

# Building the Organization Capabilities of Gram Panchayats:

## The Pilot Project in Jharkhand

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Evolving a process-centric Gram *Panchayat* Organization Development framework, the Anode Lab, in collaboration with PRADAN, focussed on building the organizational capacity of *gram panchayats*, knowing that if the local body is capable and its members and staff are inspired to perform, it can impact sustainable change in key development spheres

**T**HE JOURNEY BEGAN IN AUGUST 2015 with a meeting in PRADAN to explore ways to leverage Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) toward sustainable change and development. Building on its extensive work in improving livelihoods across seven of the poorest states in the country, through the formation and promotion of Self Help Groups (SHGs), PRADAN has been

helping villagers understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

However, there is a mismatch between the demands on the institutions serving the communities and their capacities (supply-side capabilities). The team at Anode Governance Lab has evolved a process-centric Gram Panchayat Organization Development (GPOD) framework, focussed on building the organizational capacity of

PRADAN commissioned an exploratory study to gain an understanding of the devolution status in the states of Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh as well as to see its impact on the actual functioning of the *panchayats* and how the citizens engage with these bodies

*gram panchayats*<sup>1</sup> (GP), with the premise that if the local body is capable and its members and staff are inspired to perform, it can impact sustainable change in key development spheres.

As a first step, PRADAN commissioned an exploratory study to gain an understanding of the devolution status in the states of Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh as well as to see its impact on the actual functioning of the *panchayats* and how the citizens engage with these bodies. Based on the findings of this study, Anode and PRADAN were to conceptualize, design and implement a deeper engagement with *panchayats*.

**Status of devolution:** The findings of the exploratory study for Jharkhand have been summarized in a Strengths, Weaknesses, Limitations and Threat (SWOT) format, which further informed the design of the two-year pilot.

**Theoretical foundation:** The GPOD framework is inspired by the principles of organization development (OD), which take a holistic, systemic view of an organization and stress

#### Strengths

- Significant provisions for representative and direct democracy mechanisms—*Gram Panchayats* (GPs) and *Gram Sabhas* (GSs)
- Social capital created through women's collectives facilitated by PRADAN
- Basic foundation for GP functioning exists: Provision for staff, Notifications by 16 departments
- GPs implementing MNGREGA, albeit at different levels of engagement

#### Opportunities

- New local bodies in place with elections in 2015
- Capacities building capacities of GP and GS, leveraging and building on JPR Act provisions
- Collaboration with women's collectives to activate GS, support GPs
- Utilization of 14th FC funds
- Convergence through GPDP
- Improve Own Source of Revenue (OSR)
- Advocacy with state to provide support on notifications, rules, SFC etc.

#### Weaknesses

- Many provisions of the Jharkhand Panchayat Raj Act not operationalized, PESA not notified
- Lack of information and powers that legal statutes confer on GSs and its committees
- Limited funds for GP functioning: nonfunctional SFC, no roles for generating own revenue
- Inadequate staff, infrastructure

#### Threats

- Dictating a top-down agenda stifling the ability to evolve bottom-up priorities
- Patriarchal society inhibiting participation of women, especially in non-tribal areas
- Issues of elite capture and corruption prevalent in GPs
- Budgetary implications of reform (for example staff recruitment, untied funds)
- Naxal presence may impact elections as well as implementation if programs held in scheduled areas

<sup>1</sup>Developed through an action research project in Karnataka, documented in 'Nurturing panchayats to grow, the Gram Panchayat Organisation Development project: A process document'.

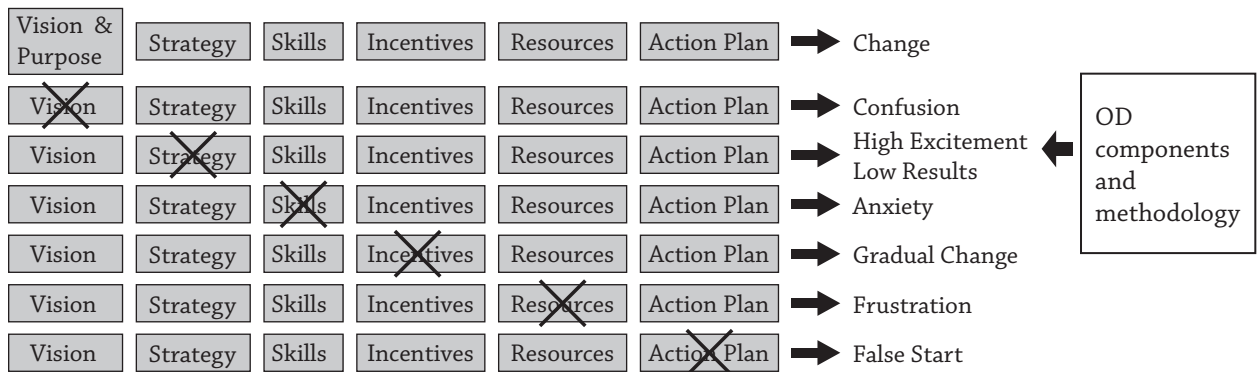
The GPOD framework is inspired by the principles of organization development (OD), which take a holistic, systemic view of an organization and stress on the role of members of the organization as key drivers of change.

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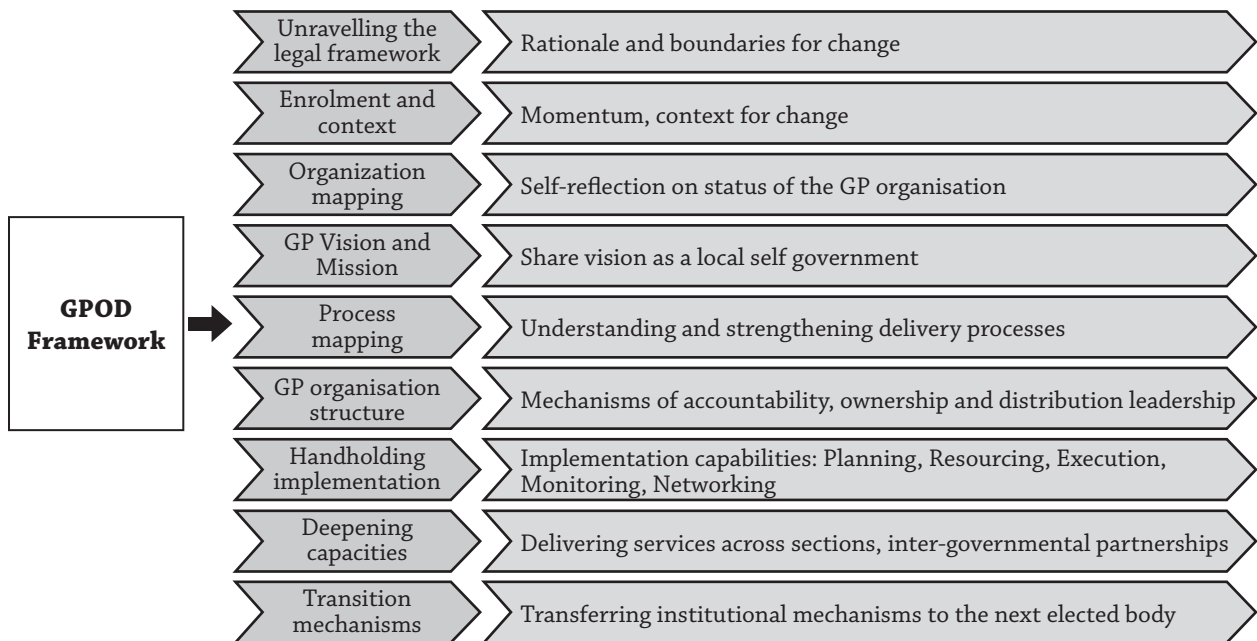
Organization members learn to analyze their own processes,

benefit from them, and make full-scale changes. OD maximizes participation to teach people to identify and solve their own organizational problems, learn to adapt to changing

organizational circumstances, and take advantage of an array of organizational opportunities (Hefner, 1988, p. 442)



Source: The Managing Complex Change model was copyrighted by Dr. Mary Lippi, founder and president of Enterprise Management, Ltd., in 1987



**Figure 1: GPOD Framework Derived from OD methodology**

The focus is to strengthen the capacity of the local government institutions, recognizing GPs as organizations in their own right, and enabling them to develop into mature institutions delivering their mandate, through a structured OD approach.

### SPACE project and its

**objectives:** The name of the project in which the GPOD intervention is embedded is Strengthening Panchayat Actions for Community Empowerment (SPACE).

The focus is to strengthen the capacity of the local government institutions, recognizing GPs as organizations in their own right, and enabling them to develop into mature institutions delivering their mandate, through a structured OD approach.

SPACE is being implemented in 15 GPs in Jharkhand, in five blocks, spanning 3 districts: Basia (Gumla district), Padma and Barhi blocks (Hazaribagh district) and Chandwara and Jainagar blocks (Koderma district). The SPACE project in Jharkhand integrates other efforts, including enhancing civic literacy among women's collectives and partnering with the state government for the social audit of the implementation of key government programmes such as MGNREGS and Yojana Banao Abhiyaan (Jharkhand's GP development planning process).

In addition, the SPACE programme is a part of Jharkhand State's Beacon

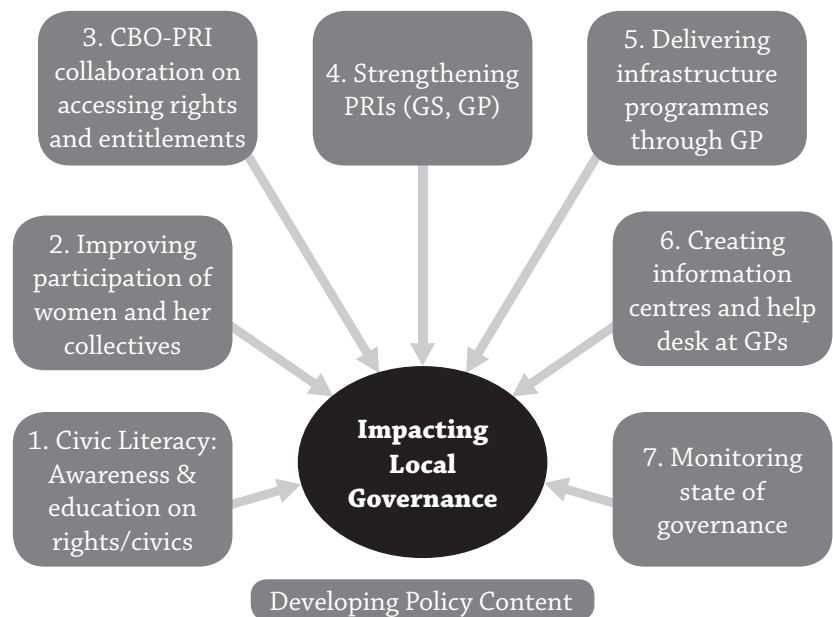
Panchayat project, which provides us the opportunity to leverage various platforms of the government and mainstream our effort.

### Legal provisions guiding

**panchayats:** A deeper understanding of the legal framework of the state was done to understand the boundaries that need to be taken into consideration when developing systems and structures for strengthening *panchayats*, as well as to make accessible the knowledge and resources hitherto not visible to these institutions. Key findings related to the

enactment and provisions in the Jharkhand Panchayati Raj Act (JPRA) 2001, the Panchayat Extension to the Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) 1996, applicable to the state, as well as notifications issued by various departments from time to time, are listed here:

- JPRA, Section 12: For each such village, specified as a village under Section 3 for the purposes of this Act, there shall be a GP.
- PESA rules have not been notified. Rules related to JPRA have not been laid out comprehensively.



**Figure 2: Intervention Buckets in Jharkhand's SPACE programme**

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The key premise of the intervention is that the GP is an institution in its own right, emphasized from the first step. Whether or not to engage in the project and sign an MoU accordingly is the panchayat's discretion as much as that of the implementing partner, PRADAN

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- JPRA Section 3:
  - District Magistrate can notify a village or a group of villages for the purpose of forming a GS/GP.
  - One revenue village is to have one GS.
  - PESA Area: More than one GS can be constituted in a revenue village.
- Sections 71 and 72 define the Standing Committees of GS, GP, *Panchayat Samiti* (PS) and *Zilla Parishad* (ZP).
- JPRA Sections 10, 75, 76 and 77: Functions of the GP, PS and ZP, respectively.
- The government may delegate powers by amending, after due deliberation, the Acts/Rules for the time being in force with regard to the functions of the GP, PS and ZP (in general areas) or its additional functions (in scheduled areas)
- There could be possible conflicts between GP structures and mandates, and PESA provisions.
- Fifteen departments of the state have issued notifications detailing the functions, funds and functionaries of the three PRIs.

Whereas these provide the legal basis for our intervention, they also reveal the fragile position

of the *panchayats* in Jharkhand, where the state has an overriding power over PRIs. More on this will be discussed in the section on challenges.

### **Journey of different**

***panchayats*:** Whereas the GPOD processes followed were more or less similar, the responses varied across *panchayats*, exemplifying the need for contextualizing interventions, in-built in the principles of OD.

**Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with each GP:** The key premise of the intervention is that the GP is an institution in its own right, emphasized from the first step. Whether or not to engage in the project and sign an MoU accordingly is the *panchayat's* discretion as much as that of the implementing partner, PRADAN.

The bi-partite MoU document lists the roles and responsibilities of its signatories—the GP and PRADAN, and these were discussed with each GP in detail before seeking partnership. GP members were encouraged to discuss the MoU amongst themselves before taking the decision to participate. Kumhari and Kolhuakala GPs from the Basia and Barhi blocks decided not to sign the MoU, the former stating they did not need such an intervention, with the latter's *mukhia* (head of the elected body) not refusing but indulging in delay tactics.

On the other hand, the Tamai GP (Jainagar block) came forward and convinced the team that they wanted to be included in the pilot, despite it being in a block not covered by the project. Needless to say, Tamai is one



**Figure 3: MoU discussion in Dapok panchayat, Barhi block**



The construct of organization mapping tools is built on OD principles. Facilitators, through conversations, help *panchayat* members understand the components of an effective organization as well as the legal mandate of a GP as an institution

of the front-runners, because it already had the key foundation for change, that is, the will to move forward.

At the stage of the MoU signing, the seeds for the core programme objectives were emphasized through identification of quick wins in three categories: Activities to improve the functioning of GPs (regular opening, full attendance of elected members in monthly meetings); improving citizen participation (information board in villages); and enhancing service delivery (GP to forward widow pension applications to the block, to construct soak-pits in schools), etc.

### Showing a mirror to the GP and Organization Mapping:

The construct of organization mapping tools is built on OD principles. Facilitators, through conversations, help *panchayat* members understand the components of an effective organization as well as the legal mandate of a GP as an institution. There is a subsequent process of self-rating, in which the members rate their *panchayats* on various organization parameters, understanding its strengths and weaknesses, and, consequently, establishing a trigger for change. Two key tools were designed, one each to understand the status

कर्मों के मुख्य बिंदु	अनिच्छित के सूचक	वर्ग
ग्राम सभा के मुख्य कार्यों में लैंगी की सहभागिता	ग्राम सभा का उद्देश्य एवं आम सभा में लैंगी की भागीदारी	2.5
ग्राम सभा - 2	ग्राम सभा पर सहायी सचिवों का महत्व एवं उनके सहभागिता	1-2
लैंगी - 1	ग्राम सभा का उद्देश्य	0-1
चौधारी - 3	लैंगी का चयन (ग्राम सभा द्वारा)	3
विपरीत - 3	लैंगी सचिवों का महत्व	3-4
" - 2	14 वित्त आयोग के बारे में जानकारी	3
सूचक - 2	ग्राम सभा का चयन (ग्राम सभा द्वारा)	3
25	ग्राम सभा का क्रियात्मक दस्तावेज	2

**Figure 4: Interactive process for rating GS participation as part of the citizen engagement tool (Bhondo GP, Chandwara block)**

of GP functioning and citizen engagement. The focus on quick wins continues to sustain the momentum of change.

Six to seven months into the intervention (July 2017), the status of the GPs was consolidated on the basis of ratings from the organization mapping. The journey with the *panchayats* continued and a similar exercise was done about a year later, to understand the movement of GPs (Figure 5).

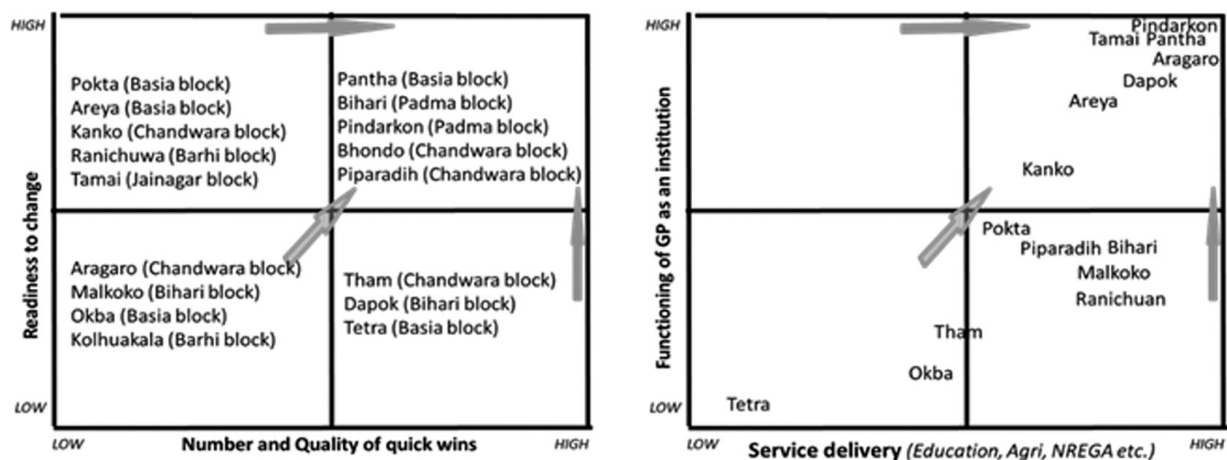
### Developing the Vision and Mission of a GP:

With an understanding of the current status of their GP, the next step for the participants was to develop and agree on the

direction in which they wanted their institution to move. The process was facilitated in a workshop, with elected members and citizens drawn from different wards representing different professions, economic class and caste, the purpose being to have a microcosm of the GP to develop the vision for their *panchayat*.

In each *panchayat*, members from SHG collectives were invited to participate in the workshop. The process evoked significant participation among members and citizens, with people sharing personal stories and drawing their dream GPs. The process was designed to enable visioning, based on the deepest thoughts and aspirations of what the

Against stereotypes, and to the pleasant surprise of the facilitators, most panchayats arrived at a vision, which was not the typical—road, electricity and water—but which spoke of the values they cherish and want to nurture, and the kind of society they want to build



**Figure 5: Comparative Categorization of the 16 GPs from 24.7.2017 to 9.8.2018.**

people wanted their GP to be like in the future. Against stereotypes, and to the pleasant surprise of the facilitators, most *panchayats* arrived at a vision, which was not the typical—road, electricity and water—but which spoke of the values they cherish and want to nurture, and the kind of society they want to build.

Deciding focus areas, understanding service delivery processes and developing accountability structures: Our recommendation to *panchayats* was to keep their focus on quick wins across many sectors, and yet to go deeper in one or two areas, both to understand the systems and processes as well as to be able to contribute significantly rather than spreading themselves

thin during the early years of engagement. This being a pilot, we also suggested that the

*panchayats* identify common areas of focus, which could help the facilitators consolidate their



**Figure 6: The visioning exercise, Tamai panchayat**

Our focus has been to build the capacity of *panchayats*, with the premise that these institutions will build pressure from below, eventually leading to meaningful devolution.

efforts, and which would also enable peer learning among GPs. Accordingly, based on most vision statements, the *panchayats* in Koderma and Hazariabagh identified education and agriculture as their focus whereas those in Basia chose to focus on NREGA and agriculture.

With a view to understanding the existing processes and structures, and the potential areas to which GPs could contribute, an in-depth study was conducted for agriculture and education. This would feed into workshops with GPs on the roles of various agencies and the GP itself. Not surprisingly,

whereas notifications issued by the departments state significant mandate to the *panchayats* (Figure 7), they have not really been actualized and remain more or less on paper.

Whereas process analysis revealed issues through the value chain, which required systemic change and redesign of processes, our focus has been to build the capacity of *panchayats*, with the premise that these institutions will build pressure from below, eventually leading to meaningful devolution.

Post the visioning process, we focussed on another key

component of an effective organization: developing an organization structure that will help a GP take its vision forward. Activation of Standing Committees in the focus areas, and the nomination of their *Adhyakshas* (Heads) aimed at designing the organization structure of the GP as per the needs rather than the rule.

Rather than constituting all seven Standing Committees of the *panchayat*, which remain on paper due to lack of clear roles and identity, GPs started with activating one or two Standing Committees, that for agriculture in all the three districts and also

**Figure 7: Notifications by Departments of Agriculture and Education**

- **Assessing agriculture-related activities** such as the requirement of seeds and their distribution, assessment of fertilizers and their distribution, procurement of food grains and their storage, distribution of other agricultural raw material/machinery, as well as **monitoring/observation of successful implementation of** other agricultural work.
- **Selecting eligible beneficiaries** for successful implementation of agricultural work.
- Ensuring **availability of agricultural loans** for farmers and distributing farmer credit cards, etc.
- Organizing successful district/block/*panchayat*-level publicity and **promotion/exhibition/workshops**, etc.
- Encouraging farmers to get **crop insurance** and ensuring its timely payment.

**Statements from the notification:**

- **Maintain registers** with all available human resources and other facilities
- Conduct education campaigns, along with SMC, need for schools, **enrolment**.
- Monitor and inspect schools
- Ensure **attendance** of students and teachers
- Make sure delivery of books, kits, etc.
- Support minimizing **drop outs**.
- Meet with **parents & SMC**
- Supervise **mid-day meals**
- Have **head teachers and para teachers** function under the authority of the GP



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education in case of the GPs in Koderma and Hazaribagh. With an emphasis on the principle that responsibility can be shared but accountability best lies with one individual, the focus has been on building the capacities of *Adhyakshas*, who have begun to identify with their role, seeking further understanding and also driving various initiatives. Forums such as the Joint *Adhyaksha* meetings are being institutionalized to reinforce identity as well as peer learning. In our experience, distribution of leadership (till now primarily with the *Mukhia*), overall transparency and effectiveness of the *panchayat* begins to improve.

**Role of facilitators slowly to change from drivers to catalysts of the change**

**process:** One year into the engagement, the role of the facilitators began to shift. As the *panchayats* started developing their plans, the role of facilitators was no longer to implement and deliver tangible results; rather it was to ensure the institutionalization of processes, shifting the onus gradually to the *panchayats*. One of the processes being focussed on was the monthly meetings of *Adhyakshas* and to ensure that they received the required knowledge and support to perform their roles.

The goals being set with GPs, therefore, focussed both on the process and the results. For example, during the monthly Joint Agriculture *Adhyaksha* meeting (September 2018), the following goals were set:

**Process goals:**

- Plan activities for the next three months
- Regularize Agriculture Standing Committee meetings in each GP

**Outcome of Agriculture-related activities discussed**

- Identify the poorest families and link them with credit Kisan Credit Card (KCC)
- Initiate kitchen gardening in schools and households
- Train farmers, in collaboration with Krishi Vikas Kendras (KVKs) and Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA) (technical training agencies of the government)
- Help farmers access insurance through the Prime Minister's Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)
- Identify infrastructure, to be incorporated in the annual Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)

Similarly, in education, a Core Committee has been constituted, comprising the *Mukhia*, the *Adhyaksha* of the Education Standing Committee, the Headmasters of all the schools in the GP and the Presidents of the School Management Committees. The Core Committee meets on a monthly basis in different schools on a rotation basis, to discuss the issues and the possible solutions. Institutionalizing this committee and building capacity of the Education *Adhyaksha* has been the key role of the facilitators. The functioning of the Education Core Committee has brought about another aspect of effective organization functioning: as the GP engages with various stakeholders, it is reflecting on its styles of engagement, moving from a hierarchy driven confrontation approach to that of collaboration and empathy.

Project facilitators in Basia, who have engaged with GPs extensively, to develop the 2019–20 GPDP, are taking the opportunity to invest in and to institutionalize the two Standing Committees formed during the preparation of the plan, that is, the committees for Women, Children and Social Welfare (with a mandate to implement social security programmes) and Development and

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their involvement in the delivery of services, GPs are beginning to understand the hurdles that impact access to services at the last mile, and arrive at targeted solutions, which the departments are not able to, given their reach in remote locations. Following the well-established principle of subsidiarity, if supported adequately and if they function as effective institutions, GPs are better placed to resolve these sticky and persistent issues. The focus of the project, therefore, is on strengthening institutional functioning, hand-holding GPs during the preparation and the implementation of plans, networking with other stakeholders and gradually deepening their capacities to address more complex, development issues.

Figure 9 provides a glimpse into the review of the functioning of the Kanko *panchayat* from September to October 2018.

Achievements of the GPs in the sectoral areas listed here are those that reflect the enhanced ability of the GPs to work with the system, and functioning as institutions in their own right. The text within brackets indicates the GP(s) where such movements have happened:

### Agriculture

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Ongoing and collective negotiations with the block machinery, to ensure timely access of seeds to farmers, which are otherwise delayed (most GPs); improving accuracy in soil testing by the *Krishak Mitra* (Rani Chua) by ensuring that samples are collected from diverse farms; leveraging schemes from the Department of Minor Irrigation (MI) for lift irrigation structures with an outlay of Rs 7 crores. Locations for the lifts are decided through meetings in the GS; the material is procured from the vendor appointed by the MI department; and citizens are provided labour through the constitution of a Beneficiary Committee (Pindarkon).

### Education

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The GPs organize sports and other events to engage with the students, which essentially is to impact attendance and prevent dropouts (two to three GPs); assessment tests are organized by the *panchayat* and the schools together for Math and English for all Class 8 students in the *panchayat* to gauge school-wise

improvement areas (Tamai); the GPs track whether toilets are functional in all schools, and take corrective measures, which are discussed and resolved in the GPEC (most GPs).

Needless to say, the *panchayats* in Jharkhand are far from the local self-government institutions that we envision. There are many internal as well as external challenges. One of the biggest challenges is the lack of transparency and the existence of corruption in various facets of their administration, ranging from selecting ineligible beneficiaries, the nexus between the contractors and the *panchayats*, to elected members and staff asking for bribes for providing services to citizens. A recently conducted study on management of the Fourteenth Finance Commission funds in some of our *panchayats* still shows fragile systems and inadequate record-keeping. Of course, there are many exceptions. In our work, we have come across *Mukhias* with high levels of integrity, who follow and demand transparency from others. However, corruption and non-transparency are pervasive issues and need to be addressed. As stated by Mr.

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**Figure 9: Review of the Kanko GP (September to November 2018)**

Activities	Status	Remarks
Monthly Gram Panchayat Executive Committee (GPEC) meetings	2 of 3 held. September meeting was not organized	On the pre-fixed date for GPEC, 5th October, the <i>Mukhia</i> was unavailable due to illness of her mother-in-law. Later, the lady passed away. The <i>Mukhia</i> tried to organize the meeting in the last week of October, which could not be held due to festivals
GPEC meeting attended by block coordinators	2	
Participation	7/12, 8/12	Consistency in participation by women unlike by men, whose participation fluctuates.
Quality of GS- and GP-level meetings	Significant improvement in the quality of GPEC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting is organized on the 5th of every month.</li> <li>GP income and expenditure details are shared in every meeting.</li> <li><i>Sachiv/Rojgar Sevak</i> writes the minutes of the proceedings during the meeting and the <i>Mukhia</i> closes the meeting.</li> <li>They review the proceedings of the last GPEC.</li> <li>Role of the husbands of EWR is now minimal.</li> </ul>
Opening of GP office	At least four days	Due to Pragya Kendra, the Panchayat Office now opens regularly. The <i>Sachiv, Rojgar Sevak, Mukhia</i> and the <i>Up-Mukhia</i> ensure their presence at least once in a week.
Registers maintained by the GP	Minutes register, Cash book, Scheme register, GS register, Asset register, 7 registers of MGNREGS	<i>Sachiv</i> : GS register, GPEC minutes register, Cash book, Asset register  <i>GRS</i> : MGNREGS register
Annual Plan and Budget	2019–20 GPDP planning process is going on	GS meeting held on 15 December, 2018
Pragya Kendra	Regular	The <i>panchayat</i> provided a separate room for the Pragya Kendra on the ground floor. This ensures that the main gate of the <i>panchayat</i> office opens regularly.
Trainings conducted for women Ward Members, if any	Yes	Seven Ward Members and almost all the women members participated. Topics: The three-tier PRI system, the role of the GPEC, GPDP and the role of the GP, MGNREGS and the role of the Ward Member
Challenges at the GP level	Challenges of the GP as a functioning institution	Villages are remotely located so the Ward Members come to the GP office primarily during meetings. The <i>Sachiv</i> handles the multiple GPs. The BDO engages the <i>Rojgar Sevak</i> in block affairs also. Some caste-based conflicts in the GP, also spill to the GPECs



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Another key challenge relates to the oft-spoken and well-documented ambiguity in devolved functions and the power of the panchayats, and the lack of commensurate human and financial resources to these bodies. Panchayats are not treated as equal inter-governmental bodies by other tiers, but rather as the implementation arms of government departments, which are to follow instructions rather than to self-govern.

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SM Vijayanand<sup>2</sup>, “Corruption at the village level is indeed more dangerous than at other levels because it kills democracy and culture.” We do believe this situation will change when we focus on building the institution.

Another key challenge relates to the oft-spoken and well-documented ambiguity in devolved functions and the power of the *panchayats*, and the lack of commensurate human and financial resources to these bodies. *Panchayats* are not treated as equal inter-governmental bodies by other tiers, but rather as the implementation arms of

government departments, which are to follow instructions rather than to self-govern.

I hope this article will contribute to a discussion on the need for a structured methodology in developing GP institutions. The team at Anode has been working with *panchayats* across four states, since 2009. Our experience in each state deepens our understanding, helping us build further on the GPOD framework. We strongly believe in the potential of this institution to address sticky issues and bring the much-required changes at the village level.

I would like to acknowledge the Governance Team, which has come on board particularly to work with the *panchayats*, the PRADAN professionals, as well as the participating GPs. Without their wholehearted engagement, this journey and our learnings, though not anywhere near complete, would not have been so rich.

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**Sonali Srivastava**, founder and CEO of Anode Governance Lab is a development & management professional. She set up Anode Governance Lab to pursue work towards systemic strengthening of institutions engaged in public services.

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<sup>2</sup>Retired Chief Secretary, Government of Kerala, and Former Secretary, Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj