Capacity building and Governance

The 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of the Constitution brought into force in 1993, mandated the constitution of local governance bodies, conferring them with substantial powers and responsibilities. The provisions in these Amendments have far reaching ramifications and usher in enormous potential for growth of these bodies in both rural and urban centres.

Prior to these Amendments, women, dalits, tribals and other marginalised groups had been relegated to the periphery as far as governance was concerned and have largely remained voiceless, passive and almost invisible citizens. The Amendment has been particularly perceptive of this fact, by providing one-third reservation for women and proportionate reservation for other marginalised sections of the society, such as tribals, dalits, etc. However, one can not overlook the fact that this decentralisation is coming after hundreds of years of centralisation in the state machinery, public resources and bureaucratic structures. This has engendered the malaise of dependency on government agencies, programmes and resources amongst ordinary people.

On the other hand, government functionaries are resistant to conceding and devolving powers to these local bodies.

Enormous and sustained inputs by way of capacity building are necessary to reverse this process. These inputs need to be directed at the whole gamut of actors ranging from the people’s council elected representatives, to NGOs/CBOs, media, bureaucracy, donors, judiciary and the civil society in general. These inputs have to be multi-pronged and directed towards enhancing capacities of its stakeholders: knowledge, skill, confidence, attitude, etc. These capacity enhancement initiatives at various levels, together with other enabling processes, can help these local governance bodies to realise the potential and faith reposed in them by the Constitutional Amendments. It is only when this happens, that there will be a greater match between peoples’ needs and expectations, development plans and their implementation.

This issue of the bulletin is thus devoted to capacity building of Panchayati Raj Institutions. It seeks to share PRIA’s own experiences over the years, in capacity building. It traces the meaning and various aspects of capacity building in the context of local governance and delineates the demand-supply linkages of capacity building at various levels and for various stakeholders of governance. While doing so, it also suggests interventions for achieving better dovetailing between
the demand for capacity building and supply of the same. A global perspective on capacity building for governance is also incorporated, which serves to highlight efforts being made in this direction, at the international level. On the other hand, coming to a more topical issue, it discusses the reconstruction measures undertaken in Gujarat after the earthquake and emphasises the need for capacity building of existing PRI functionaries, to take up reconstruction on a more sustained basis.

Side by side with these theoretical aspects, is learning drawn from the field by engaging directly in the ‘Dalit Adhikar Abhiyan’ in western Rajasthan. This article recounts the multi-pronged capacity building interventions undertaken in western Rajasthan to promote social justice, by challenging deeply entrenched discriminatory practices against dalits. Lessons drawn from PRIA and its partners’ experiences of conducting PEVACs (Pre-election Voters’ Awareness Campaigns) are described. These can serve as capacity building inputs for conducting future PEVAC. Lastly, the salient features of the PRIA : (Panchayati Raj Jagrakta Abhiyan) campaign to orient newly elected representatives are outlined.

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The Bulletin

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Building Capacity of Civil Society for Addressing Basic Rights Issue: A People’s Movement at the Grassroots

Susmeet Sarkar

This article describes the ‘Dalit Adhikar Abhiyan’ (Campaign for Dalit Rights) undertaken in western Rajasthan to curb and challenge the discriminatory practices against Dalits. This campaign for securing social justice for the Dalits entailed mobilization and capacity enhancement of the Dalit community to fight against discriminatory social practices perpetrated against them, as well as sensitizing other actors such as government officials, the police and judicial machinery, the media, NGOs and CHOs and other civil society actors. Together with fighting such practices head-on, attempts were simultaneously made to bring about a change in attitude. Such organized campaigns for the cause of Dalits have been few, and documentation of such efforts has been lesser still.

Dalits in contemporary India bear the unguished burden of a long unbroken legacy of the deepest social degradation. They usually fall at the bottom of almost any parameter relating to economic well being or social quality of life. Exploitation of Dalits and marginalized sections of the society by other castes is deeply entrenched in our society. Prejudice and bitterness against reserved categories is a countrywide phenomenon. Even a series of enabling laws of the Constitution have failed to protect the Dalit community from the onslaught of discrimination. The enacted laws are largely dysfunctional both due to the failure of civil society in enabling such implementation and the lackadaisical approach of the machinery, supposed to implement such laws. The bureaucracy lacks the required drive and sensitivity to stringently implement such laws.

Situation of Dalits in Western Rajasthan

Incidents of discrimination against Dalits by other castes are largely prevalent in a highly feudalistic state like Rajasthan. The condition of Dalits is further compounded in western Rajasthan, given the dominant caste system prevailing over here. Despite strict laws against Dalit atrocities, their exploitation by dominant caste forces remains unabated in the villages of western Rajasthan. There has been a phenomenal rise in cases of atrocities against Dalits. Such arise depicts the increasing vulnerability of the Dalits in western Rajasthan. The poor enforcement of “Prevention of Atrocities Against SC & ST Atrocities Act” speaks volumes about the indifferent and apathetic approach of the state police machinery. The conviction rate of cases related to Dalit atrocities stands at a meagre 10 percent according to Rajasthan police sources.

A large proportion of agricultural land belonging to the Dalit community is forcefully encroached upon by higher caste people. According to a conservative estimate, about 1500 acres of land belonging to Dalits are illegally occupied in the district of Jodhpur alone.

The Dalits are treated as untouchables and denied access to village common resources. To add to their plight, an uneven distribution system exists in almost all villages where the community properties are distributed among higher castes.

The Dalits are debarred from the basic public services like services of barber, washermen, etc. in a large number of villages. The Dalits are also often debarred from offering their prayers in the temples.

The practice of untouchability can be observed in a more overt and crude form in common public places like primary schools, PHCs (Public Health Centres), Panchayat building, water collection points etc. There are incidents of large-scale discrimination against Dalit children in Government run primary schools of western Rajasthan. The discrimination of Dalit students ranges from separate sitting arrangements to separate drinking water facilities in state-run primary schools. Most schools have separate pitchers - one for the upper caste students and other for the Dalit students. In many schools, only upper caste students are allowed to draw water from cement tanks. Such a situation clearly depicts that to quench their thirst the Dalit students have to appease their upper caste friends. These practices often discourage dalit students from attending schools, and are one of the reasons for the high drop out rate amongst them. The students belonging to the Dalit community accede to the age-old discriminatory practices in the process of receiving primary education. Being deprived of equal and basic human rights from early childhood can result in low self-esteem.

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The panchayat representatives belonging to the Dalit community are debarred from occupying their rightful seat in a majority of Panchayat buildings in the Thar Desert region. The PRI representatives belonging to the Dalit community are harassed by the caste elements towards smooth execution of their duties. On offering resistance, the Dalit representatives have to face no confidence motions against them engineered by the higher caste forces.

Capacity Building Initiatives of Civil Society

The reason behind the dismal status of the Dalit community can be largely attributed to the lack of leadership among them. Lack of leadership among Dalits forces them to comply with age-old exploitative discriminatory practices. Rajasthan has a significant number of NGOs working in the region. The activities of these NGOs are largely confined to extending basic services and addressing immediate needs of the community. Any attempt by civil society actors to address or challenge the societal power structure is lacking. Such attempts when made have failed to make a significant dent in the existing situation of the Dalits.

PRIA’s partner, UNNATI, is currently facilitating a movement titled “DALIT ADHIKAR ABHIYAN” in ten blocks of Jodhpur division with partner voluntary agencies and independent Dalit activists of western Rajasthan. Dalit Adhikar Abhiyan aims to propel civil society initiatives towards eliminating all forms of discrimination practised against Dalits. The major thrust of the movement is to build Dalit leadership at the grassroots level. These leaders are expected to express their voices collectively against age-old exploitative discriminatory practices. We have initiated a series of capacity building measures for a variety of stakeholders, viz., local Dalit community leaders, NGOs, alliances and the police machinery for a telling impact at the grassroots level. The capacity building initiatives adopted for different stakeholders are elaborated below in detail.

Promoting and Nurturing Dalit Leadership at the Grassroots

Any voice to oppose traditional age-old exploitative discriminatory practices carried out against Dalits by caste elements has to come from within the Dalit community. Our efforts are concentrated around generating local level Dalit leadership at the grassroots level. The process involved is stated below.

Mobilisational Efforts

Efforts are initiated to organise the Dalit and the marginalised section of the society around issues related to denial of basic rights. Currently, a committee comprising about three hundred people has been constituted at the village level to oppose any form of discrimination. These village level committees are further federated at the block level to give a wider reach to the voice of the leaders. Currently ten such block level committees are operating in the division of Jodhpur.

Potential youth, indigenous leaders, active community leaders represent these block level committees. Some 245 block level leaders and 1700 village level leaders have been identified and nurtured under the canvas of these committees. These leaders have started asserting their basic rights with a higher degree of self-confidence.

Capacity building initiatives for enhancing knowledge base and leadership skill

A series of capacity building measures have been carefully designed and implemented looking into the major capacity building needs of these civil society leaders. Two rounds of training programmes have been conducted for the block level community leaders.

The first round of training was aimed towards broadening the understanding of the community leaders on issues related to the lives and livelihood of Dalits. The community leaders were enabled to look into the problem of Dalits with a macro perspective. In-house support has been extended to these leaders towards evolving local strategy to address the issues related to denial of basic rights. Specific and pertinent local issues related to Dalits have been identified in different blocks to expedite the process of Dalit mobilisation at the grassroots level.

The second round of training was aimed towards sharpening the leadership skills of the community leaders. The community leaders were also oriented about the provisions of the Constitution towards checking denial of basic rights. The roles and responsibilities of different autonomous national and state bodies, such as the State Human Rights Commission, Women’s Commission and the National Human Rights Commission, supposed to protect the interest and rights of the vulnerable community, were also discussed at length.

These training programmes helped the community leaders both towards sharpening their leadership skills, as well as enhancing their knowledge base.
Constant Information Sharing

A constant need for information sharing has been strongly realised at the grassroots level, as these community leaders were expected to take up the daunting task of opposing the age-old discriminatory practices. The Dalit Resource and Information Center (DRIC) developed at the block level, supplies relevant information to these community leaders on a regular basis. It disseminates new information, mutual learning and recent developments on a regular and timely basis. The process of continuous sharing of information has helped these leaders to mobilise the support of people, not merely on the basis of slogan shouting, but on the basis of their enhanced knowledge and skills. The role of the DRIC is to attempt to catalyse the process of cross learning among the community leaders.

Developing a Platform for Monitoring and Follow-up

The local NGOs facilitating the movement have developed a local level platform (block level committees) for sharing and learning from the proceedings. The leaders assemble in the beginning of every month to plan their course of action after receiving inputs from fellow leaders and local NGOs. The problems faced by the community leaders are also discussed at length in these meetings and solutions to them are sought. The local level NGOs monitor the movement at their respective blocks and ensure proper follow-up of the developed plan of action. The developments of all the block level committees are shared in the monthly meetings. The victories are celebrated, while the failure shared among the community leaders.

Sensitising Police Machinery on Dalit Issues

The Dalit community leaders have started challenging the exploitative dominant practices perpetrated against Dalits for centuries. A sensitive dealing is expected from the police machinery.

Police excesses and mishandling of cases related to Dalit atrocities have been constantly reported by media. The victims of atrocity have frequently complained about the indifferent and apathetic approach of the police, which inhibits them from approaching the police.

There is an imperative need to bridge the gap between the police and the emerging group of community leaders. A cordial relation with the police will further encourage these leaders to raise issues related to denial of basic rights with full vigour.

Training programmes have been specially designed for the police personnel engaged in probing of cases related to Dalit atrocities. Such training programmes have been conducted for all the police stations of Balotra block, Barmer district in the first phase. The training programmes are envisaged to have the dual objective of bridging the wide gap between the community and police on one hand and sensitising the police machinery on the other hand.

Building Capacities of Alliances Espousing the Cause of Dalits

There are a number of organisations like the Ambedkar Sena, Samta Samiti, etc. which are striving to espouse the cause of Dalits. These organisations have a large member base, but were generally lying in a state of dormancy. The activities of these organisations are primarily driven by short-term perspectives of pressurising the police machinery for fair dealing in the case of Dalit atrocities. There is a pressing need to incorporate the strengths of these organisations in the endeavour of the community leaders for a perceptible change at the grassroots level. These organisations are being encouraged to play a more meaningful and pro-active role. Constant support has been provided to these organisations towards devising a strategy on the lines of the ongoing movement. These institutions are sensitised to adopt a long-term perspective and work towards building Dalit leadership at the grassroots level.

Impact at the Grassroots Level

The movement initiated by the community leaders and other civil society institutions has paid rich dividends. They have initiated a wide campaign to eliminate all forms of discrimination against Dalits. These leaders have raised cases related to discrimination through the platform of their village and block level people’s institutions. The civil society leaders actively involved in the ongoing movement have raised about one hundred and seventy-five cases related to discrimination of Dalits.

About fifteen inquiries have been ordered by the district administration of Barmer and Jodhpur district on cases related to denial of basic rights. NHRD and National Commission of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have asked for specific reports on various occasions from the district authorities of Barmer and Jodhpur district. The initiatives taken by the district administration have sent strong signals to all the primary schools of western Rajasthan.

Various other civil society institutions have extended their support to the ongoing movement. Rajasthan
Shikshak Sangh has initiated a signature campaign of government teachers stating the presence of discriminatory practices in Government primary schools. About seven hundred teachers have joined the campaign. Print and electronic media have constantly reported about the movement. Such organised and multi-pronged efforts to challenge deeply entrenched social practices have not been commonly heard of in Rajasthan.

Some policy level changes have been undertaken by the district administrations of Jodhpur and Barner to curb the practice of untouchability in Government primary schools. The district administration has issued strict circulars to all the primary schools urging them to look into the seating arrangements and drinking water facility of Dalit students. Some teachers perpetuating the practice of untouchability have been suspended from their services.

The cases related to Dalit atrocity are now strongly followed up at the block level by the community leaders. The local NGOs are also providing the much-required facilitating support at the local level. Various civil society institutions like Anbedkar Sena, Santa Sainik, and other CBOs have stepped up to complement our efforts. This closing of ranks has helped to accelerate the impact of the movement.

Barber brought to book for refusing to provide his services to Harijans

Anil Harizan, a community leader has filed a FIR against a barber for denying services to him. Perhaps it needs to be mentioned here that the barbers don’t extend their services to the members of the Dalit community in western Rajasthan. The local NGO, Marudhar Ganga Society engaged in the movement, constantly followed upon the FIR filed by the community leader. The errant barbers were arrested by the DSP on the basis of the FIR, after a police inquiry was initiated against them.

The community leaders are mutually complimenting the initiatives for pressurising the district administration and on several instances the bureaucracy was forced to succumb to the collective pressure of these community leaders. The impact of the movement can be better understood in the light of the appended cases.

Turban of limit

Dalits of western Rajasthan can not wear a ‘kesariya pagri’ (saffron turban), since it is considered to be a symbol of power and an exclusive garb meant to be donned by the dominant upper caste people. Further, the Dalits are not even allowed to crown turbans on chief guests in any public ceremony.

The sarpanch of Adal Panchayat, Mr. Bhera Ram will not forget that fateful day when he dared to crown a turban on the local MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) of Barner in a public ceremony at Adal village of Sandhir block, Barner district. The upper caste people humiliated the sarpanch in front of the MLA and local district officials of Barner district. The Dalit community leaders protested against the incident and went on an indefinite ‘dharna’ (demonstration). The Dharna was called off after fourteen days, with the district official filing an FIR against the errant people, including the MLA. Moreover, the Pramukh (village head) who happens to hail from the upper caste, was forced to crown a pagri on the dalit sarpanch.

Building on the case, the Dalit community leaders conducted a ‘pagri’ rally on Bagoda on the eve of Anbedkar Jayanti.

Temple of dissent

It has been a long cherished dream of Dalits in rural Rajasthan, to enter freely into temples. But vestiges of the feudal system still existing in the society, prevented their entry into the temple Mata jee Ka Mundir (temple of the mother goddess). However, the Dalits of Karryali village, Luni Block, broke the shackles of centuries and gained entry into the local temple after a relentless struggle. This change was brought about by the members of the community themselves, and not by the patronage of the administration or with the help of the police.

The community leaders and particularly the local NGOs are receiving several threats from the higher caste people and the political parties to withdraw the movement. The NGO leaders especially have been threatened with dire consequences.
Resistance to change

SAPVS is one of UNNATI’s partner organisations, crusading the Dalit Adhikar Abhiyan in the Baleshwar block. A NFE centre cum local office of SAPVS was razed to the ground by the Rajput families in the village of Devathu, as an act of retaliation for addressing dalit issues.

Sujeet Sarkar works with UNNATI at Jodhpur, Rajasthan and is intensively engaged in the ‘Dalit Adhikar Abhiyan’

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Discrimination in schools:
Dalit children sitting distinctly apart from the rest of the children.
Reconstruction and Governance: After the Quake in Gujarat

Rajesh Tandon

This article discusses the aftermath of the quake in Gujarat and emphasizes the vital link between the various aspects of rehabilitation and governance. When the Gujarat Government postponed the elections to the Gram Panchayats last September (2000), the reason stated was the situation of drought prevailing in the state. Following the earthquake in January, the elections have been further postponed. This write-up, on the contrary, postulates that the very situation triggered off by these natural disasters makes it imperative to set in place these constitutionally mandated local institutions. Together with efforts at rehabilitation by external agencies, it is only these local bodies that can impart the much-needed sense of belonging and vigorously monitor the rehabilitation process in a long-term, lasting manner. In the present situation, it makes a case for mobilising and building the capacities of existing PRI functionaries, whose term may have ended, but who continue to play important social and governance roles in their communities.

The massive upheaval caused by the earthquake in Gujarat on January 26, 2001 has led to widespread destruction of lives, livelihoods and communities, particularly in the Kutch region. Spontaneous response from citizens and voluntary groups inside the country, as well as internationally, has brought in massive relief materials and support to the living. In this effort, the Government of Gujarat also rose to the occasion with an efficient and responsive management of relief operations, in collaboration with civil society organisations, volunteer and business houses. A month after the earthquake, the time for rehabilitation and long-term resettlement of the families in the Kutch region was the need of the hour. It is indeed heartening to note that the Gujarat Government has come out with a detailed 'package of rehabilitation and reconstruction for earthquake victims'. This was released on 19th February.

In order to assess the possibility of future rehabilitation, it is important to understand that rehabilitation of quake affected people is not merely about building their homes and providing them roads and electricity. While that is an essential pre-requisite, it does not add up to building neighbourhoods, communities and the Kutch society. As is already known a diversity of experiences, cultures, ethnic and religious practices abound in the Kutch region. Kutchees are also highly enterprising, hardworking and self-made people. The process of rehabilitation and reconstruction of Kutch society, therefore, must be built on the premise of effective local governance. It is a pity that the Gujarat Government had postponed the statutorily and constitutionally mandated elections of Gram Panchayats in September last year. In place are Taluka Panchayats and Zila Parishads whose newly elected representatives can be mobilised to take their rightful role in reconstruction of Kutch society. It is also important to mobilise the Ward, Panch and Sarpanch whose term may have ended but who continue to play important social and governance roles in their communities. Likewise, in small towns and municipalities, municipal and ward councillors can become a rallying point around which reconstruction of communities can take place in Kutch.

One may ask the question why the administrative machinery of the government and external agencies like NGOs and business houses are not adequate. The interventions of external agencies can build houses, roads, community centres and schools. But they cannot build neighbourhoods; they can not build social capital that requires mutual trust, mutual support and a sense of belonging. The experience of rehabilitation in Latur and other places clearly indicates that sustainable reconstruction of communities must begin with mobilising people, families and their social connections. This is where strengthening local governance can be the most powerful ingredient in reconstruction of Kutch society.

It has to be acknowledged that the package announced by the Gujarat Government early this week has many elements which reinforce this perspective. It has been clearly mentioned in the salient features of the package that affected people and communities must be actively involved as central players in the rehabilitation process. Likewise, the role of Gram Sabha has been adequately acknowledged to avoid top-down, externally imposed solutions. It is also proposed to set up village level committees, which will take decentralized decisions in relation to resettlement work. These principles can be further strengthened, if we find a way to mobilize, reenergize and engage elected ward panchs and sarpanchs, leaders of Taluka Panchayats and Zila Parishads as well as ward and municipal councillors in the urban
centres. These elected leaders represent different segments of society, different padas, busties, neighbourhoods and hamlets. They will be able to identify the families which require reconnection and thereby build the basis for social reconstruction of Kutch society.

As the recent experience of relief had demonstrated, good will and material support from outside is not enough. Despite the massive arrival of clothes, it was not uncommon to find Kutchi women and men who had not changed their dress since January 26th, because the clothes they had received were not appropriate to their practices, habits and ecological requirements. It is already obvious that caste and religious divisions have separated the relief efforts. Several relief providing agencies (including the Army) are running separate kitchens for dalits and non-dalits. Social reconstruction process needs to enable mechanisms for resolving inter-group conflicts and assuring healthy, mutually supportive rehabilitation of neighbourhoods and hamlets. This is possible only if local governance mechanisms are energized. Finally, energizing local governance will ensure long-term monitoring and accountability of all the resources and inputs that are being applied towards reconstruction.

The package of rehabilitation announced by the Gujarat Government is providing subsidy to all those whose houses have been destroyed. But the amount of subsidy reinforces present inequality. Why should better-off families get higher public subsidy? Who should raise such issues? The Gujarat Government's calculations suggest that rehabilitation of afflicted families would require Rupees three crores, half of which the Government of Gujarat will provide. How are these resources applied? How are they spent? How is the physical design of houses and layout of neighbourhoods prepared? And how are the assets so created owned and managed by the community? This depends primarily on how energised and effective the local governance system becomes. It was necessary for speed of response in the face of such a massive tragedy that administrative machinery, army and national/international NGOs took charge. In the next year or so, Kutchis, their local associations and local system of governance, constitutionally mandated and in place through panchayats and municipalities, alone can ensure dignified, humane and sustainable reconstruction of Kutch society.

Rajesh Tandon is the President of PRIA

Rehabilitation of Gujarat People
Capacity Building Lessons for Future PEVACs
(Pre-election Voters’ Awareness Campaign)

Malini Nambiar

In the year 2000, elections to panchayats were held in the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh and more recently, in Bihar, in the year 2001. PRIA and its partners in these states conducted a PEVAC (Pre-election Voters’ Awareness Campaign) prior to the elections. This article lists the objectives for conducting PEVAC, and the lessons learnt therein, which can feed into future PEVACs. It also gives a glimpse of PEVAC in these states, in terms of duration of the PEVAC, the coverage achieved, and the linkages forged in the process.

Elections to Local Governance bodies are an exercise in participatory democracy. It provides space for people to express their freedom of choice in selecting their representatives who would heed and strive to fulfill their needs and interest. Such an understanding of the significance of elections, which is stressed upon by the recommendation committees as well as Part IX of the Constitution, ensures participation of the local people in the governance process. But how far are the local citizens aware of their rights to participate at the village level? In the last six years since the enactment of the Amendment, various studies, group discussions with the villages, representatives, government functionaries, community based organisations all reveal that one of the greatest drawbacks in elections could be traced to the lack of participation.

In heeding to the need of the hour, of facilitating the engagement of fellow citizens in the process of Panchayat elections, PEVAC as a method was adopted. PEVAC seemed not to be limited entirely to transferring ideas, information or equated with imparting knowledge but, it is seen as a process of growth and discovery aimed not just at knowing more but at a behavioural shift. The focus was on building up people’s critical consciousness to examine their current situation. It aimed at building a more questioning attitude, rethinking and following rational democratic ideology. It aimed at building a common understanding for common action towards a common goal.

The underlying factor was to make them aware of their rights, which would eventually motivate them to take some action, which in this context was to participate in the election process as a community. But one must realise that communities are not homogeneous bodies. There are certain sectors of the community that have access to information, have higher awareness level and are economically well to do. For instance, gender inequality, caste, illiteracy and other form of marginalised groups exist in society. So, keeping with the ground realities, the objectives of PEVAC were formulated and tried to address the above needs and give special focus to certain sections of the community.

The objectives for conducting PEVAC are to:

- Generate awareness among both voters and candidates regarding the process of elections and sensitising them towards the significance of PRIs
- Mobilise citizens’ groups (including civil society organisations, voluntary organisations, informal groups, etc.) towards building public awareness and participating in the panchayat election process.
- Create an enabling and conducive atmosphere for the emergence of efficient and effective leadership
- Create an enabling environment for women and those belonging to the weaker sections of the society so that they are encouraged to contest elections on reserved as well as unreserved seats.
- Help in building a congenial and conducive environment so that free and fair elections are held.

Lessons learnt:

PEVAC is not a one-time event. With the growing need for increasing participation and awareness, PEVAC or any other awareness campaign needs to be organised at appropriate intervals. Various lessons that have emerged would pave the way for the future challenges that we all need to work towards in order to sustain people centred and people managed development. Some of these lessons are consolidated below:

- Set attainable objectives that could be measured (quantitatively and qualitatively). This would help
in furthering the work and planning for future initiatives in strengthening Panchayati Raj institutions.

- Ways of forging linkages and maintaining these linkages need to be thought of. One way of maintaining linkages is by involving and keeping CBOs, government officials and others informed about the activities planned for follow-up or trainings. This would bring continuity in interventions. This would also help to put panchayat related issues on their agenda.

- The follow-up plan should be promptly put into action. Long gaps between the awareness campaign and future interventions could lead to people becoming disinterested, and information becoming redundant.

- Awareness and information dissemination is not a one-time affair. The optimum utilisation of resources should be well planned. One way of balancing the resources is through good networking. If networking with other organisations is strong, then resources could be pooled and responsibilities delegated according to capabilities with regard to a) production of material, b) organising other media of communication like padyatra, mukkad natak, Kala Jathas c) organising group meetings d) documentation and e) running Panchayat resource centres. This would ensure full utilisation of resources and leave no room for duplication.

- Need to build a wider platform for PEVAC by tapping into other networks to improve outreach and effectiveness. This would include use of radio as well as getting print media to engage more widely and deeply on PRIs, to help establish non-political credentials of PEVAC.

- To use Panchayat Resource Centres more effectively and efficiently to maintain the information flow as well as to meet the need of wider outreach. These centres could reduce information gaps and increase knowledge base on election procedures and processes. Activities of this centre could enable to demystify electoral procedures such as - rotation of reservation seats, reservation for OBC, 2-child norms, filing and filing nomination, which are some of the hindering factors of people’s participation in election processes.

- It is evident that elections are a political phenomenon - how to open dialogue with political parties in ensuring that they have the interest of the people and the panchayats on their agenda?

**Conclusion**

Knowing that the way ahead is not simple, Advocacy efforts aimed at building congenial and enabling environment throughout the State needs to be initiated at the State and the national level. This will require timely flow of information from bottom to the top so that people friendly policies and statutes are formulated. Efforts aimed at influencing the policy makers are required. Similarly, to move on the path that Part IX (73rd Constitutional Amendments Act) of the Constitution has laid, we need to stretch to all the nooks and corners of the village via Pre-election voter’s awareness campaign (PEVAC). We need to take this challenge ahead because the experiences gained in conducting, organising and assessing the campaign have showed that public interest can be mobilised for the purpose and large networks can be built for one purpose - to strengthen local self governance. There is much to learn and there is much to do. This is a good time to be in the field of decentralization and Panchayati Raj.

Malini Nambiar works in the Centre for Local Self-governance, PRIA. For more information on PEVAC, refer to the July 2006 issue of the Participation and Governance bulletin.
Pre-Election Voters Awareness Campaign in Seven States

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<td>3. Coverage</td>
<td>Intervened district 12 out of 19 Total number of GPs = 9184 Intervened GPs = 846 Percentage coverage = 9.1%</td>
<td>Intervened in 33 out of 62 Intervened Gram Panchayat = 3818 Percentage coverage = 12%</td>
<td>Intervened in 12 out of 19 Total GPs = 5958 Intervened GPs = 600 Percentage coverage = 10%</td>
<td>Intervened in 15 districts out of 63 Total number of GPs = 58605 Total GPs covered = 1303 Percentage coverage = 2.2%</td>
<td>Intervened in 15 districts out of 63 Total number of GPs = 991 Total GPs covered = 584 Percentage coverage = 5.9%</td>
<td>Intervened in 10 out of 12 Districts Total number of GPs = 2921 Total GPs covered = 584 Percentage coverage = 19%</td>
<td>Intervened in 33 out of 37 districts Total number of GPs = 12181 GPs intervened = 938 Percentage coverage = 7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Networking</td>
<td>• At the State Level - Youth club/Anganwadi members, NGOs, PRA's partner organisation UNNATI</td>
<td>• At the state level with partner organisation, With Government officials, With Media</td>
<td>• At the State Level (CASA) • With Partner organisation, With Government and Media</td>
<td>• Worked with NGOs at the state and the District level, SSK • Networked and established contacts with Media and Bureaucrats</td>
<td>• Established a wide network of NGOs and CBOs, SAHAYA • Mobilised and Worked the SC/ST communities</td>
<td>• Established a wide network of NGOs and CBOs, • Tried to incorporate media, former elected members</td>
<td>• CENCORD along with 356 organisations, Media and government networking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Capacity Building for Effective Local Self-Governance

Rajesh Tandon

Capacity is a Multi Dimensional and complex attribute. Some of these attributes may be awareness, knowledge, skill, self-confidence and actions. Building these attributes has become an need and integral part in the functioning of any system of governance. This article traces the trend in Capacity Building, its conceptual understanding, its present demand and supply in strengthening the Local Self Governance.

Context:

Nearly 88 countries of the world have begun to promote some form of decentralised local government in the past 5-10 years. Despite enormous variation across the countries and regions, two common elements of this decentralised local government are:

1. Some form of regular election to local level bodies with elected representative council for a village or town;
2. Specific administrative and financial devolution to these elected local bodies for undertaking and managing programmes of local development.

In South Asia, this trend began in the early 1990s. In India, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments brought in 1993 provided the Constitutional framework for constituting such local bodies. The provision in these amendments have some far reaching implications with respect to the governance of local areas in rural and urban centres. By providing 1/3rd reservation for women and proportionate reservation for other socially excluded and deprived sections (tribals, dalits, etc.), the Constitutional framework for local bodies in India has an enormous affirmative action potential.

The experience of functioning of these local bodies in the past 6-7 years in India makes it clear that effective local self governance is still a distant dream and requires enormous interventions to dispise its potential.

However, the complexity of the situation demands a broader understanding of the methodologies for capacity building. This paper presents our perspectives on the same, based on our experience during the last 5 years.

Meaning of Capacity Building :

Capacity can be defined as the totality of inputs needed by an actor to realise its purposes1. Applied to local bodies, this will ensure that such institutions are able to function effectively as institutions of local self governance in the perspective elaborated above.

Capacity of such institutions can also be seen in three distinct though inter-related aspects:

a) Intellectual Capacity: This implies capacity to think, reflect and analyse reality independently and in pursuit of self defined purposes of local self-governance.

b) Institutional Capacity: This implies procedures, systems, structure, staffing, decision-making, transparency and accountability, planning, implementation and monitoring. It also includes mechanisms for building linkages with others.

c) Material Capacity: This includes material resources, physical assets, funds, ability, systems and procedures to mobilise resources; and access and control over physical and natural resources and infrastructure; systems and procedures required for adequate management of funds and such infrastructure.

Viewed in the above sense, capacity of a development actor or a local body means an examination of its purposes at a given period of its life cycle. The capacity building needs change over time.

One of the consequences of the above is an acknowledgement of diversity and temporal dynamism in the requirements of capacity for any development actor.

What then is Capacity Building? Invariably, training of individuals is seen as the sine-qua-non of capacity building through some pre-determined package of inputs. However, capacity building comprises of a variety of other approaches and processes. Organisational strengthening, institutional learning, field exposure and projects, horizontal sharing and

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1 Future Capacity Building of Southern NGOs, 1998, IPCB Founding Conference in Brussels.


Participation & Governance 13 Vol. 7 No. 20 March 2001
solidarity are some of the other illustrations of practical, on-the-job and experiential learning processes to capacity building.

Viewed in this sense, capacity building is a long-term process of strengthening an actor (or a local body) based on systematic learning of new knowledge, skills and attitudes. Like all learning, the actor must see the value of and take responsibility for that learning. This capacity building can not be imposed from outside. Preparation of the actor (or a local body) to identify its particular capacity needs and motivation to take responsibility for learning those is a major part of capacity building intervention in such framework.

This does not imply that external interventions have no role in capacity building. There are many:

- Preparation of the actor (or a local body) in terms of external stimulation and intervention.
- Providing opportunities for systematic learning and facilitating such learning.
- Accessing and making available resources for capacity enhancement.
- Supporting on-going and sustained capacity enhancement over a long-term.

In this framework, capacity building efforts address needs for enhancing capacity at the level of individual and organised collectives.

In the framework presented above, different elements and processes of capacity building for local self-governance in the Indian context are elaborated and illustrated.

**System of Local Governance:**

Through Constitutional Amendments, the system of local self-governance established in India has the following broad features:

1. There are 3 tiers of elected bodies in rural areas - Gram Panchayat (GP) at the village level; Panchayat Samiti (PS), at the block level and Zilla Parishad (ZP) at the district level.
2. The village assembly of all adult voters is identified as Gram Sabha.
3. At all tiers of elected representatives, 1/3rd of all seats is reserved for women. Like-wise, reservation for socially oppressed (dalits and tribals) has also been mandated.

4. Regular elections every 5 years have been constitutionally mandated.
5. The Constitution lists a number of development areas for which the three tiers of the local bodies have responsibility.
6. Finance Commissions have been constitutionally required to allocate budgetary resources and the power for mobilising revenue to local bodies.

In a vast country like India, this democratic decentralisation has enormous challenge. In rural areas, nearly a quarter million local bodies exist. Nearly three million elected representatives are there in these local bodies, of which nearly one million are women.

**Capacity Building for Local Governance:**

PRIs's focus of interventions to strengthen local self-governance have targeted the lowest tier of this structure. Therefore, the interventions aimed at capacity building have largely been of two varieties: demand and supply. Figure 1 provides a schematic overview of the system of local governance and its demand-supply linkages.

**Figure 1: Tiers of Local Body and Administration**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Body</th>
<th>Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zilla Parishad</td>
<td>District Collectorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Sectoral Officials/ Departments)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panchayat Samiti</td>
<td>Block Development Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Agriculture, Engineering)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gram Panchayat</td>
<td>Village Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Primary School Teacher, Anganwadi Workers, Patwari...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gram Sabha (CBOs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A. Strengthening Demand:

Effective functioning of local self-governance requires active, engaged and organised citizenry. In the practical context of today’s reality, families and communities have been increasingly divided around caste, religion, ethnicity and gender. Therefore, the most significant intervention needed is to strengthen Gram Sabha as contemporary civil society formation in each hamlet and village.

1. Capacity enhancement interventions at this level would entail an appreciation of the collective identity of Gram Sabha. Such an intellectual preparation requires inculcating a perspective of collective citizenship as the basis of civil society. PRIA’s efforts at mobilising individuals and families in a hamlet or a village to work together to address common problems at the village level has been inspired by this approach.

2. A strong Gram Sabha also requires institutional mechanism to function effectively. It requires effective conduct of periodical (quarterly or six monthly) Gram Sabha meetings where development planning at the local level as well as monitoring of implementation could be undertaken to enable the Gram Sabha (including acquiring further legitimacy constitutionally) to operate as the basic unit of collective decision-making in common public good.

3. There have existed many informal local community based associations in these villages. Some of them are traditional associations around caste or kinship, cultural- religious associations, etc. In recent years, many government or NGO development programmes have also catalysed formation of new associations like self-help groups, mahila mandals (women’s groups), youth groups, village education committee, forest protection committee, watershed committee, etc.

A significant aspect of strengthening local demand system is to build the capacity of these traditional and contemporary local associations.

PRIA’s interventions at this level have largely attempted to enhance their intellectual capacity to share the perspective of local governance. This enables these traditional and contemporary local associations to work in synergy with the Gram Panchayat and the Gram Sabha.

4. The elected representatives of Gram Panchayat (numbering between 7-11 members), represent a small hamlet or village. In addition, there is a Sarpanch - elected as Chief of Gram Panchayat directly by all members of Gram Sabha. In some ways, this body is the first and most direct representative body of local self-governance. However, Gram Panchayat as a vehicle for exercising representative leadership with transparency and accountability to Gram Sabha is a distant ideal.

a) To understand the autonomous and basic democratic nature of Gram Panchayat as a collective decision-making body, most significant interventions have focused on preparing this collective identity. Such interventions have aimed at developing a common perspective and intellectual appreciation of the Gram Panchayat.

b) The second set of interventions aimed at Gram Panchayat is their institutional mechanism to function as transparent and accountable local body. This includes mechanisms for conducting meetings, preparing minutes, sharing information with Gram Sabha, securing participation and contribution of Gram Sabha, developing participatory micro plans, procedures and systems, effective implementation and monitoring of these plans, securing and mobilising resources and maintaining transparent systems of financial management, etc.

c) The capacity building intervention at this level also needs to address the question of enhancing the material base of Gram Panchayat to make them financially autonomous and sustainable entities.

Capacity enhancement interventions in this area particularly focus on mobilising local resources from the village.

5. Perhaps, the most significant interventions in capacity enhancement at this level need to focus on building individual leadership of each of the elected representatives. This is particularly relevant for women, dalits and tribals. Political participation in public space is being experienced by these newly elected leaders for the first time in their life. Thus, enhancing their leadership roles requires capacity enhancement in several ways:

a) Access to authentic information about the system of local governance, their roles and
responsibilities and financial resources available to them are the first and foremost requirement. Capacity building for these literate and semi-literate constituencies such as women, dalits and tribals, requires methodological innovations in audio-visuals, folk forms, etc. to be carried out in different settings.

b) Most of these elected women have not left their house or hamlet ever before. Therefore, opportunities for homogenous groups of women, dalits and tribal to share their experiences, express solidarity and provide mutual support need to be created. It is in this context that exposure visits for groups of elected representatives, joint camps and big summelans (Conferences) have been utilised as innovative approaches to building self-confidence for the elected leadership.

c) Exercising new leadership also requires learning new skills. These skills include how to conduct a meeting, how to prepare minutes, how to prepare village plans, how to manage funds, etc. Learning these skills through training, practical demonstration and hand-holding needs to be promoted.

Therefore, capacity enhancement interventions aimed at individual strengthening and empowerment of new leaders is a fundamental challenge in local governance.

6. Given different tiers of local bodies, vertical linkages across them need to be strengthened.

7. One of the most significant areas of strengthening is to enable horizontal linkages between different tiers of local bodies and commensurate tiers of local administration. These include primary school teachers, village level workers. Aanganwadi workers, multi-purpose health workers, forest guards, police jawans (constables), etc.

According to constitutional provision, all the above mentioned government functionaries should be accountable to Gram Panchayat. However, this is not a reality anywhere in India so far. Gram Panchayat needs to learn how to assert their rights and supervision over the concerned government functionaries and relevant government development programmes and resources. Structured learning opportunities need to be created separately for Gram Panchayat, as well as jointly with concerned government officials and their supervisors.

8. Another area of horizontal networking is building relationships and support mechanisms with other elected representatives in neighbouring villages, blocks and districts. Support towards building such horizontal networks as bottom-up pressure groups and mutual support mechanisms are a major challenge of capacity building in local governance.

B. Strengthening Supply:

Another aspect of building capacity is to influence and enhance the supply side in local governance.

1. Orientation and attitudinal change for government functionaries at all levels is a major challenge in working with responsive and accountable bureaucracy. A primary vehicle for bringing this about is through civil service training institutions at the district, state and national levels. This may imply improving pedagogy and quality of facilitators in such government civil service training institutions.

2. The second area of capacity enhancement for government functionaries has to do with specific skills that they may need to work with Panchayati Raj Institutions. For example, in the system of top-down development interventions, lowest level government officials have no skill in planning and monitoring since all of that has been centralised. They need to learn skills in promoting micro plans (including budgeting) as well as social audit and community monitoring of implementation of these plans.

3. Sensitisation and attitudinal changes are also a major arena of capacity enhancement for political leadership at all levels. Barraging a few individuals, the political culture in most political parties and among active and elected politicians is one of the disregard for the activities and motivations of ordinary people to take responsibility for village level development. Carefully selected communication strategies, meetings, dialogues and workshops could be utilised for such capacity enhancement interventions.

4. Another aspect of supply side is intermediary development NGOs. Most of them have a package of development programmes, which they implement in various villages. Orientation and sensitisation of these intermediary NGOs to work through Panchayats and the Gram Sabha is a necessary challenge of capacity enhancement. PRIA and its partners' interventions have reached out to more than 500 such NGOs in the country. Yet, there are many more who are neither
convinced about the significance of local government nor willing to change their approaches
and programmes to respond to them.

5. Capacity enhancement interventions are most urgently needed to sensitize and re-orient donors.
Despite general discussions, concrete shifts in donor policies, resources and programmes towards
strengthening institutions of local governance is yet to take place.

6. Finally there is a vast arena of public education for society at large so that different individuals and
institutions such as the media, academic institutions, youth groups, human rights
organisations and others who need to be sensitised
and oriented to the challenges faced by local bodies in building their capacities to accomplish
their constitutionally mandated purposes.

To ensure the match between strengthening the
demand side and responsiveness of supply side is a
challenge in the present context. This is particularly
so when demand generates heightened levels of
expectations which are not adequately responded to
by the supply side.

Conclusion:

The above narrative describes the challenges facing
effective development for effective local self-
governance. Bulk of this capacity focuses on
promoting participation in local public institutions.
Obstacles to such participation are cultural, systemic,
institutional and human. Thus, inclusion of the
marginalised is a primary challenge of capacity
enhancement interventions.

Local governance can be made more transparent and
accountable to local community only if civil society
assertions are coherent and persistent. The interface
between strong civil society and effective local
governance can be secured more organically if
capacity building interventions are properly designed
and implemented.

Changing attitudes and beliefs is at the very heart of
democratic functioning. This implies a culture of
dialogue, consultation and consensus building. These
values and processes need to be nurtured through
sustained capacity enhancement interventions.

Intensive documentation of these interventions is a
necessary first step. Sharing of innovations and
experiments and best practices is an important part of
this effort.

Rajesh Tandon is the President of PRIA. The above
paper was presented on behalf of IFCB for the
INTERACTION FORUM meeting during April 17-18,
2000 at Washington D.C. The full-length paper is
available with PRIA.
Asia Pacific Regional Conference of the International Forum on Capacity Building (IFCB)

The International Forum on Capacity Building (IFCB) was formed in May 1997 to promote dialogue among donor agencies, Southern NGOs (SNGOs) and Northern NGOs (NNGOs) on promising approaches to or best practice in capacity building of SNGOs. Since then it has become a multi-stakeholder forum of the three sectors focused on building the capacity of SNGOs to address issues of poverty, marginalisation, democratisation, civil society strengthening, human rights and sustainable development.

The conference from October 11 to 13, 2000 held at Manila, Philippines came on the heels of a series of national level multi-stakeholder dialogues in Asia and the Pacific as well as NGO and donor studies on capacity building. Six persons from amongst PRIA and its partner NCORSOs (National Regional Support Organisations) attended this conference. The conference was particularly devoted to:

1) Sharing lessons from case exemplars of the capacity building initiatives of coalitions, alliances and networks;

2) Sharing the results of national level multi-stakeholder dialogues;

3) Evaluating current donor policy and practice regarding SNGO capacity building; and

4) Drawing up action plans for SNGO capacity building.

The IFCB has identified the following priorities for capacity building:

1. Leadership development

ii. Policy research, analysis and advocacy

iii. Strategic planning and management

iv. Project/programme implementation

v. Organisation development and renewal

vi. Building coalitions, alliances and networks, North-South partnership and inter-sectoral partnerships

vii. Information access, use and dissemination

viii. Resource mobilisation

So far, IFCB has drawn the following lessons:

a) The meaning of capacity building has yet to be coherently understood by the different actors. There are three aspects to capacity building:

- intellectual- which has to do with concepts, ideas and vision;
- institutional- which deals with how SNGOs organise their work; and
- material- which promotes the sustainability of the organisation

b) Capacity building is not a linear process, it is enormously difficult to monitor the impact of capacity building processes.

c) The context in which development NGOs operate can either enhance or inhibit capacity. Hence, it is important, for example, to improve government and donor policies.

d) Capacity building for NGOs can not be viewed in isolation of local communities, NNGOs and donors. The capacities of those we partner with are just as important as our own capacities as an organisation.

The following action plan was drawn up at the end of the deliberations of the conference.
### ADDRESSING CAPACITY BUILDING NEEDS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of Capacity Building</th>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Consensus Points</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|                            | 1. Differences in perspective, interests, commitment, level of understanding, capacity building needs among stakeholders | • Respect for equity of stakes (requiring sensitivity to the stake of each partner) | • Build negotiation skills  
• Keeping/ ensure network structures are flexible  
• Get training in network management  
• Adopt narrowly defined goals |
|                            | 2. Lack of common/ coherent understanding of “capacity building” and “Northern NGOs” | • Dialogue and continued sharing of concepts                                      | • Continue debating/ discussing the concept of capacity building                                      |
| Financial sustainability    | 3. Dependence on external funding                                       | • Need to reduce such dependency and promote financial sustainability            | • Establish an endowment fund  
• Mobilise internal sources of funding  
• Brainstorm on innovative funding schemes                                                      |
| Information access, use and dissemination | 4. Lack of access to information and communication technology (ICT) by grassroots groups/local communities. | • Recognition of existing digital divide, while maximising use of ICTs       | • Make ICTs available to local communities (i.e., in terms of skills building and access to capital requirements) |

### IMPROVING MULTISTAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Consensus points</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Inadequate representation of grassroots interests/viewpoints in dialogue process</td>
<td>• Recognition of grassroots as the ultimate constituents</td>
<td>• Create mechanisms to involve the grassroots in processes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2. Differences in stakeholder perspectives; who decides on the terms of engagement among the stakeholders | • Continued dialogue  
• Accept differences, but set limits for accommodation of differences | • Continue listening to respective policies, plans and perspectives of stakeholder groups |
<p>| 3. Appropriateness of one-time national level dialogue vs. informal, regular/cyclical meetings | • Recognition that participation in such dialogues is part of a strategy, not an end in itself | • Continue processes and follow-up on action plans arising from the multistakeholder dialogues       |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Consensus points</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tension between development and advocacy roles of NGOs</td>
<td>• Development work and advocacy efforts linked by the same set of values</td>
<td>• Acknowledge diversity and value of roles of NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Unclear indicators for accountability of NGOs</td>
<td>• Need to recognize &quot;multiple accountabilities&quot; • Need to strengthen internal governance of NGOs (e.g., board processes to ensure participation of members/constituencies)</td>
<td>• Need to put people at the centre of accountability processes • Create/establish a mechanism to ensure adequate representation of grassroots views/concerns • Ensure that NGO members/constituencies are represented in all NGO board of directors processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Unfavourable policy environment for popular participation in local governance</td>
<td>• Need for multi-pronged action to promote an enabling policy and legal environment for people's participation in local governance processes</td>
<td>• Use donor influence with governments to promote a more enabling policy and legal environment for people's participation in local governance processes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above write-up is an excerpt from the conference report of the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference of the International Forum on Capacity Building held from 11-13th October 2000, ADB, Manila, Philippines.
PRJA - Initial Orientation of Newly Elected Representatives

Sangeeta Ukhade Singh

Following the Panchayat elections in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh, PRJA and its partners in these states launched a campaign titled: PRJA (Panchayat Prajinidhi Jagrukta Abhiyan) or Initial Orientation of Newly Elected Representatives. This article gives a brief outline of the rationale for conducting this campaign, its salient features, and the lessons drawn, which can be taken into account while undertaking similar campaigns in future.

Rationale for conducting PRJA - Why it was done

A substantial number of elected representatives in these states were first-time incumbents to these posts, and were stepping into the public arena for the first time. They were assuming new roles and responsibilities as leaders in their respective communities. To enable them to discharge their responsibilities more effectively, they needed capacity enhancement, in terms of building their confidence, leadership, knowledge and skills. This was particularly true in the case of women, tribal and dalits who had hitherto been relegated to the periphery, where positions of political leadership were concerned.

In all the states mentioned above, there was a distinct gap between the elections and the institutional delivery of capacity building. In some states such as Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the Governments did initiate a process to train newly elected representatives on a large scale, but after the orientation of master trainers, the actual delivery of capacity-building inputs to the panchayat functionaries did not take place.

Given this backdrop, and perceiving the urgent need for quick, proximate orientation for newly elected members, PRJA and its partners in these states took up the challenge in a campaign mode.

The objective of the PRJA was to create awareness among the elected representatives on the following:

- Role and responsibilities of elected representatives as people's representatives rather than agent of block and district administration.

Campaign strategy: How it was done

The need of the hour was to attempt maximum coverage, despite low resource availability. It was decided to deliver the orientation in a campaign mode. To facilitate easy accessibility, the training was conducted at the cluster level (one cluster comprising of 4-6 villages each) rather than at the block or district level. Primarily, the trainings were designed to be non-residential and of one-day duration, though in some states, they did conduct residential training for women. Separate orientations were held for women and dalits, taking into account their specific capacity building needs. Appropriate materials were designed and participatory methods were employed to impart the training, so as to encourage participants to articulate their doubts, queries, and participate in discussions.

In the course of the campaign, attempts were also made to forge linkages and involve other actors as well, such as:

- BDOs and district administration
- The other three tiers of PRI
- Local organisations/CBOs for facilitation.

The purpose of engaging the above actors was to build better rapport between government officials and elected representatives, sensitise both government officials and CBOs to participatory methodologies, and ensure their continued support to the elected representatives in future. This would possibly later help to make the campaign sustainable beyond its time-frame. These orientations also helped to promote group solidarity and promote lateral linkages between villages.

In Madhya Pradesh, an innovative effort of bringing together present and ex-elected members was made, through a consultation meet. The objective of the meet was to build good relationship between the two, and also learn from ex-elected members' experiences.

Prior to the orientation, a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) was conducted which took into account factors like: local language, custom, gender division, strengths of the CBOs, local resource availability, and other...
location-specific information. The TNA also helped to gauge the training needs of the participants, which helped to design simple, relevant and appropriate learning material. The material designed ranged from manuals for trainers, to simplified versions of State Acts, informative booklets with pictures and illustrations, games and newsletters.

Resource persons associated with PRIA were taken from varied sectors to encompass plurality of experiences. They were -

- From all the tiers of Panchayats - Ex as well as present Pradhans/ Sarpanches, Zilla Parishad Members, Panchayat Samiti members, Gram Sachivs.
- Block administration such as Retired Block Education Officers having training experience.
- Retired teachers having training experiences
- NGO Personnel
- District administration such as District and Development Officers.

Lessons Learnt

- Incorporating Seasonality - We need to take into account seasonality, since women’s roles and burden (region-specific) changes or increases according to seasons.
- Convergence of resources - State Institutions like the State Institutes of Rural Development (SIRDs) and Panchayat Training Institutes have resources like human power and infrastructure. Other institutions like bilateral and multilateral institutions have trained facilitators and resources for sector specific projects like WATSAN, Watershed in Panchayats, etc. There is a need to converge these resources to use in Capacity building interventions for elected members.

- Engaging the Academia - There is a need to engage proactively with academia (e.g. Association of Schools of Social Work in India, Indira Gandhi National Open University, etc.) to offer structured opportunities for students to engage in capacity building interventions. Although there is a positive mindset for this approach of individuals in academia, the challenge lies in incorporating it institutionally as an ongoing endeavour by this sector.

- Horizontal Networking - There is a considerable body of knowledge, expertise and skills existing in the field of capacity building endeavours of elected members all over India. There is a constant need to share the learning from these among facilitators at the inter-district, inter-state, National and inter-regional level. The challenge lies in how to structure this body of knowledge for wider sharing of the learnings on Capacity building on PRIs.

Sangeeta Ukhade Singh is working with the Centre for Local Self-governance, PRIA

Orientation of Newly Elected Presentatives
Parallel Bodies and Panchayati Raj Institutions

Even after seven years of passing of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, PRIs are still striving to avail of the opportunity provided to them, to emerge as the loci for decentralized government at the local level. In recent times, a concern has being raised and a debate generated regarding the setting up of parallel institutions in various states of the country, that hold sway over the panchayats, thus encroaching on their constitutional status. On the surface, these bodies which are extra-constitutional, find their abode for existence in the technical incompetence of PRIs, for convergence of programmes and promoting efficiency, etc. In effect however, they signal the back-door entry of bureaucrats into PRI functioning, and insidiously usurp the powers and functions of PRIs.

Though most of these bodies ensure the inclusion of the Sarpanch and sometimes other elected representatives in their committees, their presence is merely of token value. More significantly, most of the parallel institutions are totally indifferent to the representation of women and other marginalised communities and by their very nature, preclude the Gram Sabha from participating in the decision-making process. Though the reluctance often demonstrated by the higher rungs of government to concede powers to their counterparts in rural areas is an established fact, the subterfuge with which they trespass the jurisdiction of the panchayats, systematically impairs the intent of the Constitution.

Parallel Gram Sarkars and village development committees functioning as local self governments in Madhya Pradesh and Haryana respectively have come to the notice of the Rural Development Ministry. Stating that Panchayat is a legal entity under the Constitution, the Union Rural Development Minister said that the Ministry was presently studying complaints regarding the setting up of these parallel bodies to the Panchayats. Ironically however, the Centre has been party to the above process. Even while censuring the states for constituting parallel bodies that tend to undermine panchayats, the Centre is guilty of the same in view of the continuing existence of DRDAs. It is through the DRDAs that the Centre continues to route funding to the PRIs.

Since most of these bodies were set up with the apparent intention of complementing the efforts of panchayats in the effective discharge of their functions, PRIA and its network of partners decided to undertake a study of some of these institutions, to explore how they were complementing, substituting or appropriating the functioning of panchayats. The parallel institutions taken up for study in seven states, were the following: Janmabhoomi in Andhra Pradesh, Vigilance Committee in Himachal Pradesh, Expert Committees in Kerala, Gram Vikas Samiti in Haryana, Joint Forest Management in Gujarat, Water User Groups in...
Rajasthan and Water User Associations in Uttar Pradesh. The present bulletin gives an overview of the issue in question, i.e., parallel bodies and Panchayati Raj Institutions. Together with this, it presents a gist of the structure, functions and findings of these studies, pertaining to parallel bodies constituted in each of the above-mentioned states. The detailed studies on parallel bodies in different states are available with PRIA. The findings of these studies largely substantiate the apprehension that these parallel institutions are actually over-riding and threatening the autonomy of the panchayats as well as democratic processes.

The answer to the lacunae in the capacities of panchayats does not lie in merely constituting parallel bodies (whose existence and lifespan depend on the party in power, project period or donor interests) but in building capacities of panchayat representatives and the Gram Sabha to enable them in the effective discharge of their responsibilities. Before the establishment of parallel bodies becomes a growing trend with other states following suit and thus making a mere farce of the Constitutional provisions, there is an urgent need to nip them in the bud.

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### Letters and Contribution

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

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### The Bulletin

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Development functionaries working in the field of strengthening Panchayati Raj have been highlighting concerns over the emergence of bodies functioning parallel to PRIs and which are constituted by the Central and State governments. Such bodies were often found to be posing serious threats to the effective functioning of local governance institutions. The issue was widely discussed in the last review and planning meeting of PRIA and partners held in January 2001, convened by PRIA. The result of the deliberations was that a study on the issue of parallel bodies strengthening or undermining the role and functions of Panchayati Raj Institutions was undertaken in 7 states - Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Haryana, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

The passage of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, which came into force on 24th April 1993, provided a new and institutional framework, through the mandatory establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), for ensuring active and sustainable people’s participation. It provided the much-needed opportunity for the local people to be an integral part of the planning and development process of their village. This decentralization of powers, it is hoped, would promote (a) efficiency, as the decision makers are local people who know about the local conditions and hence can bring about optimum utilisation of funds (b) accountability, as the decision makers who live in the same locality are under close scrutiny by the villagers, and (c) sustainability, as panchayats and gram sabhas are constitutionally mandated bodies and are here to stay, regular elections and flow of funds are assured, etc.

It is assumed that this participation through local self-governing institutions would go beyond enhancing project effectiveness to empowering local people and further building units of local self-governments through which people can engage in democratic decision making which gets represented at higher levels of government. Moreover, the voice of the hitherto voiceless and marginalised people will reflect in the development plan. To this end several subjects as listed in the Eleventh schedule accompanying the Constitutional Amendment Act, were brought under the ambit of PRIs. It includes a whole range (29 items) of works of local significance ranging from agriculture, drinking water, land and water conservation, minor minerals, minor forest produce, poverty alleviation programmes, family welfare, education, maintenance of community assets, etc.

The concerns highlighted in the functioning of parallel bodies were that they represented processes external to the constitutionally mandated role of panchayats and enabled bureaucracies to override democratically elected representatives, the trespassing of such bodies on the existing functions expected of panchayats vis-a-vis administrative and financial functions etc.

It was in this background that PRIA initiated a study in 7 states on the issue of parallel bodies strengthening/undermining the role and functions of Panchayati Raj Institutions. The parallel bodies in question taken up for study in each state were: Janmabhoomi in Andhra Pradesh, Joint Forest Management in Gujarat, Gram Vikas Samiti in Haryana, Vigilance Committee in Himachal Pradesh, Expert Committees in Kerala, Water User Groups in Rajasthan and Water User Associations in Uttar Pradesh. The objectives were to describe and analyse the emergence and subsequent functioning
of parallel bodies and to explore whether these bodies strengthen, overlap, duplicate or replace/substitute the functioning of PRIs.

On the whole, the study has shown that parallel bodies have been formed for one or more of the following functions - ensuring user/beneficiary participation, provision of technical expertise, convergence of programmes and promoting/ensuring efficiency. One might then wonder, what are the roles/functions of PRIs.

The case of Janma Bhoomi in Andhra Pradesh is a case in point. All the local issues related to the functioning of local institutions and implementation of government schemes are brought under the purview of PRIs. More interestingly, there are now two types of gram sabhas functioning in Andhra Pradesh. One is the statutory gram sabha as mandated by the Central Act and the other is the gram sabha conducted by the state government for Janmabhoomi. Where do the people participate? Naturally the promises of Janmabhoomi and the presence of officials in the programme lure them. Participation hence has been higher in JB gram sabha.

It is seen that where parallel bodies have been formed, the creators tend to maintain the link of parallel bodies to PRIs through member representation of sarpanch/elected member in the parallel body. It is obvious that in such cases the sarpanch/elected member have very little say in the management and decision making process of the parallel body. Moreover, the advantages of having women and other marginalised sections as specified in the Panchayati raj amendment, is completely lost in the composition of parallel body. Their voices again go unheard in the planning and development process of their village.

It also appears that through parallel bodies, the respective state governments are trying to bring bureaucracy and officialdom back into the local governance mechanism. This makes it easier for the casteist and interest groups to take control over the affairs of the village, since it is easier for them to deal with the bureaucrats than with the elected local members. In many states the DRDAs are functioning independently of PRIs. In Madhya Pradesh, the District Government consisting of a minister from the state government, district collector, MPs, MLAs from the area and the Zilla panchayat representatives, have been conferred with wide powers. By forming such a non-elected district government, the status of Zilla Parishads has been reduced and is only second to the district government.

On the one hand, elected members, civil society etc., are crying hoarse for want of adequate powers at the local level. While on the other hand, the state governments who have to ultimately devolve powers, seems to be promoting structures which tend to take away or enable them to have a major stake in whatever little powers that were devolved to panchayats. Madhya Pradesh presently is experimenting with direct democracy by giving all powers to the gram sabha. In this new scenario, the three tier panchayat system has lost its delegated responsibilities. Concerns have already been raised that the quorum of gram sabhas in the new mechanism of gram swaraj is not being met. So much for strengthening PRIs!!

On the finance side, one finds that most parallel bodies are in a better financial position than panchayats. This is in a situation where panchayats are to deal more with tied funds and have less of own resources. It is well above time that the schemes of MPLAD and MLALAD are scrapped. Schemes which come under these local area development scheme in fact, come under the purview of panchayats and municipalities. The total amount under the MPLAD scheme for an MP comes to Rs.2 crores. Concerns have been raised that these funds are being misused or have
remained unutilised. The total amount of money, Rs.2835.30 crores released during 1993-97 under MPLADS and also the money under other such central schemes should have gone to PRIs as untied funds.

There is also a need to review the provisions of various Acts which have lost significance after the introduction of the 73rd Amendment. Examples pertain to JFM and Watershed Associations. It is true that these programmes have also been promoting beneficiary participation and decentralised planning. By transferring some of these provisions like control over minor forest produce etc. to PRIs, a broader purpose was hoped to be realised. For example, the idea of decentralisation in most earlier programmes was to enable communities to meet their basic needs. On the other hand, decentralisation through panchayats is expected to bring about local autonomy and self-sufficiency in villages. Moreover, the benefits cater to a wider community.

Considering the number of parallel bodies and their operation in the areas demarcated to panchayats, it is little wonder that the functioning of Panchayati Raj institutions have not yet stabilised or been effective even after seven years of functioning. It is quite disheartening to note that such forces are working directly or indirectly against the smooth working of the panchayats and that too promoted by the respective governments in the name of realising Gram Swaraj. This is a strong reflection of the persistent reluctance on the part of governments to part with their powers by devolving them to panchayats.

It is true that the present functioning of panchayats is not devoid of gaps. PRI members in general lack the capacity and confidence to prepare technical and feasible plans. However, the next automatic solution to the problem does not lie in the creation of new structures. It should not be forgotten that new structures bring with it a new set of problems and gaps, which needs to be addressed. What is needed is a critical analysis of the situation, which has led to the gaps in the Panchayati Raj system. Keeping with the spirit of the Constitutional amendment Act, the state government should then address the gaps and strengthen the system within the framework of PRIs. Energies have to be channelized through the Panchayats.

Experiences in state government functioning have shown that on the whole it is the will of the ruling government and especially the chief minister, which is reflected in state policies. There are people charged in various cases holding important portfolios both at the central and state levels. Still the governance and functioning of the state and union goes on. This is not to say that corruption is justified. It is only to affirm the fact that this how the whole system works in our country. Therefore, condemning the functioning of panchayats in the name of sarpanch rule, corruption, inefficiency etc., and creating parallel structures to counter this does not provide a reasonable answer. Moreover, the issue here is not that of corruption or sarpanch rule. These are only problems within the system which are bound to happen and which needs to be tackled. At the same time, addressing the problems does not mean doing away with or weakening the very system itself, which is mandated by the constitution.

It is time to let go off the control over panchayats by higher levels of government and let the local self governing units make their own decisions on aspects/issues that affect their day to day lives. Let the PRIs be governments by their own rights. The need of the hour is (1) for the state government to devolve adequate functions, functionaries and finances to the panchayats so as to enable them to function as autonomous and self governing institutions, (2) strengthening of gram sabha as there is no greater fora for a social audit than the gram sabha.

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Panchayati Raj Institutions and Janmabhoomi in Andhra Pradesh

Anil Vaddiraju

In AP, the government of TDF has created numerous Associations or Groups in rural areas. These are Water Users Associations (WUAs), Watershed Associations (WSAs), Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Parents and Teachers Associations (P&TA), Vana Samraksha Samitis (VSS) (Forest Protection Committees) and CMEY (Chief Minister's Empowerment of Youth) groups. But in addition to these, there is a massive programme called Janmabhoomi (literally meaning 'land of birth'), which is undermining the PRIs. All the bodies listed above also erode the effectiveness of the PRIs, however none of them encompasses the village/Gram Panchayat (GP) as a whole, which Janmabhoomi (JB) does. In this write-up, we thus concentrate on JB, which is a programme that is unique to AP.

Purpose and Functions of the body
The purpose of setting up JB was social mobilization for rural development. The AP government, prior to launching JB, has initiated a programme called PVP (Prajala Vaddaku Palana) in November 1995 and a programme called Slamadanam in 1996. Prajala Vaddaku Palana means Sarkar Aapke Dwar or 'Government at your doorstep' and Slamadanam means voluntary contribution of labour. According to the official version, the government has reviewed the above two programmes and after considering the popular response to these programmes, they wanted both the programmes to be rolled into a single one. The programme that emerged out of this effort, is the Janmabhoomi programme. JB was launched in 1997 January (Post-73rd amendment PRI elections were held in June 1995).

Functions of JB
- To mobilize masses in GP/ Village to take

note of needs and make efforts to fulfill them. Self-help is a major principle behind JB; here comes the role of Slamadanam.
- To make possible, interaction between (on one side) the government officials, political executives, line departments and (on the other side) the local people.
- To make possible, the direct accountability of the administration to the people.
- To make the government and the process of administration transparent to the people.
- To mobilize sections of society (college students, teachers, NCC Cadets, NSS Volunteers) other than local people, to go to rural areas and contribute to the process of rural development under the aegis of the JB programme.

Structure of JB Programme
The JB programme operates through a structure, which is as mentioned below:
- 28,245 villages in the state are divided into 67,505 'Habitations'. Habitation is the basic unit of the programme.
- There are 1,100 nodal officers to run the programme in 1125 mandals in 23 districts. These operate at the mandal (block) level.
- There are 1,249 supervisory teams above the nodal officers.
- JB operates through quarterly rounds, with fixed schedules
- Various department officials and people's representatives attend each round of JB
- Action taken report is submitted after each round.

The institutional arrangements for JB are supposed to be as follows:
- Gram Sabha, consisting of all adult voting population in a habitation, is supposed to be the basic unit.
- Habitation Level Committee (HLC) or 'People's Council' is supposed to be the institution for JB at the habitation level, consisting of group leaders of the self-help
groups, NGO members, representatives from the weaker sections and women. The Sarpanch is supposed to be the chairperson of this committee.

- A Mandal level nodal team is to be headed by a nodal officer.
- The District Level Committee is to be headed by the District Collector.
- The State Level Committee is to be headed by the Chief Minister.
- At the HLC level, a "JB Volunteers' team" and "Social animators" are supposed to support the HLC in implementing JB.

Ground reality
Each habitation is supposed to be constituted for every 2000 people, but in practice the situation is different. The Habitation Level Committee (HLC) is comprised of the Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat (as the Chairperson of the Committee), and various other members, including the ward member (Panch) of the habitation concerned and group leaders of other CBOs.

It is clear from the above structure of the HLC, that JB envisages the participation of the Sarpanch and the ward member (Panch) in whose habitation the JB programme is carried out. But in reality, the participation of the Sarpanch and the ward member is only nominal and the entire show is carried on by the officials and the political executive who derive their constituency from beyond a particular habitation or village.

Talking about the involvement of the Sarpanches, Mr. Timpati Reddy, Sarpanch of Maheshwaram Village said: "The Sarpanch sits in the JB Gram Sabha (or habitation sabha) like a doll and the entire show is run by the nodal officer", and he continued, "In JB, the Gram Sabha officials sanction government schemes to whosoever the local MLA wants them to sanction. There are instances when the local MLA (TDP) openly said that he gives preference to his own party people for sanction of the schemes." The official story is different; the officials support the programme to the hilt.

In both the villages - Maheshwaram (Narsampet district) and Laknepally (Warangal district) - where the fieldwork was conducted, the GP representatives felt that they were ignored and sidelined while the JB Gram Sabha was on.

Local CBOs contacted during the field visit were of a different opinion. The members of two different CBOs in two villages (Ambedkar Yuva Jana Sangham & Vijwala Yuvajana Sangham) said that Dalits are particularly apathetic towards JB, since needs in Dalit bastis are never met, in JB Gram Sabhas (JBGs). Moreover, JBGs frequently dilutes the concept and seriousness of the Gram Sabha itself. People in villages, and dalits in particular, appear to take the programme as a casual and routine matter.

Finances
The finances of the JB programme are derived from the state and central government funds. There is a major criticism that funds meant for central government schemes are diverted towards the JB programme. But the government anywhere, does not state the exact situation of funds. The data is kept confidential. The officials at the State Secretariat level who have all the information about the funds, are notorious for not parting with information.

Undermining the role of PRIs
The JB programme undermines the PRIs in the following manner:

Functions
The JB programme takes up all the local issues related to the functioning of local institutions and implementation of government schemes into its purview and tries to substitute the GP. In the name of direct interface between people and administration the entire institutional relevance of PRIs is undermined.

Evaluating the JB programme, S.P. Jain and Vatsala Ranji of NIRD say, "The (JB) programme by bypassing the PRIs, already in existence, except for the token inclusion
of Sarpanches at various levels/activities, contributes to the situation. It excludes the PRIs completely in the exercise of "Transparency and Accountability" envisaged for other government officials. The nodal officials have been accorded great importance and play a vital role in decision making," and "This nodal team is also burdened with too many 'gram sabha' meetings making them 'routine' acts, performed very perfunctorily without the necessary enthusiasm."

In practice, the habitation level GS is not organized population-wise, but hamlet-wise. This is because JB takes place every three months. Habitation level GSs also take place every three months. It is precisely because convening of GSs is so frequent, that village people do not attend gram panchayat gram sabhas. Increasingly, JBHGS (JB Habitation level GS) is attended by less and less people. In Maheshwaram village for e.g., the Sarpanch informed that of late, JBHGS is attended by as meagre a number of people as 20, who mainly are prospective beneficiaries.

**Functionaries**
The HLC of JB consists of the Sarpanch, the concerned ward member and the heads of 6 other CBOs created by the government. In actual functioning, some of the CBOs receive as much funds, if not more, from the government. Therefore the presence of functionaries of CBOs in the HLC tips the balance towards the parallel body.

**Finance**
In the JB programme, all the works decided upon by HLCGS are to be carried out partly through people's contribution, and partly through government funds (The ratios are 30:70, 50:50 and 0:100 depending on the nature of work, respectively.) All the schemes meant to be implemented by PRIs are implemented via JBHGS. The PRIs are sidelined in the process. Another important fact is also that some of these bodies eg. WUA which are part of HLC have more or at least as many funds as the GP; therefore, they act as parallel sources of power and patronage. The situation of conflict between GP and parallel bodies arises if the people heading them belong to different political parties, ideologies and castes.

Had the functions and finances given to these bodies been given to PRIs or more specifically GPs, they would have emerged much stronger institutions of local governance. Often a counterpoint made is that GPs are prone to corruption and therefore multiple institutions (or parallel bodies) are better. Now the situation in AP is such, that corruption has crept even into these parallel bodies. There is a lot of gap between intention and practice. To give two examples:

- Contractors are prohibited in JB works but in practice contractors are pervasive;
- The elections to parallel bodies too have become highly political and even violent. Since money is pumped into parallel bodies from such institutions as World Bank and NABARD, contestation for posts of parallel bodies is also getting intensified.

**Consequences of Parallel Bodies**
Institutional Process: The JB programme is operating through all other parallel bodies and trying to strengthen them. In the process, the constitutional primacy of PRIs is being undermined. Some of these parallel bodies are statutory (WUA, P & TA, VSS) and some are not (WSA, CMEY, SHGs). JB itself is not a statutory programme. Therefore the institutional reality at the GP level is much more complex today than earlier. Now the question is the link or relationship between this multiplicity of local bodies, JB Programme and PRIs. The government at present emphasizes the link between JB and six other bodies. At the same time, the JB programme is a centralized programme at the state level. Therefore these alternative structures in effect centralize power and decision making at the state level. Whereas a genuine devolution of functions,
functionaries and finances to PRIs would have truly strengthened the GPs and local government, the JB programme strongly has a tendency to centralize power in terms of decision-making, monitoring and evaluation at the CM's office. This happens in a highly personal manner. By ignoring PRIs which are permanent constitutional bodies and by developing all these transitory institutions, JB does more harm than good to institutional development.

Delivery of Services
JB has been much acclaimed for its interface between officials and people. But increasingly, those processes are becoming routine matters. Secondly, the promises made in different rounds of JB are not being met, and therefore JB is losing its credibility and grassroots people are also getting disillusioned with it. As a result, they are sometimes even boycotting JB collectively. The question of efficient delivery of services remains a controversial aspect of JB and there is no convincing evidence to the effect that JBHGS is doing a better job than what a mobilized GP would not have done.

Linkages to other Institutions
The question of linkages between JB and GP and other CBOs and GP can be discussed both in terms of horizontal and vertical linkages. Firstly, so far as the horizontal relationship between GP and other CBOs goes, there is a total lack of coordination between the six varieties of CBOs and the GP. If at all there is coordination or cooperation between GP and CBOs (horizontally), it is more incidental and exceptional. In both the villages visited, Sarpanches expressed this view and said that the CBOs operate entirely independently.

Vertically, while GP has established linkages with MP (Mandal Parishad) & ZP (Zilla Parishad), the CBOs have no relation with them and operate entirely through line departments.

Conclusion
- The multiple institutions at the GP level make the situation complex.
- Panchayats are deprived of the knowledge & information of what is going on in these institutions.
- There is no coordination between GP & CBOs.
- JBHGS is dominated by CBO heads and GP has no primacy in it.
- WUA, P & TA, VSS etc., these are statutory bodies and are going to last even if the government falls. i.e., they would last till the statute itself is changed.
- JB programme does not forge any working relation between the GP and the CBOs.

JB has been developed as an approach to rural development in which social mobilization is being attempted at the expense of PRI institutions and at the expense of institutional development. If the government changes, JB will be gone too. But by creating so many CBOs, JB has by design and intent contributed to the weakening of PRIs.

In this context, there are two considerations for advocacy. So far as the PRIs go:
- To assert the constitutional primacy of PRIs. This is urgently needed.
- To do advocacy, mobilization of public opinion etc. to make PRIs -GPs & MPs-umbrella bodies over all these CBOs.

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Vigilance Committee Affecting the Role of Gram Panchayat in Himachal Pradesh

Ajaya Mahapatra

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act paved the way for democratic decentralisation at the grassroots (i.e. at the village, block and district levels) and enabled PRIs to function as institutions of local self-governance. Moreover, the Gram Panchayats are also entrusted the functions of preparing the plans and implementation of schemes and programmes for economic development and social justice. However, in Himachal Pradesh, it has been found that there are various committees which are functioning parallel to the Gram Panchayat, such as Watershed Committee, Vigilance Committee, Education Committee and Joint Forest Committee. This write-up primarily focuses on the functioning of the Vigilance Committee (VC) and how far it is affecting the functioning of the gram panchayat.

Purpose and Structure of the VC
As per the Notification No.1-18/97-XEN(RD), to encourage people’s participation in the process of development at the village level, and also to ensure speedy execution of works with quality control, the Department of Rural Development, Government of HP introduced the system of social audit by constituting a Vigilance Committee at the panchayat level.

According to the provisions after the general election of the panchayat, the Gram Sabha in its first general meeting forms one or more Vigilance Committee(s) consisting of not less than five persons comprising of one reputed member from each constituency of the Gram Panchayat, who are not members of the Gram Panchayat. The Gram Sabha shall form not more than two Vigilance Committees, if there is no consensus amongst the members of Gram Sabha regarding formation of a single Vigilance Committee.

The members of the VC(s) shall by consensus elect a Chairperson among themselves. The Vigilance Committee(s) shall meet at least four times in each year. The term of the Committee(s) is of two and a half years. After the expiry of the term, the Gram Sabha, in its general meeting, again forms one or two vigilance committees for the remaining term.

Functions of Vigilance Committee
The functions of the VC are to supervise the Gram Panchayat works, schemes and other activities. It shall place its reports concerning any office bearer of the panchayat, besides other matters relating to schemes and other activities of the panchayat before the Gram Sabha in its general meeting. A copy of the said report shall be sent to the Block Development Officer for such action as s/he may deem fit. After examining the report sent by the VC, the Block Development Officer shall initiate immediate action as may be required and shall inform the Vigilance Committee in this regard. In case the VC is not satisfied with the action taken by the Block Development Officer, or the Block Development Officer does not take/initiate action within 30 days from the receipt of the report as the case may be, the Vigilance Committee may report the matter to the Deputy Commissioner and thereafter to the Director for necessary and immediate action.

The VC is empowered to exercise supervision over schemes/works costing up to Rs.50,000/- being executed by Gram Panchayats and is responsible to conduct the Social Audit in respect of the following aspects
- Whether the execution of work(s) is being done in accordance with the approved estimates and desired technical standards.
- Whether the quality of work executed is upto the mark.
**The Social Audit**

The Social Audit by the Vigilance Committee will be completed within two months of completion of the work. It shall prepare a summary report every month about the work inspected by the Committee to the Gram Panchayat in accordance with the format. After examining the report sent by the Vigilance Committee, the panchayat shall forward the case for release of next instalment/balance payment to the BDO in case the work has to be reported as satisfactory. In case the Committee has made any observation regarding defects or execution problems, the Gram Panchayat shall first get the defects removed. On receipt of the report about removal of defects, the committee shall inspect the work again and submit its report to the Gram Panchayat. The committee may consider the report of the Committee and submit the case to the BDO for release of payment. The work should be considered as completed after the full amount released has been issued by the Gram Panchayat.

**The Ground Reality**

**Functions**

The study reveals that in hardly any of the Gram Panchayats, the Vigilance Committee was formed immediately after the 1995 PRI election. As per the opinion of Gram Sabha members, it has been found that most of them were not aware of the legal provisions because of the changes made in the State PR Act which was amended in 1994. Secondly, there were no clear guidelines about the composition, role, and functions of the Vigilance Committee as per the PR Act.

In 1998, when the Notification related to Social Audit System at the Gram Panchayat level was made by the state government, the Pradhans strongly resisted the formation of Vigilance Committees and the Notification made thereof. As most of the opposition members would become members of the VC, they would try to put hurdles in the smooth functioning of the Panchayat.

If we analyse the functioning of the VC, the study reveals that the Vigilance Committee is acting as a parallel body to the Gram Panchayat due to the following reasons:

- There is a lot of difference between existing rates and actual rates of the state government for any construction work and the Panchayat makes adjustments in the muster rolls, in order to make the actual payments to the mason and labour. This is almost known to all the government officials; however, the VC may object and the case may go to the court or the Block and district administration. Legal action could be taken against them, and the work of the Gram Panchayat would thus be affected. In some cases, in spite of the issues raised by the VC regarding the same, the Panchayat tried to convince the Gram Sabha members and got their approval in the Gram Sabha meetings. However, in most of the cases, the nexus between the VC and vested interests within the Gram Panchayat, demotivated the Gram Sabha members by stating that the Gram Panchayat had misutilised the fund.

- The functions of the VC are highly politicised. In spite of facilitating in the process of development in the Gram Panchayat and bridging the gap between Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat, they consider themselves as a superior body to the Gram Panchayat, to find out their mistakes/loopholes in functioning. Most of the time they pose questions to the Gram Panchayats as if GPs are accountable to the VC, rather than to the Gram Sabha. On the other hand, neither the Panchayati Raj Act nor the Rule talks about the accountability of the VCs.

- It is also evident from some cases, that due to lack of technical competencies among the members, the VC was not able to make proper assessment of the work. The work was delayed, as the utilisation...
certificate was not made available in time by the VC.

- In some cases, in order to get their (Gram Panchayat) work done in time, the Pradhans bribed the Chairperson of the VC to get the utilisation certificate. The whole power lies with the Chairperson, therefore the concept of the VC is getting defeated.

- The notification of the State Government pertaining to the Social Audit system, indicates that all the work and expenditure details will be open for scrutiny by the VC. The VC is empowered to inspect the work(s), any documents/records and also to record statements of any person connected with the works, if necessary, at different stages of execution. In a sense, VC is a supervisory body over the Gram Panchayat, which has constitutional entity. It is not only undermining the role of Gram Panchayat but also the role of Gram Sabha because Gram Sabha has to play the role of social audit. Thus, necessary steps should be taken to strengthen the Gram Sabha and not to form a VC which is again a representative body.

- As per the amendment made in the State PR Act, 2000, there shall be four Gram Sabha meetings in a year and moreover, there would be two ward sabhas in a year. It is possible for Gram Sabha to play this role and it should be empowered to do the social audit within the Gram Sabha meetings, so that every Gram Sabha member gets an opportunity to know about the work done by Gram Panchayat vis-à-vis the funds utilised thereof. If necessary, the ward sabhas could be mobilised for this purpose. It would not only help in enhancing participation of the Gram Sabha members in the affairs of the Gram Panchayat, but also make them aware about the work of the Gram Panchayat. The linkages between Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat would thus be strengthened.

**Functionaries of VC**

- The question arises as to whether the Vigilance Committee is a representative body. As per the provision, Gram Sabha shall form by consensus one VC, but when the Gram Sabha meetings are not taking place with the required quorum, who would select the members of the VC and how would the members from each constituency be selected? The study reveals that those who have political influence and/or lost the election, form the VC. Most of the Gram Sabha members were neither aware of the functioning of the VC nor the functionaries.

- In many cases, one of the defeated Pradhans who was affiliated to the political party or involved in petty politics at the GP level, was elected/selected as Chairperson of the Vigilance Committee. Moreover, either due to interpersonal rivalry or political compulsions, they settled their political or personal scores against the elected Pradhan. In order to gain political mileage by using their position, they tried to misinform the gram sabha members and demotivated them to paralyse the functioning of the Gram Panchayat.

**Finances of VC**

- There is no provision of finances for the Vigilance Committee, it is considered as a voluntary body of the Gram Sabha. However, the question is from where they are going to get the funds for their meeting expenses, maintenance of records, proceeding books, etc., but there is no financial provision under the State PR Act or Rule for the VC.

- The study reveals that VCs are also getting funds from the Block administration, to implement various development activities without the knowledge of the Gram Panchayat. This is due to the political connections as well as better relationship with the block officials.

In Mand Gram Panchayat in Bajjnath Block, Kangra district, one of the members of the Vigilance Committee got a grant of Rs. 1.5 lakhs from the Block office under the MLA grant for construction activities without giving information to the panchayat. A large amount of the fund had been squandered by the member. The Gram...
Panchayat got to know about this grant when one of the suppliers for cement complained, that he had not got his payment for delivering cement. When the matter was reported to the BDO, he was also silent on this matter. Then the Gram Panchayat asked the supplier to produce the bill for the same and found it to be true. However, the Panchayat tried to get information from the BDO regarding the total allocation, which was found to be Rs.1.5 lakhs. On paper, the work has been completed, but in reality no work was done by the member of the VC. In spite of several reminders to the BDO, no action has been taken against the errant member due to his political connections and linkages with block officials. Therefore, the purpose of the VC is defeated.

Consequences of functioning of Vigilance Committee

Based on the above experiences, it may thus be assumed that the Vigilance Committee is functioning as a parallel committee to the Gram Panchayat, which is affecting the functioning and also paralysing the development of the GP. Even the state government made the Gram Panchayat a suspicious body by keeping the VC as a supervising authority to assess the work of the Gram Panchayat which not only undermines the role and functions of the Gram Panchayat, as well as the Gram Sabha as constitutional bodies. Under these circumstances, how far can the Gram Panchayat act as an institution of local self governance and the Gram Sabha as a village assembly?

Conclusion

The Gram Panchayat as an institution of local self-governance, should be made accountable to the Gram Sabha rather than accountable to the Vigilance Committee, which has no constitutional sanctity. When the Gram Sabha is considered as the village assembly and as the direct democracy for citizen’s participation, the constitution of the VC is clearly undermining the efforts of both Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat. Therefore, we need to seriously rethink the function and very existence of VCs. In the context of the recent amendment made for ward sabha and Gram Sabha, the VC needs to be abolished in order to make these bodies the institutions for social audit system.

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Role and Performance of Expert Committees in Kerala

P.M. Dev

In Kerala a number of innovative attempts have been made in the area of transferring power to the people and enabling them to exercise it. These attempts find their culmination in the decentralised planning experiment labelled 'People's planning for the 9th Plan'. A criticism levelled against the methods adopted in the people's planning campaign is that the parallel/extra-constitutional committees and structures (Task Force, Block Level Expert Committee (BLEC), District Level Expert Committee (DLEC), State Level Expert Committee (SLEC) etc.) in reality are undermining the authority and performance of the Panchayats, which are the constitutional and democratically formed institutions. While the government, through the Planning Board, has totally denied this, many Panchayat members and functionaries have strongly endorsed the criticism. It is in this context that Sahaï did a rapid assessment of the issue.

The People's Plan
A number of parallel bodies like the Beneficiary Committee, Task Force, Block level Expert Committee, District Level Expert Committee, Co-ordination Committee, have been constituted by the government for facilitating the planning and implementation of projects. Among these, the bodies of critical/strategic importance are:

- Block Level Expert Committee
- District Level Expert Committee
- State Level Expert Committee

for processing the projects of the village, block and district Panchayats respectively.

The study focuses on Block Level Expert Committee (BLEC) and the District Level Expert Committee (DLEC), since our interactions have been mainly with the members and functionaries of the Gram and the Block panchayats.

Structure and functions of the Bodies

Block Level Expert Committee (BLEC)

This is an expert committee consisting of officials and non-officials constituted at the Block level by the district Collector in accordance with the guidelines and advice of the Planning Board. It is a rather large committee with as many as 80 members. The committee, for greater effectiveness is divided into 13 sub-committees for various subjects. Projects are first scrutinised by the sub-committees before they are reviewed and finally either given technical sanction or rejected by the General Body of the Committee.

The function of BLEC is two-fold: (1) Scrutinise the plan documents submitted by the Gram panchayats from the technical point of view and advise the District Planning Committee (DPC) of the feasibility of various project proposals; (2) Assist the Gram Panchayats to formulate projects in accordance with the technical requirements. The BLEC has to give their appraisal to DPC in the prescribed form. DPC will take the final decision. Funds are given to panchayats only for those projects approved by the DPC.

Thus it becomes clear that together with pointing out the technical problems to the DPC, the role of the BLEC is also that of facilitating the planning process at the Gram Panchayat level. BLEC’s accountability, therefore is both to the DPC and to the Panchayat.

DLEC and SLEC

These are expert committees parallel to BLEC constituted at the district and state levels to fulfill similar functions at their respective levels. All these bodies are comprised by volunteers consisting of retired officials, officials in service and non-official experts.
Ground Reality
The crucial point examined was whether these bodies, set up by the government, are a help to the panchayats in the area of planning and project formulation or a hindrance, undermining the powers and roles of the panchayats. Our study does not conclusively prove that these parallel bodies undermine the powers and roles of the panchayats. Experiences and opinions are sharply divided.

About 10 percent of the respondents have, in effect, said that the BLECs are functioning well and serving a very good purpose. Naturally, the members of the BLEC are among the supporters of this view. Even some members belonging to the opposition parties were keen to point out the merits of the parallel bodies. Conversely, there have been negative criticisms coming from the members of the ruling parties. In other words, experience in the matter of the functioning of the parallel bodies varies considerably across the panchayats.

The positive roles of these bodies have been identified as:

- They provide technical expertise, which the panchayats very badly lack
- They obviate the ordeal of going after the bureaucrats for getting sanction which can therefore be got very quickly.
- Bribery and corruption have come down
- There are very many sincere and committed persons on these committees

Many people (around 25 percent) have taken a middle position and said that the idea is very good, but there have been some practical problems (like delay), which can be remedied and the arrangement made more effective.

The majority (65 percent) had very negative feedback on the performance and relevance of the parallel bodies. They particularly had in mind, the functioning of the BLEC. The criticism ranges from pointing out flaws like delay in sanctioning projects to downright condemnation implying that these parallel bodies are usurping the authority of the Panchayats and undermining the very rationale of democratic decentralisation. Some of the criticism levelled against them is as follows:

- They are exerting extra-constitutional influence
- Political discrimination is practised
- The BLEC members never visit the site; they are ignorant about the local situation
- Expert committees do not have adequate expertise, but they exploit the technical ignorance of the elected members

Undermining of Panchayat by the Parallel Bodies

Functions
In theory, the functions of the panchayats and those of the parallel bodies are clearly distinct. The primary function of BLEC, for instance, is to provide advice to the District Planning Committee on the technical soundness of the projects submitted by the panchayats; secondly, they are to provide guidance to the panchayats to improve the formulation of the projects on technical matters. The role of the panchayats is to prepare plans, which is exercised through the Standing Committees, particularly that for Development. As the Standing Committees do not have the expertise to assess technical feasibility, the parallel expert committees are appointed. The moment the panchayat committees acquire the required expertise the parallel bodies will become redundant.

On the practical side however serious objections and fears have been expressed by a large section of the panchayat members, that these parallel committees are usurping the powers of the panchayats.

Functionaries
The members/functionaries of these parallel bodies are all volunteers. They are either officials (retired or in service), or voluntary activists. There is no question of their being transferred to the panchayats. One
possibility is that the present expert committees are dismantled and a panel of experts is made available at the panchayat level for dealing with matters related to the technical feasibility of projects.

Finance
There is not much finance involved in the parallel bodies, since these are voluntary bodies, which function from the Block Panchayat office. Hence the panchayats are not going to benefit much from devolution of finance from these bodies.

Impact of the Parallel Bodies
Institutionalised Process of Development
Under the guise of technical feasibility, the decision-making power of the Panchayats has been mortgaged to the parallel bodies, which follow a rather technocratic-bureaucratic approach and without adequate field study and consultation with the members of the local bodies, either make drastic alterations in the projects or reject them completely. This practice, in the view of the majority of the interviewees, is detrimental to the spirit and goal of participatory, sustainable local development.

It is an irony that with the introduction of the People’s Campaign with its numerous committees, the people’s fora like the Gram Sabha have lost their role in project planning and development. What is required is gradual empowerment/improvement in the capacity of the masses to take decisions on matters of vital importance to their existence.

Delivery of Services
The majority of the respondents have the view, that these bodies have been the bane of the panchayats, since they have been instrumental in the inordinate delay or rejection of projects. Often enough, projects were sanctioned with arbitrary cuts in budget, delay in sanctioning and sometimes even rejection, creating hindrances in the efficient delivery of services.

A fall out of this state of affairs is that the credibility and accountability of the panchayat concerned is eroded. On the other hand, the expert committees do not communicate with the panchayat, creating gaps in mutual transparency and trust. Neither the panchayats nor the people fully feel that the projects implemented in their areas are owned by them. The expert committees, not visiting the sites, nor consulting the people act like foreign agencies imposing their will on the people and their elected representatives.

Conclusion
Since the rationale for the creation of these parallel bodies is the incompetence of the local bodies in matters technical, the panchayats should be encouraged and enabled to develop their technical competence. Till such time that this is done, the following improvements are suggested:

- At least the Panchayat President should be allowed to be present at the BLEC meetings, so that he/she can effectively follow up the process

- The Standing Committees may be empowered to sanction minor projects/those that do not have serious technical implications.

- The panchayat members should be extra vigilant and vigorously follow up the proposals (It has been observed that wherever the concerned members were active and vigilant, the negative fall out of the parallel bodies has been minimal).

- There should be free and constant flow of communication between the parallel expert committees and the Panchayat Samithy. For instance, after the technical scrutiny there should be discussion between the members of the expert committee and the panchayat.

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Emergence of Gram Vikas Samiti in Haryana

Shalini Biflani

The 73rd Amendment Act was seen as a turning point vis-à-vis promoting people's initiative in planning for their own development. A full five-year term has elapsed since the enactment of the Act. Certain impediments were observed in the working of Panchayats. State Governments responded with measures to deal with the same. In the state of Haryana, Gram Vikas Samiti (GVS) has been introduced and this article attempts to understand its functioning and consequences vis-à-vis institutions of PRIs. The aim of this write-up is to understand people's perception about the Gram Vikas Samiti as set up by the State Government, whether Gram Samitis would support or undermine the powers and roles of the Gram Panchayats. Experiences and opinions in this regard are clearly divided. The understanding derived from the study is a projection, as Gram Vikas Samiti is yet to start its functioning.

Structure & Functions of Gram Vikas Samiti
The State Government of Haryana issued a Government Order regarding constitution of a Village Development Committee (Gram Vikas Samiti) in every Gram Panchayat (Panchayat at village level). Gram Vikas Samiti (GVS) is a body formed at the village level during Gram Sabha meetings held in November-December, 2000.

GVS is not a statutory body, yet it has been given certain functions (out of the State funds) that are expected to be performed by Gram Panchayats. The function is related to implementation and supervision of Construction related work. They are expected to perform this function out of three principle State funds - Haryana Rural Development Fund, Decentralised Planning, any other Schemes of the State Fund.

These funds were usually devolved to Gram Panchayats. The Centrally sponsored schemes and funds will as usual flow to Gram Panchayats.

The seven member committee comprises of four members from Gram Panchayats and the rest of the three from the Gram Sabha: the Sarpanch who is also the chairperson, Mahila Panch, Panch from the SC community, Panch from the OBCs, an ex-serviceeman and two other Gram sabha members.

Objective
While the Gram Funds are utilized by the Gram Panchayat for developmental works with technical assistance of the Panchayati Raj department, the funds released from Government agencies are primarily utilised by the Government agencies like Block Development and Panchayat Officers and Ex.En (Executive Engineer) etc.

Therefore, the State Government felt that the formation of GVS is vital to "ensure more & effective participation of the residents of GS in the execution of development works of the village". In addition, the GVS will ensure more transparency and efficient utilisation of funds. Besides, minimum official intervention in the village development was another reason to form GVS for each Gram Panchayat.

Funds: Core Fund Committee (Gram Vikas Nidhi)
Haryana Government will directly transfer all the funds related to HRDF, Decentralised Planning & other schemes of the State government to Gram Vikas Samiti through a cheque, which would be deposited in a bank under separate account either under a Nationalised Bank or Central Co-operative Bank.

The transfer would not require the sanction or approval that is otherwise necessary from Block Development & Panchayat Officer (BDPO).

Director, Panchayati Raj Dept., Mr. Hardeep Kumar explains that there will be no
interference in the working of the Panchayati Raj institutions and the seven member committee.

In the Memo No. PRA-I-2000/59505-23 Chandigarh dated 16-11-2000, utilisation of these funds will be the responsibility of a sub-committee of Gram Vikas Samiti. This sub-committee is called Gram Vikas Nidhi Fund (it is different from Gram Nidhi as stated in Section 40 of Haryana Panchayati Raj Act).

It also mentions that Gram Vikas Samiti will not be responsible for the works undertaken from the Gram Funds by the Gram Panchayats (GP) for which the existing mechanism will continue to operate.

Functionaries
Gram Vikas Samiti consists of four members from the existing Gram Panchayat and rest three from the Gram Sabha.

There are certain conditions attached to the membership for Gram Vikas Samiti. If there is more than one Panch belonging to the reserved category (i.e. SC/BC/Mahila Member), the Gram Sabha will decide which Panch, is to be a member of the said committee.

In case the Sarpanch belongs to any of the three reserved categories (SC/BC/Mahila), the Gram Sabha will nominate any member of the Gram Sabha to be a member of the said community in place of that particular category of Panch.

• For example, if the Sarpanch belongs to the SC community, the Gram Sabha will nominate any member of Gram Sabha (including SC category) to be a member of the committee, in place of SC Panch to be nominated.

• Similarly if a Sarpanch is a Mahila, any member of Gram Sabha (could be male or female) can be nominated as a member of the committee, in place of a Mahila Panch.

• There may be an instance where the Sarpanch belongs to the SC category and is also a Mahila. In that case, the Gram Sabha will nominate two members from the Gram Sabha (could be SC or not, or could be male or female) to be the members of the said committee in place of the Mahila and SC Panch.

• If there is no Panch belonging to any of the above said reserved categories, the Gram Sabha will nominate any member of the Gram Sabha to be the member of the said committee in lieu thereof. In addition to constituting a seven member committee, the State Government has made provision for a multipurpose worker (an assistant to GVS).

Mr. Hardeep Kumar (The Director, Panchayati Raj) has explained, “a multipurpose worker, appointed at Rs. 2500/- (may be paid by Panchayats/State Government) will be in charge of development. Earlier, the Gram Sachiv was made in charge of about 5 villages. His work has been assigned to this man, who will have only one Panchayat to look after, reducing the actual workload and ensuring quality service. He will be appointed in consultation with the Sarpanch and two panches.” Each Gram Sachiv will supervise the work of five multipurpose workers.

Undermining the Role of Panchayats
Functions
Functions devolved to Gram Vikas Samiti, including construction work, coincide with the village development functions that have been constitutionally entrusted to Gram Panchayats (Section 21 of the Haryana Panchayati Raj Act mentions the functions and duties of the Gram Panchayat. Also see Sections 37, 38 of Haryana Panchayati Raj Act, 1994).

No mechanism is specified for functional linkage or co-ordination between the two bodies. Gram Vikas Samiti is being increasingly viewed as a body that has encroached upon the functions and finances of the Gram Panchayat.

Let us also consider another aspect. Gram Vikas Samiti is entrusted with supervision and implementation of construction related
work. Linked with this aspect is the issue of mobilising people and seeking their opinions and priorities on construction work. This does not fall in the work domain of GVS. In that case, is the Gram Panchayat responsible for performing the same? If it is, then one needs to examine how the two bodies will co-ordinate the same. As of now, the mechanism for co-ordination between the two bodies has not been stated.

**Finances**

Initially, the HRDF and Decentralised Plan funds were available to Gram Panchayats. With the introduction of Gram Vikas Samiti, the funds will be transferred to the GVS and they have a fair amount of autonomy to utilise it in the manner found useful by them.

Besides, funds from other schemes of the State will be devolved to Gram Vikas Samiti. Major sources of State funds would flow to GVS without official intervention. This is a step towards strengthening this body. As GVS is the creation of the present State Government, the Government would make best attempts to further strengthen it. This could translate to promoting functioning of GVS with greater devolution of funds. Although Gram Panchayat is entitled to Central funds and Gram Fund, that is appreciable, but the funds devolved to Gram Vikas Samiti is sizeable (128 crores in 1999-2000). The trend is that the amount may grow under HRDF Fund. It certainly takes away a good share from the Panchayats and transfers the same to Gram Vikas Samiti.

The percentage of HRDF from the rest of the share to the Panchayats (over the period of five years) shows that on an average HRDF forms 22.07% of the total five major funds to panchayats\(^1\). It is significant to note that more than this amount (if one includes funds related to decentralised planning and state Government schemes) will now be transferred to GVS for development work.

On the other hand, some positive understanding is lent to us by a certain section of the people.

From 1994 to April 1996, every legislator could suggest Rs. 20 lakhs worth of development works in his/her constituency and the funds from the HRDFAB were converted to this scheme. This was, however, scrapped by the present government.

The HRDF is distributed in "Sarkar Apke Dwar" where the Chief Minister has the discretionary powers to decide which GP will be the beneficiary. According to one of the field personnel, the beneficiaries in his area were decided according to the political affiliations of the concerned GP.

Now, with the formation of GVS, it seems that HRDF will be devolved to it, which is then under the control of neither legislators nor the Chief Minister. Further, the GVS, as the order envisages, will minimise official intervention. What is more significant is that the farmers’ money is returned to them for their own development (according to their own terms).

**Functionaries**

A large section of Ward members not included in GVS, have voiced their dissent. Composition of GVS makes a provision for 4 GP members and does not include the rest. Inclusion of some persons and alienation of other GP members has infused a feeling of “division”. If it has given some a sense of added responsibility, and yet others a feeling of powerlessness, does it help to strengthen an established institution of governance (PRIs) as the Order may envisage?

The special conditions applied to the membership of Gram Vikas Samiti, in some manner, hinder representation of Gram Panchayat members. Consider this case - if the Sarpanch belongs to any of the three reserved categories (SC/BC/Women), then the Gram Sabha has the right to nominate any Gram Sabha member to the committee instead of the “Panch” category. Therefore, composition of Gram Vikas Samiti may decrease representation of Gram Panchayat as a body.

The Composition of Gram Vikas Samiti does

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1 Source: Sain Ajmeri; Directorate of Panchayats, Chandigarh, Haryana.
not ensure 1/3rd reservation mechanism ensured for women's representation in PRIs.

**Impact of The Functioning of Parallel Bodies**

**Institutionalised Process of Development**

GVS is the creation of the Ruling political party, Indian National Lok Dal, that is at the helm of affairs. In the next elections, if the ruling party is unable to secure a clear mandate from the people and remains "out of power", Gram Vikas Samiti can be made redundant. It does not enjoy either the Constitutional Status nor the approval of the State Legislature.

No functional linkage exists between the GVS and PRIs. There is no constitutionally stated mechanism of co-ordination and communication patterns between the two bodies. Clearly, in the absence of functional links, GVS stands as another "power centre" at the village level. It only fuels confusions regarding the functioning of GVS, intensifying dynamics of PRIs with State and with GVS and encroaches upon the legitimacy of the powers conferred on Gram Panchayats.

The perceptions of the people do not suggest people's interest to sustain the body on a long-term basis, nor can the body claim Constitutional backing.

Problems could also plague GVS. In the absence of a defined Constitutional framework, the GVS may be characterised by ambiguity and inefficiency.

GVS in principle has organic linkage with PRIs yet institutional linkage does not exist. Institutional linkage entails a clearly articulated relationship with defined terms of co-ordination and communication between the two bodies. A relationship legally constituted stands to benefit, because the indicators of accountability are established. The relationship then is guided by a set of rules, laws and policies giving less room for ambiguity and inefficiency.

Introduction of new structures does not lend itself to strengthening PRIs, nor diminishing their problems. One must endeavour to harness the potential and strength of the parallel bodies if they are a reality, and seek their convergence with PRI bodies. The relationship of the two should be mutually satisfying and supportive.

This would entail merging the two bodies within the provisions given in the Act and the Constitution. GVS may be linked with PRIs as one of its sub-committees (Section 22 of Haryana Panchayati Raj Act).

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Joint Forest Management System and Panchayats in Gujarat

Prof. H.M. Shah

To activate the village communities in forest-based activities, the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act established Village Panchayats as governments at the local level. Realisation of grass-root democracy is the motto of the said Amendment. Operationalisation of direct democracy through the means of Gram Sabha was the prime objective behind the Amendment. But parallel structures like JFM committees / mandals undermine the role of Gram Sabhas and Village Panchayats in strengthening the local self-governance units at the village level, especially in the Schedule-V tribal areas which are rich in natural resources such as forests.

JFM is a programme evolved by the National Forest Policy announced in 1988. It is being implemented in Gujarat through the government resolutions of 1991 and 1994. The major objectives of this programme are as under:

- To regenerate, conserve and develop degraded forest areas through the support of village communities and NGOs.
- To meet the needs of village communities staying in the vicinity of the forest areas by growing trees, grass, fuelwood and small timber and other forest produces.
- To establish environmental balance through productive afforestation.

Institutional Arrangements and Panchayats

According to the government resolution, a village level committee will be formed consisting of village community members to implement the JFM programme. The resolution states, that any cooperative society or a development society or forest development and conservation committee is eligible to undertake this activity. So far as the panchayats are concerned, the said resolution provides that:

- The village panchayat itself may become a committee for the purpose of JFM.

- A representative of the village panchayat will serve as one of the members of the committee so constituted for JFM.

The JFM committee is constituted of persons interested in forest development, with at least two women members and representatives of an NGO or a financial institution involved in the regeneration work. In Gujarat, it is estimated that there are almost 7000 registered committees working in the field of JFM. Nevertheless, not a single Village Panchayat is solely responsible for JFM in any Schedule-V area, as no Village Panchayat has undertaken such activity due to lack of motivation from the forest authorities. Since there is only one representative of the village panchayat on board of the said committee, he/she practically does not possess any clout or influence in the area of forest management of the village.

Financial Arrangements and Gram Sabhas

In accordance with the issuance of the government resolution of 1994, the JFM committee is entitled to:

- implement the schemes of the state forest department.
- possess consumption rights on the forest land delineated for the purposes of JFM.
- acquire fodder from the developed/conserved forest area.
- collect minor forest produces and tree-branches.
- collect fuelwood from the cut-back works.
- collect timber from cleaning works.
- collect 25% bamboos from thinning works.
- collect 50% of the total yield from tree-cutting, according to the working scheme approved by the state government.
- dispose of final products in collaboration with the forest department of the state.

The Gujarat State Assembly enacted an Amendment in the Gujarat State Panchayat Act-1993 in June-1998 for the Schedule-V areas. This Amendment applies to 5055
villages of 33 taluks of 7 districts of the state according to the 1991 census and
delineation. It means that it is applicable
to at least 15% of the total population and
28% of the total number of villages in the
state. Thus the financial arrangements made
for the JFM committees, directly affect and
undermine the role of local self-governance
units in the vast tribal areas.

Other Issues
- So far as forest management is
concerned, the JFM committee replaces the
Gram Sabha in the decision-making
process.
- Gram Sabha is constituted by all the
eligible voters of the Village Panchayat,
whereas, the JFM committee consists only
of some of the Gram Sabha members.
Therefore, the majority of the Gram Sabha
members are kept out of the JFM
committee.

Financial Arrangements and Panchayats
Major role conflict is emerging between the
JFM committees and Village Panchayats
with respect to minor forest produces. As
per the enactment in the Gujarat State
Panchayat Act:
- The minor forest produces of the forest
areas other than National Parks and
Sanctuaries are vested in the Village
Panchayats.
- The income earned through the sale of
minor forest produces will become part of
the Panchayat Fund.

According to the Gujarat Minor Forest
Produces Trade Nationalisation Act-1979,
13 categories of 6 minor forest produces
have been identified, of which all the rights
are vested with the Gujarat State Forest
Development Corporation (GSFDC).

The Village Panchayats in Schedule-V
areas, have therefore, no powers to
cultivate, collect and sell the minor forest
produces. The JFM committees and GSFDC
jointly manage the minor forest produces
for their own financial benefits and do not
take care to deposit the amount earned
through the sale of the same. Thus, the
Village Panchayats do not possess any
control over the minor forest produces, and
this results in the following:
- JFM committees become financially more
resourceful than the Village Panchayats.
- JFM committee distributes the benefits
among its own members, and therefore, the
benefits are not equally distributed among
the Gram Sabha members.
- Forest areas delineated for JFM purposes
are actually common property resources,
which are being developed and used by
limited Gram Sabha members in the village.
- Though all the minor forest produces are
vested in the Village Panchayats, they are
not entitled to use the same.

Functions overlapped
JFM system in Gujarat plays a pivotal role
in undermining the importance and the
very existence of Village Panchayats by
being engaged in the works hitherto
assigned to Village Panchayats and Gram
Sabhas. When these functions are being
performed by a committee formed for this
purpose, the Village Panchayats and Gram
Sabhas remain merely as ornamental pieces
of self-governance. The functions
overlapped by the JFM committees are
described as follows:
- As the right to cultivate, collect and sell
the minor forest produces lies with the
committee formed under the JFM system,
the Village Panchayats cease to be an active
guardian of the forest areas vested in them
by the provision of the 1998 Amendment.
Though the JFM mandals were promoted
and encouraged by the Forest Department
of the State, it has not taken care to train
Village Panchayats to manage the forest
areas legally vested in them. Thus, the
empowerment of Village Panchayats in the
tribal belt of Gujarat with respect to forest
areas, remains only on the paper of the
statute book.
- The JFM mandal in the village works as
a parallel structure also in the area of socio-
economic development programmes and
schemes to be implemented in the village.
The Gram Sabhas are supposed to conserve
and maintain common property resources such as forests according to local tribal cultural identity and traditions. Strange enough, now the same becomes a duty of the committee formed under the JFM. The Gram Sabhas, therefore, feel untrained to produce any result-oriented strategy for the overall village development.

- In the 1998 Amendment, the Village Panchayats were given control of all village-level social sector institutions, including their employees. But in practice, with the JFM mandals having control over natural resources, the Village Panchayats do not possess any practical control over this parallel body. Sometimes, it is the other way round and the panchayat functions are controlled by the JFM mandal.

Problems faced by Village Panchayats

The problems Village Panchayats are facing in relation to JFM and allied areas of natural resource management, are enormous. Briefly, they are as follows:

- The Forest areas are vested in Village Panchayats but they are without delineated borders. Therefore, the Village Panchayats do not enjoy actual and real collection rights in the forest areas.
- The fact that trained personnel are needed to keep up-to-date records for the collection of MFPs, is a major bottleneck in the management of MFPs, for Village Panchayats. The establishment expenditure to be incurred by at least 4000 VPs will be to the tune of around Rs. 2 crores a year. Financially, the VPs are too weak to bear this burden.
- Some of the VPs may face a problem of negligible volume of trade, if they have very small forest area vested in them. They therefore, will not be in a position to bear the fixed cost of personnel. In such cases, if they do not collect the MFPs in time, there will be sheer wastage of natural resources.

After the 1998 Amendment, the GSFDC is working in tandem with District Panchayats (DP) for trade in MFPs which are not at all trained in these kind of activities. Also, DPs do not involve either VPs or GSs in the trading process. The purpose of the Amendment, therefore, is not actually attained.

Recommendations

- All the rights of minor forest produces should immediately be vested with the Gram Sabhas.
- All the income earned by the sale of minor forest produces should be deposited in the Village Fund and not with the JFM committee.
- Provision of compulsory registration for Village Panchayats as a society should not be continued, as the same are now constitutional entities.
- The JFM committee should implement the programmes only with the permission of Gram Sabhas, and the Gram Sabhas should be empowered to allocate the benefits accrued from the said programmes.
- GSFDC should implement the programme through Gram Sabhas and accounts should be separately maintained for each of them, where there are more than one Gram Sabhas in a Village Panchayat.
- Thus, the Gram Sabha should be converted into a JFM committee and the Village Panchayat should be empowered to utilize financial resources with the prior approval of the Gram Sabha.

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Watershed Committees Undermining the Role of Panchayats in Rajasthan

Shampa Batabyal

In Rajasthan, 72 percent agriculture depends on rainfall and is a gamble of nature. Underground water is also depleting due to indiscriminate pumping and poor rainfall. In spite of DDF (Desert Development Programme), DPAP (Drought Prone Area Programme) and Wasteland Development Programme, not much could be achieved in Rajasthan. In 1980, the Directorate of Watershed Development was created and World Bank and Government of India provided funds and work was done only by engineers, not the community. In 1995-96, the Hanumantha Rao Committee recommended that Watershed Development works be implemented by the Watershed Committee (WC) through Project Implementing Agencies (PIAs).

Structure and Functions of Watershed Programme

Various agencies, called Project Implementing Agency (PIA) that are entrusted the work of watershed development, include the Forest Department, Soil Conservation Department, local NGOs and the Panchayat Samitis/Panchayats. PIA is supported by the Watershed Development Team (WDT) comprising 4 specialists, one each in the area of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Civil Engineering and Social Sciences.

Government of India, through DRDAs of every district, sanctions watershed project to a particular PIA, if the PIA or WDT team attached to that PIA has 3 years of past experience of such works. The Government of Rajasthan appointed a committee under the Chairmanship of Development Commissioner, P.N. Bhandari in 1999, and recommended that all soil conservation and water management projects must be allotted to Panchayats on priority basis in Rajasthan. This was approved by the state cabinet and came into effect from 3rd January 2000.

A Panchayat to become a PIA, has to prove that either it has been executing Watershed projects for the last 3 years, or the services of such experienced persons (under WDT) are available to them. As per the Bhandari Committee’s recommendation, Panchayats can become PIA for watershed projects on a priority basis, but at present, Panchayats do not have access to such WDT members; hence other parallel bodies (government departments and NGOs) are being appointed as PIAs.

Panchayats can get experienced WDT members easily in rural areas, as:
- A large number of Agriculture graduates and Civil Diploma-holders are unemployed
- Retired Veterinarians can also be hired by paying a honorarium of Rs. 250/- per day, which is provided within the budget for WDT members.
- Post Graduate in social science for PRA activities and coordination can also be chosen from the retired senior teachers and head masters from the local area.

The capacity building of Panchayats to run the watershed projects could be done by involving a local experienced NGO or through State Government’s regular orientation programs on this.

Allocation of Funds for Watershed Development Works

One watershed normally consists of five hundred hectares of area. PIA should be allotted 10-12 such watersheds for viability. Funds are provided at the rate of Rs. 4000 Per hectare. Hence Rs. 20 lakhs is given to implement works in one watershed to be spent over a period of 4 years. PIA gets 25% funds to be spent on survey and entry point activities (5%), training (5%), community organisation work (5%) and administrative expenses (10%). The Watershed Committee gets the remaining 75%, i.e., Rs. 15 lakhs per watershed for works.
Functions of WDT
The Watershed Committee consisting of WDT members plays the role of facilitator only. WDT supports the Committee in training the people to discharge the day to day functions and prepare them to take over the development through the committee and Watershed executive committee. The functions of WDT can be enumerated as follows:

- PRA for need assessment and action plan. People of the village sit in groups along with WDT members and share their past experiences, their needs, aspirations and problems and suggest local solutions based on ITK (Indigenous technical knowledge).
- Training of farmers on water and soil conservation methods, improved agricultural practices, livestock development, horticulture, self-help group formation, etc. The Chairman, Secretary and members of Watershed Committee are specially trained in maintenance of accounts, measurement of works, maintenance of muster rolls and payment, as well as monitoring and evaluation methods.

Formation of Executive Committee
Gram Sabha selects members of the executive committee, including 3 to 4 farmers, 2 Panchayat members, 1 woman, 1 person from SC/ST, 1 youth representative, and WDT member for execution of the projects. All the works are sanctioned by the Gram Sabha and executed by the Watershed Committee. The committee is re-elected every 2 years.

Undermining Role of Watershed Committee
Till very recently, Panchayats were not able to become PIAs because of:
- Lack of information that they can become PIA for watershed development
- Lack of experience of watershed works
- Non-availability of WDT members in Panchayat area.

Since January 2000, the government ordered for allotment of Watershed to Gram Panchayat/ Panchayat Samiti, on priority basis and now, even the condition of three years experience is being waived. Moreover, experienced WDT members are also being provided to them by DRDA.

The overall objective of every Panchayat is rural development. Panchayat is an elected body, which represents the will of the people. Panchayats have been given top priority for implementation of the watershed project as PIA. If any other agency like forest department, soil conservation department or NGO is allotted watershed projects, they also have to form a Watershed Committee for execution of works. This committee is also from among the same villagers who have elected Panchayat members. Hence, in such cases where a separate Watershed Committee and its executing body is formed by external agencies such as PIAs, it undermines the role of the Panchayat.

Moreover, since January 2000, the following functions have been transferred to the Panchayats, which are helpful in formation of WDT at the Panchayat level:
- Agriculture extension including the services of VEW (Village Extension Worker) who is an agricultural expert.
- Animal Husbandry sub-centres along with veterinary Compounder have also been transferred to Panchayats.
- Panchayat has been authorised to spend Rs. 7500/- per year for getting the services of an engineer on contract from the funds of Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana. These funds are directly given by the Government of India to Panchayats.
- Postgraduate in any social science can be engaged on an Honorarium of 250/- per day from 10% administrative expenses sanctioned in the watershed project.

Thus, Panchayat members can easily replace the Watershed Committee for execution of the project. They can also get the services of 4 watershed Development Team members as suggested above. It is more justified that Panchayats be given this work as they are already vested with so
many other developmental functions. On the other side, other PIAs (government departments) are not able to effectively implement watershed works since it is one of the programs for them.

Hence it is suggested that the Gram Panchayat should be allotted the watershed program as PIA. Since they have limited programs, the panchayats will be able to attend to it. Moreover, Gram Panchayats need finance, which will be fulfilled through the watershed development fund. Each Panchayat will get about 50 lakhs during 4 years for watershed. A trained team can be easily provided from a panel of such officers from DRDA. Only Panchayats are to be made aware of it and their capacity should be built for execution of such projects.

Overlap of Functions
Panchayats are vested with the powers of agriculture extension, animal husbandry development, watershed development, irrigation tanks and other poverty alleviation programmes. These are overlapping with the functions of the Watershed Committee. This is nothing but duplication of agencies and functions on one side and weakening of the Panchayats on the other.

Impact of Functioning of the Watershed Committee
If the Panchayat is to be made a self-sustaining body, Watershed development projects should be allotted only to them, as they can utilise the funds with the help of Watershed Development Team members available with them.

Since the qualified team will be available to them, it may ensure more efficient delivery of services. Since Gram Sabha is held every 3 months, people can question the Sarpanch on how the funds were utilised and discuss the future works also. So far as the government departments or NGOs are concerned, they can help in building the capacity of Panchayats and make available the services of a specialist, if needed, by Panchayats.

Conclusion
- The Panchayat as an elected body can very well implement Watershed projects. Hence there is no need for the Gram Sabha to nominate another team in the form of a Watershed Committee, since both are representatives of the same village.
- Watershed Development Team is available to Panchayats and even if some member is missing, the Panchayat can hire their services at the rate of Rs. 250/- per day, which is allowed in 10% administrative expenses of PIA.
- Since all the functions performed by the Watershed Committee are already handed over to the Panchayats since January 2000 in Rajasthan, it will result in overlapping of functions.
- This will also strengthen the finances of the Panchayat who will be able to meet need-based aspirations of the local people through watershed project funds.

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It was in 1993 that the government of UP started the UP Sodic Lands Reclamation Project (UPSLRP) with financial assistance from the World Bank. The main objective of the project is to reclaim the sodic land, which has been lying unused in the state and thus increase the production of foodgrains to improve people’s livelihoods by addressing institutional, social, environmental as well as technical issues. The project implementation period (2nd phase) is of six years i.e. 1999 - 2005. The implementing organisation of the project is UP Land Development Corporation (UPLDC). At the village level, the project establishes Water User Groups (WUGs), who further unite into a Site Implementation Committee (SIC). This article examines how the SIC is encroaching upon the powers of the Gram Panchayat.

State Level Provisions
The UPPR (United Provinces Panchayat Raj Act, 1947) Act states that gram panchayats are required to form committees as notified by the state government from time to time, to assist the gram panchayat in the performance of all or any of its functions. Thus, the following six committees were formed at every tier of panchayats: Planning and Development Committee, Education Committee, Construction Works Committee, Health and Welfare Committee, Administrative Committee, and Water Management Committee. This was further emphasised by the state government that finances needed for execution of works transferred to panchayats will be handed over directly to them.

Site Implementation Committee (SIC) Structure
Each village has multiple Water User Groups (WUGs). All the members of the WUGs unite into a Site Implementation Committee (SIC) which is a general body of the village comprised of one male and one female representing each household. The village Pradhan (head of Gram Panchayat) is the ex-officio Chairperson of the SIC and the local Assistant Manager of the UPBSN acts as the Member-Secretary. If the members of SIC feel and agree then they are free to elect their leader other than Gram Pradhan of the Panchayat.

Objective
The main objective of the SIC is to implement the activities of the Uttar Pradesh Sodic Land Reclamation Project. At the same time, the SIC is to observe and monitor the activities of the Water User Groups falling under every SIC.

A Core Team - the Executive Body of the SIC - is responsible for executing and monitoring the activities. It is constituted from the leaders of the Water Users Groups (WUGs) and a Mitra Kisan (Male animator) and a Mahila Mitra Kisanii (Female animator).

The SIC is conceived of as the platform for decision-making and implementation of the activities at the village level and as a forum for interaction of the different actors of the project. SICs are so far unregistered bodies, though discussions about registering them under the Societies Act of 1860 are going on.

Functions
The SIC is responsible for the preparation and implementation of a Site Implementation Plan (SIP) which is a micro-plan containing all the activities that are to be carried out in the village as a part of the land reclamation process. It would subsequently be responsible for distribution of agricultural inputs to the participants and for future maintenance of the assets developed under the project. Further, the SIC has a maintenance account for maintaining drainage networks of the village. It is also required to take post-
project management of assets created during the project, by generating its own fund.

The SIC is required to meet twice a month during the project implementation phase in the area. After the withdrawal of the project, it is required to meet once in a quarter. The following records are to be kept by the SIC: financial, meeting minutes, records relating to maintenance and management of drains and list of SIC members.

The financial inputs which the SIC gets from the project are for maintenance and management of the drainage network in the village. Payment for construction, maintenance and management of drains to the WUG groups is made by the SIC which, in turn is distributed by the group among its members as labour costs incurred for construction of these drains.

The SICs are required to develop their own rules and regulations regarding taking decisions, change of leadership, conducting meetings, methods to be adopted for informing the SIC members about different activities related to the project, etc.

Undermining Role of Parallel Structure
As is clear from the details mentioned above, the committees which have been formed under the UPPR Act are to perform governance functions, i.e. plan, make arrangements for execution, monitor and evaluate.

As far as overlapping is concerned, the parallel structure considered above, interferes with the functional areas of the committees of the Gram Panchayats formed under the UPPR Act. Following are the areas, which need consideration:

Functions
- The WUGs formed under the UPSLRP have been made responsible for works related to water management. As per the UPPR Act these functions fall under the purview of the Water Management Committee.
- Functionally, SIC is responsible for preparation and implementation of the Site Implementation Plan. The Planning and Development Committee, on the other hand, is also required to formulate development plans of the village in general and, those related to agriculture development in particular. These plans then have to be placed before the Gram Panchayat for approval and consideration.
- The WUGs formed under the project are required to help the staff members of UPLDC in selection of farmers and hence the land to be included under the project. As per the UPPR Act it is in the meetings of the Gram Sabha that the selection of villagers for any rural development schemes has to be done.
- Construction, maintenance and management of link and main drains falls under the purview of WUGs. Further, monitoring the construction of drains constructed under the project is done by SIC. The Construction Committee is the legally authorised body at the village level for taking up this task.
- The WUGs have also been entrusted with the responsibility of deciding the rates of the water charges to be charged from each member of the group. This policy level decision should fall under the purview of the Water Management Committee and not any project group.
- Finances related to the project come to the WUG either directly or through the SIC, whereas Panchayats should receive all the funds related to village development.
- Further, the project also has a major component for infrastructure construction such as roads, etc. As per section 15 (xiii) of the UPPR Act, the Gram Panchayat has been made responsible for this.
- Although it may seem that the head of the SIC is the Gram Pradhan of the Panchayat, in reality, this is only for namesake. Further, if the SIC members feel, they can change their leader and elect somebody else from among themselves as the chairperson.
- The SIC and WUGs are required to maintain several records related to the project. Similar records are also to be maintained by the Gram Panchayat. This results in duplication of work and creates confusion at the macro level.
Functionaries
The following functionaries are involved in the SIC: Gram Pradhan, Local Assistant Manager of the UPLDC (Village level functionary of UPLDC), Farmer members of WUGs, Mitra Kisan and Mahila Mitra kisan.

At times, conflicts arise in the WUGs on the matter of water sharing. Some of the members of the WUGs being dominant due to their privileged socio-economic condition, try to gain undue advantage and hence create a lot of problems like blocking the link or the main drain. In all these matters, the Panchayat having a constitutional status, is in a better position to deal with these conflicts rather than the SIC.

Finance
Payments to WUGs are made through SIC. As far as details of the expenditure are concerned, though they have to be presented in the monthly meetings of the SIC, the meetings often do not take place regularly and hence the details are not available to the members of the SIC or the WUGs. If the money is routed through the Panchayats to the SIC/WUGs, the details can be presented in the monthly meetings of the Gram Panchayats as well as in the open meetings of the Gram Sabha. This would also make for greater transparency and accountability.

Consequences of Functioning of Parallel Bodies

Sustainable process of development
• After completion of the project, the SIC needs to meet quarterly. Since funds would not be made available to the SIC after the project is over, the maintenance and management of the drains of the concerned area would become of secondary importance to the SIC. In that case, this aspect may remain neglected. Hence after the completion of the project, the sustainability of the work would become questionable.
• The membership in the WUGs is based on the criteria of having sodic land and the possibility of being served by one pumpset. But once the project is over, the members tend to break away from the groups and try to join different groups solely on the basis of homogeneity.

• The result of one of the assessment made by UPLDC in 32 villages in 10 districts of UP, brought to light the fact that in 12 villages the possibility of survival of SIC after the withdrawal of the project is highly uncertain. Out of 32 villages, members of the WUGs of 13 villages complained that a large number of borings have failed; in 10 villages the members of the WUGs have complained that there are problems in water sharing which need to be sorted out and the SIC meant for the above has not been able to do so; in 22 villages there are problems in the maintenance of drains and in 19 of the villages people have complained that the SIC is highly ineffective.

Delivery of Services
Due to internal group dynamics, the members often oppose the water charges decided by the SIC. In this case, the SIC often tends to take populist measures by charging very low rates for the water supplied to the members. This affects the proper management of the drains.

In the supply of water there are general complaints that the person in charge for the supply of water to the members, supplies more water to their near and dear ones and for less charges.

Linkages to other Institutional Frameworks
Gram Panchayat is not able to establish any link with the UPLDC working for land development which is a part of the functions of the Gram Panchayat.

Similarly, the linkage between the Water Management Committee and Planning Committee, as well as Construction Committee is missing in the present framework, as the functions of the Water Management Committee are being looked after by SIC/WUGs.

Conclusion
Based on the aforementioned discussion, several aspects need to be taken care of in view of the Constitution (Seventy-third) Amendment Act, 1992 and the UPPR Act, 1947:
• First of all, there is a need to establish organic linkages between the WUGs and the related committees. Since the committees are to mainly perform the governance functions in the area of the jurisdiction of their Panchayat, then these WUGs should form the implementing organs of the Water Management Committee, the Planning and Development Committee and, the Construction Committee formed under the UPPR Act. This in turn implies that these WUGs should report to these committees respectively for the work which falls under any of these committees’ functional area.

• Further, the Core Committee of the SIC should be a sub-committee of the Gram Panchayat.

• In case of the project, the final authority to approve the plans formed by the WUGs rests with the SIC. These final plans should be approved in the Gram Sabha meetings. One can argue that since sodic land reclamation is a highly time bound process, this may or may not coincide with the time of the meetings of the Gram Sabha. But the Gram Panchayat has the authority to call Gram Sabha meetings as and when required.

• The Gram Sabha should form the platform for interaction of the different actors of the project, for decision making, and implementation of the activities at the village level rather than SIC.

The Assistant Managers placed by UPLDC should report to the Gram Panchayat. The works which they are required to do also fall under the purview of the functions of the Gram Panchayat Development Officer.

• The finances for rural development are to come straight to the Gram Panchayats as per the orders of the state government. In this light, the finances for the project which come to the WUGs and/or SIC should also be routed through the concerned Gram Panchayat.

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# Reader Response Form

1. Name: 
2. Age: 
3. Sex: 
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5. Organisation: 
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7. Readers opinion: (Please select the statement with which you agree)

a. What is your opinion about the number of articles in P&G?
   1). The number of articles should be more [ ]
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b. What is your opinion about the themes covered in P&G?
   1). More coverage is required [ ]
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   3). The coverage is just right [ ]

c.) What is your opinion about the quantity of articles in P&G?
   Very Good [ ]
   Satisfactory [ ]
   Good [ ]
   Needs considerable improvement [ ]

d.) What is your opinion about the relevance of content / information in P&G?
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   Satisfactory [ ]
   Good [ ]
   Needs considerable improvement [ ]

Any other suggestions:
The State of Panchayats: A Participatory Perspective

by Manoj Rai, et al. (Eds): Samskriti, New Delhi, 2002; Pp. 347, Rs 695 (hardbound)

Reviewed by Mandakini Pant

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1993, created spaces within Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for the marginalised sections of society. The Gram Sabha, comprising of all registered voters, has been established by the Act. Such specific initiatives of decentralization and inclusive participation of all the citizens, particularly the marginalized sections of society, in the process of governance proposed to change the existing unequal power relations. The experiences and learning of PRIA about PRIs, accumulated in the course of seven years succeeding the enactment of the 73rd Amendment Act, however, repudiates such imposing claims.

PRIA's report on 'The State of Panchayats: A Participatory Perspective' points to the gaps between rhetoric and practice. It provides insights into various facets of PRI functioning, firstly, by reviewing the provisions in the Constitution and then assessing the ground realities in the areas of actual functioning of Panchayats. Works on PRIs have, by and large, focused on exploring the constraints and problems faced by PRIs and the enabling conditions necessary for a workable functioning of PRIs generally from the point of view of the State. This book makes an important departure in this respect. It is a review of the state of Panchayats from the civil society perspective.

While highlighting constraints to people's total participation, it explores those aspects, which would help make PRIs a vibrant and dynamic base of society, accountable and responsive to both people and the government and, thereby, truly become a people's body.

"The State of Panchayats: A Participatory Perspective" is a first-hand account PRIA-NCRSOS (a network of NGOs) experienced over the past seven years towards strengthening PRIs in about 15 states of the country. PRIA and the network have been working in the states of Bihar (CENCORED) Gujarat (UNNATI), Haryana (PRIA), Himachal Pradesh (PRIA), Kerala (SAHAYI), Madhya Pradesh (Samarthan), Orissa (CVSD), Rajasthan (UNNATI), and Uttar Pradesh (Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra). The issues relating to different aspects of Panchayat functioning such as the structure and functioning of Panchayats, Gram Sabha, leadership of women and dalits, participatory local planning, capacity building initiatives, issues pertaining to Panchayat elections, and the role and perspective of civil society and the media in the context of Panchayats are very well and clearly brought out. The book also comes out with a set of recommendations, which could help shape PRIs as vibrant loci of self-governance.

Crucial issues such as autonomy, accountability, democratic participation and empowerment that are instrumental towards building accountable, decentralized, local self-governing PRIs, are critically examined in the book. It has succeeded in highlighting the varying dimensions of the issue of inclusive participatory democracy. This is a systematically documented book. It covers a complex topic in simple language. It provides descriptions, analysis, case studies, and data to authenticate its findings and provide a holistic picture of the current status of PRIs, gains, constraints and challenges of promoting people's participation and democratic governance through local grassroots action.

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PRIA

The Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) is an independent, non-profit, non-government organisation registered in 1982 under the Society Registration Act, 1860. PRIA is based at New Delhi, India.

Over the last eighteen years, PRIA has promoted people-centred development initiatives within the perspective of participatory research. Strengthening popular knowledge, demystifying dominant concepts and promoting experiential learning, have been the basis of supporting empowerment of the poor and oppressed in PRIA's work. Through field studies and documentation, workshops and training programmes, networking and enabling linkage, PRIA has facilitated the strengthening of capacities within grassroots groups, voluntary agencies, NGOs and other formations.

As a cherished mission, PRIA endeavours to promote people centred, holistic and comprehensive evolution of society, characterised by Freedom, Justice, Equity and Sustainability, by:

- creating opportunities of sharing, analysis and learning among formations of the Civil Society (in particular, people's organisations and NGOs);
- engaging in independent and critical analysis of societal trends and issues, development policies and programmes; and
- enabling dialogue across diverse perspectives, sectors and institutions.

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Planning & Local Self Governance

Planning as development strategy in the immediate post-independence period in India had a centralised bias. With time, political and administrative imperatives emerging from regional specificities and imbalances, uneven distribution of populations, complex local conditions, difficulty in administrating remote areas, etc., triggered off a series of events for a shift towards a more decentralised system of governance and planning. This finally culminated in the passing of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992), which sought to confer the power of local administration and planning on PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions). This was envisaged to be translated through the forum of the Gram Sabha (People's Council). The intention is to ensure the initiative and participation of all sections of the village community (e.g., women, lads, tribals, and other marginalised groups) to work towards forging a better match between their needs, local resources and the plans.

Never policy shifts alone cannot usher in a change overnight. Though Panchayats now have institutional legitimacy to facilitate the process of planning and implementation, they require back-support from various stakeholders (e.g., the community itself, CSOs, the government machinery, NGOs, CBs and civil society in general). PRIA and its partners have been working in various states towards mobilising the Gram Sabha for developing micro plans. In this regard, our interventions are guided by the perspective that bottom-up comprehensive planning based on the micro planning exercise, is to be the basis of self-governance.

The advantages of undertaking local level planning in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders include that it increases participation of people in the Gram Sabha, it is a means of optimum mobilisation of resources, it becomes an instrument of accountability towards the community and is more inclusive in nature (addresses the development needs of the marginalised too). Though some people level the criticism against micro planning that it is a time-consuming and cumbersome process, it is the process itself which will help reap long-term gains. The micro planning exercise engenders a sense of ownership amongst the community by mobilising local resources, local knowledge, technology, raising awareness through information dissemination, and building skills of planning at the organisation. The process thus also ensures greater sustainability of development assets (both tangible and intangible).
This issue of the bulletin thus gives a brief overview of the mutations in the concept of planning (from the conventional approach to planning at the micro level) since the post-independence period and makes a case for micro-level planning. This is further endorsed by an article on the 'labour force' in Kunnathukal Gram Panchayat, Kerala, an initiative taken up under the aegis of the People's Plan Campaign, which gave a new lease of life to the limping economy of this Gram Panchayat. A similar experience of people's participation in development planning from Himachal Pradesh is shared. The write-up makes a case for greater convergence and collaboration among PRLs, State and civil society. A 'doable' model of a people-centred plan drawn from PRIA and its partners' hands-on experience of micro-planning with Panchayats and CBOs (Community Based Organisations) is outlined. Methods of Participatory Poverty Assessment in the context of Urban Local Governance are also highlighted.

It is heartening to note that more and more state governments are realising the importance of people's participation in the planning process at the panchayat level and have modified their respective State Panchayat Acts to promote it. Kerala has initiated the People's Plan Campaign, and Himachal Pradesh has provided training to a selected group of people in each block who will then facilitate the planning process in all the panchayats within the block. At the same time, NGOs too are experimenting to evolve a more simplified, doable, replicable process of micro-planning.

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Lessons from the Field:
An Experience in Micro Planning from Himachal Pradesh
Ajaya Kumar Mohapatra

This article analyses the ground reality as against the stated provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, which confer the functions of preparation and implementation of development plans on the Panchayats. In this context, the initiatives undertaken by civil society in the area of micro-planning in the Kehad Gram Panchayat of Himachal Pradesh are recounted. On the basis of this experience, the write-up makes a case for greater convergence and collaboration between the Gram Panchayat, the government and civil society organisations, to pool in their respective resources and carry the process forward.

Context

Keeping in view the Constitutional 73rd Amendment Act, the Government of Himachal Pradesh amended its State Panchayati Raj Act w.e.f. 23 April 1994, with a view to ensure effective involvement of the PRIs in local administration and developmental activities. The State Government entrusted functions to PRIs for preparation of plans and implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice as specified in Schedule - II. The State Government on 31 July 1996, entrusted powers, functions and responsibilities upon the Panchayati Raj Institutions in relation to 15 Line Departments.

Section 184 of the Principal Act, has been substituted by Section 9 of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj (Second Amendment) Act 2000, which says that every Panchayat, would every year prepare a development plan of schemes for economic development and social justice for their respective area and submit it to the DPC (District Planning Committee). As per the legislation, people’s participation in plan preparation has to be ensured through the Gram Sabha.

Gram Sabha vis-à-vis preparation of micro plans

As far as the ground reality is concerned, it has been found that hardly any of the Gram Sabha meetings are held, either with the required quorum, or for the preparation of development plans for economic development and social justice through people's participation. Therefore, making of micro-plans through the Gram Sabha is a distant dream as far as the ground reality is concerned.

Most of the Pradhans and Panchayat Secretaries endorsed the non-fulfilment of the quorum and accepted the fact that in order to fulfil the quorum on paper, they had to take fake signatures from the Gram Sabha members.

In other words, the planning is done by the members of the Gram Panchayat, without involving the Gram Sabha members. Moreover, most of the elected representatives of the Gram Panchayat are also not very keen to involve people in preparing the micro-plan, because they think that this would make them accountable towards the Gram Sabha, which they do not want. Secondly, they do not want to prepare micro-plans through people’s participation, because they have a fear that Gram Panchayats may not get the required financial resources as per the micro-plan. Ultimately, people would ask for an explanation and they would not be in a position to give an answer for that. Hence, mobilisation of resources in accordance with the micro-plan is one of the most significant problems, and most of the Gram Panchayats are least interested in initiating the process.

Above all, the Gram Sabha meetings are held for the selection of beneficiaries under schemes like Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), Gandhi Kutir Yojana (GKY) or Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). Therefore other important issues related to the Panchayat and the planning process have less/no significance in the Gram Sabha meeting. This is mainly due to lack of time; usually the meeting starts at 2 p.m. and
ends at 4 p.m. Moreover, only those people who are able to understand the problem get a chance to participate in the meeting, while most of them remain silent throughout the meeting. The personal agenda of a select group of people dominates the community agenda in the Gram Sabha meetings. As a consequence, over a period of time, people do not find any relevance in attending these meetings and issues related to infrastructure development get priority, while social issues like health, education, prohibition, etc. are sidelined.

The Panchayats hardly get resources from the government as per the resolutions, since most of the resources given to them by way of the state and centrally sponsored schemes, are tied in nature. The allocation of funds or schemes is largely decided by the district administration, which has hardly given priority to the resolution submitted by Panchayats. Moreover, the Gram Panchayats are not able to generate their own resources (which are found to be negligible as compared to the grants received from the state or central government) to implement their own plans in accordance with the prioritised needs and issues of the Gram Sabha.

Most of the Gram Sabha members had a feeling that Gram Sabha meeting means either issuing of certificates and ration cards or selection of beneficiaries. The dependency syndrome of the people also makes the Gram Sabha defunct. Most of the Gram Sabha members said that, "we have elected Gram Panchayat members, and hence, making plans is their duty". They also said that their responsibility is to raise problems and it is the responsibility of the Gram Panchayat to prepare the plan and mobilise resources for its implementation.

**Initiation of Micro-planning Process in Kehad Gram Panchayat**

**Civil Society Initiatives:** PRIA-Himachal Pradesh (in collaboration with one of its partner organisations called Rural Technology and Development Centre (RTDC) based at Mandi district), launched upon and facilitated the process of micro-planning in Kehad Gram Panchayat of Balth Block (Mandi District) in March 1996. This process was the first of its kind in Himachal Pradesh. Besides PRIA and RTDC as facilitators, other civil society organisations such as Youth Club, Mahila Mandal and Kisan Sabha, as well as the Gram Panchayat and gram sabha were actively involved in this process.

It was also a learning process for the above stakeholders because they had experimented with this process for the first time. Though preparation of a comprehensive bottom-up plan based on the micro-planning exercise was time-consuming, it was worthwhile, since the participation of all sections of the Gram Sabha such as women, dalits, youth, etc. was ensured. Moreover, the plan was based on the issues and problems prioritised by the Gram Sabha, which had a greater impact during its implementation, as the people made significant contribution in terms of physical, human and financial resources. The whole process was owned by the people, and therefore, they made the gram panchayat accountable for its implementation. In each and every step, the Gram Sabha members extended their full support and co-operation in this regard. Besides this, the gram panchayat also played a significant role in this process. It was the Pradhan who had a basic understanding about micro-planning and was motivated enough to shoulder the responsibility of this process with the objective of ensuring people's participation in the development of the Gram Panchayat.

**Taking the Process Forward**

In order to implement the micro-plan and encourage its replication in other areas, dialogues and workshops were organised with members of other Panchayats, State and Union Government and officials at the block, district, state and national level, voluntary organisations of the state, Interna-tional Development Agencies, State Advisory Committee on Panchayati Raj, etc. Initially however, it was very difficult for the gram panchayat to mobilise funds based on the micro plan because most of the government officials were indifferent and apathetic towards the participatory democratic process and its impact on the development of the gram panchayat. Secondly, they faced limitations in allocating funds for the micro-plan, as the funds were largely tied in nature. However, with strong determination and support extended by the Gram Sabha, the...
gram panchayat was able to implement its micro plan to a large extent.

It was not the end, but just the beginning. After three years of continuous dialogue and interactions, the state government realised the importance of micro planning in the process of democratic decentralisation. On 27 October 1999, in order to strengthen PRIs, the State Cabinet made the following decisions:

- Gram Panchayats are entrusted to prepare micro-plans by ensuring participation of Gram Sabha members by identifying and prioritising problems and issues in the Gram Sabha meetings;
- Gram Sabha may address the following problems on a prioritised basis such as rural roads, school building, health, veterinary facilities, drinking water, sanitation, etc. The micro plans would be approved by the Gram Sabha;
- 75% of the grant-in-aid under Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) and Local District Planning (LDP) would be allocated by the State Government for the micro-plans approved by Gram Sabha. Moreover, the Deputy Commissioner (DC) has been empowered to allocate funds for the micro-plans under Decentralised Planning, award money under small saving schemes, etc.

The line departments were asked to allocate resources based on micro plans prepared by the gram panchayat. PRIs would decide the location for opening of schools, veterinary hospitals, primary health centres, angan wadi centres, installation of hand pumps, distribution of water connections, etc. The gram panchayats are also empowered to appoint officials such as Panchayat Sahayak, Gram Vidya Upasaks, etc., and these officials would be accountable towards the GPs for all intent and purpose. Further, for the preparation of micro plans, a Participatory Micro Planning Committee has been formed at the ward and gram panchayat levels. The ward members have become chairpersons of the ward level micro planning committee to facilitate the process at the ward level. The ward sabha has been recognised legally as the lowest unit for preparing micro plans that would be consolidated at the Gram Sabha level.

PRIA and partners were invited by the state government to conduct training on micro planning for both government officials and PRIs. PRIA and its partners, in collaboration with the State Government, prepared a Manual on micro-planning which has been used as reference material for the PRIs to prepare micro-plans for their respective areas. The state government has laid special emphasis on micro planning during the training of newly elected representatives of PRIs. Many NGOs in the state have also started facilitating the micro planning process in their respective areas.

Issues and Challenges

- Though the State Government has taken some measures to ensure micro planning as the basis for preparing development plans of the gram panchayat, it is not sufficient and a lot needs to be done. One of the most significant issues is to change the mind-set of the government officials at the lower levels, i.e. at the gram panchayat, block and district levels. Policies made at the state level have no impact, until and unless they are implemented at the grassroots. To do so, it is the lower level officials who have greater responsibilities. Yet, most of the officials are indifferent towards micro planning and also lack an understanding of the subject. Therefore, there is need for orientation of these officials on micro planning and sensitisation towards these processes.

- If one goes through Section - 9 of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj (Second Amendment) Act 2000, there are no linkages among the three tiers of PRIs as far as micro planning is concerned. Though it was stated in the Principal Act 1994 that GPs would submit their annual consolidated plan to PSSs (Panchayat Samitis), PSSs to ZP (Zilla Parishad) and finally ZPs to the District Planning Committee (DPC) for preparing the annual consolidated district plan, it was amended in the year 2000. The amended Act states that GPs would directly send their plan to DPC, due to which organic linkages among the three tiers are lost. This amendment was made without even practically testing it in the field. Therefore, how the linkages would be established has become a major issue among the PRI representatives. Each tier has its own plan and there is no congruence in terms of plans prepared by these institutions. In this regard, how
will the people's plan get implemented when there is a separate plan for each tier and from where will they get the resources to implement it?

- How the PRIs should give priority to the micro plans prepared by the Gram Sabha rather than put up their own agenda and plans separately, is a challenging task. How to establish organic linkages among these tiers for an integrated micro plan, needs to be thought through.

- One of the significant issues raised in several forums since the last six years is the constitution of DPC, which has to play an important role in planning and allocation of funds. In reality however, even after six years, most of the districts do not have a DPC, in which case, the question arises as to who is going to consolidate the plan. What would happen to those Gram Panchayats who are really motivated and seriously trying to prepare micro-plans? It would lead to frustration and lack of faith in the government, which has serious implications for the future.

- Though it has been mentioned that 75% of various grants would be sanctioned on the basis of micro plans, how far is it applicable and feasible? Very few Panchayats have already prepared their micro-plans while a large percentage of GPs are yet to prepare such plans. In this case, on what basis will the government allocate grants to them?

- The Government has raised the expectation level of the Gram Panchayats, as well as the Gram Sabha members. People have again started coming for the Gram Sabha meetings with lots of expectations and the results are very positive. At the same time, however, will the government keep its promise and allocate resources?

**Conclusion**

In order to make micro-planning an integral part of the planning process of the gram panchayat and ensure its effective implementation, there is a need for convergence and collaboration among PRIs, State, Government and civil society. All these institutions have their own strengths and limitations. The Government has the resources in terms of physical, financial and human, which have not been optimally utilised for development. On the other hand, it has its own limitations in ensuring people's participation in the development process, whereas the NGOs have strength in this area. The government could make the policies and ensure their effective implementation at the grassroots. It could ensure the participation of government officials in providing technical support to the gram sabha during the micro planning process. Timely release of grants-in-aid based on the micro-plan prepared by the gram sabha will ensure prompt implementation.

NGOs have the ability to ensure people's participation to a large extent in the development initiatives. They directly work with the people and institutions at the grassroots. Therefore, they have a better understanding about the ground realities and build a rapport with the community. Moreover, they have the skills to facilitate the process of micro planning and enhance people's participation especially women, dalits and tribals in identifying and prioritising issues, preparing micro plans and motivating people for its effective implementation, by mobilising their own resources and external assistance. NGOs could also play the role of capacity building of elected representatives of PRIs, government functionaries, gram Sabha members, members of micro planning committee, as well as the other civil society actors.

Above all, PRIs are democratically elected bodies and have enormous potential to mobilise people's support and co-operation in the planning and implementation of micro-plans. Gram Panchayats particularly need to play a significant role in the planning process such as organising meetings, disseminating information, resource mapping, ensuring people's participation in identifying and prioritising their issues and problems, making comprehensive bottom-up plans, mobilising resources for its implementation and follow-up of plans. Moreover, they can play a catalytic role to bring about greater convergence between the Gram Sabha, civil society, government and other tiers of PRIs.

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Micro Planning: A Conceptual Framework

Kavita Kanan

Planning for development appeared as a concern the world over, in the post Second War period, when problems of population explosion, unequal distribution of resources and poverty became more pronounced, especially in the developing economies of the world. Planning is basically a decision making process through which certain development goals are achieved. Today it has become indispensable, and India is no exception. Many a times, the planning process is questioned when it does not lead to the desired results and therefore, this is one of the fields, which has witnessed a wide range of changes over time. In this article, an attempt has been made to capture the changing concepts of planning and the emergence of micro level planning as an effective technique. Further, the write-up focuses on the role of micro planning in local resource management and its relationship with PRIs.

Paradigmatic Shift in Concept of Planning

In India, planning as development strategy was adopted after independence and therefore, the planning commission was set up. In the initial years of planning, the focus was on sectoral resource allocation, while the spatial dimensions of development were ignored. Although the first and second plan did mention the need for ‘dispersal’ and ‘diversification’ of economic activities, the regional disaggregation and decentralisation of the national development plan was not attempted. The Fourth Plan onwards, an attempt was made to address the regional imbalances in development; the approach remained sectoral and centralised. In the 70s and 80s the spatial dimension emerged on the Indian planning scene and emphasis was laid on backward area development and infrastructure planning in urban areas. The directions for planning over the years have been centrally undertaken development programmes, the allocation of resources to states by the Centre, special allocation of funds for backward areas and encouraging private investment in certain sectors. This flow of resources takes place through a channel across various levels, which in planning terms is referred to as “Multi-level Planning”. This implies flow of resources and decision-making functions in a hierarchical order, i.e. from center to state to district and then to the lower levels. The master plan approach, both for urban and regional planning has been adopted, and in most of the states, development authorities are being set up for planning, while local governments act as mere implementing authorities.

In the name of local level planning, district planning has been evolved, which is again based largely on a “Programme approach” and does not result from a careful assessment of local resource potentials, constraints and local capacities. Although they are mostly land-use plans, each of the sectors has its own plan and the interrelations between all the sectors do not get operationalised over geographical space. The district plan does not emerge as a coherent set of programmes reflecting the conscious and deliberate set of priorities which is the essence of rural planning.

Conventional vs New Planning Approach

The Conventional planning approach which was largely based upon theories and principles of physical planning could not address the local dynamism of development. Generally master plans and comprehensive regional plans are made for a period of 20 years and by the time the implementation phase comes, the pace of changes occurred in reality is higher than what was predicted by planners. The case of the Delhi Master Plan is a good example, which even after revision does not fit in the existing situation, because Delhi experienced much higher growth of population and economic activities than what was anticipated by the planners.

Conventional planning approaches have been criticised also due to lack of people’s participation. In this approach, objections of people are invited only after the draft plan is
prepared and there is no compulsion to incorporate people’s suggestions. Due to such criticism a new planning approach has emerged which lays emphasis on need-based and community-based planning practices. The Conventional techniques start with concepts and theories, and strong normative elements become guiding factors for policies. On the other hand, the new planning approach focuses on micro level projects, as in a dynamic situation, it is easy to intervene at the micro level and motivate and bring people together.

The table below shows broad differences between the two approaches of planning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASPECTS</th>
<th>CONVENTIONAL PLANNING</th>
<th>PLANNING AT MICRO LEVEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GOALS</td>
<td>Increasing wealth or GDP</td>
<td>Resourcefulness and well being of majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEOPLE</td>
<td>People as object of development</td>
<td>People as subject of development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROFESSIONALS AND PLANNERS</td>
<td>They assume a role of benefactor/prescriber and decide the fate of others</td>
<td>Role of professionals is catalytic. Emphasis is on community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEY ACTORS</td>
<td>Planners and Government authorities</td>
<td>Community, NGOs, CBOs and VOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TECHNOLOGY</td>
<td>Transfer of tools and technology from elsewhere to target area.</td>
<td>Appropriate technology brought out from local knowledge and skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFORMATION</td>
<td>Data is information collected as per the suitability and mind-set of planners</td>
<td>Local knowledge is information and integration of knowledge is done through a transparent process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADMINISTRATION</td>
<td>Promotes centralisation of decision making. Norms are made at higher level and applied to lower levels</td>
<td>Decentralisation and devolution of decision making process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENTERPRISES</td>
<td>Value added large enterprises</td>
<td>Viable size of enterprises on sustainable basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORMS</td>
<td>Based on strict rules, norms and standards uniformly applied to all places</td>
<td>Norms are formed according to prevailing situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCALE</td>
<td>Scale is large (a city or a district, metropolitan region, etc.)</td>
<td>Scale is smaller, i.e. Village or Gram Panchayat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Lectures of Prof. B. Mishra (9th-16th September 2001), School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi*

Unlike the conventional approach where the planning process starts with identification of goals and objectives, in Participatory planning it starts with identifying problems with the help of the community.

Micro planning is people centered participatory planning and therefore, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques are a most suited technique for micro planning exercises. The principle of PRA technique is involving people in research and in plan preparation and therefore, it is accepted as an appropriate technique. It also reduces the cost of collecting data and ensures reliability. Since micro planning aims at utilization of local resources, availability of resources, quantum, frequency of use, complexities involved, cost and benefit and potential and constraints can be better analysed by people and can be addressed through PRA.

**Micro Planning and the Panchayati Raj Set-up**

In the wake of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, when we say that Panchayati Raj Institutions have become a constitutional obligation, it becomes important to see how the planning or decision-making process is structured to ensure participation and accountability.
making processes are executed at the grassroots level. In the list of functions assigned to Panchayats (Article 243G), the Constitution does not use the term "Planning" as such, but various functions and responsibilities devolved (or to be devolved) definitely need a sequential and deliberate process which we term as Planning. Planning for rural areas has always been a question before a Planner and most of the time they become part of some District/Regional plan. No clear-cut emphasis is laid on villages as separate entities; rather some strategies for rural areas are proposed in these plans. Now the question arises as to how our villages will be planned in the light of the new Panchayati Raj System.

The control over natural resources (land, water, forest, etc) has been given to Panchayats and powers related to implementation of development programmes and administration also lies with the Panchayat. Theoretically, Panchayats therefore become development authorities at the grassroots level that are supposed to not only plan for the village, but also to implement the policies and proposals.

The illustration (flow diagram) below shows the interrelationship between micro-planning and Panchayati Raj Institutions, in which PRIs act as organisations or systems of governance through which the decision-making process involves more and more people at different levels. Such a process is possible only when an appropriate planning approach is followed. Therefore, micro-planning is perceived as an appropriate technique of planning, which will lead not only to utilisation of locally available resources, but also to accountability and transparency in the process, natural or human.

**Micro Planning in Practice**

After discussing the conceptual frame of Micro Planning and its relevance to the decentralised system of governance, it is important to see the application of this planning approach in the real world situation.
In India, Conventional Planning approaches are widely practised especially in the case of town planning. The application of new Planning methods and techniques have been limited. It is only in the 1990s that micro planning exercises came into the picture. Efforts of micro planning can be divided into two parts, viz., Government interventions and Non-government (NGO) interventions.

- **Government Interventions and Micro Planning:** In the late 1980s and beginning of 1990s, several government-assisted projects emphasised on community-based planning and management. After the new economic policy, decentralisation of the planning process was widely advocated and it was realised that centralised management does not have an effective cost-benefit balance. The costs of operation in big projects are huge and involving beneficiaries in planning and managing the projects is an appropriate way. Taking this into consideration, Joint Forest Management(JFM) and Participatory Irrigation Management(PIM) were initiated. These projects gave user’s right to the beneficiaries, who were given the project on “patta” basis. PIM has been started in most of the states where farmers form Water Users’ Associations(WUAs). These bodies enter into an agreement with government departments, and functions related to planning, distribution and tax collection are entrusted to the beneficiaries themselves. These community-based projects promised the involvement of people at every stage of planning, right from designing to the implementation stage. In actual practice, however, they are not participatory in the real sense.

The evaluation of the PIM project in the Western Zone Command Area of Bihar shows that the community has to take the approval of the Executive Engineer for the design, construction and maintenance of water channels, while water taxes are decided by the government. The Water Users’ Association is dominated by higher caste and powerful farmers, and the system lacks equity (both in distribution and participation), accountability and transparency. Involvement of Panchayati Raj in the whole water management process is negligible. The PIM model has been uniformly applied and it has not taken into consideration the local economic and socio-political set up. Therefore, terming such models as ‘Participatory Micro Planning’ models, will not be appropriate.

- **NGOs’ Interventions:** As discussed above, the involvement of government projects is very specific and the community has no role to play in overall planning. Participation is ensured for planning and implementation at the village level, but they have no role to play in project design, which is much larger in scale.

In contrast to government-sponsored large projects where communities adopt the participatory model prepared at a higher level, NGOs have attempted community-based planning mechanism in a more realistic and practical manner. Here, it is worth mentioning the attempt made by PRIA and partners to initiate the micro planning process at the village level.

Samarthan, in association with local partners in Madhya Pradesh, applied the concept of micro planning in the drought-prone districts of Gwalior, Sehore, Tikamgarh, Panna, Datia and Morena. In the beginning, they followed PRA techniques for identifying problems and prioritising them and thereafter, the planning process was carried out systematically. Construction of new wells and hand-pumps and deepening of wells have been the major outcomes of this micro-planning process.

SSK in Uttar Pradesh undertook several micro-planning experiments, and one of the examples is planning for the Pipra Panchayat in Kushinagar district. Here, the community identified problems and prioritised them and on this basis, a work plan for three years was prepared. The main aspects of planning here included construction of a bridge, deepening of ponds, and educational programmes and their implementation.

Similarly, PRIA-Himachal Pradesh, with the help of Rural Technology and Development Centre(RTDC) Mandi, and with the help of the community, prepared plans for each of the wards. Planning for water facility and road construction was done after following the stages involved in PRA. Preparation of a Village Development Plan was also attempted, and after analyzing the raw materials and labour force available in the village, the process of road construction was approved.
Fatehabad, Haryana, the micro-planning exercise was undertaken step-by-step, and with the help of the district administration, the problem of drinking water and electricity could be addressed.

In this way, the NGO sector as compared to government projects, has carried out micro-planning exercise in a more people-centric manner.

**Major Issues and Challenges Ahead**

After going through the theoretical frame and practices of micro planning, several issues have been identified as follows:

**Issues Related to Micro Planning**

- Unlike Comprehensive Development plan and Master plans, Micro plans are not very comprehensive. Like the Metropolitan plan or Comprehensive Development plans at the district level, the concept of Village Development plans at the village/Panchayat level have not been applied. PRIA H.P made an attempt to formulate a Village Development Plan; however, since finances of Panchayats are limited, only one or two top priorities could be addressed. SSK, Lucknow also made an attempt to conduct planning in phases according to priorities, but the question here is how those plans get implemented. It is clear from the above examples that not all the priorities and development needs of rural masses can be planned and implemented due to absence of resources (especially financial) and powers with the Panchayats. Therefore, criticising micro-plans on the ground that they are not holistic is not justified. The integration of sectoral issues at the village level also gets affected due to a complex institutional set-up, through which finances do not percolate to the grassroots levels.

- The conventional planning approaches are often criticised due to the time taken in data collection and its analysis. As seen from the examples presented earlier, NGOs have devoted a lot of time and professional skills in carrying out PRA, but the outcome of this whole process is construction of a few structures. The point here is - are we not following the same track of micro planning processes which conventional planners have been doing? However, if we see the process carried out for micro-planning positively, the large amount of information generated during this exercise can always be useful for planning in the next phase. Secondly, this process not only builds rapport between NGO workers and the community, but also provides a platform to them for sharing information and skills. This is also a way of exploring the capacities and knowledge inherent in the community, which our planners and policy-makers often tend to ignore.

**Other Related Issues**

- The planning functions (both sectoral and spatial) are still under development authorities at the district level, and planning for rural areas becomes part of district plans. In these plans, strategies for rural development are made and land-use for the district as a whole is proposed. The issue here is that the strategies followed by schemes proposed at a higher level may not be compatible with the local needs, and in that case, how can the micro-planning process be implemented at lower levels?

- Planning for natural resource utilization is absent and the local resource utilization in micro-planning exercises has confined itself to financial and human resources only. Even if natural resources (i.e. water and forests) are focused upon, the approach is not holistic if we consider even one aspect. For instance, in participatory water management planning, the emphasis is on irrigation, while other uses like drinking water for livestock and conservation aspects have been ignored. This is common especially in government-sponsored water resource projects.

- Since most of these natural resources are controlled and managed by government departments, Panchayats can not undertake the micro-planning process to plan for these resources. The point here, is how to implement the provisions under Article 243G effectively and how long will the livelihood base of the rural areas be controlled by a centralized management system?

- Working with problem communities and addressing the community dynamics is a challenge. The study of the Western Zone Command Area in Bihar shows that the planning and management process is controlled by a few
socially and economically powerful classes. In such a case, ensuring equity in participation and distribution of benefits is a major policy issue.

Conclusion

The criticism of conventional physical planning has led to the emergence of a new people-centered planning approach. Although micro-planning aims to involve people in the planning and management of development processes, the existing practice of micro-planning lays more emphasis on planning for physical infrastructure and thus, it lacks comprehensiveness. Taking into account the time, resources and skills involved in the process, one can question the outcome of the whole exercise, but before that, one should not forget the status of our grassroots governance. It is true that they have received a legal back-up from the Constitution, but in the absence of institutional and attitudinal supports from government departments, the planning functions are not executed.

Kavita Kanan is working as a Programme Intern in the National Team of the Centre for Local Self-governance, PRIA.
Breaking Barriers through Micro-planning: A case of ‘Labour Force’ in Kunnathukal Gram Panchayat in Kerala

Dinoo Mathew

This article recounts the experience of a small revolution in the agrarian economy of a Gram Panchayat in Kerala. Kunnathukal, a Gram Panchayat located on the southern tip of Kerala was reeling under the pressure of low agricultural productivity and the concomitant problems of acute labour shortage and increased production costs for land owners and severe unemployment, poverty and low social status of labourers. It was at this point, that the micro-planning efforts initiated through the People’s Plan Campaign process gave the GP a new lease of life. The series of processes and developments which helped Kunnathukal Gram Panchayat to revive its economy, is the main focus of this write-up.

Kunnathukal, a gram panchayat situated in the southern tip of Kerala, may be considered a microcosm of the state in terms of the agricultural scenario including labour problems. The panchayat, bordering Kanyakumari district, has a population of 33648 and an area of 26.85 sq.km. As in other parts of the state, the panchayat is dependent on agriculture, with paddy once being the major crop cultivated in the land.

Agricultural Scenario in Kunnathukal Gram Panchayat

The basic problem of the village as elsewhere, in the agricultural sector, was the decrease in production and productivity in paddy cultivation. The magnitude of the problem was overwhelming, but a solution to the same remained elusive. Available statistics revealed that within a span of a decade or so (1980s to 1990s), the panchayat witnessed a drastic decline in paddy cultivation from 315 ha to a mere 8 ha. The area of cultivable wastelands increased to around 300 ha. This should be seen against a scenario where more than eighty per cent of the population have land holdings ranging from 10 cents to above 5 acres. Land owners lost interest in cultivation due to various reasons like high labour cost and subsequent rise in production cost, acute labour shortage during the harvest season, etc. Besides these, the agricultural sector was facing other problems like marginalisation of agricultural holdings, poor irrigation infrastructure, etc. In the course of time, landowners either shifted their interest to less labour intensive crops or left the lands fallow. While this was so on the farmers’ side, the situation of the agricultural labourers presented another bleak picture. When landowners were witnessing acute labour shortage during the brief harvest season, the agricultural labourers were facing severe unemployment during the lean season, resulting in partial employment and poverty, low social status, etc.
Decentralised planning process

Like the rest of Kerala, this tiny village was living with the problem for many years. A feasible solution seemed a far cry, given the intense political unionisation of the labour sector. It was in this context that micro planning or decentralised planning initiated through the People's Plan Campaign for the Ninth Plan in Kerala found relevance. The Plan Campaign was a concerted effort of the then ruling LDF government in Kerala, in bringing about democratic decentralisation of the planning and development process. To start with, the government decided to earmark 35 to 40 per cent of the outlay of the Ninth Five-year Plan towards projects and programmes made by the local self-governing institutions. In this new mechanism of decentralised planning, the district is no longer treated as the basic planning unit. Instead, the planning process begins at the grassroots level with maximum participation of people together with elected members, non-official experts, volunteers, etc. The officials were expected to work alongside the non-officials in the whole process. The Campaign thus unleashed wide opportunities and created an enabling environment for the panchayats to take up innovative and development work as per the felt needs and priorities of the local communities.

Thus, with adequate amount of funds coming to the panchayats for development work, the panchayats were enabled to take up comprehensive work in their areas. For this, people were mobilised in large numbers for gram sabhas as these were the fora where the developmental needs and problems could be debated and problems prioritised. Any programme is sustainable only if it is need based. In the planning stage of every gram sabha, the people are divided into sectoral groups like agriculture, animal husbandry and the like, to discuss the problems in the respective sectors. Similar such gram sabhas were conducted in all wards of Kunnathukal gram panchayat too. During these gram sabhas, the problems of labour unemployment, declining areas of paddy cultivation, etc., were highlighted by the people in the agricultural sectoral group.

Analysing the age-old problem and the resources made available through the plan fund, the panchayat members and the agriculture officer of the line department introduced the concept of labour bank to the villagers. Consultations were held with the gram sabha members regarding the concept, who found this to be a good idea.

Thozhil Sena (Labour Force)

The main purposes of the labour bank or the thozhil sena were: to step up production and productivity in the agricultural sector by ensuring timely availability of local labour and providing employment assurance and social status to farm labourers, healthy farmer-labourer relations, partial mechanisation in the farm sector to reduce cost of production and physical exertion of farm labourers, social security to labourers, etc. As is seen, the purpose of the programme was not just addressing the problem of unemployment. It had a social justice perspective as well in that the programme went further to enable the growth of healthy farmer-labourer relations. This is quite a breakthrough, given the stress and strain in farmer-labourer relations.

The Thozhil Sena consists of 300-500 agricultural labourers, whose services are available on demand by the farmers, for the cultivation of crops like paddy, tapioca, coconut, plantain and vegetables. The details of work like labour norms, work time and wage rates are pre-fixed by a committee at the panchayat level, involving representatives of farmers and labourers. The committee also provides a forum for the farmers and labourers to discuss their needs and problems. The payment for the work done is made at the panchayat who will then pay the labourers. Thus the link between the farmers and the labourers is forged at the panchayat level such that neither side is exploited.

To take care of the entire supervision of the farm operations, farm help societies have been formed at each ward of the panchayat. This society consists of farmers, members of thozhil sena, neighbourhood groups, agricultural development committee, a key resource person/ a member of the block level expert committee, etc. The functioning of the farm help society may be likened to that of a mini agricultural office as
they provide all the services of the agricultural office, including dealing with the problems of farmers and labourers, receiving applications for the services of labour force and other agricultural materials. They also function as a resource centre for providing labour, seeds, fertilizers, agricultural implements etc. Discipline in the functioning of workers is ensured by this mechanism. If the farmer has any complaints regarding the labourer, he needs to complain only to the farm help society, which will deal with the issue.

Moreover, the labourers are assured 20 days employment per month throughout the year, which is a great boon to them. During the lean season, the services of the labour force are used in the service sector like house construction, infrastructure work and as and when the need arises in other development work, so that they are not out of employment for long. With funds being provided to the panchayats for various activities, the panchayats are also in a position to assure employment of labourers.

Regarding the budget, the panchayat earmarked the entire amount which it had allocated for the agricultural sector for the implementation of the programme. In the financial year 1999-2000, Rs.1.55 million from the plan fund and Rs.0.15 million from the agriculture department fund was set apart for the purpose, thus making a total of Rs.1.70 million.

**Methodology**

The methodology adopted in the whole exercise was a participatory one, where the panchayat and the agriculture officer took pains to identify and enlist the cooperation of various stakeholders. Various participatory methods were employed in the process. The problem was identified and prioritised by the people in the *gram sabha*. Taking the matter further, the panchayat and the agriculture office held *focus group discussions* with representatives of important organisations of farmers and labourers in the area, members of the agriculture development society and task force on agriculture to analyse in detail the problems and opportunities in the agriculture sector. Based on this, the concept of labour force was coined by the panchayat and the agriculture office.

In order to spread the message of labour force and call for people’s participation, regular *public meetings* were convened. Once the people showed a positive attitude to the concept, the work of operationalising the concept started. Regular *awareness building/ conscientisation* programmes were provided to the citizens regarding the concept and the pressing need to keep the whole programme free of politics. However, the cooperation of political parties and trade unions in the area was enlisted. At the onset itself, wide *consultations* were held with the leaders of farmers and labourers’ unions, who in turn had discussions with their respective members, and their cooperation enlisted. Next, the panchayat and agriculture office members had discussions with the members of the leading political parties in the locality to ensure their cooperation too. The efforts taken for the above two steps are commendable since trade unions and political parties can play a decisive role in making the programme a success.

Work details were finalised only after a *consensus* was reached by the high level committee. As the programme was still in a stage of experiment, it was decided to operationalise the concept with limited number of labourers. People themselves were asked to select the eligible labourers from each ward, based on agreed guidelines. The rest of the labourers were assured that they would be selected in the following years. To provide technical training to the labourers, the panchayat took the help of Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad, the faculty of the Agriculture University and the agriculture officer. A three-day intensive training was given to these labour force members on the new concept, the use of new machines and the need for upholding discipline, sincerity and commitment to the new cause.

Obviously, the planning, operation and sustenance of the project were not easy. As mentioned earlier, the People’s Plan Campaign provided an enabling environment for panchayats to take up development initiatives. However, this alone could not be a sufficient assurance of success. It needed people at the helm of affairs (here, the panchayat) with initiative, with creativity and a vision to make use of the opportunity and take up activities based on the felt needs of the people and in tune
with the resources, for the all round development of their village. Above all, it needed the political will, which was here provided by the panchayat president and the elected members. This proved a major factor in handling a delicate issue like labour and that too with the cooperation of farmers and labourers. Equally significant were the services of the agricultural officer, who was one of the major brains behind the programme. At a time when the panchayats are at loggerheads with the officials of the line departments, this healthy cooperation and collaboration between the panchayat and the agricultural officer is laudable.

Promoting factors of success

- **Felt Need/ Pressing problem:** The whole exercise was based on the felt need of people, especially the farmers and labourers. People were thus for the programme.

- **Stakeholder participation:** The panchayat members and the agriculture officer took care to identify and enlist the cooperation of all those people who were directly or indirectly associated with the programme. The inclusion of members of all political parties and farmer and labourers' unions helped in avoiding any obstacles which could otherwise come from quarters of vested interests.

- **Formation of people's organisations:** In each ward of the panchayat, farm help societies were formed which function as mini agriculture offices and provide all services of the agriculture office. Supervision and management of the whole programme is done by these people's organisations.

- **Work details** like labour norms, volume of work, work time and wage rates were fixed only after consultation with representatives of farmers and labourers.

- **Linkage with panchayat:** Though the whole operation is managed by the farm help societies and the labour force, the coordination of the labour force activities is with the panchayat and the agriculture office. The gram panchayat president and the agriculture officer find representation in all the committees formed for the programme. This has enabled in sustaining the programme and preventing any situation where the labour force/farm help society grow to be bodies functioning parallel and hence undermine panchayats.

- **Assured employment:** Since the linkage has been kept with the panchayat, 20 days employment per month for the labour force members was assured even during the lean season, as their services could be utilised in other work of the panchayat like construction, etc.

- **Coordination between panchayat and agriculture office:** Without the healthy coordination between the panchayat and the agriculture office, it would have been difficult to operate a programme of this nature.

- **Political will:** It was sheer political will which enabled the Government of Kerala to devolve more than one-third of their state budget to local bodies, which in turn motivated the local bodies to take up comprehensive work in their areas. Similarly, it was the political will of the panchayat president and elected members which paved the way for such an initiative and that too with the cooperation of trade unions and political parties in the local area.

Challenges faced

- **Initial scepticism of farmers:** Like all new changes, the concept of labour bank was regarded with some scepticism by the farmers in the initial stages. The fear of unionisation is so engrained in the minds of people that the panchayat had to deal with this issue as the major challenge. Majority of the farmers had the fear that the labour force would eventually grow into a labour union. They feared that their applications to the farm help societies requesting for services of the labour force could be used as a document by the labourers in later years to claim a portion of their income from the produce. Thus in spite of the fact that local labour was available through the labour force, the farmers continued to depend upon outside labour.

It needed a lot of effort on the part of the panchayat and the agriculture office to convince the farmers of the potential benefits of the programme. A team of panchayat members and the agriculture officer had continuous discussions with the
farmers. To counter the fear of labourers using their documents against them, the team suggested that they put only their name on the application without the address or signature. The team also detailed the benefits of mechanisation resulting in cost reduction in production. For example, the team asked the farmers to pay just Rs. 800 to the agriculture office for harvesting in a hectare, which by normal rates would have cost them Rs. 2000. The few people who showed interest were motivated and the success of the programme paved the way for others to make use of the services of the labour force.

- **Resistance from labourers and vested interests:** Continuous education was also required for the labourers, as certain sections of labourers who had not joined the programme gave strong resistance to the fact that the labourers in the labour force mechanism were working on lower wage rates. The people in general and the labourers in particular were made aware of the broader purpose of the programme, particularly of assured employment.

- The creation of farm help societies provided a check to the siphoning of funds by middlemen and influential people, since in the new set up, all benefits in the agriculture sector can be obtained only through these societies. Naturally, they started attacking the services of the labour force. But by then, the people were convinced enough of the efficacy of the programme not to fall prey to such mischief.

- The greatest challenge however was when a leading local daily allowed publication of a series of articles by vested interests against the programme. Despite repeated requests by the Panchayat President to the editor of the newspaper, the articles continued. The panchayat members, agriculture office, farm help societies and the local people then took a mass decision to boycott the particular newspaper. The boycott continued for two months. Realising the folly, the newspaper sent a team to study the actual facts after which, a half page article was given in the newspaper lauding the programme.

**Outcomes of the Labour Force Experience**

An immediate outcome of the whole process was that a healthy partnership developed between the farmers and the labourers. Through the concept of labour force, a new identity was given to the labourers. It brought in a new culture where the labourers are now organised for assuring their employment, dignity of labour and work security, rather than on financial and work rights.

A major outcome of the experience has been the increase in the area under paddy cultivation. Around 60 acres of fallow land have been brought under dry land cultivation and 13 ha of land under paddy cultivation. Cost of production has reduced to 40 per cent due to mechanisation. The interest of the farmers and labourers in agriculture has been revived. Around 1300 farmers have made use of the services of labour force till now, the major advantage being that the farmers can benefit from the subsidy immediately after the completion of work. Before, they had to shuttle between government offices with their vouchers. But now they need to approach only the farm help societies for any work to be done. Similarly, those labourers who had kept away from the programme have shown a new interest. There are nearly 400 applications from local labourers to join the force.

Moreover, the labourers were registered under a group insurance scheme worth one lakh rupees. Those labourers who had 150 days of work to their credit were given a festival allowance of Rs. 500 during the onam festival season. The labour bank provides the workers with credit coupons of various denominations to enable them to buy provisions at a village store, run by the women's self help group ‘Samata’ formed as part of the initiatives undertaken under the People’s plan.

The situation now can be contrasted to earlier days when the agricultural labourers had to look for employment in other sectors and outside their village, due to lack of regular employment. They can, thus, save the additional cost, which would have accrued if they had to work outside the village, and spend the savings on the family. In addition, the drain of money from the village is checked, as local labour is now readily available in the village itself. The money is now circulated in the village itself, thus contributing to village development.

The involvement of people at each stage of the process and in the management of the
programme has resulted in generating their support in general and the labour force members in particular. They have developed a sense of 'we' feeling. Participation and support of the people were the major tools which enabled the experience to overcome all challenges. People are now more aware of the agricultural schemes available and benefits now tend to reach the target group.

With the success of the programme and revived interest in agriculture, neighbouring panchayats have started replicating the efforts of Kunnathukal panchayat. Various panchayats have also requested for the services of labour force members.

Labour Bank

Perhaps the most positive outcome of the experience has been the creation of a labour bank. In this mechanism, the farmers can avail of the services of labourers from the bank on loan basis, when they do not have enough initial capital to invest. The loan needs to be repaid only after the harvest, in the form of wages with interest at 12.5 per cent.

Follow up

The panchayat is now making efforts to conduct a survey of the agriculture land and land-use practices of every farmer and store the same in the computer. The farm help societies are expected to give reports regarding these aspects so that the data can be updated. The major purpose is to provide technical advice to the farmers on modern and scientific practices of farming. For this, efforts are on to identify unemployed students in the area who have undergone vocational higher secondary education to form a core group so as to provide technical advice to farmers.

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Methods of Participatory Poverty Assessment: How to Hear the Voices of Urban Poor

Anil Kumar Roy & Pravin Bhardwaj

It has been widely understood that the most authentic information can be obtained through a participatory manner. Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) not only helps in understanding poverty at the grassroots level, but it also helps in bringing out the poor's perception about poverty. This article attempts to explain the various methods of Participatory Poverty Assessment in the Indian context. It also deals with our initiatives (PPA) in strengthening urban governance with focused attention on the urban poor and marginalised section of the slum population. The case study of transitional urban area presents a new set of challenges (local dynamics) in smaller and medium towns. Lastly, we have tried to draw constraints and lessons from PPA (specially social mapping and multi-stakeholder dialogues) to build a strategy for strengthening ULBs (Urban Local Bodies) to hear the voices of the urban poor people.

Participatory Poverty Assessment may be used as an instrument for capturing the views of poor people living in the slum. Later on, the views collected thereby can be taken for policy level advocacy. PPA may become a guiding factor for making strategy for poverty reduction measures. However, it may not be taken as the alternative method of structure survey for poverty analysis. PPA is a rather complementary approach to the conventional way of data collection. The data collected in a conventional manner can well be explained with the help of PPA. PRIA along with its partners initiated a pilot project in five states of India namely, Haryana, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh by selecting two small or medium towns with the focus entirely on urban poor & marginalised section of the society. The PPA has been used effectively in the selected area for our active intervention.

Although there are many methods of PPA through which an understanding on urban poverty can be built upon, we would like to present some of the widely used methods in urban poverty analysis. To avoid the complexity of actual methodology of each method at this stage, an attempt has been made to present conceptual understanding of the methods of PPA.

Social Mapping

To begin with, let us take up the case of “Social Mapping”. It is a method through which a map on social assets of the community in question is prepared by the active participation of the community itself. The other trained research group can just facilitate the entire exercise. To prepare a social map, the assembled group would be asked to draw a map of the “Slum”, either on the ground or on a large sheet of paper. Pebbles, twigs and sand can be used as indicators for maps drawn on the ground. Coloured marker pens and bindis may be used on the chart paper. In the first stage people should be asked to mark the infrastructure of the slum, including roads, lanes, by-lanes, hand pumps, taps, latrines and so on. Each of the assembled members should be encouraged to take active part. The landmarks such as temples and clubroom, etc. can also be marked on the chart/ground. Maps thus prepared, would then be revisited during later exercises to identify house-holds (HH) with malnourished children, places of open defecation, households where there are single earning members, households headed by women, houses where family planning measures are being adopted, and so on, depending on the response and involvement of the poor community. This process has to be the first step in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the slum area in an urban settlement. The map prepared can serve as an icebreaker or entry

1 CMDA- Participatory Impact Assessment of Calcutta Slum, pp 20
2 Slum-Cluster of houses without any basic facilities such as- water, sanitation, electricity, roads, etc. It is demarcated and notified by the municipality.
point to reach out to the poor community. PRIA and its partners have carried out the social mapping exercise in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh & Rajasthan.

**Well Being Exercise**

Social mapping can be followed by “well-being exercise” which captures the residents’ perceptions of various status groups within the slum. Well-being exercise should ideally look beyond the economic criteria of income grouping of slum households. Criteria for well-being may be discussed thoroughly and a consensus can be arrived at. Then the entire slum population could be arranged in a group of three or four. Some such indicative criteria can be suggested, as achievement of education, number of family members employed, type of employment, sources of income, etc. After arriving at the criteria and category of house, approximate income range of each category and proportion, can be presented through a pie diagram. After having a fair understanding of social assets, one could look to identify the internal as well external linkage of slum areas. This can be done with the help of a “Venn Diagram”. The above exercise has been successfully carried out in our interventions in Sehore and Ichhawar municipalities in Madhya Pradesh where a Muhalla Samiti has been formed with the wards. Now the committee meets at regular intervals to sort out their problems and find solutions.

**Venn Diagram**

It captures the relationship between slum-dwellers and various external or internal agencies and the role of each agency in the slum. Venn Diagrams are popularly known as Chapati Diagram. In the Indian context, these agencies can be an individual, ward councillors, Mahila Samiti (Women’s Group), Local CBOs/Muhalla Vikas Samiti, Municipality, Urban Development Authority, various Political Party wings, Trade Unions, etc. Chapati diagram was used in the Fathehabad municipality of Haryana and the relationship between various stakeholders was clearly identified.

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3 CBDA, DFID-Calcutta, PP-14
4 ibid-pp-33

**Seasonal Calendars**

“Seasonal Calendars” are used to capture the extent of slum problems and how much they vary from season to season. Say for example, the problem of illness of children in slums. A special calendar can be prepared in such a way that the number of children suffering from various types of illness can be shown month-wise. The chart thus prepared, provides the seasonal fluctuation of illness. A greater preparedness can thus be developed taking the effect of seasonality into consideration.

**Focus Group Discussion**

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) gather information from the perspectives of specific groups. They differ from ordinary group discussions as the groups include only people who conform to a particular criteria, such as elderly people, women, club members, teachers, trade workers, etc. This is an exercise which helps in gathering opinion of a particular group on the issues in question, vis-à-vis the community. Women in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh & Haryana have been encouraged to come forward and discuss their problems. Most of the time solutions of such problems come from the women themselves. To strengthen it further, small Mahila Mandals have been formed to address the problem.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-Structured Interviews (SSI) are held with the key actors of the slum area. SSI tries to elicit an individual perspective on issues of concern. Care is taken to structure the interview loosely in an open-ended way, around the key issues of the slum. Key actors’ opinion can suggest the vital indication of issues and their remedies. However, a crosscheck mechanism may be advised before arriving at suggestions for the issues. Ratia in Haryana, Gazipur in Uttar Pradesh and Sehore and Ichhawar in MP were the places where the problems were accessed through semi-structured interviews.

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3 ibid- PP-48
4 ibid-pp-64
There are many more methods in practice for assessing Urban poverty. Nevertheless, the above methods can be helpful in a better understanding of urban poverty in a slum area. PRIA and its partners' recent initiatives for strengthening ULBs (Urban Local Bodies) with specific focus on urban poor and marginalised women, have been very instrumental in understanding poverty through participatory means.

The urban poor's voices are seldom heard by ULBs. An attempt has been made to bring the poor and municipal functionaries on a common platform through a Multi-stakeholder dialogue (MSHD). Multi-stakeholder dialogues were attended by municipal staff, elected councillors, NGOs/CBOs, journalists, government department officials, individuals and various other members of Samitis formed at the ward level. Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues have been organised in Chomu and Bilara municipality in Rajasthan, as a part of the community mobilisation exercise to understand the voices of urban poor. Following are the main objectives of the MSHD:

- To bring all the stakeholders in development of a municipal area on a common platform.
- To develop an understanding of limitations of various stakeholders and also reveal the shortcomings of various constituents of the meeting.
- To draw upon greater commitment of such stakeholders to contribute towards the solutions of the problems.
- To prepare the ground for future interaction among various stakeholders.

The whole exercise has been done by mobilisation of ward citizens. A preparatory meeting had been conducted before the actual (MSHD). Invitation letters had been distributed to all the ward councillors and the municipal officials. The ward citizens undertook a signature campaign where they identified all the problems. The signed letter was distributed to ward councillors and municipal officials. At both the venues, an open discussion was initiated among residents, councillors, municipal officials and people from UNNATI.

A preliminary campaign was initiated by UNNATI to prepare the ground for MSHD. A relatively smaller Group (30) of people met on 10th June 2001, in the Raiger Muhalla of Chomu Municipality. In this preparatory meeting, the Group identified the problems of their wards and also prioritised them accordingly. The following problems were identified:

- Dirty drains and lack of provision for removing garbage.
- Absence of public toilets (specially for women, which is a very acute problem)
- Lack of a Training Centre or programme for self-employment skills for women.
- No building for school.
- No tap water for alleviated areas of the wards.

The above mentioned problems (as prioritised by the community) were discussed and debated in an open meeting with all the concerned stakeholders of Chomu Municipality on 20th June 2001. The participants were community men and women, municipal staff, elected representatives, CBOs and CDS members. All the stakeholders took some or the other initiative in addressing their problems and finding a solution to them.

Following have been the constraints faced in MSHD

- The community was very heterogeneous in terms of its economic activities and caste/class set up.
- Locally, the authorities, including the municipality were less in favour of such an event.
- Women in the community accept their problems stoically but express their unwillingness to act upon such events.
- Male members of the community by and large have a habit of drinking local made wine (alcohol) in the evening or even in the daytime.

UNNATI (Rajasthan) - is PRIA's partner organisation.

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8 CDS-Community Development Society under SJRY
Lessons Learnt

- The multi-stakeholder dialogue is a means of enabling the urban poor to show their solidarity in articulating their demands for basic services. Such events put greater pressure on other actors (stakeholders including community, such as elected councillors, municipal staff, CDS members, Vice-chairperson, etc.) to ensure the delivery of services.
- Lack of interaction between the various stakeholders tends to make local self-governance inert towards the poor.
- With a little catalytic effort, the urban poor can be mobilized to act towards getting their voices heard by ULBs. Subsequently, these processes can lead to better availability of services and ensure accountability of all the stakeholders.

Ways forward

- Such events at all stages of ULBs can be promoted to provide a regular platform for interaction.
- Follow-up of such events determines the success of the process of bridging the gap between the urban poor and the ULBs.
- Consolidation of such events and taking them on a wider plane of sharing may result in benefits for the poor.

- ULBs can be sensitised through this process towards the problems of the Urban poor.

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Multistakeholder Dialogue at Chomu Municipality, Jaipur, Rajasthan
Learning from Experimentation: People-centered Plan Preparation

Purvi Dass

PRIA and its partners in various states have been engaged in a hands-on experience of micro-planning with Panchayats and CBOs (Community Based Organisations). The past seven years' learnings have been consolidated into a doable, easily replicable model of micro-planning, which is described below. We hope this may prove to be handy for practitioners.

Rationale: Why People centred plan in PRIs?
1. PRIs are democratically elected bodies with reservations for women, dalits, etc.
2. PRIs are the loci of decision making in relation to resource allocation, natural resource management and human capital.
3. Gram Sabhas/Ward Sabhas are an appropriate forum to
   - Articulate and prioritise needs.
   - Hold accountable the decisions of PRIs.
4. Top down/technocratic/bureaucratic decision-making
   - has not brought about development (does not reflect local needs and priorities),
   - tends to exclude marginal groups and
   - is neither transparent nor accountable to communities.

In this context, a conscious effort has been made by PRIA and partners to work towards a "goal-oriented change," a change made in the existing situation, so as to solve the problems experienced by the community. Introducing a participatory element into the planning process lends clarity to the most difficult question - "Who needs what, as defined by whom?" With the involvement of the people in their own planning process, a sense of ownership and greater understanding of their own situation increases.

The objective of the ‘Doable’ Model: To enable preparation of a ‘doable and replicable’ Panchayat level development plan for a fiscal year, with community participation.

‘Doable’ Model of People Centred Plan

The lessons learnt in the course of PRIA’s micro-planning interventions during the last five years, have made us realise that:

- Firstly, women elected members tend to be more sensitive to local needs;
- Secondly, the more faithful the plan is to local felt needs, the better the chances of success;
- Thirdly, time is the essence - people appreciate quick turnover of an initiative;
- Fourthly, a needs oriented planning process generates its own data and implementation base - there is no need to set apart time/resources for data gathering.

With the above lessons in mind, a model has been developed which could be prepared by the community and elected members, without the help of experts. Government officials at the Panchayat, Block/Taluka and District levels are involved from the beginning of the preparation. This model has been named as a People-centred Plan (PCP) instead of microplan.

The People Centred Plan is not an end, but a means for future development of Communities. The base of the People-centred Plan is to build on the strength of each panchayat/mohalla/tola/ purva/ward and try to overcome the shortcomings.

Objectives of People Centred Plan

- To build the capacity of people to prepare their own village and/or Panchayat plan and implement it,
- To be able to work as a group in a village/Panchayat,
- To develop understanding of resources and information,
- To identify the root cause and solve the problem,
- To increase their capabilities (quality of life).
To be able to take decisions,
- To improve upon social, economic and legal environment of the village / Panchayat.
- To be 'agents' in the process of development
- To negotiate with larger institutional frameworks.

**The Strategy**: Through mobilisation of elected members, youth groups/ Mahila mandals/Kisan Groups, Panchayat Secretary/Sevak/ Gram sevak (while keeping district and block officials fully in the picture).

**The Steps in Preparation of People Centred Plan**

**Step 1** - Orienting elected members to the concept of microplanning (focus on economic, environmental and social needs) in a panchayat meeting of *one-day duration*. The Role-play method could also be used.

**Step 2** - Ward/Tola/Muhalla/Purva level meetings held simultaneously, for understanding the concept of microplans focusing on economic, social and human development, rather than on infrastructure development. The timing of the meeting should be suitable to the ward panchayat and community. The major issues of the ward should be identified; the cause and the probable solution should be identified (*Methodology - large group discussion*). One or two intellectuals/ youth/ individuals (volunteers) may be identified, who would be able to take part in preparation and implementation of the microplan along with the panchayat. A discussion on the need for contribution in kind or cash from the community may be initiated. (*This step may cover half a day or about two hours in each ward - total duration will depend upon number of Wards/ Tolas/Muhallas/Purvas*).

**Step 3** - Consolidation of the major issues of wards, causes and probable solutions at the panchayat level may be conducted, and a rough plan prepared on this basis. This will be done by the elected members, Panchayat Secretary, ward level volunteers and other Government officials. *One day*

**Step 4** - Preparing the People Centred Plan under following heads. *One day*

- Introduction of panchayat (brief demographic, geographic and socio-economic status - Map of the Panchayat can also be inserted).
- Issues and Priorities of wards
- Consolidation of priorities, probable solutions and appraisal of available resources.
- Plan based on solution with implementation responsibility
- Proposed Budget with community contribution.
- Conclusion/ways ahead

**Step 5** - Resolution passed by Ward/Gram Sabha *(upto one day)*

**Step 6** - Getting it typed and making multiple copies. *(one day)*

**Step 7** - Recording it on a Panchayat board.

**Step 8** - Submission and follow-up by elected members to Block Development office, Block Samiti and District Panchayat Officer. Other tiers of PRIs (Zilla Parishad), MLA, MPs and DPC (Banks/ NABARD/SHG, etc. if need be).

**Some Points to be Kept in Mind**

- **Scale of preparation** - Ideally, the efforts for People Centred Plan cover the entire panchayat or even a ward, but due to varied reasons if it is not happening, then to demonstrate the result, a Mohala/Tola/Purva or part of a ward may be considered.

- **Linking with the two higher tiers** - In the process of preparation of the People Centred Plan inviting/involving members of the above two tiers shall help in developing the linkages among the three tiers and mobilising the resources available to the other two tiers. (This can also serve as a basis for further negotiations with other institutions, e.g. DPC).

- **Conflicting Interest Groups** - In every Panchayat, there are conflicting interest groups, prior to starting the People Centred Plan. Care needs to be taken to involve them too.

- **Strike when the iron is hot** - Generally it was found that soon after the first meet, elected members, volunteers and government officials are enthusiastic for ward level meetings. It is better to conduct the ward level meetings immediately, as the environment is conducive and people are enthusiastic after the first meet.
Secondary Data - Prior to intervention for People Centred Plan, secondary data needs to be collected. This helps in correlating the problems and probable solutions.

Initiation of Meetings - All the meetings need to be initiated by elected members at the ward or Panchayat levels or by members of CBOs.

Learning Materials - Some kind of learning material if distributed during the meetings, promote better understanding and assimilation by the community. An easy-to-do People Centred Plan process, with objective and outcome may be disseminated. The language can be simple, font bigger and the content, short and comprehensible.

Media - The media may be contacted prior to the intervention. This helps in replicating the process elsewhere.

The use of Link with NRC -> SRC <- PRC

Most of the times technical inputs are needed for People Centred Plan preparation. The NRC (National Resource Centre) and SRC (State Resource Centre) shall have a data-base of various experiences available in this network. For example in Haryana for addressing a sanitation problem, technical advice was needed, which is readily available in HP. Here, a successful low-cost technique for sanitation in School building has been undertaken. The NRC and SRC should be able to provide this kind of information.

Marriage between Top-down and Bottom-up Approach - We are at present in a stage where bottom-up and top-down approach can be merged together for resource mobilisation in a people centred plan. This helps in involving the community and in implementation of the plan and is also useful for correcting the one-way relationship (top-down only).

Sustainability - Wherever there is a need-based process which could even solve at least some problem of the tola, mohalla or purva, the people centred plan could be sustained. However, it must be located directly in the Gram/Ward Sabha and Gram Panchayat processes.

Distance - The challenges of doing people centred planning in remote/far flung areas of the block need to be addressed.

This model is an idea. The way of doing it may differ from place to place, depending upon the situation and circumstances. However PRIA’s experience in 16 panchayats of Madhya Pradesh, 2 panchayats at Haryana, 1 panchayat each in Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh has helped in developing this model.

The NRC (National Resource Centre), SRC (State Resource Centre) and PRC (Panchayat Resource Centre) are resource banks at the National, State and Panchayat levels respectively, in PRIA’s PRI programme.

Puri Dass was working as a Programme Coordinator in the Centre for Local Self-governance, PRIA.

Workshop on sharing of hands-on-experience in micro planning-PRIA & Partners
New Horizons in Rural Development Planning in West Bengal

by Prabhat Datta; Das Gupta and Co. (P) Ltd., Kolkata, 2001; Pp. 24
Reviewed by Shivendra Tiwari

This book describes Community Convergent Action (CCA) and its growing importance in the developing world. CCA lays special emphasis on an organised community, household economic security and basic health and education. It refers to community action with government support in a partnership mode. The book takes into account rural development planning through the partnership or CCA approach.

Considering the failure of community development programmes of the 1950s, the CCA approach lays emphasis on involving the community not as mere beneficiary, but as key player/actor in the whole development planning process. With this backdrop, the author discusses the growth of decentralised planning concept in India with reference to West Bengal. The various phases and methodology of decentralised planning in West Bengal are discussed. The profile of rural West Bengal today and in the post 73rd Amendment phase is delineated. Finally, CCA as a new initiative in decentralised planning is detailed out.

The book provides a good overview of decentralised planning in West Bengal along with post analysis. It also describes how community convergent action is taking place with more powers given to the grass roots governance. But the book gives an impression that CCA programmes are to be initiated by government functionaries, and in that case the Panchayats become mere implementing agencies. Some insight into grassroots planning, without being dependent on the higher levels (district blocks) could have added value to this analytical paper.

Shivendra Tiwari is working in the Centre for Local Self-governance, PRIA.

+++ STRENGTHNING PRIs IN SIKKIM - PRIA’S INITIATIVE ++

Jyoti Kanwar

An initial foray in Sikkim was made in October with a visit to sensitize the local NGOs, Voluntary organisations and government about PRIA’s programme of strengthening Panchayats Raj. An assessment of the pattern of development in Sikkim and institutional mechanisms of delivery revealed an economy artificially buoyed by central grants, highly skewed distribution of resources and great urban, rural as well as regional disparities. Hence, to emphasise the need and relevance of Panchayats, and build a participatory perspective, PRIA has strategised a workshop on learning and exchange of experiences, in Sikkim. Leading NGOs, self-help groups, academia, representatives from the government and members of civil society are invited to participate in it. Findings of the study on devolution in Primary Education conducted by PRIA and partners will be shared. Intense interactive sessions are planned with members of NGOs, and civil society members to discuss various themes like the 73rd amendment and its importance, PRIA’s PRI experiences in other states, participatory approaches to development, Panchayats and the status of devolution in Sikkim, women in Panchayats and participation of the marginalised.

Organisations working on various sectors like community health, microcredit and education are invited to share their sectoral experiences. Issues and conclusions drawn from these discussions will then be channelised to help direct and strategise our interventions.

Jyoti Kanwar is coordinating PRIA’s PRI programme in Sikkim.
Training on Micro Planning for NGO personnel, Himachal Pradesh

Workshop on Sharing of Experiences in Micro planning - PRIA & Partners

Micro Planning exercise at Azoli Gram Panchayat, Sirmour, Himachal Pradesh

Multistakeholder dialogue at Gazipur Municipality, Uttar Pradesh
The Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) is an independent, non-profit, non-government organisation registered in 1982 under the Society Registration Act, 1860. PRIA is based at New Delhi, India.

Over the last eighteen years, PRIA has promoted people-centred development initiatives within the perspective of participatory research. Strengthening popular knowledge, demystifying dominant concepts and promoting experiential learning, have been the basis of supporting empowerment of the poor and oppressed in PRIA's work. Through field studies and documentation, workshops, training programmes, networking and enabling linkage, PRIA has facilitated the development of capacity within grassroots women voluntary agencies, NGOs and other bodies.

As a cherished means of the evolution of society and society and evolutionary process, PRIA, by:

- creating opportunities for dialogue and interaction among various segments of the Civil Society (in particular women);
- engaging in innovative policies and programmes;
- enabling dialogue among policies and programmes and institutional policies and programmes;
- promoting a participatory and comprehensive approach to development issues, development policies, development trends, development initiatives, and development institutions.

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