

newsreach

THE LIVELIHOODS AND DEVELOPMENT BIMONTHLY

JAN_FEB 2019 • Vol 19 No 1

Strengthening Local Governance

Strengthening the organizational capability of gram panchayats by addressing systemic issues within the panchayats is both a process and a journey

LEAD

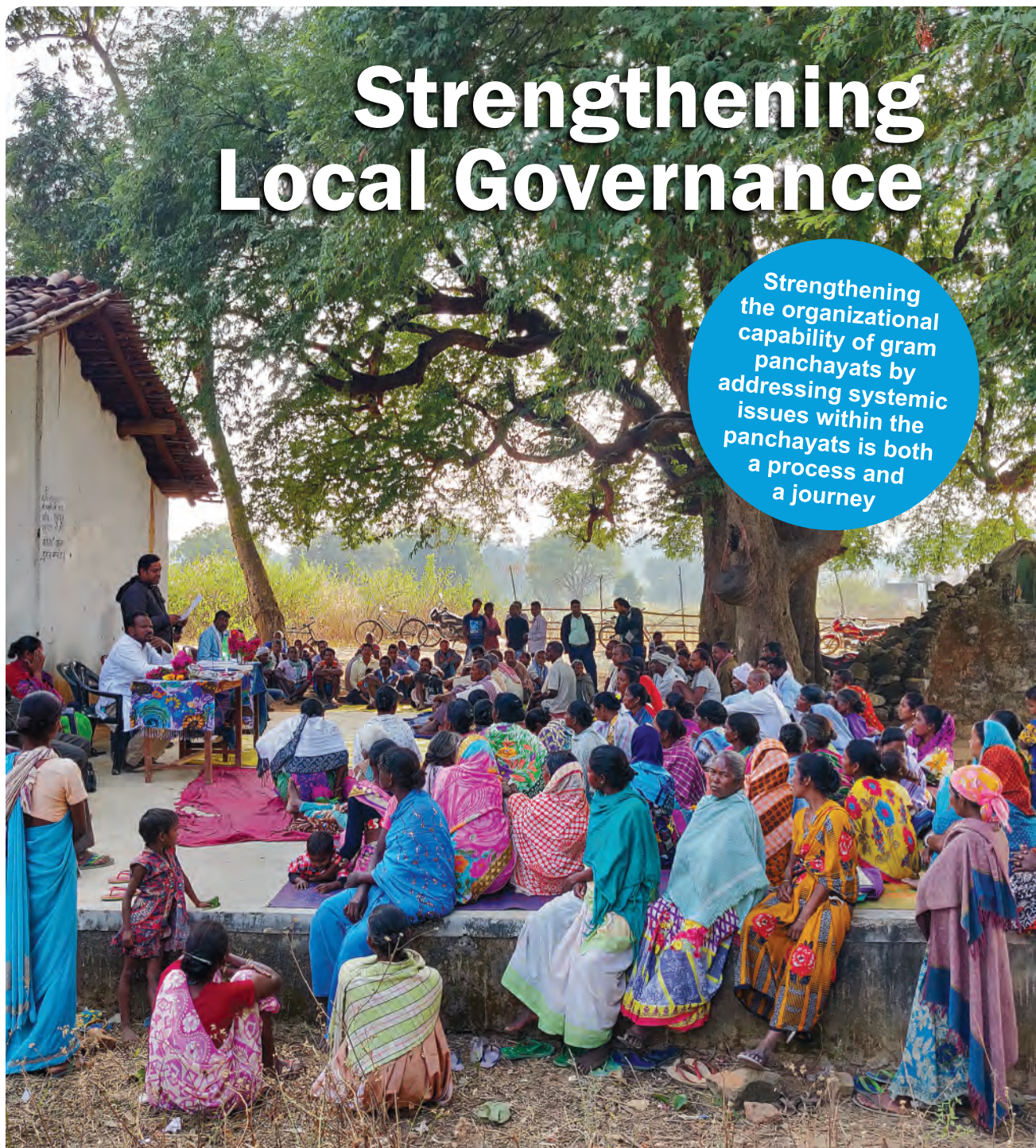
Scaling up Gram Panchayat Organization
Development: The Way Forward

CASE STUDY

Pindarkone Gram Panchayat:
Setting Examples of Governance

JOURNEY

Activating Panchayats
through MGNREGA



SHG members
participate in the
GPDP exercise (pg. 27)



02 LEAD

Scaling up Gram Panchayat Organization Development: The Way Forward

Strengthening the organizational capability of *gram panchayats*, the constitutionally recognized units of democratic governance vested with the responsibility of economic development and social justice, by addressing systemic issues within the *panchayats* is both a process and a journey

DR. ANJALI KAROL MOHAN

08 REPORT

Building the Organization Capabilities of Gram Panchayats: The pilot project in Jharkhand

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

SONALI SRIVASTAVA

21 CASE STUDY

Strengthening Local Governance: A Development Paradigm

Recognizing the idea of the Panchayati Raj as crucial for the foundation of the Indian political system, the 73rd Constitution Amendment was passed by Parliament in 1992, giving Constitutional power to local elected bodies, leading to a decentralized form of governance in which each and every village is responsible for its own affairs

NEHA JOSHI AND NIDHI TRIVEDI

35 JOURNEY

Activating Panchayats through MGNREGA

Implementing MGNREGA in its fullness is a movement to establish local democracy and instruments of local governance, honour local wisdom and knowledge, promote power decentralization to *panchayats* and encourage participatory decision-making. Jharkhand's experience warrants telling.

DEBMALAYA NANDI

48 CASE STUDY

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..."

SHAILENDRA KUMAR SINGH, SURJODOY NANDY AND DHIRAJ KUMAR MAHATO

DR. ANJALI KAROL MOHAN

Scaling up Gram Panchayat Organization Development: The Way Forward

...

Strengthening the organizational capability of *gram panchayats*, the constitutionally recognized units of democratic governance vested with the responsibility of economic development and social justice, by addressing systemic issues within the *panchayats* is both a process and a journey

Context

SINCE 2015, PRADAN AND ANODE Governance Lab are implementing the Gram Panchayat Organization Development (GPOD) framework across 15 *panchayats* in Jharkhand and 10 in Madhya Pradesh.¹ *Gram panchayats* (GPs) are constitutionally recognized units of democratic governance vested with the responsibility of economic development and social justice. It needs no reiteration that, despite this recognition, even after 25 years, in most states—Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand being no exception—GPs are far from being autonomous,

democratic units of governance steering economic development and ensuring social justice.

This context provides the rationale for the Gram Panchayat Organizational Development (GPOD) framework. It aims to strengthen the organizational capacity of GPs. Conceptualized as a process and a journey, the GPOD framework aims to address systemic issues within the *panchayats*, using the philosophy and principles of organization development (OD) and behaviour. Foregrounding the GPs as a unit of analysis and intervention, the framework recognizes the members of a GP—the functionaries as well as the elected representatives—as primary agents of change.

¹https://www.panchayat.gov.in/documents/10198/456811/Book_English_Framwork%20for%20RGs%20Abhiyan%204.pdf

Two years since, there is a conviction in working collaboratively with multiple stakeholders, to contextualize and implement GPOD to strengthen GPs as organizations and institutions of self-governance, having the potential to emerge as centres of excellence

GPOD through SPACE

—

The framework is being implemented as SPACE (Strengthening Panchayat Actions for Community Empowerment) in the two states. It involves an active engagement with multiple stakeholders. These include management and development professionals, state and district governments, grass-roots practitioners working with NGOs and CBOs and, last but not the least, elected and executive members of GPs. The latter are the most critical and should necessarily display an interest and the will to improve the functioning of GPs.

The framework entails an iterative step-wise process (translating into a journey) that GP members embark upon to strengthen themselves. In doing so, it simultaneously draws upon and embeds the legal and statutory provisions to engage with GPs. For instance, a starting point of the engagement is a bi-partite MoU between the GP and PRADAN, expressing the willingness to engage. This is premised on the state Panchayati Raj Acts, recognizing the GP as a body corporate having the powers “to sue and be sued as well as the power to acquire movable or

immovable property and to enter into contracts.” (Section 11 of the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Raj Avam Gram Swaraj Adhiniyam, 2001)

Following the signing of the MoU, GPs are facilitated into a process that underlines the need to simultaneously differentiate and integrate its components as an organization: vision, organization structure, incentives, resources and action plans. Ultimately, GPs are encouraged to plan for and implement solutions to identified pain points. This essentially translates into GPs initiating action-planning with individual GP members, taking on the onus of delivering on select functions. The objective of the process and the journey is to encourage GPs to move from sporadic fire-fighting to process-oriented functioning. Gradually, GPs are facilitated to establish and strengthen structures and systems that bring in accountability and transparency in their functioning, through a pro-active division of work and responsibility.

Two years since, there is a conviction in working collaboratively with multiple stakeholders, to contextualize and implement GPOD to strengthen GPs as organizations and institutions of self-governance,

having the potential to emerge as centres of excellence. Over these two years, the intervention has resulted in several tangible and intangible movements that enhance a belief in the appropriateness and applicability of the framework.

Tangible results include the opening of *Panchayat Bhavans*, regularizing GP meetings inclusive of recording attendance, minutes and decisions, setting an agenda, and maintaining the requisite registers that mark an active GP.

There are GPs in both the states that have moved to a stage where they are taking decisions and planning actions around larger deliverables that aim at systemic solutions. For instance, GPs have identified deeper intervention and focussed engagement with challenges related to education, agriculture and MGNREGA. To resolve these challenges, GPs have been facilitated to establish and activate corresponding GP structures as prescribed by the law, namely, setting up Standing and ad-hoc Committees.

The intangibles include collaborative decisions around recurring issues, enhanced negotiation skills while engaging with block and district

This visible movement of GPs towards debating and thinking collectively and working collaboratively, evidences the relevance of this framework in strengthening governance at the grassroots

panchayats, better conduct of the *gram sabha* (GS), etc. This visible movement of GPs towards debating and thinking collectively and working collaboratively, evidences the relevance of this framework in strengthening governance at the grassroots

Way Forward: Emerging Imperatives

With the first phase of the SPACE project nearing completion (the initial agreement with PRADAN is for 2016–18), there are two emerging imperatives that merit mention. First, how do we internalize the learnings from the field to further enhance the applicability of the framework? Second, how do these learnings inform the way forward in GPs wherein the engagement is ongoing?

That two years is too short a time to expect dramatic changes on the ground needs no reiteration. As was rightly remarked by one of the PRADAN professionals, “A 25- to 30-year history of de-capacitating GPs cannot be reversed in a two-year period. Strengthening GPs as units of self-governance is much required and calls for long-term sustained efforts.”

Whereas the engagement with GPs and the implementation of various steps conceptualized in the GPOD framework has led to (and continues to do so) in positive movements in GPs, the journey is far from complete. Thus, the first emerging imperative is to sustain these positive movements and, at the same time, incorporating the learnings and recognizing the evolving needs and requirements of GPs.

A second emerging imperative is to scale the intervention in a manner that impacts the magnitude of the challenge substantially. That the current engagement across 25 pilot GPs is perhaps a tiny drop in the ocean needs no reiteration. To put it in perspective, Madhya Pradesh has close to 23,000 GPs whereas Jharkhand has 4,402. Yet, this pilot and the learnings it has afforded cannot be negated. Without this pilot, the application of the philosophy and principles of OD would have remained a mere theoretical exercise. Furthermore, the way forward would perhaps be fuzzy, at best. Thus, questions on how can the pilot, inclusive of its learnings, be scaled and who would be

the stakeholders in this scaling process, assume significance.

There may be many ways of meeting these emerging imperatives; here are a few possibilities.

Imperative One: Sustaining and deepening the efforts of SPACE in pilot GPs.

a) Sustaining ongoing practices and interventions:

Several GPs within the pilot have reached a stage in which they have collectively and collaboratively created aspirational visions for their GPs. Deriving from these visions, these GPs have identified tangible goals, which, in turn, require a deeper engagement. For instance, Rampur Mal has identified streamlining the provision of water, facilitating higher education and enhancing labour provision through MGNREGS. Towards this end, the GP has collectively made efforts to establish structures (mainly Standing Committees) and processes that will facilitate a deeper engagement. Committee members have been nominated and responsibilities have been assigned. Yet, it is critical to

There are several internal and external challenges that GPs identify and acknowledge as intervention points as they move in this journey. PRADAN and Anode need to co-learn and co-create with GPs the ways and means of continual strengthening

recognize that this is work in progress and, while gaining momentum, there is much that is yet to be done. For instance, delivering on specifics in any of these areas would require skills of collective bargaining and negotiation with higher tier PRIs, namely block and district *panchayats*, both of which play a critical role in delivering on these. Developing these skills requires hand-holding GPs. There are several internal and external challenges that GPs identify and acknowledge as intervention points as they move in this journey. PRADAN and Anode need to co-learn and co-create with GPs the ways and means of continual strengthening. In those GPs in which progress has been substantial, there is now an engagement around instituting processes to raise revenues through some of these committees.

b) Transition Management:

SPACE was initiated in year two of the election cycle in both the states. With the elections in the pilot GPs likely to happen in the end of 2019, effectively, the engagement with GP members would be for three years. What this also implies is that there will be a change

in the elected representatives (and perhaps the functionaries too). The management of this transition is the first step to sustaining the change that is slowly taking form in the GPs. This can be effectively addressed by roping in aspiring candidates as well as past elected representatives in the change management process. Conversations that stand to ground the implications of the transition in the GP body on the momentum gained in affecting change in the day-to-day functioning of the GP will help bridge the gap likely to emerge with a new elected body. To quote an instance, in the pilot GPs in Madhya

Pradesh, such conversations have led to an understanding that, probably, GPs will see a 50 per cent change in the elected representatives. Work on initiating the likely/aspiring people representatives into the GPOD framework is currently being planned with the GPs.

Imperative Two: Scaling the GPOD

a) Scaling through state

structures: Visible impact requires scale and the state departments are critical stakeholders in the scaling. Various state schemes and programmes that have a similar objective, that is,

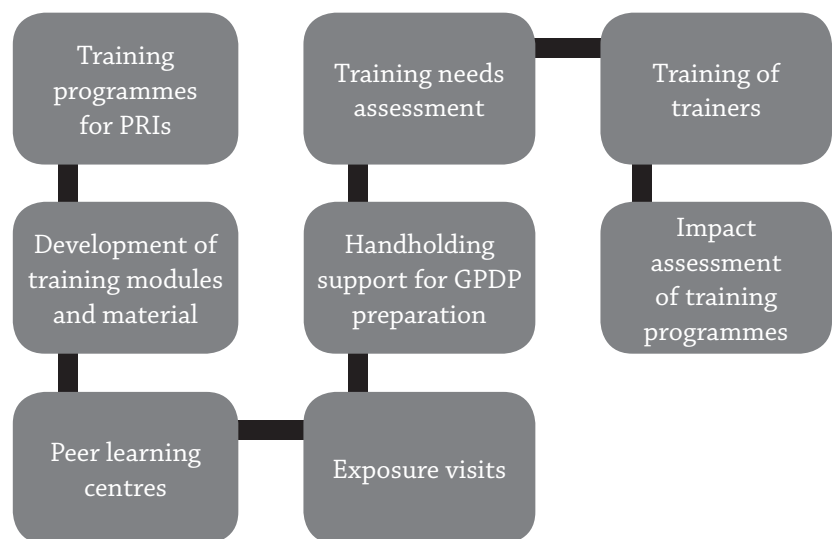


Figure 1: Training and Capacity Building: RGSA Guidelines

It must be kept in mind that leveraging state structures, schemes and programmes helps mitigate the risk of creating parallel delivery mechanisms and structures while bringing in a degree of legitimacy and ensuring systemic change.

strengthening the GPs as units of autonomous units of local governance, can be leveraged and converged with. For instance, the Rashtriya Gram Swarak Abhiyan (RGSA) of the Government of India is premised on an acknowledgement of weak administrative and technical capacity at the GP level. It mandates capacity enhancement of PRIs to deliver on economic development and social justice within their respective jurisdictions. As per the guidelines, the PRIs must go through a foundational course that aims to cover the themes of “good governance, enhancing efficiency, transparency and participation.” Figure 1 outlines the specific activities that the scheme will cover.²

Furthermore, the guidelines recognize the potential of (and mandates) involving the existing scheme-specific committees (Joint Forest Management Committees, Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committee and Village Education Committee, to name a few) and community-based institutions (SHGs, CBOs) in strengthening

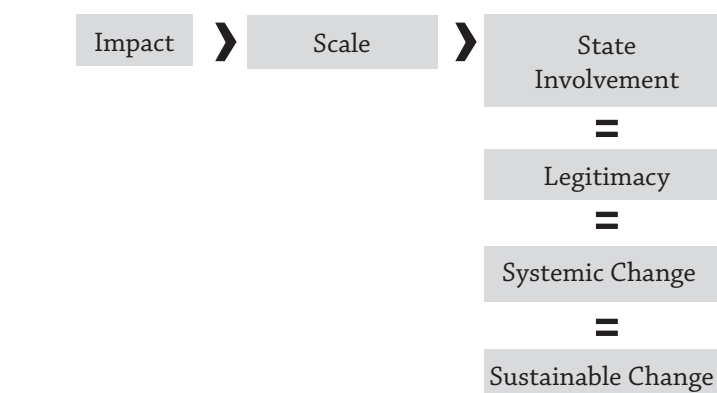


Figure 2: Visible Impact Requires Scale: Scale is Possible with the Involvement of the State

GPs. A detailed reading of the guidelines points to an alignment of the aims and objectives of the GPOD framework with that of RGSA. It must be kept in mind that leveraging state structures, schemes and programmes helps mitigate the risk of creating parallel delivery mechanisms and structures while bringing in a degree of legitimacy and ensuring systemic change. Thus, scaling with the state departments and their programmes and projects is a possible way forward.

As in Karnataka, the GPOD framework in Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand can be scaled to cover an entire block. There are two possible options of interventions at the block Level.

The GPOD framework can be modularized as a training programme to be conducted through the State Institute of Rural Development through its infrastructure, while leveraging RGSA and its provisions. In doing so, the facilitation of GPs in the field cannot be done away with. It is recommended that this be operationalized through a host of identified organizations (such as PRADAN), which are engaged with GPs and have an established relationship with them.

b) Scaling up through CSR:

Scaling up can also be done through CSR involvement. Here, the state machinery of the *zilla* (district) *panchayat* could be approached with an

²https://www.panchayat.gov.in/documents/10198/456811/Book_English_Framwork%20for%20RGS%20Abhiyan%204.pdf

Initiating change within GPs requires a clear understanding and acknowledgement that this institution is distinctly different from CBOs, the SHG being one of them

intention to cover one block. Given the larger number of GPs, it may be prudent to have several CBOs hand-holding GPs in implementing the GPOD framework. Scaling up through CSR could also supplement scaling up through the State Institute of rural Development (SIRD).

Conclusion

—

Meeting both these imperatives requires pro-active thinking and strategizing. The following learnings from the field will assist in this strategizing:

1. Initiating change within GPs requires a clear understanding and acknowledgement that this institution is distinctly different from CBOs, the SHG being one of them. Whereas strengthening citizenship (through SHG engagement) is necessary, it is not a sufficient condition to strengthen GPs. Instituting accountability mechanisms are a necessary condition and this can be achieved through an effective and meaningful engagement with elected

representatives. Thus, the need for a balance between CBO-PRI engagements.

2. Sustaining any change in this institution requires a degree of preparedness of a GP that is premised on complex dynamics, both at the individual and organization levels. Hence, the need for continuous and concerted engagement around, for instance, role realization by Ward Members, and increased understanding (of elected representatives as well as *panchayat* functionaries) of the statutory framework, mandated structures, processes and responsibilities, necessary to deliver.
3. Initiating and sustaining change within the GP requires a necessary engagement with the larger eco-system comprising state departments and block and district *panchayats*, on the one hand, and CBOs on the other. In other words, it demands an intensity of engagement at various scales.
4. Given this intensity of engagement, when scaling,

those blocks/districts should be prioritized in which there is SHG saturation.³ This will have a two-fold advantage. On the one hand, it will provide functioning CBOs to enhance governance mechanisms. On the other, it will save energy and effort in mobilizing CBOs/SHGs, thereby freeing up space for engagement with the GPs.

In conclusion, meeting the above emerging imperatives requires a two-fold engagement: a) designing and implementing a deeper engagement in the existing GPs in identified sectors, be it education, health, employment or agriculture; and, b) working with the state machinery and, or, leveraging CSR to intervene on scale. In doing so, it must be borne in mind that challenges and opportunities of scale are different from those of a deeper engagement. Yet, the experience with the latter, currently ongoing in GPs across the state, will inform the former.

—

Dr. Anjali Karol Mohan works with Anode Governance Lab as Lead, Research and Training. She is based in Bangalore.

³ There are geographies where SHG creation and mobilization (under the Government of India's National Rural Livelihoods Mission) is complete.

Building the Organization Capabilities of Gram Panchayats:

The Pilot Project in Jharkhand

...

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

THE 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*¹ (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

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

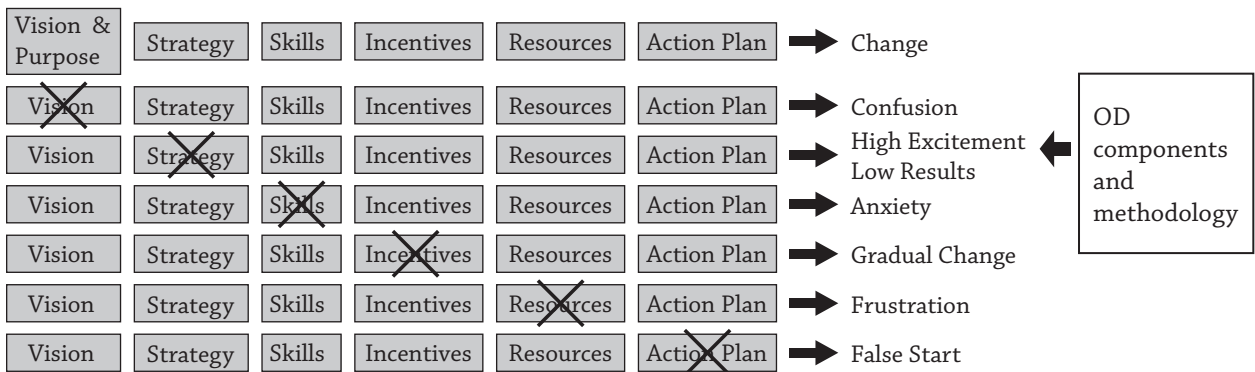
The GPOD framework is inspired by the principles of organization development (OD), which take a holistic, systemic view of an organization and stress on the role of members of the organization as key drivers of change.

on the role of members of the organization as key drivers of change.

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

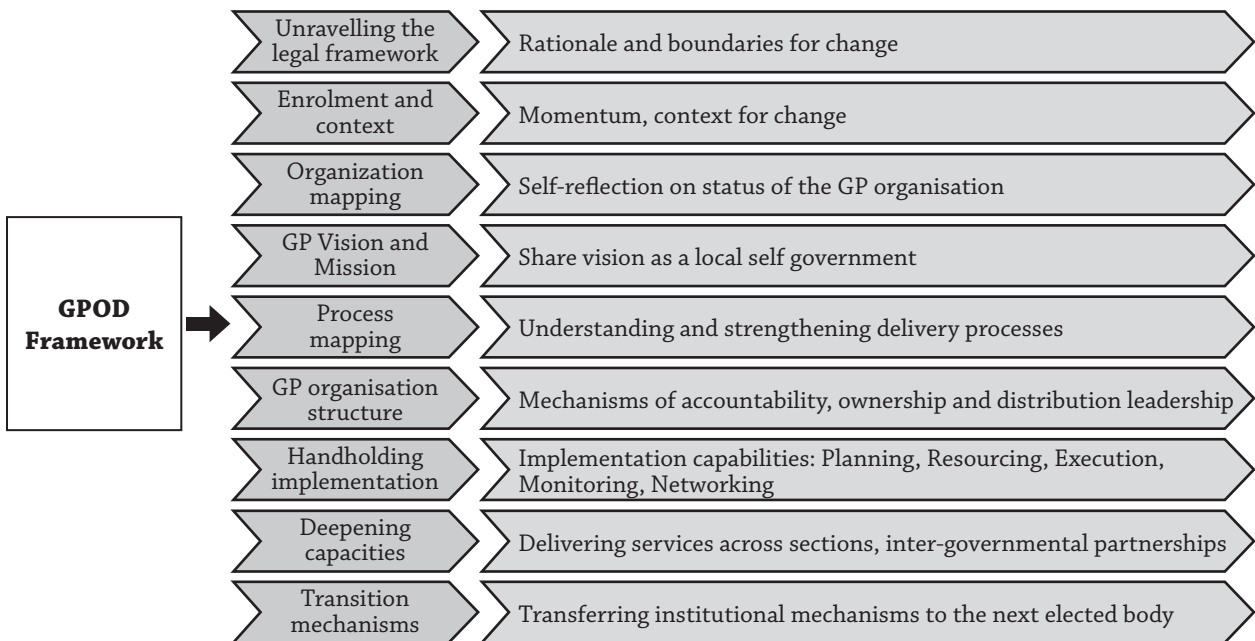


Figure 1: GPOD Framework Derived from OD methodology

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.

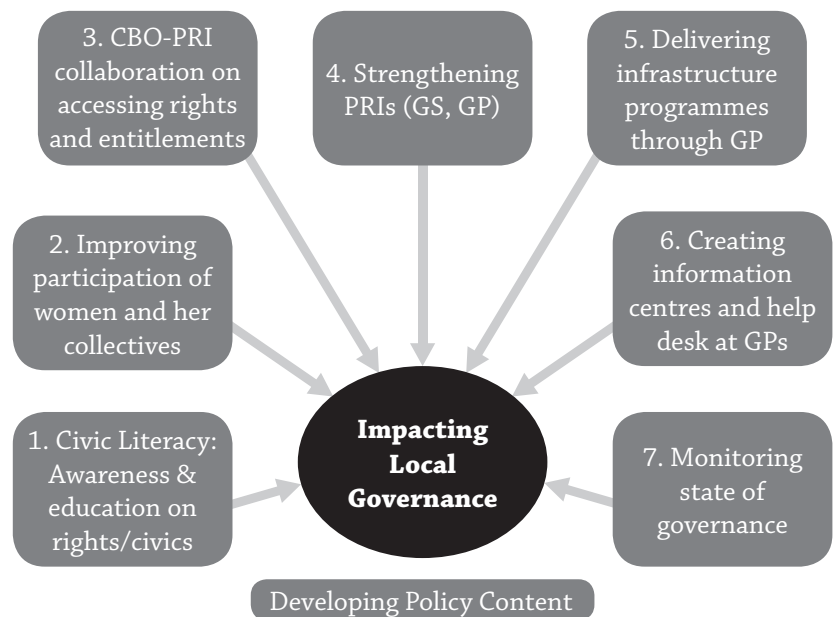


Figure 2: Intervention Buckets in Jharkhand's SPACE programme

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

- 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	वर्णन
ग्राम सभा के मुख्य कार्य में लैंगी की सहभागिता	ग्राम सभा का चयन एवं ग्राम सभा में लैंगी की सहभागिता	2.5
ग्राम सभा पर छाया सचिवों का बैठक एवं उनके सदस्यों	ग्राम सभा पर छाया सचिवों का बैठक एवं उनके सदस्यों	1-2
ग्राम सभा का चयन	ग्राम सभा का चयन	0-1
लैंगी का चयन (ग्राम सभा में)	लैंगी का चयन (ग्राम सभा में)	3
लैंगी की सहभागिता का चयन	लैंगी की सहभागिता का चयन	3-4
14 वित्त आयोग के बारे में जानकारी	14 वित्त आयोग के बारे में जानकारी	3
योजनाओं का चयन (योजना विकास)	योजनाओं का चयन (योजना विकास)	3
योजनाओं का क्रियान्वयन	योजनाओं का क्रियान्वयन	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

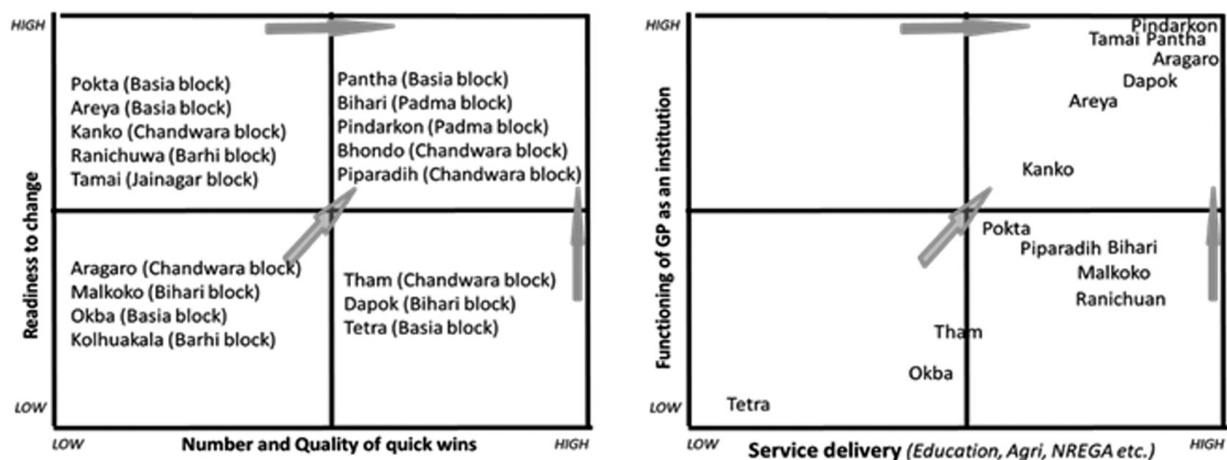


Figure 5: Comparative Categorization of the 16 GPs from 24.7.2017 to 9.8.2018.

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

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

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

Our engagement with GPs in Jharkhand (and Madhya Pradesh) is, at present, a work in progress. However, it is apparent that with

Our engagement with GPs in Jharkhand (and Madhya Pradesh) is, at present, a work in progress. However, it is apparent that with their involvement in the delivery of services, GPs are beginning to understand the hurdles that impact access to services

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

—

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

—

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.

The GPs organize sports and other events to engage with the students, which essentially is to impact attendance and prevent dropouts

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"> Meeting is organized on the 5th of every month. GP income and expenditure details are shared in every meeting. <i>Sachiv/Rojgar Sevak</i> writes the minutes of the proceedings during the meeting and the <i>Mukhia</i> closes the meeting. They review the proceedings of the last GPEC. Role of the husbands of EWR is now minimal.
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

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.

SM Vijayanand², “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.

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.

²Retired Chief Secretary, Government of Kerala, and Former Secretary, Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj

STRENGTHENING LOCAL GOVERNANCE:

A Development Paradigm

...

Recognizing the idea of the Panchayati Raj as crucial for the foundation of the Indian political system, the 73rd Constitution Amendment was passed by Parliament in 1992, giving Constitutional power to local elected bodies, leading to a decentralized form of governance in which each and every village is responsible for its own affairs

Background

—

IN OCTOBER 1989, RAJIV GANDHI GAVE A SPEECH THAT envisioned the idea of a *panchayat* and a self-sufficient village ecosystem. In his speech he said, “In a vast country like ours, there are at present not more than 5,500 persons—5,000 in the state legislatures and around 500 in the Parliament—to directly represent 800 million people. The number of voters seeking the assistance of elected representatives is so large that there is no way the representative can give his personal attention to his electorate as a whole.”

This meant that if the people at the grass roots had an issue they needed resolved, they would have to directly approach the MLA. The desire to allow people to have local self-governance led to the passing of a crucial Act in the Parliament, in 1992—the 73rd Constitution Amendment 1992, that gave Constitutional power to local governance bodies.

The idea was to bring uniformity in the structure of local bodies and, simultaneously, ensure the representation of the weaker sections of society through reservation in all local bodies

Later, in 1993, Article 243 G was added; this gave “provisions of mandatory devolution of powers, authorities and responsibilities by state governments to the *panchayats*.” Initially, the Amendment was passed in eight tribal states. The idea was to bring uniformity in the structure of local bodies and, simultaneously, ensure the representation of the weaker sections of society through reservation in all local bodies. Mahatma Gandhi had advocated the idea of Panchayati Raj as very crucial for the foundation of the Indian political system... the decentralized form of governance in which each and every village would be responsible for its own affairs.

Later, in 1996, on the basis of the report submitted by the Bhuria Committee in 1995, the Parliament also enacted ‘The Provisions of the Panchayat (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act 1996’ also known as the PESA Act. This extends particularly to Part IX of the Constitution, with certain modifications and exceptions to the Fifth Schedule Areas that were notified in 10 states, that is, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Telangana,

Odisha, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh.

This Act gave special powers to the *gram panchayat* (GP) and the *gram sabha* (GS), which includes participatory planning for decision-making, approval of plans, programmes for social and economic development, and mandatory consultation before acquisition of land in the Scheduled Areas for development projects. The GS refers to a body comprising persons registered in the electoral rolls of a revenue village within a GP area.

This Act also made GSs and GPs the centre of self-governance for protecting tribal population from exploitation. It lays emphasis on empowering GSs; this has not been conferred by any other Act in any state. It has already been 22 years since PESA and 25 years since the 73rd Amendment was passed in the Parliament.

Here, we critically look at the status of the 73rd Amendment and PESA in Basia block of Jharkhand, and attempt to understand the struggles during the implementation of both of these Acts, the current engagement of the Basia team with PRIs and the GS, and the

challenges and scope of our engagement.

Context

—
Basia block lies 101 km from Ranchi towards Simdega. It is located in Gumla district, Jharkhand. It has 15 *panchayats*, comprising 88 revenue villages. The total tribal population of the block is 64 per cent, with a major dependency on agriculture. It also lies under the 5th Schedule Area. PESA empowers GSs, making it a prime institution with decision-making powers.

Conditions in Basia block

—
The GSs of Basia block are not empowered enough to make their own decisions, in spite of being in the 5th Schedule area. PRIs have a certain level of execution powers and they are increasingly replacing the concept of a GS. The traditional leaders, the *Gram Pradhans*, are not aware of their powers and their rights, and are, therefore, not equipped to pass on the decisions taken in the GS to PRIs. GSs are usually held to discuss government schemes to be rolled out in the village under MGNREGS. On the other hand, the women of Basia block are

The team thought that professionals need to engage extensively with PRIs to create a better delivery mechanism of social welfare schemes and that could only be possible through rigorous engagement with local governance institutions

slowly collectivizing themselves strongly through SHGs, VOs and Cluster- and block-level Federations.

During the interactions with the collectives and in their meetings, it was always on the agenda that the Community Based Organization (CBO) members should contest the elections because many members faced difficulties in approaching *panchayats*. The PRADAN Basia team also thought of engaging extensively with PRIs for decentralization of democracy. The whole idea of engaging with PRIs became stronger when seven of the SHG members were selected as *Mukhiyas* and, that too, in just the second elections held in Jharkhand for *panchayats*.

The CBOs were quite happy with SHG members being represented by the *Mukhiya* of the *panchayat* and it gave hope to the members that now they would be able to get their work done at the *panchayat* level. The CBOs took charge of calling the *Mukhiyas* to their meetings and the members of the Federation explained to them the struggles of their *panchayats*.

On the other hand, the *Mukhiyas* were not completely effective due

to lack of awareness of their roles and responsibilities. They were also getting into trouble with the middlemen and the naxalites. This led to a conflict situation between the CBOs and the *Mukhiyas* because the Collectives were not able to understand the struggle of the *Mukhiyas*, and the CBOs eventually started questioning them.

The team thought that professionals need to engage extensively with PRIs to create a better delivery mechanism of social welfare schemes and that could only be possible through rigorous engagement with local governance institutions. The Basia team thought that there was a complete mismatch between the demand on the institutions serving the communities and their capacities (supply-side capabilities); and looking at the *panchayat*, it was the need of both the team and the CBOs to strengthen the local governance institutions, that is, the GS and the GP. PRADAN was new to the field of governance; therefore, the team initiated a pilot project called the Strengthening Panchayat Actions for Community Empowerment (SPACE) in five *panchayats* of Basia, with the support of ANODE (Governance lab), which

is a Bangalore-based organization, working on strengthening PRIs in Karnataka. The objective of the programme was to strengthen GP institutions through capacity-building trainings.

In the beginning, the team engaged with *panchayat* members informally to understand the current state of affairs, the struggles and the challenges of the *panchayat*. A meeting then took place of the *panchayats* of all five *panchayats*, wherein the PRIs and PRADAN had a detailed discussion on the functioning of the *panchayat*.

This helped the team identify the key areas in which to engage with PRIs such as in areas where there was no clarity of roles and responsibilities among Ward Members, the lack of awareness among the citizens, the lack of clarity about the ownership of resources, the demands of the citizens not being met and the poor service delivery mechanisms. This opened a door for the team to engage with *panchayat* members.

An MOU was signed between PRADAN, the *panchayat* and the Panchayati Raj department. In order to show *panchayat* members the current state of the *panchayat*,

The team also introduced a citizenship perspective because during meetings with panchayat members, PRIs constantly complained of lack of awareness of rights among the villagers.

an organization mapping was done at the GP level called the Gram Panchayat Organization Development (GPOD). This was to help PRIs understand the current state of *panchayat* deliverables, their capacity and capability, and build self-awareness of the roles and responsibilities among *panchayat* members and the staff, and ownership in the organization building process.

At the end of the GPOD processes, PRIs were asked to rate their *panchayat* (on a scale of 1–5) on four parameters, that is, infrastructure, service delivery, citizen demand and GS functioning. When this was done, it was time for the team to understand the vision of the *panchayat* members and what they aspired for in their own *panchayat*. An exercise was conducted with all the members of the *panchayat*. Training programmes on the legal framework of the state were also conducted with PRIs so that the *panchayat* could understand the boundaries that were to be taken into consideration when doing any system settings for strengthening the *panchayat*, and the provisions of the Jharkhand Panchayati Raj Act (JPRA) 2001, the Panchayat Extension to

Scheduled Areas (PESA) 1996, which was applicable in Basia. The notifications that were issued by the departments, from time to time, were shared with the PRIs. This provided a legal basis for our intervention in Basia. Various other trainings were also organized in the *panchayat* such as MGNREGA, MIS system set-up, and GP help-desk and Ward Members.

Interventions

—

The team also introduced a citizenship perspective because during meetings with *panchayat* members, PRIs constantly complained of lack of awareness of rights among the villagers. In order to fulfil this requirement of the *panchayat*, PRADAN collaborated with an organization called ‘We the People’ for enhancing citizenship awareness through civic literacy programmes at the grass roots. Twenty (men and women) cohorts were selected by the team, and are to be trained by We the People on Constitutional rights. These cohorts underwent three-phase trainings on the Constitution, the Acts relevant to Jharkhand and the struggles faced by villagers in their everyday life.

These cohorts (now known as *Samvidhan Saathis*) are men and women, who are motivated enough to further motivate, educate and encourage others to be aware of the rights, values, and morals enshrined in our Constitution. Thereafter, they run training sessions on the Constitutional values and principles at SHGs, VOs and the GS, in the local language. They help the villagers understand their rights and entitlements. They have also been talking to community members about laws and Acts such as MGNREGA and National Food Security Act, relevant to them.

Pertinent issues such as water, sanitation, drought and discrepancies in social security schemes were taken up by the cohorts and later by the Federation as well. The investment on cohorts and the trainings that were given to them had a very positive impact on the villagers. The people have grasped the skill of writing applications with reference to the Constitution and have consequently been able to put pressure on the block administration. The language of the letters has changed from “*Aapke sada ehsaanmand rahenge to kuch dinon ke andar yeh karya*

There was also a need to bridge the gap between the GPs and the GSs. It was important for both to take ownership and control of their respective powers.

karwana sunisshit karein (We will forever be grateful to you if you sanction this work for us in a few days)” to that which quotes the relevant Acts and Rights detailed in the sub-clauses. The officials

have also taken a back seat once they read the applications written by the cohort.

In the beginning of this programme, a lot of time

was spent on strengthening *panchayats* and building citizenship perspective with the help of cohort training in the community. There was also a need to bridge the gap between the GPs

Regd. No. - 373/13

महिला विकास मंडल, बसिया
Registered Under Society Act 21, 1860

पत्र-सं० : दिनांक : 29/01/2018

प्रति
अंचल पदाधिकारी बसिया

विषय- पंचायत स्तरीय वृद्धाविधवा/विकलांग पेंशन कैंप कराने के सम्बन्ध में।

महोदय,

महिला विकास मंडल-बसिया, प्रखंड के 830 महिला मंडल और लगभग 11600 महिलाओं के साथ विभिन्न मुद्दों पर महिलाओं के स्थिति को बेहतर करने के लिए लगातार कार्यरत है।

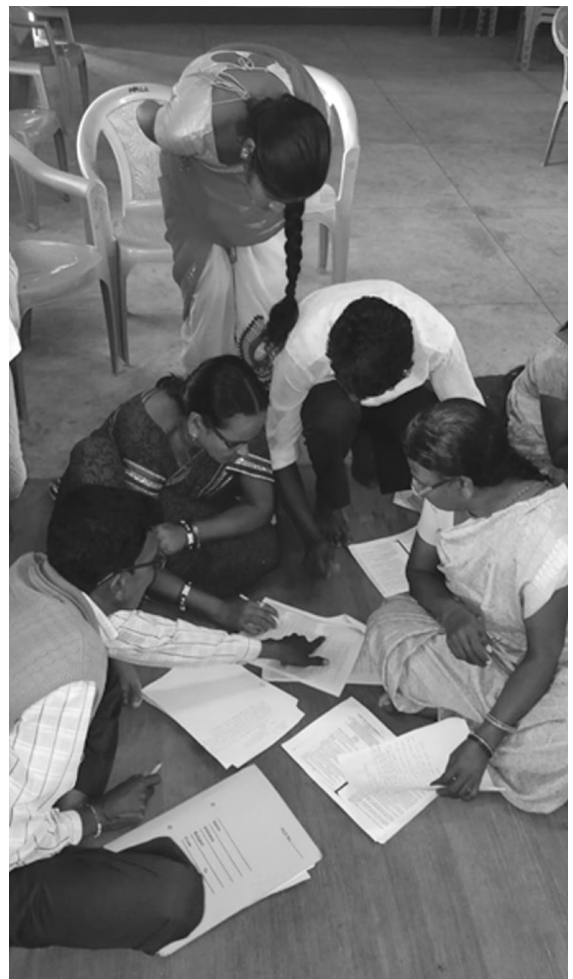
उपरोक्त विषय में कहना है, की मुझे बहुत खुशी के साथ कहना पर रहा है की पिछले दिन ही बसिया पंचायत में एक दिन पेंशन के लिए कैंप का आयोजन किया गया था।

प्रखंड में 14 और पंचायत है, जहाँ वृद्धाविधवा/विकलांग पेंशन नहीं मिलने वाली की संख्या काफी अधिक है, जिनकी उम्र 60 साल की हो चुकी है, विधवा है और विकलांग हैं, हमलोग को क्षेत्र भ्रमण के दौरान लगातार गाँव के नागरिक इस समस्या को रखते हैं। वृद्धाविधवा/विकलांग पेंशन का अधिकार होने के बाद भी उनको उनका अधिकार नहीं मिलना, भारत की संविधान के अनुच्छेद 21, 41 एवं 42 में वर्णित नीति-निर्देशक सिद्धांतों का गंभीर उत्प्रेषण है, और राष्ट्रीय सामाजिक सहायता कार्यक्रम-1995 और राज्य सरकार के दिशा निर्देश का भी उत्प्रेषण है

अतः श्रीमान से कहना है, की बसिया प्रखंड के बाकी 14 पंचायतों में भी पंचायत स्तरीय कैंप का आयोजन किया जाये, ताकि जो वृद्धाविधवा/विकलांग को उनका अधिकार मिल सके जो अपने अधिकार से वंचित हैं।

प्रतिनिधि
प्रखंड विकास पदाधिकारी-बसिया महिला विकास मंडल, बसिया
अनुमंडल विकास पदाधिकारी-बसिया अध्यक्ष सचिव कोषाध्यक्ष

महिला विकास मंडल - बसिया, दूसरा तल्ला, बैंक ऑफ इंडिया बिल्डिंग, कोनबीर - बसिया, जुमला - 855229 (कारखाना दूरमाय :
Email id - mvmbasiagumla@gmail.com



Application written with the help of cohorts by the Federation leaders for conducting pension camps in their *panchayats*

Training of new *Samvidhan Saathis* on Constitutional rights

During various internal discussions and field observations, it was realized that GSs could not revive themselves in a vacuum; the need to hold thematic *sabhas* on issues pertaining to a particular village was recognised; this would help re-establish a system for the community and reinstate the importance of GSs

and the GSs. It was important for both to take ownership and control of their respective powers.

A healthy relationship between a GP and a GS is imperative, wherein the GS takes part in the decision-making and the *panchayat* ensures that the decisions are executed. The Panchayati Raj system is still dormant in Jharkhand and power devolution is not a visible phenomenon. Hence, the *panchayat* has to take repeated initiative to establish itself as an institution. The team, therefore, arrived at a consensus that working with the GS should also be a part of our institutional strengthening engagement because it needs to sustain and evolve.

During various internal discussions and field observations, it was realized that GSs could not revive themselves in a vacuum; the need to hold thematic *sabhas* on issues pertaining to a particular village was recognised; this would help re-establish a system for the community and reinstate the importance of GSs. This method will further help in systematizing GS meetings. Thematic meetings on Forest Rights Act (FRA), social

security schemes, participatory planning, drinking water, etc., are now taking place in Basia.

In addition, we initiated *panchayat*-level monthly meetings of all *Gram Pradhans* in a *panchayat*, where they would come together, share their experiences, hold discussions on various methods of dealing with issues, concerns, good practices and cross-learning. These meetings were initiated in five beacon *panchayats* of Basia. (Beacon *Panchayat* Project aims at empowering GP by improving their infrastructure, service delivery mechanism and making them aware of their rights, powers and responsibilities as an institution.) The Gram Pradhans responded to it very well and look forward to such meetings. After detailed discussions and a needs-realization exercise, we are now in the process of planning several trainings for them. Discussions around *jal, jungle, zameen* (water, forest, land) and the involvement of youth in GSs have been some of the major deliberations in the meetings so far.

Alongside, the Basia team began talking to PRI representatives and the community to understand their idea of a GS. The team made

a list of observations in order to be able to better comprehend group processes, decision-making and the overall functioning of a GS.

In one of our initiatives with the *panchayat*, we worked on the vision-mission, in which the GPs underwent a three-day workshop in meditating upon the aspirations that they have for their *panchayat* and the themes that they believe are the most important in the coming two to three years.

This exercise with our beacon GPs has helped in prioritizing their goals on agriculture and MGNREGA. *Panchayats* took up their roles to make these two activities function better. Agriculture Standing Committees of all the respective *panchayats* were activated. MGNREGA has a clear mandate, wherein the elected representatives of the *panchayat* and the GS have clearly defined roles in sanctioning schemes, monitoring ongoing works, grievance management and escalation, etc.

The Act, in its spirit, is clearly focussing on strengthening local institutions of governance. Therefore, after an initial

They also worked at setting up of a Management Information System (MIS) in the panchayat for MGNREGA-related works, which was earlier being operated from the block headquarters

training, an action plan for PRI members was charted out, whereby Ward Members and the *Mukhiya* had to take up certain activities that have been prescribed through various circulars and notifications of the state government. Activities such as ward-wise camps for grievance collection, demand and job card-related applications were organized. These camps were led by Ward Members themselves. The *Mukhiya* took up the responsibility of reviewing the Mates once a month. Other activities included the regularization of Gram Panchayat Executive Committee meetings and piloting the GP help-desk through PRI-CBO collaboration. A *didhi* from the SHG and a Ward Member volunteered to work on the regularization of the Rozgar Diwas, once a week, which was to be attended by workers, Mates, the *gram rozgar sevak* and some PRI members.

They also worked at setting up of a Management Information System (MIS) in the *panchayat* for MGNREGA-related works, which was earlier being operated from the block headquarters. There is no specific standing committee for MGNREGA; hence, a *panchayat*-level General Administration Committee

was activated. This Committee comprises the heads of all the other Standing Committees. These Committees have not been functional since the PRI system has come into being in Jharkhand. In order to activate them, we had to find specific and concrete roles for them.

Agriculture in the block that was allocated a certain amount of seeds and agri-inputs did not reach all the villagers. There were middlemen and powerful agents involved. In order to tap this resource and also demand for more inputs, a VO-level agri-planning was carried out in Pantha and Areya *panchayats*. The demands of the *panchayats* were consolidated and presented in the GS for further inputs of the villagers. Once finalized, this resolution was forwarded to the *panchayat* and was further pushed to the block and district administration through a block-level Ajeevika Mela.

The demands received by both the *panchayats* were later merged with the Gram Swaraj Abhiyaan affecting the coverage of the allocated input distribution. The *panchayats* also demanded fertilizers and trainings from the Ajeevika Krishak Mitras.

During the process, those families that were not a part of the women's institutions automatically get excluded from such activities. Our SHGs were not completely inclusive and, hence, we planned to have a more micro-level picture of the work we were doing. For the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP), the planning was done at the *tola* level, led by *Gram Pradhans*, the traditional leaders supported by SHG women and field cadres.

In Basia, the team also began engaging in the implementation of the FRA in Areya village of Areya *panchayat*. This village enjoys a forest cover of approximately 540 acres but there are some rising concerns on the unruly usage of and access to their forest land by the villagers from inside and outside Areya. Some of the villagers were aware of the provisions defined in FRA and wanted some level of guidance in grounding it further.

After three to four consecutive GS meetings, to understand the provisions of the Act thoroughly, the villagers initiated the claim process. The process was mainly led by the women of the village, with the elderly describing every possible detail of the forest, its

The Forest Rights Committee, formed in the GS under the Act, has been working actively in collecting documents such as the *khatiyān*, revenue maps, filling the form and notifying government officials for physical verification of the area that they are set to claim

usage, its relevance to their lives and why they wanted to protect it. Areya also faces the potential threat of attracting companies because it lies near the main road, has more plain land, has a canal and a dam nearby and also has a huge forest cover.

Also, the recent phenomenon of a land bank created by the Jharkhand state government has taken almost 800 acres of Areya's *gairmazurwa aam* (public land that has passed on to the state after the abolition of the *zamindari* system) and forest land into account. Sensing these dangers and establishing the relevance of forests into their lives, the Areya villagers are eager to get a Community Forest Rights (CFR) claim to their name. The Forest Rights Committee, formed in the GS under the Act, has been working actively in collecting documents such as the *khatiyān*, revenue maps, filling the form and notifying government officials for physical verification of the area that they are set to claim.

This process is nearing completion and, it is expected that, in one month, the claim document will be submitted to the sub-divisional committee. The discussions and processes

in Areya have had a snowballing effect, leading to similar movements in nearby villages. All forest fringe villages such as Kurdega, Sakya and Konaskeli of the same *panchayat* have begun the process of claiming CFR. One more village will be joining the list soon. A similar movement has been seen in a far-off *panchayat* in Okba, where Bataloya village has initiated the same process.

In Basia, PRADAN is not the first and the only one to initiate CFR claim processes. People who are aware of it are going ahead and doing it themselves and also helping others. We, through our engagements, are trying to talk about these processes as holistically as possible. People realize the potential threat to their land, especially forest land, and wish to reinstate their relationship with nature.

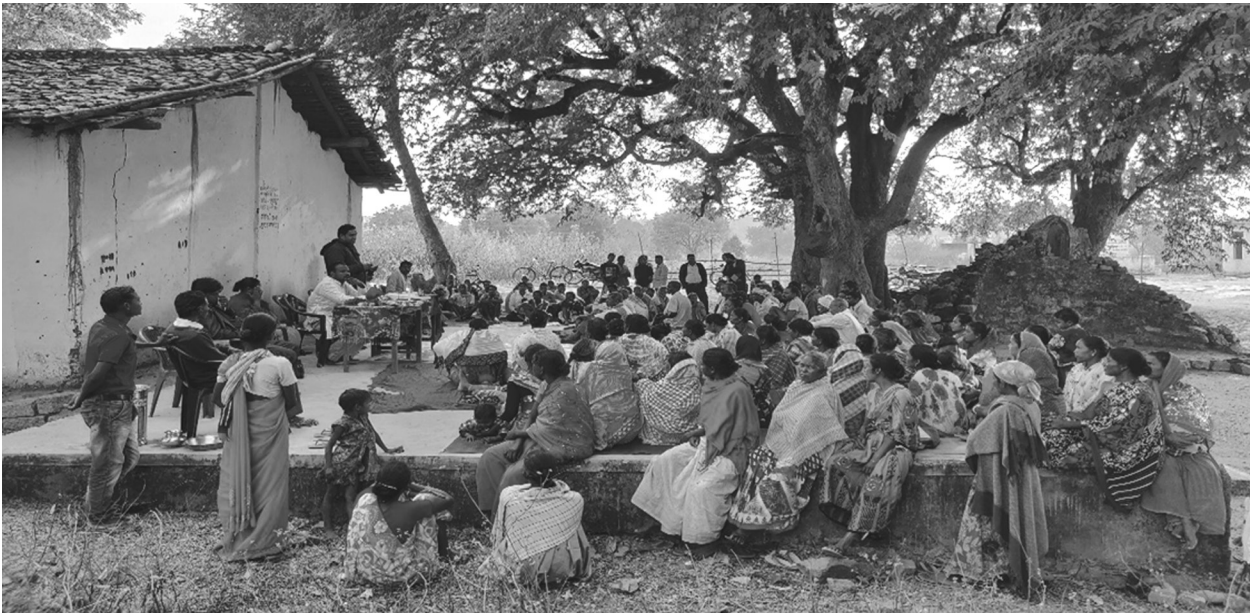
The GSs in Basia are not very cohesive because of the repeated disappointments in the Yojna Banao Abhiyaan, the non-implementation of PESA, the lack of consideration of the needs and priorities of the people and the formation of unconstitutional parallel structures such as the Adivasi and Gram Vikas Samitis by the state, further weakening the traditional GS structures.

Such processes are meant to happen only through the GSs and taking the holistic view of the scenario can propel the *sabha* to redefine itself, its motto and its functioning. Currently, they are known as the *yojna sabhas*, which meet only after receiving letters from the block administration. The nature of the GS is being twisted and turned by vested interests for their political motives, to weaken it further so that it loses control and ownership of its resources.

Alongside, Jharkhand launched GPDP, the *sabki yojna, sabka vikas* programme, asking *panchayats* to make plans and demands for relevant schemes. It was launched on 2 October 2018 and was to last till 31 December 2018. According to a gazette notification, the *panchayat* was supposed to conduct two GSs and make all possible plans. In order to make it more participatory and inclusive, the team along with the block and the beacon *panchayats* elaborated on this plan. PRADAN facilitated the GPDP processes in five beacon *panchayats*, in which the process was as follows:

Three years ago, at the Yojna Banao Abhiyaan, the community made intensive plans for a period of three years. Important natural

The discussions and processes in Areya have had a snowballing effect, leading to similar movements in nearby villages

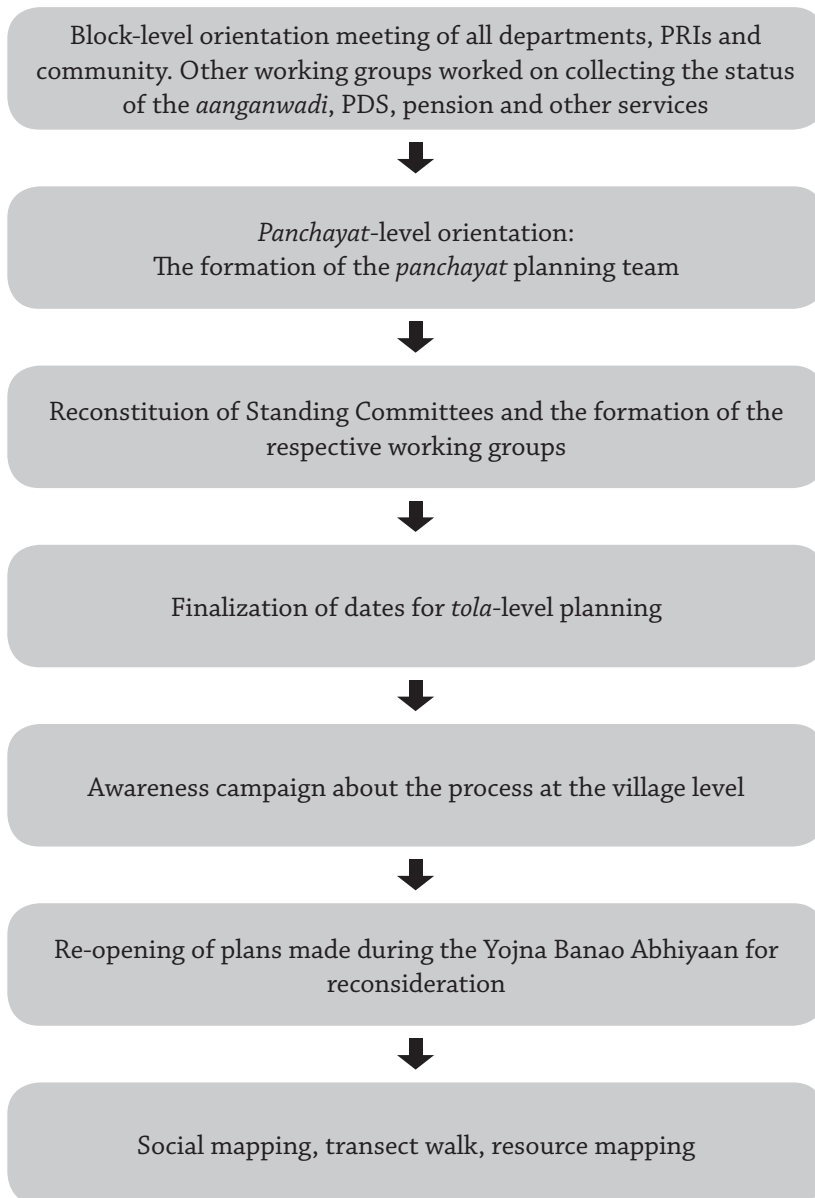


GS meeting on FRA at Konaskeli village, Areya.



Social mapping and resource mapping through a GPDP exercise at Gopalpur village, Areya

The planning process was mainly aimed at ensuring that no needy or vulnerable families were left out and that their plans were prioritized by the GS

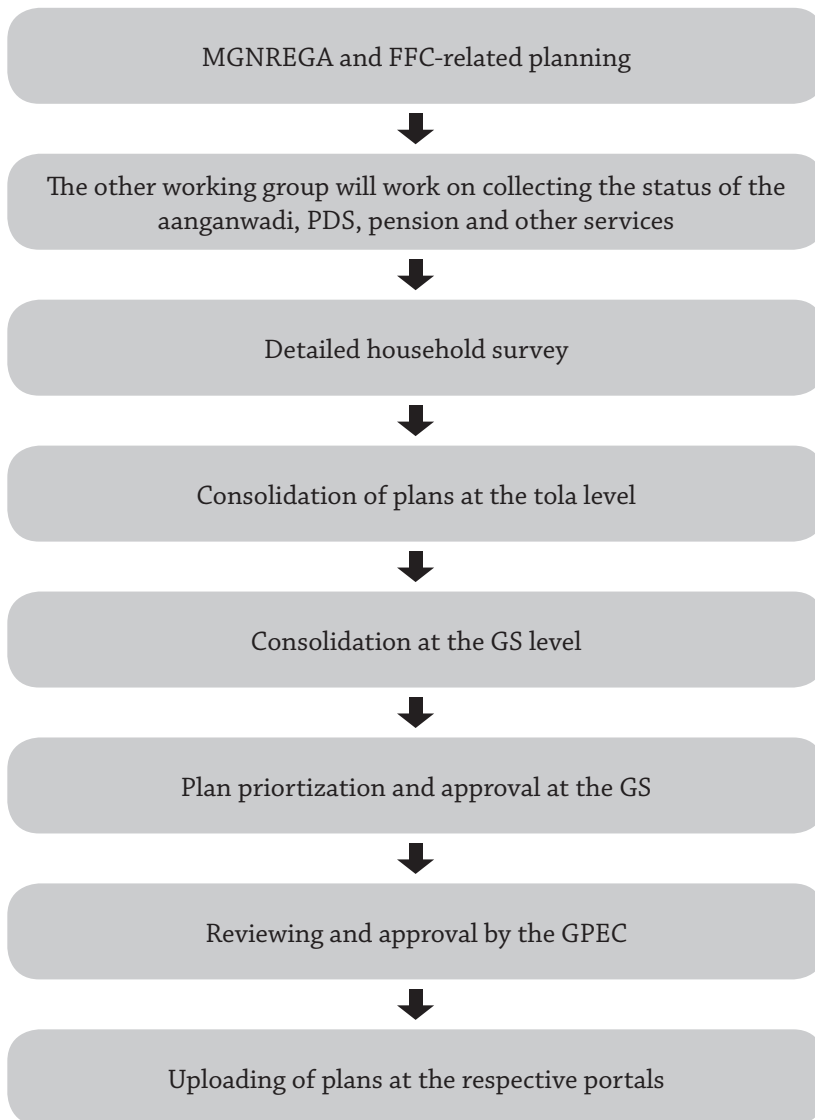


resource management plans were made during the *Abhiyaan* but the state government approved and rolled out only the five per cent model (water harvesting pond) locally known as the *dobha*. This time, plans that are located in the *panchayats*' plausible area of implementation are to be considered first. These plans were made according to the Fourteenth Finance Commission (FFC) and MGNREGA budgeting for one year only because the needs are dynamic in nature. The planning process was mainly aimed at ensuring that no needy or vulnerable families were left out and that their plans were prioritized by the GS.

Impact of our Intervention

This initiative has lessened the gap between the *panchayat* and the citizens. The villagers have started to show some faith in the *panchayats*, which they did not have initially. There have been times when the *panchayat* has shown lot of interest in people's issues. This year (2018), Gumla district in Basia faced severe drought conditions. In the beacon *panchayats*, the GSs made an application for drought sighting the situation and demanding relief and submitted it to the

This year (2018), Gumla district in Basia faced severe drought conditions. In the beacon *panchayats*, the GSs made an application for drought sighting the situation and demanding relief and submitted it to the *panchayats*. The *Mukhiyas* made sure that the MLA received these applications and the villagers got the necessary compensation



panchayats. The *Mukhiyas* made sure that the MLA received these applications and the villagers got the necessary compensation. This intervention has created a healthy relationship between the *panchayat* and the villagers. The *panchayat* office started opening on a regular basis for the *Rozgar Diwas* and the villagers began visiting the *panchayat*, demanding work in MGNREGA and listing their grievances.

When the GPDP was to be implemented in the *panchayats*, the *panchayat* invited CBO members and *Gram Pradhans* for implementing the planning process. During this meeting, the *Gram Pradhans* decided the date for the GS, and the planning process started accordingly. And during the GPDP processes, the GS made sure that more schemes related to solving the water issues of the village were planned and the PRIs supported these decisions.

Challenges

In the last one-and-a-half years (since 2017) in Basia, because of the low remuneration, there have been major challenges to the active participation in the PRI. Moreover, PRIs are seen to

The Panchayati Raj system is new to Jharkhand and the devolution of power to the third tier of democracy is challenging. The lack of clarity on its role has de-motivated PRIs and prevented them from functioning to their fullest capacity.



Mukhiyas, submitting applications, relate drought conditions in Basia to Mr. Dinesh Oraon (MLA).

be lacking in awareness about their roles and responsibilities because of which they failed to exercise their rights. This has given power to the state to intervene in *panchayat* matters and put forward its views of how the *panchayat* should function. Clearly, this shows that the power still lies with the state and the centre, leading to de-motivation among PRI members.

The Panchayati Raj system is new to Jharkhand and the devolution of power to the third tier of

democracy is challenging. The lack of clarity on its role has de-motivated PRIs and prevented them from functioning to their fullest capacity.

In last six months, there have been burning discussions in GSs on the formation of *Adivasi* and *Gram Vikas Samitis*. The Jharkhand government, through a gazette notification, and pushed further by the administration (which was very persistent about forming these committees, and put immense pressure on the

Panchayat Mukhiyas and *Panchayat* secretaries to execute the orders), formed these Committees at the GS level. Nine-member Gram Vikas Samitis and eleven-member Adivasi Vikas Samitis were formed in June 2018 throughout Jharkhand. The Committees have the power to spend up to Rs 5 lakhs on infrastructural development of the village.

This move apart from being unconstitutional is ridden with vested interests of some groups and jeopardizes the roles and

Discussions also led to pertinent questions such as why the money was not being given directly to the GS and its Committees. What was the *panchayat's* role now?

powers of both the GP and the GS. Neither the Jharkhand Panchayati Raj Act nor PESA talk about any of these committees. Moreover, these Committees were formed only for a period of two years, with financial powers that could have been diverted to the *Gram Kosh* (GS account), empowering the already existing GS Standing Committees. Such parallel formations have not been set up by any other state and the move is now being contested in the Ranchi High Court by renowned lawyers.

The gazette notification nowhere mentions the decision-making processes to be taken up by the committee. It overlooks the provisions of PESA, in which the GS is supposed to play a pivotal role in decision-making. The formation of these committees has caused fights and disturbances within tribal and non-tribal communities, both of which believed that the Committees were formed to serve certain groups only. Moreover, the District Magistrate issued an order against those *Mukhiyas*, who would not extend their support to the formation and the opening of bank accounts of these committees. *Mukhiyas*, across the state, realized very well that the powers guaranteed to them

by the Jharkhand Panchayati Raj Act were at stake due to these committees.

The women were approached by the *panchayat Swayam Sevaks* to get the work done. The rising disturbances within tribal and non-tribal groups across the block was a matter of concern for us and the Collectives as well. While these discussions were fresh, during our meetings in the village, we initiated discussions around these Committees discussing and analysing the pros and cons of these formations with the community. Evidently, the community did not have clarity as to why these Committees were formed so urgently by the state.

Discussions also led to pertinent questions such as why the money was not being given directly to the GS and its Committees. What was the *panchayat's* role now? The community did sense the lingering threat that selected members might overlook the GS and dominate the decisions because they would have the financial power. This was related to the already overarching concerns of the GS not being active anyway in the region and middlemen acquiring larger decision-making spaces. The *Gram Pradhans*, who were the

traditional heads of the GSs, would be reduced to being just nominal heads.

Scope

—
This process defines the roles of all the possible stakeholders, and where all the interventions are also inter-connected. Prioritizing the GS's decisions and pushing the GP to ensure the execution of these decisions was a plausible way of setting systems in place. We are currently engaged in processes to activate various stakeholders to carry out their roles. This discourse is gradual and needs continuous effort at all levels, ranging from the individual to the state. The GS, being the main focus, cannot activate itself in a vacuum. If it takes up issues concerning its members strongly, it will reaffirm people's belief in its power as an institution.

The GP, on the other hand, can begin experiencing a soft devolution of power through the continuous activities of various groups in the community, catering to their needs. In the project, we have been able to connect the GSs and the *panchayats* through some initiatives. CBOs are also taking

Such interventions can create a huge pressure group of aware masses and simultaneously ensure that the roles and responsibilities of such institutions are actively rooted in the ground and are monitoring the state of governance continuously

charge and helping GPs as well as government departments to implement plans. Cadres such as the cohorts have an active role in connecting these three institutions, initiating questions and generating discussions. The process is gradual, and the relevant exposure and opportunities can propel these institutions to design a way forward for themselves.

Such engagements, like the one in Basia, cannot have an external validity. These steps with the GPs and the GS can be taken with respect to the context and

relevance of interventions in the area. Scaling-up of such actions can lead to accountability of the *panchayats* for the people and the people's responsibilities as citizens. Such interventions can create a huge pressure group of aware masses and simultaneously ensure that the roles and responsibilities of such institutions are actively rooted in the ground and continuously monitoring the state of governance.

This approach is dynamic and evolves with the experiences of the *panchayats*, the community

and the respective organizations. Establishing systems and processes by strengthening the local governance and each of its institutions with its clear roles and accountability is the way forward. In this way, after a point of time, these local systems will not have to depend on an external organization for their functioning. These processes, too, will further evolve over time with respect to the needs and demands of the communities.

Neha Joshi and **Nidhi Trivedi** work with PRADAN as Executives. They are based in Palkot block, Jharkhand.

ACTIVATING PANCHAYATS THROUGH MGNREGA

...

Implementing MGNREGA in its fullness is a movement to establish local democracy and instruments of local governance, honour local wisdom and knowledge, promote power decentralization to *panchayats* and encourage participatory decision-making. Jharkhand's experience warrants telling.

Introduction

THE MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is considered to be the foundation for establishing local democracy. The Act itself is empowering for local governance and the provisions of the Act strongly promote power decentralization to *panchayats* and villages. The Act honours local knowledge and wisdom, and its operational structure is based on the principles of decentralized and participatory decision-making.

The provisions of decentralized planning and implementation processes embedded in MGNREGA have great power to establish the instruments of local governance and activate *gram sabhas* (GSs) and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

The true potential of decentralized operations in MGNREGA is yet to be realized in Jharkhand. The *gram panchayats* (GPs) in Jharkhand are relatively new but are gradually maturing. PRIs are also at a nascent stage

MGNREGA's operations at the grass roots are supposed to strengthen the local accountability structures and ensure transparent implementation on the ground. Whereas the Act itself is amply equipped with provisions for decentralized operations, this potential is yet to be fully realized.

The Vision of Decentralized Governance

The Cluster Facilitation Team (CFT) experience in Jharkhand can be seen as a practice and praxis-based study of the gradual realization of the envisioned strong rural decentralization and the strengthening of the local governance. The positive experiences of the CFT programme have shown a few glimpses, which have helped us understand how through strategic engagement with the community, the administration and the elected local representatives, normative influences can be ensured, which can lead to a change in culture of the rural governance eco-system.

The idea of strong local governance is incomplete without the idea of democratic

decentralization, wherein people's participation in planning, decision-making and monitoring has to be fully established.

MGNREGA has given the GS the ultimate right to make their own plans, which no other institution can interfere or tamper with. It has given the *panchayats* the right to implement at least 50 per cent of the schemes under MGNREGS. In Jharkhand, the *panchayats* have been made fully responsible for 100 per cent implementation of MGNREGS.

The idea of employment guarantee completely eradicates the concept of contractor-based labour engagement in schemes, which was so far the way rural jobs were given out. The new method empowered the rural unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled people to have jobs in their locality and, at the same time, strengthened the rural service sector with opportunities in local institutions. MGNREGA promoted a system of demand-based work allocation, which empowered people to choose the time and duration of their work. It has a robust monitoring and grievance redress mechanism articulated in the Act. All this is directed to ensuring local

control and people's pro-active participation in the programme.

Whereas MGNREGA has several provisions that can be used to strengthen the processes of democratic decentralization and establish good local governance through people's participation, the CFT programme has enriched the state with many more provisions. These include circulars and detailed specific roles for each stakeholder, in the form of guidelines and office orders, which can further establish a system of people-centric planning and implementation. This also encourages strong accountability and action-strategies through the Public-PRIs-Administration integration.

The Jharkhand Context

The true potential of decentralized operations in MGNREGA is yet to be realized in Jharkhand. The *gram panchayats* (GPs) in Jharkhand are relatively new but are gradually maturing. PRIs are also at a nascent stage. Most GPs are on a learning path and the *panchayat* secretariats are not fully activated. There have been efforts, both by the government and civil society, to enhance the capacities of the

In the context of present-day situations in rural Jharkhand, democratization to the last layer is important, to enhance the state of delivery of services to the poor

representatives of the *panchayats* but the idea of developing GPs as an organization is very recent. Slowly, it has been learned that along with increasing the capacities of its members, the GP, as an organization, has to be capacitated holistically so that the secretariat starts functioning and proper systems and processes are put in place.

The local elite and influential people have dominated the implementation of MGNREGA for a long time, thereby creating space for the middleman-contractor nexus to control the show. In the absence of a strong local governance and effective people's monitoring, the poorest remained unattended and exploited because there was lack of accountability in the system and the demand side, too, was not properly developed. Institutional linkages between the GSs and the GPs are not well-established and the block office has been the centre of all key developmental activities. The dependence on the block administration for implementation of schemes and supply of social welfare benefits has been very high and, thus, the system of delivery has been weak and non-transparent. In such a context, a handful of influential people become so powerful that

awareness and benefits do not reach the last person.

In the context of present-day situations in rural Jharkhand, democratization to the last layer is important, to enhance the state of delivery of services to the poor. The *panchayats* as local governing bodies, the GSs as the ultimate decision-makers for grass-roots planning and implementation and the strong democratic local people's institutions and collectives as change agents and monitors are the way forward. Whereas physical and financial power devolution to the GPs should be a key focus area, the integration between the local collectives and the PRIs for planning and monitoring of schemes and ensuring smooth and transparent service delivery to the last person is also important.

Rojgar Diwas: A first step towards activating Panchayat Secretariats

—
The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) came up with a guideline to organize a *Rojgar Diwas* in the GPs in 2013, to improve work-demand generation in MGNREGS. However, MGNREGS is a demand-based employment guarantee programme and its

true spirit never materialized on the ground because implementation was mostly target-based and controlled by the block administration. Also, the contractor-based supply mechanism was established in many areas due to the local malpractices and the lack of monitoring.

Although civil societies and governments have run demand generation drives, called *Kaam Maango Abhiyan*, from time to time in villages to regularize work-demand and to ensure a system of demand-based allocation, there are hardly any spontaneous work-demands. The workers usually wait for supervisors and frontline functionaries to come to them and ask them to work and, thereafter, create a demand for work. The general notion among the workers is that work is only allocated if the schemes are sanctioned and opened.

Rojgar Diwas was supposed to change this set idea of work-demand and allocation, and instead create a formal space at local levels to facilitate people to demand for work as and when they require it. An institutionalized platform for constant demand for work

In Jharkhand, the idea of *Rojgar Diwas* was seen as an opportunity to activate the GP secretariats through MGNREGA transactions

at the local level was the idea behind *Rojgar Diwas*. Although the original guideline from the Ministry was that the *Rojgar Diwas* should take place at least once a month, Jharkhand has further added a lot of value to make it a more effective platform at the level of the GPs.

In Jharkhand, the idea of *Rojgar Diwas* was seen as an opportunity to activate GP secretariats through MGNREGA transactions. Both, the state as well as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), engaged in the CFT programme, have considered this as an opportunity to facilitate workers and PRI representatives. They have worked towards making the office of the GP a vibrant place, where citizens are assisted and supported to access critical inputs and services. The state government has further built on the MoRD guidelines and ordered for a weekly *Rojgar Diwas* at the *panchayat* secretariat. In Jharkhand, where Panchayat Bhawans used to always be locked up, the opening of Panchayat Bhawans once a week for the purpose of MGNREGS transactions was a significant step. Establishing the *panchayat* office as a centre of local administration is still a distant dream; through this initiative,

however, the functionaries at the *panchayat* level are operating from the Panchayat Bhawan, ensuring services and benefits to the citizens. The infrastructure of the GPs are also getting utilized.

The *Rojgar Diwas* has been designed in such a way that all kinds of MGNREGS transactions, for example, job-card application, work-demand, work-sanctioning, and preparation of documents translation are done on that day. PRADAN has been particularly focussed on establishing this forum, with a long-term goal of activating the *panchayat* secretariat as the office of the local government.

PRADAN has been facilitating the women of Self Help Groups (SHGs) to participate in the weekly *Rojgar Diwas* with their MGNREGA agenda. It has created a positive environment around demand generation; in many *panchayats* across our CFT areas, demand-generation has been regularized through citizen participation in the *Rojgar Diwas*. Jharkhand has, however, gone beyond demand-generation and included all MGNREGS activities in the *Rojgar Diwas*. As a spill-over effect, social security schemes and agendas other than MGNREGA are also addressed in the *Rojgar Diwas*.

It has been a long struggle to regularize the weekly *Rojgar Diwas*. The success of the *Rojgar Diwas* is subject to participation of the citizens in the forum. The *panchayats* and the local administration were not very keen on activating the forum but through constant engagement with the local administration and the Panchayati Raj representatives, it was ensured that Panchayat Bhawans open and the functionaries attend the event every week. The people were also reluctant to visit the *panchayat* offices with their applications and issues because their past experiences with the administration around these issues were not very good.

One other important factor that helped the *Rojgar Diwas* gain more fuel in the state was the inclusion of the grievance redress initiatives. Historically, the system of redressal of public grievances is lacking. Grievances are often not heard and registered and, if registered, they are not monitored or followed-up on. Even a hasty survey in the villages will prove that there are various issues and grievances, which never come to the surface and only add to people's grim plight. We focussed on the people's issues and grievances in the CFT

Panchayats have gradually earned credibility and the offices of the GPS have gained relevance through the initiative of the *Rojgar Diwas*. This is a pioneering initiative, which now needs to be sustained and built upon further

programme because MGNREGA, primarily being an employment-generation programme, could not deal with unresolved and unattended public grievances.

People's grievances needed to be heard, registered and constantly followed up at all levels. The platform of the *Rojgar Diwas* was considered to be an ideal forum to attend to the citizens' grievances because the representatives from the administration would be present. Important it is that local matters are registered and resolved locally, and that people should not find it difficult to register their grievances. Therefore, *panchayat* secretariats were activated for dealing with grievances, an idea which increased people's participation in *Rojgar Diwas*.

Panchayats have gradually earned credibility and the offices of the GPS have gained relevance through the initiative of the *Rojgar Diwas*. This is a pioneering initiative, which now needs to be sustained and built upon further. The challenge now is to keep Panchayat Bhawans open for the rest of the days in the week and ensure that the secretariats are activated for other transactions as well.

***Panchayats* role in sanctioning: A step towards financial autonomy**

Whereas the *Yojna Banao Abhiyan* was hugely impactful in the villages and was widely acclaimed, the story of the implementation of schemes was not as encouraging as the planning. The villagers had planned many assets but only some of these received attention from, or were sanctioned by, the administration.

So far, GPS had almost no role in the sanctioning process in Jharkhand. Incorporating the learning from the past, the state came up with a revised scheme sanctioning guidelines, which incorporated two major provisions to enable GPS to have a strong say in the matter of sanctioning the schemes. For the first time, *panchayats* were being empowered to prioritize the schemes for sanctioning. The state ordered that individual schemes of up to Rs 1 lakh and community benefit schemes of up to Rs 1.5 lakhs would not require any verification from the Circle Officer and could be passed with a self-declaration from the owner. These initiatives simplified the sanctioning process and ensured

the GP's role in the process of sanctioning.

PRADAN worked very closely with the GPS to ensure that local priorities were honoured and schemes were sanctioned according to the needs of the GPS. Due to the effective engagement of the CFT, many schemes were sanctioned and opened, and several assets were created. The *panchayat's* interactions with the state and the political executives were a lesson in how democratic decentralization would always be a journey full of struggle and strategic battles. Because of CFT's engagement, the local administration, in many cases, gave in to honour the GPS' plans and priorities.

Hatnatodang *panchayat* in Chakradharpur block has shown a way forward and created an example for all the GPS in the state. They exercised their power to get their schemes sanctioned by the block administration. The *panchayat* prioritized and submitted a proposal for animal sheds for their *panchayats* whereas the block administration was only sanctioning farm ponds. It disallowed the priorities of the GPS.

Despite being the implementing agencies of the programme, earlier GPs had no control over the implementation and monitoring, and were completely disempowered. This was, primarily, the reason *panchayats* were disinterested in implementation and were negligibly involved

The GP Executive Committee members then wrote to the Principal Secretary, Rural Development, Jharkhand, referring to the revised sanctioning guideline. The new guidelines stated that prioritizing farm ponds over the local priorities vetted by the GP was illegal and such decisions should be reversed. The state issued a letter to the district, asking the administration to sanction animal sheds, as required by the GP. As a result, animal sheds were sanctioned in Hatnatodang, and other *panchayats* also got their preferred schemes.

***Panchayat's* role in Implementation and Monitoring**

Learning from the experience of the CFT and taking cognizance of ground realities, the state listed out guidelines with detailed roles and responsibilities for GPs in implementation and monitoring.

Despite being the implementing agencies of the programme, earlier GPs had no control over the implementation and monitoring, and were completely disempowered. This was, primarily, the reason *panchayats* were disinterested in implementation and were negligibly involved.

The detailed guidelines from the state empowered GPs to allocate work to workers against work-demand and also provided it monitoring powers. Below are some of the powers given to GPs under MGNREGA:

- GPs are empowered to allocate work to the workers against work-demands.
- GPs can issue work-orders to the mates.
- *Mukhiyas* have the authority to sign Fund Transfer Orders (FTOs) as second signatories; the first signatory being the *Panchayat Sewak*.
- Ward Members are supposed to verify each and every muster roll in their Wards.
- GPs are supposed to issue the completion certificates only after which the schemes can be closed in the Management Information System (MIS).
- GPs can issue supply orders to the vendors for procurement of material.
- GPs are to provide a satisfaction certificate for the material, and only then can payment for the material be made to the vendor.
- The Block Programme Officer (BPO) is to provide the monthly 2B report, which shows the work and

expenditure for a specified period of time, to all GP Executive Committee members for the purpose of monitoring.

- The BDO also has to mandatorily provide a monthly progress report to the block President/*Pramukh*.
- GPs are empowered to review *Rojgar Sewaks* and MGNREGA supervisors (*Mates*).

Integration of community collectives and GPs

We have experienced the *Yojna Banao Abhiyan*, wherein, people's collectives have taken part to ensure proper participatory and decentralized planning at the grass roots. The locals had then, in an organized way and through CBOs, partnered with PRIs to make proper plans around schemes.

Panchayats (being the local implementers and frontline supply machinery) and GSs (being the local decision-makers) are equal stakeholders in the process of planning. Thus, with the effective partnership between *panchayats* and community institutions (being institutionalized through the *panchayat* planning teams and the recent Ward Planning Teams

Apart from planning in 13 blocks of areas in which PRADAN is operational, we have successfully demonstrated awareness programmes through the apparatus of the women's Federation office

(WPTs), the local knowledge, capacities and priorities are being honoured. Civil society's efforts in technical capacitating, in the process, further strengthens the quality of the partnership and ensures best results on the ground.

In 2018, the proposed labour budget planning was designed in a way that integration between the people and the local government takes place all the way to the Ward levels (through WPTs).

Apart from planning in 13 blocks of areas in which PRADAN is operational, we have successfully demonstrated awareness programmes through the apparatus of the women's Federation office. This has strengthened the demand mechanism and also contributed to activating the GP secretariat for MGNREGS transactions (*Rojgar Diwas*).

Experiences of the CBO-PRI integration in Jharkhand (Formal and Informal)

- Institutional linkages between the CBO and the PRI through *panchayat* planning teams (PPTs) and the WPTs for decentralized planning,

being already demonstrated everywhere

- SHG involvement has been made mandatory in Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) processes
- Active involvement of Sahayata Kendras at the GP secretariat in *Rojgar Diwas* is demonstrated in blocks such as Basia, Torpa, Shikaripara, Sonua, CKP, Peterbar, Boarijore, Kisko and Raidih.
- Frequent ward-wise camps for job-demand, awareness and other transactions are seen in Basia and Peterbar. Ward Members take the lead in such processes, with the CBOs mainly involved in organizing such camps and participating in the activities in the camps.
- Selection of SHG women Mates happens with an informal understanding among the SHG tiers, GSs and GPs in the CFT blocks.
- The Mate's joint review by the GP and the CBOs has been initiated.
- The GP help desk is part of the guidelines that is supposed to be run by the GP office, in collaboration with the MGNREGA *Sakhi* (SHG member).

GPs in a Monitoring Role: A Transparency Initiative

—

Panchayats are empowered to monitor the schemes through several office orders and a detailed guideline on their role (monitoring with 2B reports, power to issue work orders to mates, power of allocation of works, clearly articulated roles in the sanctioning process, signatory powers, scheme completion and MIS closing of schemes, material procurement and payment, etc.). In various PRADAN and non-PRADAN locations, GPs exercise their power in sanctioning and monitoring.

Again, the Chakradharpur example from Hatnatodang *panchayat* can be taken as an inspiration when *panchayat* representatives wrote to the state that their priorities were not being honoured by the block in sanctioning schemes. Subsequently, the *panchayat's* priorities were selected over top-down impositions. Also, many *panchayat* functionaries monitor MGNREGS works and seek accountability from the administration, with the help of local CBOs and CSOs. Thus, a successful partnership opportunity between the two local bodies will trigger

In Jharkhand, there have been many examples in which the *panchayats*, through effective monitoring, have been able to identify discrepancies in the physical implementation of work, in issues of workers accessing their rights and in payment irregularities

transparent implementation on the ground and will hold the administration accountable at the same time.

Scheme visits, village meetings and monitoring by *panchayat* representatives, with social audit reports (Report 2B and Report 3) for review of work-expenditure and payments, have been able to create a culture of monitoring in the area. Along with social audit initiatives, *panchayats* also actively verify reports through their organization. CFTs have played a big part in making *panchayat* representatives realize their accountability as well as responsibilities about reviewing the works and the expenditure. The accountability initiatives are a multi-tier engagement process, wherein the community, GS and GPs are simultaneously trained and capacitated to understand their roles and responsibilities. The locals can, then, question and seek accountability of the representatives and the functionaries at different levels.

In Jharkhand, there have been many examples in which *panchayats*, through effective monitoring, have been able to identify discrepancies in the physical implementation of work, in issues of workers accessing

their rights and in payment irregularities. Although dealing with leakages in the present context is a tough task, the initiatives are showing a way forward.

Activating Gram Panchayat Executive Committee (GPEC) meetings: An Organization Development Initiative

GPECs, popularly known as *Karyakarini Samitis*, are responsible for monitoring and reviewing the progress of developmental activities in *panchayats*. As several *panchayat* Standing Committees are supposed to deal with specific areas, the GPEC comprising all the Ward Members, the *Mukhiya* and the *Panchayat Sewak* (being the Secretary to the Committee) are supposed to engage in the overall progress review of the developmental and social welfare activities in the area.

The state's guidelines have given monitoring powers to GPECs; however, it is important to work with GPs, to materialize the idea. The CFT can facilitate the GPEC forum, through the dedicated *panchayat*-level staff working on streamlining of processes in MGNREGS.

Through trainings, followed by constant engagement with members of GPEC, it has now been established that the GPECs in the CFT blocks sit at least once a month (in some blocks fortnightly) to review and monitor the MGNREGS progress. The Department of Rural Development in Jharkhand also has a special monitoring focus on the operations of the GPEC, which further helped establish and activate this forum.

In the GPs of CFT blocks, the importance of a GPEC meeting is known; the processes are now practised and the powers are exercised regularly.

GPEC members meet regularly to verify job applications, allocate work, review the maintenance of seven *panchayat*-level registers, prioritize schemes for sanctioning, *abhilekh* preparations, discussions on issues and grievances, etc.

GPEC, as an organization, has flourished and started functioning only after the CFTs intervened and provided hand-holding support to its members.

In the beginning of this initiative, it was surprising to learn that, in most *panchayats*, members were

In the beginning of this initiative, it was surprising to learn that in most *panchayats*, members were not aware of their rights and powers because the local people's representatives, the guidelines and the office orders often did not reach the GPs

not aware of their rights and powers because the local people's representatives, the guidelines and the office orders often did not reach the GPs. We have ensured that GP representatives are educated and oriented adequately about their powers, rights, roles and responsibilities.

It is, however, a fact that the incentives and honorariums for GP representatives are not very lucrative and 'sometimes' responsibilities become burdens. Most members of the *panchayat*, however, become engaged in the processes according to their roles because these have established their credibility among the people who elected them and also give them a sense of power when monitoring schemes and the functionaries.

Opportunities

—

The current experiences of working with GPs have further opened up several avenues to work for establishing governance mechanisms at the GP level. These experiences have been enriching and, despite the fact that representatives of PRIs are not paid adequately and not much has happened for their capacity-building and awareness, working

with *panchayats* give us great hope and encouragement.

Panchayats in Jharkhand are still at a nascent stage and evolving very slowly and are yet to be given key powers and controls. Although, in MGNREGA, the powers and responsibilities of the PRIs in planning and monitoring are clearly articulated, the sanctioning and financial powers are yet to be devolved to the *panchayats*.

In the present scenario, we see a lot of scope in establishing control of the local self governments over MGNREGA through the introduction of various institutional mechanisms and devolution of key powers. It is an excellent opportunity and a proper time to activate GP secretariats through MGNREGA and, then, further work on the OD processes and effective advocacy at the legislative and bureaucratic levels to ensure strengthened, responsible and accountable *panchayats* in the state.

Following are some of the key opportunities:

1) Ensure administrative sanctioning powers are devolved to GPs with effective

policy advocacy at the state level.

- 2) Ensure financial power for *panchayats* to have control over the administrative funds meant for GPs (at least 2 per cent of the contingencies).
- 3) Establish complete operations of MGNREGS transactions at the GP level by:
 - Re-enforcing the existing guidelines that define the *panchayat's* powers and responsibilities in planning, implementation and monitoring
 - Ensuring provisions for muster roll printing from the *panchayat's* log-in id (currently done from the Programme Officer, PO, log-in id) by advocating with the state and through demonstration of the idea in some places
 - Ensuring provisions for muster roll generation with the *Panchayat Sewak's* signature (currently the BPO signs on it).
 - Ensuring proper infrastructure placements at the GP secretariat through state-level advocacy and grass-roots level monitoring.

The opportunities are many. In order to tap these opportunities, the state will have to ensure that the current bottle-necks and challenges are removed. Most of the current issues are linked with the policies of the central and the state governments, which need to be addressed by the government

- Setting up a GP-level help desk for information, facilitation, support and grievance management is important, which may be constituted at GP levels, with participation from people's collectives and PRI representatives. Institutionalizing these collaborations will ensure more space for collectives in PRIs and, thereby, in local governance.

The opportunities are many. In order to tap these opportunities, the state will have to ensure that the current bottlenecks and challenges are removed. Most of the current issues are linked with the policies of the central and the state governments, which need to be addressed by the government.

The issue of low honorarium, financial sanctioning authority and direct access to administrative funds are major issues that need to be dealt with immediately. At present, Ward Members are not paid adequately and their payments are irregular as well. A meagre sum of Rs 200 is inadequate to fulfill the needs of Ward Members and, thus, sometimes the powers are considered a burden and are not exercised properly.

Panchayats are yet to get financial sanctioning powers that will make them operate independently from the block and fulfill the needs of the locals according to the requirement of the area. This is an important area to be looked at.

Panchayats have also been demanding direct access to two per cent of the administrative cost. This will help them operate as an independent organization and free them from the influence of the block administration.

Apart from this, one important challenge will be to ensure muster roll generation and establish an MIS at the GP level, which would need the state to write to the central government immediately.

Financial powers will also make *panchayats* empowered to deal with the major grievances of the workers. Currently, *panchayats* are not capacitated to resolve people's grievances because they have very little control over critical matters.

Stories of Inspiration

Kaliga GP

As part of the Beacon *panchayat* programme, Kaliga GP was selected for a special demonstration for service delivery and implementation of schemes. The Beacon *panchayat* programme has been initiated with an aim to establish and enable GP secretariats to extend



A picture of MIS Operator Kajal Kumari working at the Kaliga GP Secretariat

In a state such as Jharkhand, it is important that facilitation, information, awareness, implementation, service delivery and grievance management happens at the panchayat secretariat, which is relatively closer to the people and easier to access, given the dynamics between the people and the panchayats

services to the citizens. The critical services relating to various schemes, programmes and welfare initiatives need to be channelled through the GP secretariat, in order to make the local government active and to establish proper accountability mechanisms at the grass roots.

In Jharkhand, villages are usually located far away from the block; due to many social and local dynamics, people are routinely hassled and troubled and, sometimes, denied access to their rights and benefits. Therefore, in a state such as Jharkhand, it is important that facilitation, information, awareness, implementation, service delivery and grievance management happens at the *panchayat* secretariat, which is relatively closer to the people and easier to access, given the dynamics between the people and the *panchayats*.

The Beacon *panchayat* programme aims at strengthening GPs by developing its organizational structure (by strengthening Standing Committees and the GPEC), extending support in awareness and capacity-building, and meaningful advocacy at each level.

Kaliga is the first *panchayat* that has, to some extent, materialized the dream of activating the complete MGNREGS transactions at the GP secretariat level. In the Beacon GPs and, thereby, in Kaliga, we have been constantly promoting the following activities:

- Ward-wise awareness and transaction camps for MGNREGS, with respective Ward Members leading the camps.
- Grievance Redress Day at GPs, apart from the weekly *Rojgar Diwas*, to provide people an opportunity to register their grievances at the *panchayat* level itself.
- Regular planning by *panchayat* representatives around monitoring and scheme inspections, with reports, and carrying out the responsibilities as planned.
- Carrying out the roles and responsibilities by GP members in sanctioning, implementation, scheme closure, monitoring payments and material procurement, according to guidelines.
- Appoint *Sahayata Kendra* representatives to help people

in registration-and application-related work at the GP Secretariat on *Rojgar Diwas*.

- Regularize the GPEC meeting and maintain a GPEC checklist for measuring performance of GPs.
- Regular monitoring of Register No. 3 with original documents, in order to ensure on-time allocation and Ward Members' responsibility in allocation.

Apart from this, the *Mukhiya*, Alok Toppo, went one step ahead and took the initiative to establish the Management Information System (MIS) set-up at the *panchayat* level. For complete decentralization of MGNREGS systems, it is most important that the MIS is set up at the GP level and muster rolls generated from the local GP Secretariat.

However, in the present-day system in Jharkhand, the muster roll cannot be printed from the GP's log-in id and can only be generated and printed from the PO log-in id, which is the block log-in id. Further, the muster rolls have to be signed by the BPO when issuing them because the BPO holds the issuing authority of the muster rolls in Jharkhand.

This arrangement between the panchayats and the block can be seen as a temporary one but has given adequate insights that the state is considering having a discussion with the Ministry over a possible change in the provision of the MIS to empower the panchayats to generate, print and issue muster rolls from panchayat log-in ids for Jharkhand

Despite obstacles and technical obligations, Alok Toppo's indomitable spirit has brought vibrancy to our initiative in Kaliga. The *panchayat* has appointed an operator for entries related to both MGNREGS and the Fourteenth Finance Commission (FFC) works, and pays the MIS operator from the FFC money. The operator was trained for a month in the block before finally getting placed at the *panchayat*.

Further, the block has given its PO log-in id in good faith to the *panchayat* operator and they have been generating, printing and issuing muster rolls from the *panchayat* itself with the BPO signing the muster rolls in bulk from time to time. This arrangement between the *panchayats* and the block can be seen as a temporary one but has given adequate insights that the state is considering having a discussion with the Ministry over a possible change in the provision of the MIS to empower the *panchayats* to generate, print and issue muster rolls from *panchayat* log-in ids for Jharkhand. However, there are multiple technical glitches in achieving this, including the change of issuing authority (currently the BPO in Jharkhand)

but a scope for discussion was created, which can prove to be a game-changer for the question of decentralization in the coming days.

Transactions such as the Entry of demands, Job-card generation, MR generation, Entry of filled MR, Wage-list generation, Fund Transfer Order (FTO) generation and FTO signing have been possible in the GP secretariat itself and this has made implementation far easier at the local level. The *Rojgar Sewak's* job has become easier because he no longer has to shuttle between the villages and the block to make things happen on time and can easily operate from the Panchayat Bhawan.

The story of Kaliga, however, is not a permanent solution but has given us a taste of the envisioned state that we had dreamt of. We expect, that by next year, Jharkhand would have completely established its MGNREGS transactions at the GP Secretariat.

Pantha Panchayat

Under the able leadership of the *Mukhiya*, Basant Guria, the Pantha GP has been the most impressive in the quest of achieving decentralized governance at the grass roots. Along with other initiatives, this *panchayat* has demonstrated



The Mukhiya of Pantha Panchayat, Basant Guria, facilitating a Mate review event

There are many obstacles in the journey of democratic decentralization and accountable governance. Many of these issues are linked to policies and some others are linked to implementation and grass-roots dynamics. Our short-lived experience has been an enriching one and has re-established that learning by doing is the best practice on the ground

exemplary action at the GPs in MGNREGS, which can open up new avenues in the area of local governance.

Pantha *panchayat* has been instrumental in organizing the *Rojgar Diwas* and helping people apply and register their various needs at the GP level. It has reserved one *Rojgar Diwas* as Grievance Redressal Day, wherein, only people's grievances are heard and registered. In a rural set-up, where the voices of the weakest and marginalized are hardly heard and often lost or suppressed, this initiative has given genuine hope.

As an extension to the Grievance Redressal Day and *Rojgar Diwas*, Pantha has put in place a help desk for citizens' awareness, information and registration of grievances at the *panchayat* secretariat, aimed at creating a front support desk for people for a steady solution related to information, facilitation and public grievances.

Pantha has also established a good communication mechanism with the block regarding public grievances. It has created a

linkage with the block for reciprocation relating to public grievances through *Sahayata Kendra* representatives, who act as a bridge between the two institutions through which follow-ups and escalations happen with the administration. It is still unfortunate that *panchayats* have little power to resolve or redress people's issues at the moment and hence most issues need to be taken up with the block administration and subsequent levels in case of non-redressal on time. We are also hoping that our little demonstrations will soon change this and will empower *panchayats* to deal with people's issues and grievances.

The most recent and most important initiative taken by Pantha is the review of Mates by a joint team of representatives of women's collectives and the *panchayat*. This joint review, on the one hand, helps in sustaining the SHG Mate initiative through regular reviews and immediate intervention, checking drop-outs and, on the other hand, ensuring that Mates' issues surface and payments are made on time.

This practice of a joint mate review has been strengthening the CBO-PRI integration at the *panchayat* level. Learning from Pantha many other *panchayats* across blocks in Jharkhand have now planned to initiate the process.

Conclusion

—

There are many obstacles in the journey of democratic decentralization and accountable governance. Many of these issues are linked to policies and some others are linked to implementation and grass-roots dynamics. Our short-lived experience has been an enriching one and has re-established that learning by doing is the best practice on the ground. Action on the ground and the evidence-based policy advocacy seem to be the way forward here.

—

Debmalya Nandi coordinates the CFT project (PRADAN). He is based in Ranchi. Debmalya has more than 10 years of experience and has worked in Jharkhand and Odisha.

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 who 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 Sichai 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

Gram Sabha meeting
on CFR (pg.28)



PRADAN is a non-governmental organization registered in Delhi under the Societies Registration Act. Working with small teams of professionals in several poverty clusters in seven states across central and eastern India, PRADAN builds and strengthens collectives of rural women, in order to stimulate their sense of agency and help them occupy space as equals in society. PRADAN professionals work through these collectives, to enhance the livelihoods and overall well-being of women, thereby striving for a just and equitable society.

Newsreach is an endeavour by PRADAN to reach out to the world by sharing stories of the struggles and the hopes of the rural poor, and inspiring friends and well-wishers to get involved and participate in bettering the lives of marginalized and vulnerable village women.

Newsreach is published by the National Resource Centre for Livelihoods, housed in PRADAN.

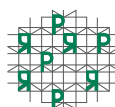
www.pradan.net



Neha Joshi lighting Diya
along with SHG members,
Palkot, Jharkhand

PRADAN

A-22, Second Floor,
Sector 3, Noida - 201301
Tel: 0120-4800800
E-mail: newsreach@pradan.net



SIR RATAN TATA TRUST