

CASE STUDY

No. 6

Service is a duty



Mamta Devi is highly motivated person with aspirations of making her Panchayat self-sustained with good and effective governance. Despite many challenges faced by her, due to both lack of manpower and gaps in scheme policies, she continues to work for the holistic development of her Panchayat.

We met Mamta Devi, Mukhiya of Ichatu Gram Panchayat (Ramgarh District in Jharkhand) in a (semi-government) school. Mamta Devi had been a teacher in a private school before she became a Mukhiya. She always had a zeal to do something for society, which was why decided to contest for the Panchayat election in 2015. As it happened, she won the support of the people of Ichatu village. When questioned further on her motivation, she said, 'Aadmi janam leta hain, khata pita hain, mar jata hai. Lekin agar sewa ka bhavna hai aur janta mauka de raha hain to acche se nibhaye to ek din sab kahenge ki phalana mukhiya ke samay me ye kaam hua, sewa ki bhavna thi unke man me (People are born on this earth, spend their lives to fulfil their basic needs and then die. But if one wants to work for people and the community provides him or her support to do that, the same people will remember that individual by the work done by that person. People will remember and say that the person worked for the welfare of the community)'.

NAME: Mamta Devi
AGE: 43 Years
EDUCATION: Intermediate
MUKHIYA: Since 2015
PAST EXPERIENCE: Private School Teacher

PANCHAYAT: Ichatu
PANCHAYAT SAMITI: Dulmi
DISTRICT: Ramgarh
STATE: Jharkhand

Roles and challenges

Mamta Devi has not received any training since she became a Mukhiya, but she still managed to carry out the following tasks on a regular basis:

- Monitoring work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) with utilisation of the Panchayat fund
- Visiting schools to ensure punctuality of teachers, students and classes
- Ensuring quality food distribution in Anganwadi
- Overseeing timely vaccination of pregnant women and infants
- Opening bank accounts, helping others with making Adhaar cards

With regard to the Gram Panchayat Development Planning (GPDP), she plays a significant role in many activities, from mobilising people to attend meetings to monitoring the process to communicating plans to the Block Office, but her real challenge is when any people's demands are not fulfilled and they lose faith in the Panchayat's efficacy. Like other many panchayats, her village also faced an issue of non-availability of labour to carry out work under the MNREGS as most villagers migrate elsewhere for work for two reasons: delay in wage release, and low wages.

Significant contributions made by Mamta Devi

She is putting her best efforts towards segregating Open Defecation Free (ODF) areas in her village (under the Swachh Bharat Mission). Dulmi Block was declared ODF in June 2016, but, in Mamta Devi's Ichatu, villagers face difficulties due to the scarcity of water, and because toilets have been constructed far from their homes. Mamta Devi tries to bring about behavioural changes among the villagers by inculcating the thought: Just as we carry water for food and washing clothes, one needs to carry water to toilets. Beyond this, she has not tried to discuss this issue with the government officials, may be due to her lack of awareness, or not being able to question the system as it was an action (ODF declaration) taken by the government.

In Prime Minister Awas Yojana (PMAY, a Housing Scheme) she and other panchayat authorities verify the actual beneficiaries based on the 2011 census data by making door-to-door visits, personally, to assess household assets such as whether the house is pucca or kutchra, whether the household owns a vehicle, and so on. Beside these contributions, she has also constructed roads, drains and repaired the community hall in the last two years as a Mukhiya.

Mamta Devi's aspiration for her panchayat

For Mamta Devi, her village would be ideally one from which people would not have to migrate in search of an improved livelihood. People migrate when there is no work in the field. According to her, there are huge barren lands which she suggested could be utilized but for that, there would have to be better irrigation facilities provided. She also wants more fruit plants in her village so that people enjoy the produce during the rainy season, when people cannot afford to buy fruits from the market. In the past, government had given some plant saplings to villages around but her village did not receive it. She firmly expressed the view that the government should look into these issues and support the people in making their village a self-sustained village.

Mamta Devi declared that she has not faced any discrimination from male counterparts at any point of time. Male authorities, including the Sachiv, have been always supportive to her.

Mamta Devi believes that better governance in terms of effective planning and implementation may address the challenges to some extent. To this end, she suggested that there should be one Panchayat Secretary for each Panchayat. Currently there is only one looking after four Gram Panchayats. Given the overload of responsibilities of the Secretary, the Mukhiya ends up with a lot more to handle, too, as it is almost impossible for a single Secretary to look into all the affairs of four Panchayats.

For Mamta Devi, there is not much need for training in soft skills, as there is a Secretary whose mandated role is to perform this. Instead, her concern is more with effective planning and execution, by bringing in more manpower into the system.