Synthesis Paper

Building Civil Society Platforms

Enhancing Citizen Participation in Local Governance Elections

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1. BACKGROUND

A vibrant democracy thrives on the active participation of its citizenry. An authentic democratic state relies on the mandates of citizens to derive its legitimacy. The state loses its legitimacy when the citizens lose its faith on the state. In modern day representative democracy, the process of election determines the authentication of state legitimacy. Despite of such importance, many a times, the election process in India is marked with gross violation of democratic norms and values. The responses from the state institutions to restore the democratic norms and values vary to a large degree depending on political interest or lack of it.

As the vibrancy of democracy is dependent on active citizen participation, the citizenry has a vital role to make the democracy work. Over the years a large proportion of Indian citizen have shown tremendous apathy to participate in the election process. However, this is only one side of the coin. A large number of citizen are excluded from the mainstream election process either purposefully or just because of lackadaisical attitude and behaviour of the state institutions. It’s not by chance, if not by design that most of these citizens are poor and marginalised. The obstacles created by the powerful sections of the society and polity to keep these large number of citizen excluded from the mainstream political process need to challenged.

The situation described above is equally relevant to the functioning of Local Self Governance institutions in India. The general apathy of a large array of state institutions to make these grass roots governance institutions effective and functional is clearly visible. Strong civil society actions to prepare the mass as active citizens in the process of local self governance is as important as advocating for the greater devolution of power to the institutions of local self governance. However, the scale and intensity required to bring reforms in these institutions is huge. As the civil society itself is fragmented and uncoordinated to launch a concerted effort to bring institutional reforms, it is also important to bring various civil society actors in one platform irrespective of their individual proclivity.

This backdrop provided a ground to PRIA and its partners to initiate building platforms of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to address the issues related to local self-governance. Although the platforms of CSOs have been animated in various states to address the larger issues of local self-governance institutions, this paper illustrates particularly the platform building to engage in the election process. Historically, PRIA and its partners have launched Pre Election Voter’s Awareness Campaign (PEVAC) to educate the citizens and the elections contestants in one hand and to bring institutional changes in the state election machinery.

The elections to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) took place in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan (1st phase for ULBs) in 2004 and early 2005. PRIA and its partners launched PEVAC in all three states for PRIs and ULBs elections. The efforts to stitch together massive CSO platform for undertaking PEVAC in these three states have been used as cases to illustrate the generalisable learning. The focus of this paper is not describe the PEVAC process (which will be done elsewhere) itself but to illustrate the process and challenges of building CSO platform in launching PEVAC as experienced by PRIA and its partners. However, the flow of the paper proceeds in a fashion
as various steps of PEVAC unfolds in a typical way. However, description to the specificity of context would appear as a side commentary.

Rajasthan was one of the states where elections to PRIs have been taking place regularly after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment came into effect. During the last elections to PRIs in the year 2000, PRIA and partners took the initiative to carry out PEVAC in 17 districts of Rajasthan. PRIA and partners also carried out Panchayati Raj Jagrakta Abhiyan (PRJA) to orient the newly elected representatives of PRIs.

Against this backdrop, the seeds of building civil society platform was already embedded in the state. However, it was felt that a forum of like-minded CSOs at the state level could be very useful for strengthening institutions of local self-governance, especially when elections to local bodies (urban as well as rural) were due in 2004-05 and when Panchayat Resource Centres (PRCs) were going to be initiated in 100 Panchayat Samitis in the state.

In Chhattisgarh the elections to PRIs were to take place in January 2005 for the first time after the formation of the new state. In pursuance of transparent and accountable PRIs a massive PEVAC was launched by PRIA covering all 16 districts of the state. A CSO platform was created involving more than 150 CSOs, which shared a common perspective on PRIs. The platform was called “Sajha Manch” (joint platform). 35 members from the Sajha Manch also participated in urban PEVAC.

In Madhya Pradesh it was for the first time that PEVAC was launched for elections to ULBs. Although Samarthan had considerable experience on PEVAC for rural areas, the experience was limited for urban areas. However, it got involved in PEVAC for elections to ULBs in 2004 with two main purposes: firstly, to grasp the issue and challenges of launching such a campaign in urban areas, so that the experience could be used in future interventions and secondly, to improve the election process by enhancing participation of women and other marginalised groups.

It was a common knowledge that not many CSOs were working in the urban areas let alone urban governance. With this prior knowledge the efforts were made to identify organisations, which are working in urban areas or at least located in urban locations. In addition, many CSOs were apprehensive about intensive political engagement especially looking at the complexity of partisan politics. Despite all these limitation and apprehension some organisations took courage to venture out in this unchartered territory and took up the responsibility to carry out the campaign. A total of 43 organisations across the state took the responsibility to run this campaign in their selected wards. This led to a selection of limited number of wards in limited number of cities across the state of Madhya Pradesh to carry out the PEVAC for ULBs.
2. BUILDING STEERING MECHANISMS AT VARIOUS LEVELS

In all three states efforts have been made to create a state level platforms known variously in different states. A two-way approach has been followed to identify the members of these state level platforms. In state like Rajasthan as a first step the state level CSOs were identified which have the outreach to different districts and those who have been working on local governance issues. These state level CSOs then identified CSOs at the level of districts or cluster of districts either from their existing partners or CSOs, which have the potential to become partner in PEVAC. In Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh the process started from below. Credible organisations were identified from the district or cluster of districts as the focal points and they along with other state level organisations constituted the state level platform.

In Rajasthan the State Steering Committee (SSC) was formed for undertaking PEVAC for PRI election. The SSC consisted of The Hunger Project, Astha, CASA (Udaipur), SDC-PRISMO, UNNATI, Nehra Yuvak Kendra, ARAVALI and PRIA. Each organisation took the responsibility of a sub-region in the state.

In Chhattisgarh the State Level Steering Committee was constituted by the lead organisations identified from each cluster for undertaking PEVAC for PRI elections. They included Samarthan, Srijan Kendra, Lok Shakti, Vanvasi Chetna Ashram, Vasudha Mahila Manch and PRIA.

In addition, another network of various bilateral, multilateral international development organisations and national level development/resource organisations was facilitated in Chhattisgarh. This platform was called Resource Agencies' Network (RAN). It consisted of the members from Action Aid, CARE, CRS, EDC/UNICEF, XIDAS, IGGSS, APRO, Centre for Environment Education, CARITAS, CASA Samarthan and PRIA. The primary objective of this network was to ensure better coordination among various resource providing agencies in the state in terms of coverage and mutual support for advocacy.

In Madhya Pradesh, in order to execute the campaign effectively, a consensus was reached to form Facilitation Committees at different levels viz. state, district and town. The committees were responsible to run and monitor the effectiveness of the campaign at the field level. They also were the bridge between the field and the state level committee presiding over the entire campaign, which in turn were in constant touch with the office of the State Election Commissioner (SEC).

The state level committee was constituted with representatives from regional CSOs, media, retired judge, advocate, academia/social worker and representative from the SEC. The state level committee was primarily anchoring the issues of the entire state. On one hand it was connected to the office of the SEC on the other with all the regional and district level committees. It also engaged the academicians involved in the impact assessment of PEVAC and the media in order to have a proper advocacy at the state level. The existence of the state level committee smoothen the process at every level. The flow of information from the regional level to the concerned official,
government department, to the academician or to the concerned media (print or electronic) became very efficient and fruitful.

The District Level Committee was constituted with representatives from CSOs at the district level, retired judge/advocate, media, academia/social worker and district administration. The district level committee was responsible for the coordination of the PEVAC at the district level. This committee captured all information flowing through the district and then sent to the state level. This committee had to deal with the other CSOs, the government officials, the media and the academia at the district level.

This committee also acted as a bridge between the field level operations and the state level committee. It had links at both levels and was responsible for implementation of all the assumed activities at the district level. The local media from the district as well as from the state was given the feedback by these committees. It also facilitated academia linkage by proving them with the required data.

The Town Level Committee was constituted with the representative from regional CSOs, advocate, academia/social worker and worker of NSS. The town level committee primarily catered to the need of the field level implementation of PEVAC. The campaign was run in the field and whatever problem occurred if not solved at the field level was immediately referred to the district and ultimately to the state level.

3. BUILDING CONSENSUS THROUGH CONSULTATIVE MECHANISMS

A variety of consultative mechanisms have been employed to build consensus among the CSOs and with other stakeholders. Some of the consultation in the form of workshops and meetings took place at the state level involving the lead organisations while other took place at the district or cluster of district level. Prior to the actual consultation in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh database of CSOs has been developed for all the districts. The basic purpose was to identify CSOs, which could be potential partners in PEVAC as well as to work on local governance issues. Personal visits, telephonic conversations with CSOs were made to obtain data under the following heads: (1) name and address of CSO, general information (date of registration and name of contact person), operational coverage area (district, block, gram panchayats, villages,) and development issues which it addresses.

In Madhya Pradesh to kick start the campaign for urban PEVAC a workshop was organised at the state level where all the stakeholders were brought together on one platform and a healthy interaction was held to work out the strategy of the campaign. The workshop was organised at AICUF Ashram on the 27th of July 2004. 43 CSOs, representatives from media, academia and government officials including the State Election Commissioner participated in this workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to share the idea of the campaign and to explore the possibility of cooperation with different stakeholders in the process of campaign. Efforts were made to evolve a strategy keeping in mind the limited resources available at hand. Suggestions were drawn from the participants to formulate an all-inclusive method suitable and acceptable to every one with enough space to incorporate the regional variations representing the peculiarities of those regions.
In this workshop the mapping of geographical coverage for the campaign was charted out. It was decided that the selection of the town and the wards should be left to the volition of the partners. This work being new to the CSO partners and the fact that it would be taken in an experimental mode it was decided not to set any pre-determined target. They were left to decide on the coverage given the existing capacity and resources. The process of choosing the wards was also left to the organisations only. As a result it was observed that most of the organisations preferred to choose the towns locale to their organisations and the wards were generally those in which they were already working or they were already located.

After the successful completion of state level workshop in Madhya Pradesh similar kind of workshop were replicated at different regional locations in a cluster of districts as well as at the districts levels. The district level workshops and the cluster level workshops were organised by the district level anchor and the cluster level organisations. The regional strategies of the different regions were designed at these regional workshops only.

The entire state of Rajasthan was divided in seven regions (Mewar, Marwar, Shekhawati, Dang, Hadoti, Mewat and Central Rajasthan). Each region consisted of a cluster of districts and one regional nodal point was identified from the members of SSC for each regional cluster. The nodal points facilitated cluster level meetings at their level to assess the coverage, chalk out strategies and actually carry out the PEVAC.

In Rajasthan different approaches were used in the seven regional consultations, which were attended by approximately 278 participants. In Mewar region, a wider platform was created like the one at state level to advocate issues of PRIs at the regional level including members from CSOs, government officials and media. In Marwar region the focus was to identify key issues for the campaign while in Dang, Mewat, Central Rajasthan, Hadoti and Shekhavati the consultation focused on mapping the number of villages to be covered in the PEVAC. It was estimated that 1500 Gram Panchayats would be covered in the five regions mentioned latter.

The type of support provided by different facilitating organisations varied from region to region. For instance, except Mewat, Central Rajasthan and Shekhawati, all other regions received financial, material as well as capacity building support. In these three regions (Mewat, Central Rajasthan and Shekhawati) material and capacity building support have been provided.

In Rajasthan a workshop on Participation in Development and Governance was organised on 28th and 29th September 2004. This Workshop was targeted at middle and senior level functionaries of CSOs to (a) deepen understanding on participation in development and governance with special emphasis on local self governance and (b) to discuss and evolve a consensus on role of civil society in promoting participation in development and governance.
The State of Chhattisgarh was divided into 5 clusters with three districts for each cluster. The formation of cluster was done keeping in view the geographical proximity and cultural similarity of the districts. Bilaspur district has been treated separately owing to its size, number of organisations working in the district and its geographical location.

Individual consultation was done by visiting various organisations in each cluster. The visits to various clusters were made in order to meet organisation working in that clusters. Discussions were held on their area of intervention. PRIA’s perspective of local self-governance was shared with these organisations. The visit to organisations of all 5 clusters helped in understanding the nature of organisations and their work. This visit gave us an initial idea to build a platform of organisations. Eventually 150 organisations from all the clusters formed a state level platform called “Sajha Manch”.

It was decided that the campaign will be launched in the name of Sajha Manch so all the materials produced and published related to the campaign would bear its name. Since PRIA had initiated the effort of building this platform, it was mutually agreed that the secretariat would be housed at the State Resource Centre of SRC. The State Election Commission endorsed the materials that were produced for the campaign. This gave more authenticity to the entire campaign.

In Chhattisgarh one workshop in each cluster was organised with a focus to discuss on the relevance and importance local self-governance and role that CSOs should play. The focus of these cluster workshops was to convince the organisations to work on issues of local self-governance in their respective field area. As a part of working long-term on governance, these organisations could start by actively participating in the PEVAC. During these cluster level meeting, some organisations owing to their history of work, reputation and spread of their work emerged as the lead organisations, which became part of the SSC.

The bilateral and multilateral agencies working in the state responded overwhelmingly to the call for supporting the campaign. The agencies agreed to distribute the handbills through their network of organisations. However, since the CSOs, which would eventually be participating in the campaign, were not oriented on elections procedures it was decided that a two-day orientation workshop for the volunteers and staff of the CSOs should be held before launching the campaign. Against this backdrop an orientation workshop was organised on 22nd and 23rd of November 2004 at Raipur. The programme was co-hosted by PRIA and IEC/HRD Cell of PHED. UNICEF – Bhopal, supported the workshop financially.
The consultations held at various levels helped in defining the broad objectives of PEVAC and the code of conduct to be followed during the PEVAC. For example, in Rajasthan through various consultation with CSOs and other stakeholders defined the objectives as follows:

1. To encourage honest, committed and duty bound candidates;
2. To curb domination by powerful groups/individuals;
3. To check dummy candidates;
4. To prevent abuse of power and money (e.g. casteism, distribution of liquor, food and other enticements);
5. To encourage participation of women and dalits in the election.

The impact that was envisaged to be achieved by PEVAC were:
1. Change in percentage of voting in intervened and non-intervened areas and it could also be compared with the last elections;
2. Participation of marginalized sections
3. Change in rejection of nomination forms

Similarly, a series of consultation led to the formal adoption of the following code of conduct:

1. Use of provocative language will be avoided;
2. No obvious campaigning for candidates promoted by individual organisations. Also avoiding luring voters for future benefits in terms of getting the benefits of schemes and other development benefits in case of election of particular candidate;
3. Avoiding socialising with candidates (e.g. eating, accepting hospitality during campaign etc.);
4. No biases or favours to any particular candidates based on caste, gender, party, religion etc.;
5. No economic support from any individual and/or party;
6. No support to unanimous candidature;
7. Abiding by the State Election Commission’s Code of Conduct mainly to end PEVAC three days before the due date of elections.

4. ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY THE PLATFORM

A. Phases of Campaign

The entire PEVAC was organised in three phases with minor variations in different states. Different activities were undertaken in various phases depending on the specific focus.

The first phase focused on Voters’ List Updation. During the first round of the campaign, the focus was on getting people enrolled in the voters list. For making any democratic system function, it was necessary that the electorate got the opportunity to take decision (by way of casting their vote or by way of participating as a gram sabha member).
The second phase focused on **Filing of Nomination**. The second round of the campaign focused on information dissemination to potential leaders on how to contest elections. In Chhattisgarh, during the second round of the campaign, CARE, PRIA and Sajha Manch agreed to prepare flyers (pamphlets) on this issue, specifically targeting the women citizen leaders like Change Agents, Mitanins, SHG leaders etc.

The third phase focused on the **Actual Election**. During the last round of the campaign, in Chhattisgarh the Sajha Manch and the other networks jointly worked on sensitising people on abstaining from malpractices, encouraging women to take part in this democratic exercise and electing good leaders to panchayats.

**B. Methods of Campaign**

A variety of methods were applied to the campaign. They included (i) door to door contact, (ii) distributing handbills/pamphlets, (iii) sticking posters, (iv) wall writing, (vi) use of audiovisual materials like cassettes and CDs. The second set of methods included (i) training and workshops, (ii) rallies, (iii) street plays and (iv) organising focused group discussions. The other set of methods included (i) organising interface meeting between the contestants and the voters, and (ii) organising nodal persons in the wards to make the voters aware about the forthcoming campaign. Such interface meetings between contestants and voters were organised in Panna, Madhya Pradesh, Rajnandgaon, Chhattisgarh.

The widest coverage was given by the method of the mass communication through the print and electronic media. The different methods used in the media was publishing articles, news and other advertisements to the print media in addition to running news strip on the local cable channels. Advertisement through TV, radio, newspaper and information dissemination through newsletter were some of the methods tried out. In Sehore and Panna districts of Madhya Pradesh the information was disseminated through the newsletters like *Gaon ki Baat* and *Gaon ki Chitti* published by Samarthan.

**C. Mobilisation of Resources**

The ambitious plan to launch a state wide campaign required ample resources in the form of human, skills, materials, logistics etc. The Sajha Manch in Chhattisgarh decided that since this was a joint initiative, all members would pool in resources and competencies to make the campaign a success. PRIA volunteered to prepare IEC materials at the state level and to provide information and training on issues pertaining to the PRI election to the CSOs. PRIA also volunteered to mobilise additional resources from the government. The organisations working at the grassroots took the responsibility of delivering the campaign at the panchayat level. While at the national level, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (GOI) supported the campaign, some resources could be mobilised at the state level for publishing IEC material. For example in Chhattisgarh it specific event or some material production was supported by CARE and UNICEF. CARE supported in publishing and disseminating the handbill on filing of nomination. Unicef, helped in organising a state level workshop for volunteers from different organisations on the issue of elections.
5. BUILDING LINKAGES WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS

In all the states linkages have been established with the SEC and district administration, media and academia. These linkages helped in establishing the social and political legitimacy to the civil society action through the campaign and also established the credibility of the platform.

A. Linkage with Media

In all the states strong linkages have been built with media personalities and institutions. It provided a lot of leverage to the campaign by covering the issues and relevant information both in print and electronic media. In Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh workshops were organised with media with the objective (i) to share the strategy and the coverage of PEVAC; (2) to workout a media strategy for awareness generation during local bodies election; and (3) to draw a plan for PEVAC and the future engagements with the media on governance and development. The role of both print and electronic media in spreading awareness was stressed upon in these workshops.

During the campaign period in Chhattisgarh a Radio programme “Panchayat Vani” was launched. This programme in 13 episodes covered various aspects of the Panchayat election like delimitation of wards and constituencies, voter list updation, filing of nomination, actual election etc. During the elections, one partner CSO called Lok Shakti in Raigarh district negotiated with AIR in Raigarh to broadcast the songs of the audio-cassette prepared for PEVAC. The station has coverage the entire district and in some parts of the neighbouring district.

The Resource Agency Network (RAN) also contributed in making the campaign a success. CARE-India Chhattisgarh dedicated one episode of its radio programme “Suno Didi” towards filing of nomination. The purpose of this intervention was to motivate the change agents, SHG leaders and Mitanins etc. to contest in the Panchayat elections.

The print media was also engaged regularly to cover the campaign from the state as well as the district level. The state level media covered extensively the networking efforts by PRIA and Sajha Manch for the Panchayat elections particularly with the State Election Commission and the other Resource Agencies. The district level media was used extensively by the partner organisations in Sajha Manch to cover the activities that they were undertaking in PEVAC.

PRIA also launched a media fellowship in Chhattisgarh to encourage media persons to write on issues of governance with special focus on elections in the PRIs. The duration of the fellowship was 3 months – October to December. Two media persons (one from Hindi and one from English daily) were awarded this fellowship.

The local cable network was also engaged to cover the campaign. The cable network also covered the kala jatahas and nukkad natak which have been used in different districts. The film “Sonha Abhiyan” based on nukkad natak was also shown in cable network in Janjigir Champa in Chhattisgarh. The private news channels also covered the campaign. Among the channels that covered the campaign the prominent ones were Sahara TV and E TV.
B. **Linkage with SEC**

In all the states right from the beginning the administration was taken into confidence. The State Election Commission was regularly updated on the activities being undertaken PEVAC. The SEC, helped in providing with inputs on the IEC materials being produced. Besides, it also provided with timely information on the dates of different phases of election, filing of nomination, voters list updation etc. The SEC allowed publishing its name on the IEC materials in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. All the material produced by PRIA was shared with the SEC, similarly all material (like booklet on code of conduct, letters to the collectors, manual of election etc) that the SEC produced was forwarded to PRIA. The SEC also accepted the conduct of a campaign like PEVAC by a letter. SEC participated in State level Workshop for PEVAC and in impact assessment sharing workshop for Urban PEVAC in Chhattisgarh. During the filing of nominations, the SEC, Chhattisgarh participated in an interview slot to talk on the procedure of filing of nomination. This was broadcasted in a programme called “Chaupat” in Chhattisgarhi language.

C. **Linkage with Academia**

The impact assessment studies on PEVAC for both ULBs and PRIs were undertaken in collaboration with academia. In Chhattisgarh the findings were shared with the CSOs through a workshop.

6. **ACHIEVEMENTS**

A. **Coverage**

In Chhattisgarh a total of 4621 Gram Panchayats were covered in 16 districts during different phases of PEVAC for PRI election. In Madhya Pradesh 11836 Gram Panchayats were covered in 48 districts and in Rajasthan approximately 3000 Gram Panchayats were covered in 32 districts.

Urban PEVAC has been conducted intensively and extensively covering 47 ULBs in Chhattisgarh. The four intensive sites were Rajnandgaon, Dongargaon, Adbhar and Ambikapur. The extensive PEVAC is being conducted in ten districts covering 43 ULBs. In Madhya Pradesh a total of 34 districts were covered for urban PEVAC. The urban PEVAC was carried on the 24 selected blocks of MP.

In Chhattisgarh while there has been an increase of 11% in the number of seats in the Panchayat elections, there has been a considerable decrease in the cases of unopposed elections, which normally happens in the naxalite-infested area. Of the total seats contested for the post of Panches during the last election, 53% were unopposed. During the elections in 2004-05, this was reduced to 44.4%. The polling turnout for both male and female has also increased in this election.

B. **Catalysing Sustained Civil Society Action to Improve Governance**

A large number of CSOs in each state participated in the platform created for conducting PEVAC in rural and urban areas. Many of the CSOs have shown initial commitment to
continue their interventions to strengthen local self-governance institutions in their respective locations. Considering the initial apprehension to engage with so-called political activity like PEVAC, this sign of commitment should be treated as achievement. In Rajasthan it was felt that the State Steering Committee should expand its role from anchoring a PEVAC process to include more incisive focus on decentralisation considering favourable opportunities from the State and the Central Government initiatives.

The experience of working together among the CSOs to achieve a shared objectives have started paying dividend in the form of catalysing networks of CSOs at various levels. In Janjir Chanpa district of Chhattisgarh a total of 27 organisations have formed a district level network. Similarly, 9 organizations in Raigarh district have formed a district level CSO Manch who took part in the urban PEVAC.

C. Participation of Marginalised Section in the Election Process

In Chhattisgarh PRIA and CARE India joint initiated an information campaign for the filing of nomination in ULB election by socially excluded groups. This intervention was carried out in four urban towns Durg, Raipur Bilaspur and Korba. The disadvantaged groups consisted of CSWs (Commercial Sex Workers) Migrants and Truckers, who were living in the slums. Community Organisers of CARE motivated people from these groups to contest election. PRIA provided the information on contesting elections. A meeting was organised in the CARE Raipur office in which the participants were given information on contesting elections for ULBs. All the CSO partners of CARE participated in the meeting. These CSOs who are working with CSWs motivated the socially excluded women to file their nominations and contest the election. CARE also organised similar meeting in Bilaspur. The effort was successful as 27 people (mostly women) including sex workers filed their nominations for the post of councilors in 4 towns.

6. LESSONS LEARNED

The CSOs in all the states by and large responded positively to engage in PEVAC both in rural and urban areas. Right from the beginning it was known to PRIA and its partners that lesser number of CSOs will get involve in the urban PEVAC as their expertise and proclivity has been historically linked to the interventions in rural areas. The challenge was however, to mark a beginning with positive note. The number of CSOs that took part in the urban PEVAC shows an optimistic future.

The CSOs both in rural and urban areas immensely contributed to the reasonable success of PEVAC, which was conducted in various phases. Issues however remain in giving the campaign a consolidated collectivised shape for the state institution to identify the civil society as an active contributor, a uniform single identity and for evoking responses on the strength of the platform.

The outreach of PEVAC in urban areas was constrained by not only the limited number of CSOs working in urban areas but also the preference of CSOs to work only within sectoral boundaries like health, education, environment and so on. The perspective on reforming urban local governance limited their participation in the PEVAC. A long-term capacity
building strategy needs to be worked out in future to engage CSOs to work towards reforming urban governance institutions.

The interventions towards facilitating platforms of CSOs and various consultative mechanisms geared only with the success of PEVAC in mind. As many CSOs were apprehensive about engaging in such political activities, many of them restricted their participation only to disseminate information at the community level. A large section of CSOs avoided interfaces with other stakeholders. A long-term engagement with the CSOs and facilitating such platforms well in advance so as to enhance their informed commitment could have produced much deeper results.

The elections in the urban municipalities were fought on party lines. This made the whole environment extremely volatile. Although the campaign withstood external pressures, it was essential that the organisations and other partners of the campaign maintain their neutrality in thoughts and action. Many a times the local level CSOs had past inclination toward a particular political party or individual which made it difficult to project the campaign as neutral one.

A campaign of such a nature has to be necessarily placed close to the regulatory and supervisory body such as the State Election Commission. Besides, bringing large-scale legitimacy to the campaign, it smoothens the building-up process at the level of the districts. Getting the relevant information and routing the experiences and the issues at the field site is also made possible in the manner.

Campaigns of such large scale require lots of resources to become effective. Influencing donor organisations to proactively link their ongoing initiatives with the Panchayats would definitely bring in larger spread to the campaign. Many international donor supported projects engage a large number of CSOs. These projects/programmes when oriented to link-up with Panchayats present the opportunity to spread the campaign and its follow-up initiatives. However, considering the nationwide structure of these programmes, the necessity is to positively influence these programmes at the national level.

CONCLUDING REMARK

The accountable and transparent functioning of the institutions of local self-governance would very much depend on the quality of the leadership who get elected in these institutions. In order to enhance the accountability of the elected leadership meaningful participation of citizens right from the election process itself is of immense value. The role of CSOs is to facilitate the participation of citizens particularly the marginalised and poor through mobilisation, collectivisation and disseminating information, which is pre-requisite of informed and effective participation. The process of PEVAC has the enormous potential to enhance the citizenship education. The platform of CSOs provides the opportunity to bring in complementary resources, competencies and outreach.