread over a two-year period, the first phase of the programme was carried out across 9 states (Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Kerala and Orissa). The major focus of the first phase of the programme was conducting orientation and training workshops for NGOs to persuade them to play a role in realising the Constitutional intent of local self governance. The programmatic activities included components such as training and capacity building, research, participatory bottom-up planning (micro planning), preparation of educational materials and working with the government.

The second phase of the programme spanned from 1997 to 1999. During this phase, the programme coverage (study component) was expanded to new states such as Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. This phase had four distinct yet interrelated components. These were:

Directly strengthening Panchayats
• Promotional intervention with other stakeholders such as government and civil society organisations

• Research for knowledge building and analytical documentation of experiences which would provide substance for advocacy and lobbying with government

• Networking

So far the programmatic interventions by PRIA and its partners have covered more than 15,000 elected representatives of about 1,500 Gram Panchayats, 600 Panchayat Samitis in more than 100 Zilla Panchayats by involving about 300 voluntary organisations. At the end of the period, the programme was reviewed and certain recommendations made. It recommended scaling up of the programme to achieve a minimum critical mass in the existing states and expansion of the programme to new states, emphasis on inter-linkage between panchayats, and extension/linking with ‘urban governance’. As a result of a strategic review exercise in 1999, PRIA along with its partners made a long term commitment towards issues of local self governance. The programmatic activity was institutionalised by setting up a Centre for Local Self Governance.

The Third Phase of the Intervention on Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions in India

With the third phase, begins a new programme for improving the functioning of PRIs in India. The programmatic priorities include: scaling up to achieve minimum critical mass in the states already intervened and extension to new states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Maharashtra and West Bengal; inclusion of Schedule V areas which have been covered by the Extension of Panchayati Raj Act, 1996.

The area of activity at the State level will be at three levels. The first will be an intensive area of activity, which will be carried out in a field based unit at the block level. The second area of activity will be more extensive work covering a large area, as well as other stakeholders. The third area of activity will be research and advocacy at the State level. Besides the state level intervention, the national programme will include strengthening the National Resource Centre and undertaking Research and Policy Advocacy at the national level.

The intervention strategy will thus be different at the various levels. Some of these strategies are as follows:

Women Participating in a Training Programme
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of activity</th>
<th>Intervention strategy</th>
</tr>
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| Intensive coverage     | • Capacity building of elected representatives  
                          • Information dissemination  
                          • Strengthening accountability through mobilising Gram Sabha members  
                          • Networking among elected representatives  
                          • Participatory planning for local development  |
| Extensive support      | • Capacity building of field based unit staff  
                          • Capacity building of other partners in the district and the state  
                          • Information dissemination  
                          • Synthesis of learning  |
| Research and advocacy  | • Establishing State Resource Centres  
                          • Documentation of local processes and Innovation  
                          • District and State level policy workshops  
                          • Publication of reports  |

In this new phase of intervention, the states have been divided into three categories based on certain criteria such as status of Panchayat elections, size of state, existing outreach of PRIA and partners and the general socio-political scenario with respect to panchayats in the state.

**Category One** includes those states where Panchayat elections have been held or are to be held in the near future. These include Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh.

**Category Two states** (Kerala, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh) will mainly focus on PEVAC (pre-election voter awareness campaign) and post election orientation of newly elected Gram Panchayat leaders.

**Category Three** states will be those which are new in terms of intervention by PRIA and its partners. These include Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Orissa.

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**(B) Strengthening Urban Governance in India**

*A Participatory Research Intervention*

**Context**

Rapid urbanisation along with a rapid increase in urban population has made India one of the largest urban centres in the world. Nearly 30% of the current population of 1 billion lives in urban centres. In the next 20 years, it is likely to become nearly half of the projected population of 1.3 billion.

According to the current estimates, 2/5th of the population in urban centres live below the poverty line. Most towns and cities have experienced a dramatic decline in provision of basic services and civic amenities.

Despite a long history of urban municipalities and strong urban governance in the past, management of urban areas and governance of urban population has declined since independence. With increasing centralisation...
of resources and functions at the national and provincial levels, municipal bodies were reduced to mere ceremonial structures, without resources, power, authority and capacity to function as effective instruments of service delivery, let alone as institutions of governance.

**PRIA’s perspective**

PRIA’s perspective on strengthening citizens’ participation and democratic governance takes into account the new political space created by the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act.

In PRIA’s view:

(a) Municipalities are institutions of Local Self Governance, with autonomous and integrated development responsibility for their jurisdiction. They should not be viewed as subservient to or an appendix of the state government.

(b) The accountability of municipal governance is of critical importance to the concerns of the poor (including women and socially disadvantaged sections). Citizens’ participation in local governance must be strengthened in order to ensure transparency and accountability of elected representatives and appointed functionaries in municipal bodies.

(c) The provisions for reservations for women/weaker sections provide an opportunity for strengthening the voice and leadership roles of such groups in urban governance.

The urban governance programme is conceived of as a cycle of pilots, with the first phase being conducted in 12 to 18 months, covering 20 urban local bodies over 5 States, namely, Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Kerala.

The principal Constituency are the poor and the marginalised sections (including women, scheduled caste and tribe, unemployed) of the urban population for whom urban governance issues are of immediate relevance in terms of physical security, economic opportunities and social capabilities - as well as in terms of access to the delivery of services.

Some of the main intervention activities will include information and knowledge building, networking and advocacy, as well as research and documentation.

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Book Review

Power to the People? The Politics and Progress of Decentralisation

(by K. C. Sivaramakrishnan; published by Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd; under the auspices of Centre For Policy Research, New Delhi, 2000.)

Purvi Das

This book traces the history, the background, the debates and the different perspectives of the process of decentralisation in post independent India—the long arduous journey of a few who were convinced that complexities of governance, managing diversity and coping with rapid economic changes can not be handled by the 'Union of States' only, but by 'Union of States, Panchayats and Municipalities'.

This book is an important milestone in presenting coherent and practical insights in understanding, facilitating and managing decentralisation through the 73rd and 74th Amendments. It draws on the considerable practical experience of the author. The lucid style and simple explanation of complex issues are the major contributions. The examples and quotes in this book are live, appropriate and interesting. The references which are given at the end of every chapter help further reading.

Urbanisation And Urban Governance In West Bengal

(by Prof. Prabhat Datta; (Ed.) 2000; Saraswaty Press Limited (Govt.of West Bengal Enterprise); 11B.T. Road Calcutta; Page:32.)

Amrita Rajluxmi

This monograph consists of two articles: “Perspectives on Urbanisation in West Bengal” and “Urban Governance in West Bengal: Evolution of Institutional Instrumentalities”.

In the first article, Prof. Datta, sharing his experience of urbanisation in West Bengal, indicates how agricultural prosperity generates demands for the growth of small towns; how the preparation of land use maps in urban areas is meaningful for planning of urban infrastructure, plus the effects of the 74th Amendment on urban development in West Bengal. In his second article, he tries to depict the historical perspective of urban governance from the pre-independence to post independence era, with reference to West Bengal. The monograph also analyses how the enactment of the Seventy Fourth Amendment of the Constitution has brought change in the internal structure and functioning of urban governance, that would lead to devolution of power and responsibility to the municipalities for preparation of plans for economic development and social justice.

On the whole, the monograph is simple and easy to read and gives a holistic view of urban governance in West Bengal. This book is good for comparative analysis and could be used by researchers and academicians interested in West Bengal.

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Glimpses of Campaign tools

- Street Play
- Puppet Show
- Posters & Pamphlets
- Audio Cassettes
- Puppets
- Panchayat Election Guide
- Wall Writing
- Cycle Rally

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PRIA

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