

SHAILENDRA KUMAR SINGH, SURJODOY NANDY AND DHIRAJ KUMAR MAHATO

PINDARKONE GRAM PANCHAYAT: Setting Examples of Governance

...

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "The best, the quickest and the most efficient way is to build up from the bottom...Every village has to become a self-sufficient republic. This does not require brave resolutions. It requires brave, corporate, intelligent work..."

PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS (PRIs) in India are a homegrown effort to decentralize government activities, to promote greater participation in governance by the public. This process of democratic decentralization was set in motion with the 73rd Amendment Act of the Constitution passed by the Indian Parliament in 1992, enabling decentralized governance through PRIs in rural areas.

Following its constitution as a separate state, Jharkhand enacted the Panchayati Raj Act in 2001. This was done in accordance with the provisions of the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution and that of the Panchayat Extension to the Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act 1996 that are applicable to this state. The state, accordingly, brought about changes in its Act and announced the *panchayat* elections.

In 2010, the first *panchayat* elections were held in Jharkhand, and the first tenure was completed at

The lack of institutional capacity, coupled with insufficient devolution of funds, functions and functionaries have restricted the effective functioning of the *panchayats*

the end of 2015. However, as the local government of the village, the *panchayats* are still not able to make any significant contribution to the overall development scenario. The lack of institutional capacity, coupled with insufficient devolution of funds, functions and functionaries have restricted the effective functioning of the *panchayats*. The perception of *panchayat* representatives is another area of concern. They consider themselves subordinate to the administration and function as its extended arm.

In Koderma and Hazaribagh districts, women leaders of the Federation promoted by PRADAN stood for *panchayat* elections. The Federation supported 125 candidates, of whom 63 won and 14 lost by very close margins. However, the women soon realized that without institutional support, nothing would change. In this context, PRADAN, in partnership with ANODE (a Bangalore-based organization working with *panchayats* in Karnataka), initiated a programme called Strengthening Panchayat Actions for Community Empowerment (SPACE) in 2017 with 11 *gram panchayats* (GPs) in Telaiya block. An MoU was signed between the GPs and PRADAN. The signing

of the MoU helped the *panchayat* understand that it can act as an independent institution.

Subsequently, a visit was organized to Kerala to expose them to the Kudumbashree model, wherein the PRI and the Community Based Organisations (CBO) work hand in hand. Following this visit, a learning-sharing meeting of the *Mukhiya*, the *Panchayat Samiti* member and the Federation leaders was organized at the *panchayat* level, to have them speak about their experiences from the Kerala exposure visit. These activities steadily started helping Ward Members connect with other Ward Members and build a unique vision for their *panchayat*. Later, a three-day workshop was organized for elected representatives, women Federation leaders, important figures from the villages and frontline workers, in which all of them sat to re-imagine and prepare a vision plan for the *panchayat*.

Here, in this article, we focus on Pindarkone *panchayat*, where considerable momentum has been gained in the last one year. Pindarkone GP has 7 revenue villages with a total population of 6,815 in approximately 1,216

households. The *panchayat* members made a vision statement for their GP. “*Hum Pindarkone panchayat ke Pratinidhi evam Janata panchayat me addharbhut sanrachna, samajik vikas, mahila shashaktikaran, paryavaran evam rojgar ke liye pratibaddh hai* (We the representatives and the people of Pindarkone *panchayat* are committed towards ensuring basic infrastructure, social justice, women’s empowerment, environment and livelihood).”

Furthermore, the *panchayat* and a CBO members identified education, agriculture and women’s empowerment as priority areas for their *panchayat*.

1. Regularizing the *panchayat* office: The Gram Panchayat Executive Committee (GPEC), which comprises Ward Members and the *Mukhiya*, started meeting on a monthly basis. A roster was prepared in which the *Mukhiya* and the *Up-mukhiya* together volunteered to keep the Panchayat Bhawan open for five days in a week. Pindarkone GP now has a well-maintained and well-equipped Panchayat Bhawan. The *Mukhiya* and the staff have a separate office room with proper infrastructure for their functioning. The Bhawan has

Today, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna (PMAY) is perhaps the most attractive individual scheme in Jharkhand because, on any given day, you will come across several people who wish to build houses under the scheme. As the aspiration levels are high, so are the irregularities

Justice Prevails

Today, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna (PMAY) is perhaps the most attractive individual scheme in Jharkhand because, on any given day, you will come across several people who wish to build houses under the scheme. As the aspiration levels are high, so are the irregularities. Often people ineligible for the scheme get away with housing loans by bribing key personnel, and the people in need are left behind. The only possible solution to this situation would be a local government that is sensitive and transparent. This is where the Pinderkone GP is a classic example.

As a general practice, the block administration sends the list of beneficiaries, based on the Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC) 2011, to the GP for validation. The GP is supposed to validate this and send back the final list to the block. Often, many *panchayats* are not able to ensure due processes at their end, due to lack of institutional capacity and for many other reasons.

However, when Pinderkone received the list of 165 families from the block, they conducted a visit to every door, by forming a *panchayat*-level committee comprising the *Mukhiya*, the *Up-mukhiya*, two Ward Members, two SHG members from the Damodar Mahila Mandal Sangh and one reputed member from each of the seven member villages. This committee conducted a study to verify the eligibility of the people and struck off 93 names because it was found that these families did not meet the eligibility criteria. However, after a few weeks, the *panchayat* was astonished to find that those 93 names were included in the list by the block administration again. Pinderkone decided to take up the challenge. Immediately, an Executive Committee meeting was held and it was decided that the *panchayat* would take the matter to district administration.

Without wasting further time, the *Mukhiya* wrote a letter to the Deputy Development Commissioner (DDC) describing the whole incident. The *panchayat* members were a little apprehensive initially. When they received a letter from the DDC, they became more confident because in his response he clearly directed the Block Development Officer (BDO) not to supersede the decisions of *panchayat* and requested the *panchayat* to organize a *gram sabha* (GS) meeting to include some more eligible families into the waiting list.

The DDC also directed the block to ensure that every individual registration was duly approved by the *panchayat*. Meanwhile, the *panchayat* organized a separate GS in every village. After getting the list from the GS, the *panchayat* conducted door-to-door visits by a committee (Ward Members of the village, the *Mukhiya* and one person nominated by the GS) and, finally, the 90 families whose names were not on the list, found a place in the PMAY waiting list.

The story does not end there. The block administration again dishonoured the *panchayat's* list and sent them a different list for approval. This time, the *Mukhiya* wrote a letter to the BDO and requested him to follow the list sent by them. Finally, the block agreed with the *panchayat* and accepted their list.

A regular monthly meeting is held to integrate the frontline worker functions at the *panchayat* and village levels.

a meeting hall equipped with sufficient chairs and a round conference table with the names of the Ward Members imprinted on each seat. The GP also has well-maintained toilets. The *Panchayat Sachiv* takes care of two GPs and supports the functioning of the GP. The other staff of the GP—the *Rojgar Sewak*, the *Jal Sahiya* and the cleaning staff—are also very regular.

2. Organizing the GS: Kamkhya Kumar Singh, the *Mukhiya* of Pindarkone *panchayat*, says, “*Panchayat ka power logon ka power hai* (The power of the *panchayat* is the power of the people!)” This would not have been realized if the power of the GP had not been given to the GS.

The GPs circulated the notice and the agenda for the GSs; introduced the various agendas during the meetings and only got involved in directing the discussions when they thought that the meeting was moving away from the agenda. The notice and the agenda are circulated in the respective GS minutes register, the date and timing are also painted on the walls at the GS venue and the

Ward Members are asked to announce this in the village.

However, all the seven villages in Pindarkone have very unique characteristics. Therefore, villages such as Karar, where the Mahatos, who are larger in number and control the economy, continue to dominate over those belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SCs), to hold political advantage. This not only affects the functioning of the *panchayat* but also hinders noble intentions. Some villages such as Bardewa and Nachanbe have been very easy for the GP to work with because their relationship with the GP have also been different. As each of the seven GSs has a different context, the GP is careful to discuss and negotiate differently in each GS. It has also been observed that whereas women Ward Members are now comfortable to speak among GP members, they do not feel this same level of comfort in the GSs, in which their relatives and members of their community are present.

3. Regular departmental review meeting: A regular monthly meeting is held to integrate the frontline worker functions at the *panchayat*

and village levels. Here, different functionaries such as the *Aanganwadi Sevika*, the *Sahaika*, the *Jal Sahiya*, the Head Teacher of the school, the *Krishak Mitra*, the Cluster Resource Person (CRP) from the education department, the *Panchayat Sevak* and the *Rojgar Sevak* mark their presence in the meeting. Other than these, Federation leaders and prominent personalities are also invited. Discussions revolve around various aspects, in which each functionary presents their status, makes plans for the next month and, if needed, seeks support from the *panchayat*. Further, any grievances that are raised are addressed here.

4. Reformulating the Standing

Committee: Seven Standing Committees have been formed in all the GPs. The composition of each Standing Committee was examined as per the individual’s interest and aspirations. Eventually, many members shifted from one committee to another. The following seven committees are, at present, functioning in Pindarkone *panchayat*:

1. Village Security Committee (*Gram Raksha Samiti*)

Committee members regularly hold meetings with parents, to motivate and encourage them to send their children to schools. They request parents to discharge their duty to their children's education

2. Committee for Health, Education and Environment (*Shiksha, Swasthya tatha Van evam Paryavaran Samiti*)
3. Committee for Agriculture, Industries and Co-operative (*Krishi, Sahkarita, Sarvajanik Sampada evam Udyog Samiti*)
4. Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare (*Mahila, Shishu evam Samajik Kalyan Samiti*)
5. Development Committee (*Vikas evam Nirman Samiti*)
6. Infrastructure Committee (*Sanchar evam Adhosanrachana Samiti*)
7. General Administration Committee (*Samanya Prasasan Samiti*)

Once the restructuring process was done, two of the seven Standing Committees of the *panchayat* prepared a thematic vision, goal and engagements in their particular fields. These Standing Committees were 'Health, Education and Environment Standing Committee' and 'Agriculture, Cooperatives and Industry Standing Committee'. Subsequently, the Standing Committee members were given four days of training on their roles and responsibilities. Simulation games were also

introduced to understand the lived reality of children, parents, teachers, farmers and women.

"Is se pehle Panchayat Bhawan tha hi nahin...panchayat karyakarini ka meeting to bahut door ki baat hai (Earlier, we didn't even have a *panchayat* building, let alone having an Executive Committee meeting)," says Ajit Kumar, a Ward Member from Pindarkone village. Lukeshwar Mahto, another Ward Member from the Pindarkone *panchayat*, nodded in affirmation.

a. Health, Education and Environment Standing Committee

This Committee has discussed, articulated and collectively made a plan for education, with greater focus on interventions that categorically revolve around the four pillars, that is, children, parents, teachers and infrastructure development. *Bal Sabhas* have been institutionalized and activities such as sports, story-telling and quiz are organized to increase children's participation. Measures have been taken to form and regularize a Core Committee of various stakeholders such as the Head Teacher, the SMC President, President of the Education Standing Committee, the *Up-*

Mukhiya and the *Mukhiya* as its members. The issues in the Core Committee range from mid-day meals (MDM), learning outcomes to parental engagements and sanitation.

Committee members regularly hold meetings with parents, to motivate and encourage them to send their children to schools. They request parents to discharge their duty to their children's education. The *panchayat* has also invested in school infrastructure, arranged for sports equipment and a water *jal minar*, mobilized the district administration to build a water tank and a hand-wash unit in all schools by selecting local vendors.

"Earlier, many times we would find insects in the school meal. Initially, we had only one teacher who taught us all the subjects. There was no opportunity of playing in school and the toilets were also locked. If we ever complained about any of these issues, we would be scolded by the teachers and the SMC President," said 14-year old Lalita Kumari, who is the *Bal Sabha* President of UMS Pindarkone Government School.

She further shared, "When Dinesh Ram, the President of the Panchayat Education Committee,

This year, 400 farmers have been linked to the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (Insurance) through the GSs, the GP and the village level camps. The GP has also linked 247 farmers to the Kisan Credit Card for paddy and corn crops

Emerging New Leaders and Spearheading the Change

“Shiksha ki jyot jalana hi mera maksad hai (My purpose in life is to enlighten and educate),” says Dinesh Ram, President of the Standing Committee on Education from Pindarkone *panchayat*. Dinesh also says, *“Shuru-Shuru mein to teacher log bahut virodh kiye jab hum unke saath shiksha ki baat karne gaye (Initially, the teachers refused to co-operate with the panchayat).”* He also reminisces the first meeting of the Core Committee, in which all the Head Teachers and the School Management Committee (SMC) *Adhyakshas* were called. They refused to collaborate with the *panchayat* because they felt threatened by the emergence of a new monitoring body. The *Mukhiya* and the Standing Committee *Adhyaksha* took multiple initiatives to build trust. Dinesh said, *“Hum log teachers ke dikkato ko sunte the, aur use dur karne ka yojna banate the, aur dhire dhire unko bhi hamre kaam se viswas hone laga (Over time, the panchayat listened to the teachers and tried to help them overcome their difficulties and managed to build enough trust).”*

“Abhi har mahine Core Committee ka meeting karte hai, Mata-pita ke saath baithak karte hai aur bacchon ke saath bhi meeting karte hai.” Dinesh told us that they now hold regular meetings with the Core Committees members, the parents and with the children. Dinesh emphasized that significant bonding has developed among Ward Members, which motivates all of them. Dinesh also shared their vision of strengthening the children’s and the parents’ voices by creating a *Bal Sabha*. Furthermore, Dinesh proudly shared that now the Head Teacher applies for leave from him and even the teacher’s salary approval needs his signature. Dinesh admitted *“Ye saab karke panchayat me ek accha shiksha ke liye mahoul ban paya hai (By doing all this, we have been able to create a good environment for education).”*

Lukeswar Mahto, the President of the Agriculture Standing Committee, talks about the agricultural interventions introduced by the *panchayat*. He excitedly shared, *“Pehle agriculture department jo bhi karta tha hamein pata nahi chalta tha aur na hi hum ek accha yojna banake kisaano ke saath jud pate the (Earlier, we had no idea what the agriculture department was doing and we could not get together as farmers and plan for our crops).”*

Now, the *panchayat* organized an exposure visit to Gola for the farmers and the *panchayat* representatives. Subsequently, they prepared a vision and an immediate action plan around agriculture and allied activities. This year, 400 farmers have been linked to the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (Insurance) through the GSs, the GP and the village level camps. The GP has also linked 247 farmers to the (Kisan Credit Card (KCC) for paddy and corn crops. In Nachanbe GS, 29 SC families were selected for cow-rearing and linked with the Animal Husbandry department for subsidy and training. Additionally, the *panchayat* mobilized a seven-crore-rupee project from the Minor Irrigation department. Lukeshwar Mahto can hardly contain his excitement as he adds, *“Bahut badlav hua hai (A lot has changed).”*

Lalita enthusiastically remembered the day the *panchayat* began to listen to their concerns and how happy and hopeful it had made her about the situation.

started visiting our school, things began to change.” Lalita enthusiastically remembered the day the *panchayat* began to listen to their concerns and how happy and hopeful it had made her about the situation. In the following months, the *panchayat* President along with the *Mukhiya* held many meetings with all the Head Teachers and the SMC Presidents. These meetings, although turbulent initially, started showing good results after some time.”

She added that there was significant improvement in MDM and in class-room facilities. An inter-school girls’ sports competition was organized by the Pindarkone *panchayat*, which was the first of its kind. She was very happy to share that the *panchayat* had also started forming *Bal Sabhas* at the village level; and also had village representation, on a monthly basis, to interact with the *panchayat*, whereby she would be able to influence some of the *panchayat’s* decisions. She only wished that her school would have a boundary wall so they could grow vegetables and plants; She wants her school to become the best performing school in Hazaribagh district.

b. Agriculture, Co-operatives, Industry and Public Estate Standing Committee

The members of this committee have discussed, articulated and collectively made a plan for agriculture and allied activities. They have focussed on agriculture, improving the water facility, increasing the dairy base and designing several interventions for the landless and the marginal farmers. They have organized many trainings for the farmers, linked them with credit and insurance programmes, etc.

The PRADAN team helped build linkages of Pindarkone *panchayat* with the Minor Irrigation department. Thereafter, the meetings at the GS were held in collaboration with the SHG leader and a plan was formulated. The whole initiative helped the *panchayat* finalize a project worth seven crore rupees, which was mobilized from the Minor Irrigation department. This project included the building of five check dams, four ponds and one lift irrigation. Some of the work for the check dam and the water pond was initiated through due GS proceedings and work worth Rs 2 crores has already been completed.

Subsequently, one ambitious programme—Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sichi Yojana (PMKSY)—which aims to provide 24-hour electricity for farmers along with installing lifts, has been mobilized by the *panchayat*. This opportunity was available for only three sites in each district. Even in this case, crucial pitching helped the *panchayat* mobilize the project. Currently, the site selection and the process of inviting tenders have been completed for this scheme by the approval of the *panchayat*.

The *panchayat* has further built linkages with the Animal Husbandry department and has come across schemes of one lakh rupees for cattle-rearing, wherein the subsidy was on 90 per cent of the amount. Here, the *panchayat* has identified 29 vulnerable farmers through the GS and linked them to cow-rearing training and quality procurement. They are linked to the Sudha dairy route to supply milk.

5. Co-working with the CBOs: The GP has been having regular meetings with SHG members, moving toward 100 per cent saturation. Through the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), they have been

“Earlier, during the monsoon, it was literally impossible to walk on this road due to water logging and garbage. Last year, therefore, we sat together and jointly decided to build this culvert,” Sanjay said proudly

Towards Transparency and Accountability

“*Bhaiya pehle khali Yadav ji hi block mein baat karte the, hamein aake batate the ki kahan road banega aur hum logon se sign karwa ke kaam karwate the* (Earlier only Yadav ji used to talk in the block meetings and used to come back and tell us where the road would be built. He would get the papers signed by us and get the work done),” Sanjay describes the situation in Gotea village eight years ago when there was no role of the *panchayat*.



Gotea is a small village in Pinderkone GP of Padma block with just 631 people as per the Census of 2011. Home of mostly small and marginal farmers, this village is situated around 20 km away from the block headquarters.

Sanjay Kumar, a charming man in his mid-thirties, is a *Krishi Mitra* of Gotea village. He told us about how Gotea village has changed in the last 15 years. There was no school in the village; the nearest one was in Kewla village, where he used to go. The condition of the roads was very poor and there were very few *pucca* houses in the village, usually a sign of wealth or of caste-based privilege of a few families. Agriculture was the primary source of income; however, apart from paddy and a small amount of potato, mainly for self-consumption, agriculture know-how in Gotea was low. Add to it, the irrigation water scarcity, income from agriculture was very low. Many of the farmers, including Sanjay’s father and uncle, used to go outside as daily labourers during the lean period.

“Much has changed today,” Sanjay said, pointing to a nearby culvert. “Earlier, during the monsoon, it was literally impossible to walk on this road due to water logging and garbage. Last year, therefore, we sat together and jointly decided to build this culvert,” Sanjay said proudly.



But this was not the practice earlier. There were a few influential people in village, who used to maintain close contact with the block officials. They were the people, who decided and acted as contractors too. However, the scene has changed after Kamakhya *bhaiyya* was elected *Mukhiya*. Unlike the previous *Mukhiya*, Kamakhya *bhaiyya* motivates us to come to the GS. He sends information of the GS in advance so it becomes easier for me to participate. “*Aur kyun na jayen? Jahan hamara suna jata hai wahan to jana hi hain. Main aaj janta hun ki panchayat kahan kitna kharcha kar raha hai. Pehle to puchne ka*

kabhi himmat nahin hota tha (Why shouldn’t we go? Where we are heard, we should go. Now, I know how much the *panchayat* is spending and where. Earlier, we did not dare to ask such questions),” says Sanjay, as the last rays of the late afternoon sun fell slanting onto his moist eyes.

All the people participate in the planning from the village level to the *panchayat* level. Members of the *panchayat* and Federation members make collective efforts to connect to the rest of the women in the group.

discussing the issues put forward by SHGs; the GP has been sharing their issues and motivating women Ward Members to attend the meetings. Some of them have been attending the monthly GPEC meetings. This has increased the interaction between SHG groups and the GP. During the vision workshop and organization mapping, SHG members also participated and played a key role in motivating women Ward Members to articulate their views. The GP has also managed to conduct separate meetings between SHG groups and Ward Members/*Mukhiya* to discuss issues more openly with the GP.

Munni Devi (an SHG member) explains, "*Mahila Mandal aur panchayat mil kar kai kam kar rahe hai* (The SHGs and the *panchayat* are doing many things together)." She said that now the GS or the General Assembly, gives its information in writing at least seven days earlier through the *panchayat* to all the citizens. Additionally, in planning, operations and supervision, women SHG members are involved. All the people participate in the planning from the village level to the *panchayat*

level. Members of the *panchayat* and Federation members make collective efforts to connect to the rest of the women in the group. "*Ab hum to panchayat karyakarini ki baithak me amantrit sadasya ke roop me bhag lete hain* (We are now invited to *panchayat* meetings)." Munni Devi said expressing her happiness at how things had changed.

6. Sharing financial and non-financial information

Pro-active disclosure is a new way of life in the *panchayat*. Various kinds of information are available now on the *panchayat* walls and project sites. These include disclosures of the Karyakarini group name, number, meeting dates of the various committees, PMAY house list and waiting list, funds used, expenditure of projects, amount used from the 14th Finance Commission, name of the contractor, etc.

Territory yet to traverse

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "The best, the quickest and the most efficient way is to build up from the bottom...Every village has to become a self-sufficient republic. This does not require

brave resolutions. It requires brave, corporate, intelligent work..."

Our two-and-a-half years of brave, corporate and intelligent work revolves around conceptualization to implementation of some of the ideas. As is clearly visible, this engagement has shown significant positive outcome. However, if we wish to see local self-governance effectively and efficiently performing for its people, the people's quest to collaborate and challenge the *panchayat* needs to come to the forefront. Furthermore, the *panchayat's* ability to forge linkages would be the keys to success. These would require a significant investment in people's capacity and the *panchayat's* institutional capacity. It also requires changes in the mind-set and attitude of the larger policy makers and bureaucrats.

Shailendra Kumar Singh works with PRADAN as an Executive and is based in Koderma district.

Surjodoy Nandy and **Dhiraj Kumar Mahto** work as block co-ordinators and directly engage with the 11 *panchayats* in Hazaribagh and Koderma districts
