

*Workshop on*  
**Good Practices in  
Strengthening  
Local Governance in India**

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**24th and 25th August 2009, New Delhi**

*organized by*



**Local Governance Initiative South Asia (LoGIn)**

*a project of*

**Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation**

**Embassy of Switzerland**

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## List of Abbreviations

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CAA: Constitutional Amendment Act

CapDeck: Capacity Development for Decentralisation in Kerala (SDC Programme)

IC: Intercooperation

IEC: Information Education Communication

IGPRS: Indira Gandhi Panchayati Raj Sansthan

KMVS: Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan

KNNA: Kutch Nan Nirman Abhiyan

LoGIn: Local Governance Initiative South Asia

MRA: Mahila Rajsatta Andolan

NGO: Non Governmental Organisation

NRM: Natural Resource Management

PEVAC: Pre Election Voters Awareness Campaign

PRIs: Panchayati Raj Institutions

SDC: Swiss Agency for development and Cooperation

SEZ: Special Economic zone

SSK: Sehbhagi Shaikshan Kendra

PRIA: Participatory Research in Asia

THP: The Hunger Project

VDF: Village Development Fund

ZP: Zila Parishad

## Background

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SDC's support to a programmes and partnerships that have aimed to strengthen the state's efforts in Decentralisation, has resulted in considerable experiences being generated on mobilising communities to engage with and benefit from the opportunities created after the passing of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments. It has to be said, that the setting of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj at the Centre did give further impetus to all these efforts.

At the end of almost a decade of work, a need was felt to review some of the successful experiences that emerged from the constant endeavour of SDC partnerships and programmes to mobilise, encourage, strengthen and enable local communities to engage in and with local governments. Given the constraints of time and the spatial spread of organisations and experiences, a peer review of the experiences in a 'Workshop mode', was the favoured format.

The workshop was held in the context of a relatively recent regional programme on decentralisation and local governance being implemented by SDC from India – the Local Governance Initiative<sup>1</sup> (LoGIn) South Asia. The implementation of LoGIn provided the motivation to assess these experiences from the perspective of their potential relevance to South Asia Countries. This workshop began to be seen as the first step towards gathering this bouquet of 'India centric' experiences and analysing them for their relevance beyond the location in which and the communities with whom these experiences had emerged.

The **objectives** of the workshop were to:

- (i) Promote exchange of experiences in a particular area relating to strengthening decentralisation,
- (ii) Develop criteria for assessing good practices in strengthening decentralisation and,
- (iii) Select good practices from the experiences shared in the workshop for the purpose of documenting and sharing with a wider range of stakeholders.

The **expected outcomes** of the workshop were:

- (i) A comprehensive exchange on a range of experiences relating to capacitating local governments.
- (ii) A more nuanced understanding of the relevance of each of the experiences to the contexts from which each of the participants come to the workshop.
- (iii) A better understanding of criteria for distilling a successful experience into a good practise

The workshop brought together 29 persons from 20 organisations. Given the wide range of experiences that were being shared (not just in terms of numbers but also in terms of the intent and scope of each of the experience) within the span of two days as well as the need to make it truly participatory with each participant having the scope to critique, challenge, appreciate the experiences being presented, the workshop design proved to be a challenge.

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<sup>1</sup>

A short introduction to LoGIn is included as **Annexure 4**

## Workshop Design and Methodology<sup>2</sup>

The Opening Session of the Workshop included (i) the welcome address by the Country Director, Ms. Sybille Suter (ii) introduction to the methodology of the workshop and (iii) a presentation on LoGIn.

Eleven good practices were identified for presentation. Given the paucity of time, each such experience was provided an hour for presentation and discussion. Each speaker was invited to make a twenty minute presentation on a scheme that had been provided in advance (see Annex 3).

The participants had been organised into 4 groups. Each group had been entrusted with the task of reviewing the presented experience from the prism/lens of one of the criterion used to assess a good practise. The criteria that were identified were (i) Sustainability (ii) Replicability (iii) Effectiveness and (iv) Potential to promote downward accountability and inclusiveness. Each group was expected to review the experience against this one criterion. Each criterion was further qualified with additional words / phrases to aid the Group (for example, Replicability was further elaborated with the words like Adaptability).

At the end of the presentation each of the groups were provided 5 to 7 minutes to discuss the feedback on the experience against the criterion for good practise that they had been provided. At the end of the discussion each group made a 5 minutes presentation in the plenary aided by cards. At the end of the feedback from the 4 groups (which lasted 20 minutes) the speaker was provided 5 minutes to respond to the feedback received. This ended the session devoted to one good practise.

Additionally, a three member panel of eminent discussants<sup>3</sup> was set up who reviewed and commented upon a set of three presentations at a time. The **key questions for the panellists** were:

- What are the key pre conditions necessary for such practice/s to be relevant and adaptable beyond the pilots that are presented in this workshop?
- Can we further qualify the broad criteria selected to strengthen their relevance to assessing local governance experiences?

The comments of the discussants helped in sharpening the analysis of the experiences presented as well as challenging and critiquing the premise underlying the work of non governmental organisations engaged in strengthening decentralisation Each feedback session of the panel of discussants was planned for half an hour.

During the discussions, issues which – in the opinion of participants and discussants - transcended beyond any one experience and were bound to emerge in a process of scaling up of efforts were noted in a ‘parking lot’ for discussion in the last session of the workshop which had been earmarked for this purpose. The **Last Session** of the Workshop was devoted to discussions on:

- What defines a good practice in the context of local self governance? and
- What should be the changing role of civil society in the changing development context?

The Workshop ended with an Evaluation and a vote of thanks from LoGIn to all participants. At the end of the Workshop, a compilation of the presentations made by the participants was provided to each of the invitees in a CD. These can also be requested by an email to [login@sdg.net](mailto:login@sdg.net)

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<sup>2</sup> The detailed Programme of the Workshop is included as Annexure 1

<sup>3</sup> Day 1 the panelists were Dr. S.S Meenakshisundaram; Ms. Sushma Iyengar and Dr. Joy Elamon  
Day 2 the panelists were Dr. S.S Meenakshisundaram; Ms. Sushma Iyengar and Ms. Meenu Vadera

## About the Report

This report has attempted to synthesise the main points made in the presentation and the ensuing discussions. To this extent this document attempts to move beyond a detailed reporting to a documentation of the main elements of the experience being presented as well as the key issues that could emerge if such an experience were to be supported in a different context.

A separate section of the Report is devoted towards synthesising the key responses of the panel of discussants.

This report can also be accessed from the SDC India website [www.sdcindia.in](http://www.sdcindia.in)

## Acknowledgements

It would have been near to impossible for the skeletal staff of LoGIn to plan and organise this workshop without the support of Mr. Adil Ali who brainstormed with us at all stages of the planning. As the numbers grew and we, at LoGIn got to be more ambitious in our expectations from the workshop, the methodology went through a series of redesigns. Adil provided thoughtful comments on each aspect of the organisation of the Workshop. The onerous task of time keeping was also shared unerringly by Adil (much to the dismay of all the presenters).

The enthusiastic participation of SDC partners and associates in this workshop at a relatively short notice of a month, their discipline in adhering to the demands of strict time keeping and a rather complex methodology and their insightful contributions in the form of presentations as well as contributions in the plenary made this workshop a valuable learning experience.

The panel of discussants who patiently waited for their turn to share their views on a set of presentations managed very successfully to take the quality of discussions to a higher plane beyond the specificities of one or the other practise. More often than not, they managed to objectively and incisively mirror the need for NGOs to redefine their role in strengthening decentralisation vis a vis elected bodies. The organisers of this workshop could not have asked for more from **Dr. S. S. Meenakshisundaram, Dr. Joy Elamon, Ms. Sushma Iyengar and Ms. Meenu Vadehra**. Their critique of the dominant perceptions of the participants opened up many new avenues for discussions. We hope to continue drawing from their vast experience.

Finally, the challenging task of preparing the report of this workshop was willingly taken up by: **Ms. Swati Dogra and Mr. Adil Ali**. Swati patiently incorporated comments in successful drafts of this document. Thank you for this.

We sincerely hope the reader of this report will feel benefited from going through it. As most Workshop Proceedings go, this too will have some editorial glitches. Apologies for them!

In case you may have any feedback or would take the trouble of seeking clarifications please feel free to write to [login@sdc.net](mailto:login@sdc.net)

## Looking Back and Peering Ahead

In hindsight, the best practices framework did not always lend itself very well for aiding presentations and ensuing discussions. The presentations, in an effort to be comprehensive (and not too truncated) covered the entire experience of engaging with local governments through the prism of one activity. In order to be comprehensive, the experience being presented needed to be anchored in the local context, overall socio political conditions and felt needs of the communities. The reviewers/participants also had a need to understand the context rather than the specificities of a practise. At times it was difficult (and also not correct) to focus on one practise as opposed to sharing of an experience. The LoGIn team hopes assess the usefulness of this framework while undertaking an exercise of capitalisation of SDC supported experiences in decentralisation and local governance in India.

It will be the effort of LoGIn to share these experiences beyond India and facilitate connections of actors in the South Asia region. It is intended to select some of the experiences presented in this Workshop and share in a printed Compendium to be made available to SDC Country Offices in the South Asia region for them to further share with relevant actors in their country. The names and coordinates of the India organisations who could be contacted for further information will be provided in the Compendium.

One of the ideas shared in the workshop was to support a similar knowledge exchange exercise with select elected representatives to test and explore if a knowledge forum of elected bodies can emerge. LoGIn team will explore the idea with other like minded institutions to see if an agency can take the lead in such an attempt.

We hope to keep in touch with the participants of this workshop in the coming times and look forward to meeting you in more knowledge sharing events.

# Workshop proceedings

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## *Address by Country Director, SDC*

The **Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation** has been supporting partnerships with national level Non-Governmental Organisations as well as state wide Programmes engaged in supporting decentralisation and strengthening local governments.

The **main areas of support** by the Swiss Cooperation include: (i) capacity development of elected representatives, (ii) training of front line functionaries who work with the Panchayati Raj Institutions (iii) strengthening select training institutions by supporting curriculum and resource material development, faculty improvement and infrastructure provisioning and (iv) research for advocacy.

In India SDC is acknowledged as one of the earliest donors to support state governments and civil society organisations in strengthening locally elected bodies in rural areas.

Presently, SDC's Programme in India is undergoing a reorientation towards supporting programmes on **global issues** such as Climate Change and Food Security. This is also accompanied with a downsizing of budgets which will allow for a smaller portfolio of flagship programmes on the global issues.

With respect to Decentralisation, SDC India Programme is committed to the **consolidation and capitalisation of the experiences** supported so far through a regional programme promoting knowledge exchange across the South Asian Countries as well as between Switzerland and the South Asian Countries. This Programme has been named '**Local Governance Initiative - South Asia**', LoGIn in short. During the course of this workshop, I hope you will have an opportunity to learn more about the intent and proposed activities of the Programme.

Finally, a **note of thanks** to the participants - all of who represent organisations with whom SDC has had or continues to have links with - for finding the time in your busy schedules to attend this workshop and best wishes for successful deliberations.



## Pre-Election Voter's Awareness Campaign

### *P.R.I.A and Sehbhagi Shikshan Kendra\**

Ever since the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, PRIA along with its partner organizations like SSK has taken the challenge to promote democratic and participatory governance at the grassroots. PRIA strategically stepped into the village political arena just prior to the Panchayat elections in 1995 across India. This is because the entire process was new for people, it involved different kind of leaders coming into positions of power. These elections began to be seen as a precursor to a larger political role that people were expected to play. It was important to inform them on the significance of their vote and the need for their engagement in these changing times. From 1995 onwards, PRIA and its partner organizations conducted voter awareness campaigns in 2000 and in 2005 in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Uttaranchal, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana.

PRIA devised a Pre-election voter's awareness campaign (PEVAC) which was an attempt to extensively reach out to voters in its intervention states to create an environment where people recognize the need to vote, authorities recognize the need to monitor a free and fair process and candidates recognize the importance to come forward and share their agendas. Broadly, PRIA and its partners aimed at creating an environment where elections could take place in a healthy and inclusive manner. This was a process to particularly ensure the participation of women, Dalits and other minorities both as voters and as candidature. The issue was not just about voter turnout but voter education. The entire campaign was an amalgamation of several small campaigns which began 6-12 months before the elections. A gamut of methods and tools, series of events and activities, multiple use of print, audio and

video technology were explored to maximize the outreach. The campaign was active during the delimitation of Constituencies; electoral Rolls Preparation; reservation/rotation of Constituencies; notification of Election; nomination of Candidatures; canvassing/campaigning for Voting; day of Voting; declaration of Results; in case of election Disputes; role taking by newly elected members.

For Free, Fair, Peaceful and Participatory Local Elections, PEVAC aimed at:

- Making citizens aware about all electoral processes from delimitation to constituencies to actual election.
- Promote citizen participation in these processes.
- Enhance voting percentages of Women, SCs and STs.
- Enable more women, SCs and STs to contest elections

PEVAC inherently had to be a campaign of large magnitude otherwise it would not be able to accomplish its goal. From government, civil society, media, to various kinds of congregations (both religious and political) spaces had to be tapped. The idea was that if a particular district or block or Panchayat was selected, then 50% of it had to be covered. PRIA and its partner organizations created forums and platforms of CSOs, NGOS, CBOs and volunteers at state, district, block and Panchayat level to ensure that there were all kinds of networks used to disseminate the material and replicate activities at scale. The campaign had to be meticulously planned and executed with discipline because of the limited time and high coverage targets. Setting up of information camps, help lines at

district and state levels, door to door contact and mock exercise on voting process provided opportunities of direct engagement. *Jagrukta Rath*, Cycle rally, *Prabhat Pheri*, *Nukkad Natak/Kalajatha*, Wall writing, Magic shows, Distribution of IEC material such as pamphlets and handbills helped reach voters extensively. Some new techniques like voter-candidate dialogues, advertisements through cable TV and mobile SMS were also introduced. *Figures of 2004-5 elections:*

Name of State	Election Duration		No. of Local Govts.		No. of Electorates (in millions)		
	PRIs	ULGs	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Total
Rajasthan	Dec 2004	Dec 2004	9453	183	24.8	9.1	33.9
M.P.	Jan 2005	Jan 2005	31630	263	26.2	11.6	37.8
Chhattisgarh	Dec 2004	Dec 2004	1486	75	9.5	4.0	13.5
Haryana	Jan 2005	Jan 2005	6085	68	8.5	3.8	12.3
U.P.	Jan 2005	Jan 2005	59582	621	86.9	21.5	108.4
Jharkhand	Nov 2004	Nov 2004	3765	40	12.2	4.1	16.3
Kerala	Jan 05	Jan 05	1156	58	16.5	5.8	22.3
H.P	Dec 05	Dec 05	3006	52	3.6	0.5	4.1

Though PEVAC was a civil society campaign, it had to draw its legitimacy from the State Election Commission (SEC). Unlike other awareness campaigns, this one was bound to involve confrontation with political elite, caste patriarchs and electoral corruption. In order to ensure the safety of field workers, the authenticity of dissemination material, the validity of events and activities and accuracy of the message, PEVAC had to work in close coordination with the Election commission.

Based on more than ten years of PEVAC across several states in India, PRIA continues to debate about quality versus numbers and finds it a challenge to meet both the criterion at the same time. But as a process designed to educate the voters, to encourage candidates from non elite sections, to set a more inclusive development agenda and to ensure the electoral environment is not violent and corrupt, PEVAC has achievements to its credit. It has managed to involve the marginalized section of society in the electoral process. It has helped many aspirant candidates to file successful nominations; it has encouraged elections to be around developmental issues and has created a critical citizenry required for the spirit of democracy. PEVAC provides a good ground for post-election campaigns and

interventions like Gram Sabha mobilization campaign. In future, expanding the outreach through media and ensuring an engagement from SEC will make the campaign nationally relevant. As Panchayat elections are being contested on party lines, new strategies need to be developed.

#### Challenges:

PEVAC has to be institutionalized in civil society but needs the support of SEC. Institutional mechanisms are needed to create a space for it in the SEC otherwise it becomes limited to the personal discretion of the Election Commissioner. Since there is an indispensable role of the SEC, some argue that PEVAC could become an obligatory duty of SEC and SEC could outsource it to NGOs but the presenters felt that PEVAC could lose its essence if it is not anchored in civil society leadership. Election related issues and debates could become a part of the last Gram Sabha in all Panchayats so that the stage setting for PEVAC takes place. A common concern that was articulated during the workshop was the need to devise interventions that have a mass appeal to maximize the outreach. Also, a process like PEVAC needs to be complemented by advocacy roles at the national level.

# Federating locally elected women representatives at the State Level

## *Mahila Rajsatta Aandolan\**

Resource and Support Centre for Development (RSCD) was established in 1994 in Maharashtra. Mahila Rajsatta Anadolan (MRA) has been a movement supported by RSCD since 2001. MRA leads a strategic campaign towards political empowerment of women across the state by federating them and building a strong identity of the federation.

MRA is aware that the economic, political, social and even cultural power lies in the hands of dominantly male, upper class, higher caste sections of rural communities. MRA motivates women to recognize their inherent power and take advantage of the provisions of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment. MRA as a campaign has a logo, a flag, a song, in an effort to build a brand identity that stands for women's political empowerment.

The Federation is spread over 25 districts, 75 blocks, has 4 regional networks, membership of 62 organizations, 105 grass-root women leaders and 2000 elected women leaders and outreach to 14000 women.

Mahila Rajsatta Andolan services it's members through (i) Local Self Governance knowledge Support Unit for Information provisioning, Training & organization work, (ii) EWR Support unit for crisis support, co-ordination and grass roots lobbying and (iii) Policy support unit for advocacy, research and publication work.

MRA runs several small campaigns, public dialogues, events, trainings and activities to strengthen women's participation. Methods such as felicitating the families of

women leaders if they have been supportive are aimed at increasing acceptance of women's political roles in society . MRA has been hosting public hearings for violence against girls and women. It even took advantage of the ownership laws in Maharashtra to fight the Joint ownership Campaign. Elected women associated with MRA get opportunities to travel for exposure to other Panchayats. They participate in courses for elected women aimed at strengthening their administrative and financial skills for managing Gram Panchayats. MRA facilitates campaigns for promoting financial transparency of the Panchayats. MRA provides on-site support to elected women who have to face a backlash (usually in the form of violence) when they exert their position. This support becomes more pertinent whenever women take a stand against corruption and alcoholism. The continued struggle of these - often isolated - women leaders is because of the power and support that a large federation accords to its members. MRA also hosts State Biannual Convention where 5000-10000 women come together and experience their collective strength.

MRA has a strong focus on Information provisioning which they try to make relevant, regular and reliable. There is also a strong focus on dissemination mechanisms so that all members can be reached out to.

So, broadly the vision encompasses a stronger engagement of women in all three tiers of Panchayat elections; not just as candidates but also as voters, they cast their votes responsibly; as citizens, participate in Gram Sabhas, demand transparency and

accountability, influence Gram Panchayat Budgets to become gender responsive and check violence against women. Elected women leaders from Panchayats federate to advocate for policy and administrative changes when required. The campaign relies on innovative methods that have to be introduced to maintain the interest and commitment that is required for any long-term campaign. E.g., MRA has been equating successful women leaders to revolutionary Savitribai Phule and running a campaign called “where are the Jyotiba Phules of our state”. This campaign articulates the need for strong and sensitive male leaders like Jyotiba who can be supportive and thus, transformative. The strength of MRA lies in it playing an inclusive role when it comes to involvement of men in the women led campaigns. The campaigns for policy change have achieved the desired results only because of the persistence with which the women’s federation have pursued their demands.

<b>Demands by MRA</b>	<b>Policy level changes</b>	<b>Follow-up work by MRA</b>
Bill to allocate powers to the Gram Sabha	Law came into force on December 2002	Publicity and Implementation
Women’s Gram Sabha	Accepted and implemented	Ensure 100% Implementation
Checking the rampant No-confidence motion against EWRs	¾ majority now needed to remove women Sarpanch	Publicity and Implementation
Right to Flag Hosting by Women Sarpanch.	Government Resolution is passed	Facilitate at least two flag hosting programs in a year.
Travel concession for Women Sarpanch, meeting allowance and honorarium	A provision of free State Transport bus pass for Women representatives at GP, PS & ZP	Information dissemination and implementation

Some other demands include: having women in position of Panchayat Secretary; removal of the two child norm; National Training Policy for all EWRs; National Mahila Sabha campaign; Vishakha Guideline for EWRs & women leaders; 50% reservation in PRI. MRA establishes a close linkage between elected women leaders and other women’s groups in the villages as strategy to strengthen women’s strength at the grassroots. This is evident when SHG women attend Mahila Gram Sabhas. MRA has a strong force of 125 women trainers who are either serving as Panchayat leaders or have been elected in the past. They act like mobile trainers and help decentralizing the capacity building initiative.

One of the challenges has been to link with mass based government programmes. The core work of MRA - being rights based and often branded as non conformist – makes it difficult to work with the bureaucratic systems. The discriminatory forces of caste, class, religion and gender remain huge

barriers. Presently, the **evolving challenges** include:

- The global, economically driven centralized agendas which not only overlook Panchayats but expose the vulnerable communities to much higher risks of destitution. These forces are much too strong and beyond the capacity of MRA.
- The political parties - especially with religious exclusion and right wing ideology - are becoming much more active at the grassroots in comparison to the more progressive political parties. It is difficult to remain a-political and strategies to engage in politics are not yet tried or tested. So far MRA works with women leaders across party lines but this will be a challenge as women start accepting party based identities and positions.
- What is the role of old and new leaders in the process? If they aren’t re-elected, how will they still remain associated?

## Federating locally elected women representatives at the District Level

### *Sushasini, Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan\**

Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan was set up in 1989 as a response to economic and social challenges that women were encountering in Kutch. KMVS aimed to work by combining economic development with gender justice. As the activities evolved, so did the nature and scope of its work. From addressing violence against women, forming women's groups around economic issues to working on political empowerment, KMVS gradually started engaging with local governments. For this, a Panchayat Knowledge Centre was set up in KMVS to support activities geared towards (a) developing a critical mass of elected women representatives across Panchayats and creating positive role models for their peers; and (b) facilitating a forum of elected women representatives in the district to raise issues in favour of good governance and inclusive development. The Knowledge Centre gradually grew to become a separate unit within KMVS called Sushasini which committed to the issue of strengthening women's role in local self governance. Sushasini aims to politically empower the rural women by supporting their engagement in Panchayati Raj Institutions so as to strengthen local self governments as well as village development processes.

Sushasini has been instrumental in forming a *Manch* (federation) of *Sarpanchs*, Ward members, politically active women and other potential leaders at block level. There are 6 *Manchs* in Kutch with 40 to 80 members. Each Manch consists of at least 30% of the elected women in each block. Manch are evolving as active women's platforms and in three years have become important units for spurring collective action. In block or district level meetings, district and state level events and in workshops, issues related to Panchayati Raj,

governance, development, gender and transformation pertinent to the district are covered. The members of *Manch* feel confident to lead developmental works in their villages. From implementation of development schemes to raising new issues, women leaders have promoted transparency and inclusiveness in public distribution system, grass land conservation, distribution of widow pension, drinking water schemes, employment, education and health programmes. However, many of the leaders face alienation from the traditionally strong male leaders in the villages. Very often there are no-confidence motions passed against these leaders as a means to discourage them. The Manch provides them a platform to share such experiences and to highlight them to higher authorities.

#### Some basic systems of the Manch:

- Membership: 70% current elected women, 15% former elected women, 15% active leaders or potential elected women
- Membership fees from rupees 21 to 100 deposited in Bank accounts
- An annually revolving Working Committee of 4-5 women provides leadership to the Manch.
- As a mandate each Manch meets at least 10 times a year and two neighboring Manch meet every quarter.
- Every year, a district level Sammelan unites all the Manch
- Exposure visits, Lecture Series and Training workshops provide learning opportunities

The Panchayat knowledge and information Centres at the Block Office provide continuous information and support to Manch members and citizens at large.

*Manchs* also provide a space to share the success that they achieve.

Sushasini has federated 500 women leaders of Kutch district through Manch and its activities. It is working directly in a total of 163 villages in six blocks of Anjar, Mandvi, Nakhatrana, Bhuj, Abdasa and Mundra. In collaboration with nine partners it has reached out to 596 villages. Through Panchayat Information Centers, the women representatives have supported more than 2000 individuals

Kutch is a large district so up scaling such a programme becomes a challenge when distances are so huge and physical contact is essential. The process of capacity enhancement through accompaniment is a time consuming one. It takes two years to establish contact, encourage and convince an elected woman leader to be involved in the programme and then it takes her another year to understand and apply what she learns in her role as a Panchayat leader, by which time it is time for next elections. Somewhere, Sushasini internally questions its efforts as the women leaders change every five years. However, they do agree that organizations committed to working on political leadership and empowerment need to accept this reality. Suhasini now accepts that a good elected leader will be a leader for life and this itself

provides Suhasini with the opportunity to create a cadre of elected women as trainers for the next generation. Encouraging and supporting strong women to contest in next round of elections is to be an essential part of Suhasini's strategy.

The support of Panchayat knowledge and information centre is also a good strategy as it provides tangible benefits to members and is a clear value addition for potential members. to means of attracting elucidates to the member, the benefit of being a member. The challenge lies in ensuring that the Manch grows beyond the mandate given to it by Sushasini and KMVS and it's relevance and vision is rooted in the articulated needs of the women leaders of the district.

The status of devolution in Gujarat has been very poor and so has been the status of local governance. In such light, women's participation in local governance is certainly not on the political agenda. This reality is confronted with most significantly, when efforts are made to up scale the activities and membership of the Manch. An upscaling necessarily entails some form of collaboration with the state and an engagement with state sponsored developmental programmes and schemes.

A need was articulated for a more consistent exchange across federations of elected women leaders in different states.

# Strengthening Gram Panchayats to integrate disaster preparedness in village level micro planning

## *The Hunger Project\**

The Hunger Project has been working towards strengthening women's leadership since the year 2000 and has partnerships with organizations across India to run leadership workshops for elected women leaders in Gram Panchayats. In Tamil Nadu, THP was active since 2003. Quite away from its mainstream work, along with its partner Gandhi Gram, THP entered in the Nagapattinam district in 2005 after Tsunami. In December 2004, the Tsunami struck and in Tamil Nadu alone 7793 lives were lost. Nagapattinam district was severely affected with 5525 casualties and extensive damage to assets (boats, nets, homes) and crops.

### Aims of the programme:

1. To strengthen Panchayats to address needs emerging from such an unprecedented disaster
2. Strengthen women's participation in local self governance
3. Synergy building between elected and traditional Panchayats
4. Disaster Preparedness at Panchayat level

It was a time when a lot of aid and relief from the government, civil society and Corporates started to flow into the district. The role of Gram Panchayats was completely undermined in coordinating relief works. There were continuous clashes between the Traditional Fisheries Panchayat and the elected Gram Panchayats. THP, along with three partner organizations intervened in 17 Panchayats across four Blocks of Nagapattinam. These 17 Panchayats covered 104 Hamlets with a population of 96,000 persons.

The activities included:

- Capacity building of Gram Panchayat members through training, exposure visits, and interface with District Administration
- Orientation and mobilisation of other stakeholders (youth, women, SHG, SC, physically challenged) to Panchayat affairs. Some Panchayats had 300-350 physically challenged persons and their special needs had to be included in the plans.
- Gram Sabha mobilisation
- Intensive micro-planning exercises; motivating Panchayats to meet needs emerging from micro plans; ratifying the plans in Gram Sabha

For disaster preparedness, Panchayat level Contingency Plans were made; ratified; displayed and mock drills were also carried out. After the immediate planning and relief phase, intensive work with women leaders was taken up.

It was a challenge to get the Panchayats and people on board as the process required far greater engagement of the local population than the simple transfer of money to 'beneficiaries' that could be witnessed across the district. Engaging community members in micro-planning in immediate aftermath of Tsunami in an aid rich environment was not easy. Alongside, getting two very differently positioned institutions which are anchored in very different institutional processes and structures i.e., elected and traditional Panchayats to engage with each other was difficult. Panchayat elections that were held mid way through project period in October 2006 were also a factor to be taken into account. The idea was to make plans at local

level which reflect not just immediate but also long term needs and also take into account the needs of the most vulnerable.

The persistent efforts of the NGOs and the communities did ensure that the traditional Panchayats and their leaders and the elected Panchayats engaged together in the planning process. The holding of the Gram Sabha became an important means of ensuring an inclusive planning and became the collective space for decision making. As the traditional and elected Panchayats came together, the dispute over fishing rights between the hegemonic fishing community and the Dalits could also come to a resolve. Finally, the two institutions found common ground to work together in the Permanent housing scheme. Some of the visible achievements were:

- 60-70 % needs of the people, particularly the marginalized that were articulated in micro plans were met.
- Participation in Gram Sabha across all the Panchayats increased. Women, Dalits and people with special needs clearly articulated their demands. Women consistently outnumbered men in Gram Sabhas.
- Panchayats became more effective in accessing schemes and provisions available with the line departments of the state government.
- Farmers' Information Centre and a Centre for persons with special needs were established.
- A pre election awareness campaign was successfully conducted.
- Women contested from unreserved seats for the first time.

As on today, this special project of THP has been successfully integrated into the THP Tamil Nadu program. Women's leadership workshops have been conducted in 2 entire blocks covering 78 Panchayats. Community Centres have been handed over to members

and are currently functioning with support from Panchayats and partner organisations.

The discussions following the presentation were focused on the role of panchayats at times of disasters when there is massive inflow of funds. Panchayats could fall prey to the 'disease of affluence'. It was pointed out that micro-planning in such a scenario can be a unique tool for promoting participation for inclusive planning. The fact that THP initiated such an exercise at a time when the environment was not very conducive to exercises of micro-planning provided a unique set of challenges and some relevant lessons. However, in the current scenario, since a Disaster Management Act is in place, a similar exercise would need to factor in a very different set of concerns and issues. The participants felt that challenges lie in (i) ensuring that disaster preparedness plans are not parallel to mainstream plans and are integrated in larger developmental plans and revised just as developmental plans are revised, (ii) different sections of the community being affected very differently by the same disaster, (iii) the disaster preparedness plans having to mainstream the most marginalized who get even more vulnerable at a time of devastation and (iv) long term sustainability of relations between traditional and elected Panchayats especially once the same volume of funds are not available for meeting their diverse needs.

The plenary discussion also reflected on the need for THP to have focussed more in its presentation on what capacity building was needed for integrating women's needs and concerns in plans prepared for strengthening disaster preparedness.



# Strengthening Local Self Governance through provisioning of untied Village Development Funds

## *Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan\**

This untied fund ranging from 1 to 3 lakhs is used by the Panchayats to strengthen the developmental agendas along the parameters of good governance, social justice & equity. Setus facilitate the Panchayats to plan, budget, make proposals, seek funding, implement, monitor & audit as steps of VDF. It provides an opportunity for Panchayats to hone their skills & legitimize their position as effective & responsive units of local self governance. The Panchayats can access the VDF only when they are ready to (i) involve the community at all levels of project management and planning, need identification, prioritization, (ii) include the most vulnerable, (iii) demonstrate a willingness and preparedness to organize village resources, mandate and record decisions, manage the funds, and monitor implementation and outcomes.

Poor status of devolution, excessive NGO and donor money after the earthquake, sectoral and short sighted development programmes have disempowered the people of Kutch and undermined the legitimacy of local Panchayats. One of the continued challenges for strengthening Panchayats has been the non availability of untied funds which can be used on the basis of peoples' needs and decision. Kachch Nav Nirman Abhiyan is a 10 year old district network institution comprised of 33 voluntary organizations that support district development by linking communities with the district administration, state and national government, donors and civil society organizations in order to leverage resources; and strengthen PRI and traditional livelihood based groups to use these resources. Abhiyan works through 'Setus centres' located in cluster of ten Panchayats which facilitate holistic development of that area with a focus on strengthening self governance, social justice and socio-economic equity. Setus introduced the concept of a Village Development Fund (VDF), to strengthen Panchayats vis-a-vis donors and NGO & enable Panchayats to sponsor & monitor the development of their villages.

Kutch has a total of 614 Gram Panchayats and Setus have covered 164 under the capacity

building programme through training workshops, lectures series, newsletter, exposure visits and Panchayat forums. As an intensive capacity building initiative, Setus facilitated the Panchayats to access and use VDF as a means to develop the confidence of Panchayats, develop a perspective on development, make Gram Sabha effective, introduce mechanisms of transparency and accountability and enable people to participate in decisions of their village development. From 2006 onwards, 38 Panchayats have leveraged the VDF for a range of activities which include: drinking water, education, health, livelihood, income generation and public infrastructure, and support to the vulnerable.

The steps for VDF implementation include: Profiling the prospective Panchayats and the villages; Receiving commitment from the Panchayat in the Gram Sabha; Ward wise PRA (special focus on the vulnerable like women, lower castes, poor, elderly, disabled etc.), Prospective plans shared in Gram Sabha, revised if needed, Mapping and prioritizing issues (administrative, infrastructural and social), Proposal for VDF to be drafted by the Panchayat and submitted, Steering Committee scrutinizes and provides the sanctions for proposal, MOU between

Abhiyan and Panchayat signed, Funding disbursed in three instalments.

Emerging Outcomes:

- 55% of the Panchayats with which the Setus are working, have shown regularity in holding Gram Sabhas with strong participation of women
- 50% of the Panchayats are holding the Panchayat body meetings regularly
- 28% of the Panchayats have activated the Social Justice Committees
- 34% of the Panchayats have developed systems for regular tax collection
- 36% of the Panchayats have improved their office administration
- Government vacancies were filled and staff regularized in 47% of the Panchayats
- Philanthropic funds made available by individual donors (affluent business families living in Mumbai or abroad who have hailed from Kutch) are being leveraged for developmental activities as opposed to the usual welfare activities that they would contribute towards.

There are a whole range of **questions and concerns** that VDF raises when it comes to sustainability and adaptability as well as up scaling. This is also because it entails the availability of significant monies. It is ironic to note that VDF is a concept to build capacities of Panchayats by creating circumstances which in reality they were intended to be in. It is a controlled programme in which panchayats require close facilitation and accompaniment at each stage. So far, it has involved a lot of rigour and has a lot of pre-conditions attached to the management of the money. The experience has encouraged other Panchayats to also explore more funding and leverage individual donations.

The experience of making available VDF has shown that given an opportunity, space and support, people as well as local institutions can become the leaders of their own development. If they have direct funds, they can manage it better. If the management is in the hands of the people, then the efficiency is high. As on today, the 38 Panchayats have progressed well in envisioning development but they will continue to need support - both human and financial.

Some details about the finances:

- 25 Panchayats accessed an amount of Rs.24,00,000 contributed by Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- 18 Panchayats accessed an amount of Rs.13,50,000 as untied fund towards developing primary healthcare systems in villages
- 7 Panchayats accessed an amount of Rs.5,81,415 for village development activities from individual donors.
- On an average, 12% of the cost of interventions has been contributed in cash by citizens

## Capacity Building of PRIs: Rajasthan Experience

### *Indira Gandhi Panchayati Raj and Gramin Vikas Sansthan\**

The State Institute of Rural Development in Rajasthan was confronted with a herculean task of training elected leaders from 9000 Gram Panchayats immediately after the elections to the local bodies. Given the limited human resources of the Institute devoted to capacity building of panchayats, the challenge was daunting.

The aim was to develop a model of Decentralized training which was cost and time effective and ensured a timely outreach to the elected representatives and functionaries (in all more than 1.25 lac) functionaries every 5 years.

From 2000 onwards, the Institution was struggling to develop a methodology that could cover such numbers effectively. As a first step a Training Needs Assessment was conducted in 2000 of all three tiers of elected bodies based on which material for a training module was developed and then the actual implementation of the training programme was planned. The Training Needs Assessment showed that the elected representatives were enthusiastic to learn about : Panchayati Raj and the elected members role in it; Vision clarity with regard to Human / Social / Rural Development; Financial Management and Resource-Mobilization; Standing Committees and their Functions; Intra and Inter departmental Coordination; Government Procedures; Micro-planning. Some core areas identified were: Gender sensitization; Disaster Management; Role of State and Central Finance Commissions and flow of Funds to PRIs; Role of PRIs with respect to Revenue matters; Decentralized Planning: Role of District Planning Committee; Social Security Schemes; Right to Information, Social Audit and Curbing Corruption. Additionally leadership and communications skills were to be strengthened. By 2004-5, there were some

new thrust areas like: Responsive & Good Governance; Constitutional Perspective development: Fundamental Rights, Duties & Directive Principles of State Policy; Millennium Development Goals of UN & relevance for GP-Level; Human Rights and Human Development Concerns; Gender Issues & Empowerment of Women; Panchayat and Human Development Progress Card.

While planning the exercise, the following were assessed to be needed for a comprehensive outreach to be planned: (i) a strong cadre of trainers to deliver direct training to PRIs as Decentralized cascades (ii) a customized/need-based responsive training corresponding to entry behavior of elected representatives (w.r.t. knowledge, skills and attitudes- existing & desired) (iii) resource material for state-wide training of PRIs with a uniform curriculum for maintaining standards of quality not just in content but also in delivery. The following was undertaken:

- Three day modules were designed for Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samitis; One day module for Ward Members and Six day modules for Sarpanches at the Gram Panchayat level. Also a two day Module for Chair persons and Women Members of Various Standing Committees of PRIs were designed.
- 100 Persons drawn from GOs, NGOs, and Research & Training Institutions were trained as state level master trainers. 1500 Persons were trained with the support of Master Trainers as District level Trainers. 21 NGO partners were involved and 5 to 7 multi-disciplinary team-members per block Panchayat were prepared, of which minimum 2 are women.
- For Empowering Women Leaders on Priority, one week residential training

camps for 3056 Women Sarpanches (55 Camps) and daylong orientation camps for 35000 Women Ward Panches (750 Camps) were organized.

- For achieving the National Training Policy Goal of “Training for All”, One week residential training camps for joint training of Sarpanches & Panchayat Secretaries (at block level) - 250 camps with 90% turnout (16,500 persons) and One day orientation training camps for all Ward Panches (at sub-block level)- 750 camps with 60% turnout (65,000 Ward Panches)

The trainings had to keep in mind that they were catering to a largely illiterate population, therefore 27 participatory and interactive exercises were devised. These are available for other states to adapt. It was important for the trainings to have a safe and women friendly environment. Efforts like inviting the wives of male government officials or inviting women government officials were made. Crèche facilities were also been provided for. A training impact assessment was undertaken in 2004 through NGO partners in 30 Districts, 70 Blocks and 270 Gram Panchayats. Some of the results were: Women PRI leaders emerged more articulate and assertive; New initiatives for eradication of social evils were taken up by panchayats; Team synergy increased across elected representatives and frontline functionaries; Efforts were initiated for transparency and social audit; Demand for continuous training and resource support has increased.

Despite the accomplishments of the training efforts there are some inherent challenges of the programme which relate to the resources requirement for a similar exercise to be undertaken:

- Financial Resources: For one round of ‘Training for All’ of PRIs in Rajasthan has entailed a resource base of Rs. 5 Crores. However, in 2010, it is likely to go upto Rs. 10 Crores, as duration for Training of

Panchayat level (which comprises almost 1.24 lac functionaries) is recommended to be increased.

- Human Resources: Although, seven rounds of ToTs have been held State-wide since 2000; each fresh round has entailed a turnover of almost 50-60% new entrants.
- Training Resources: Each fresh round of PRI training entails creation of fresh training materials & modules development, in response to emerging needs which keep growing in volume & variety.
- Administrative & Political Support: Each Decentralized Training Campaign to achieve its timelines & desired outcomes requires for the commitment and support of administrative and political will to be aligned in consonance with the campaign vision & mission

Though the use of satellite trainings have been thought of and has been established , yet there is no substitute for direct training, in the early stages of capacity building. Also, despite the desire to have longer duration trainings for Ward Members, it is numerically very difficult and resource intensive.

If the political party in power is not as supportive of Panchayat trainings then it is difficult to raise resources of the magnitude required. So it is important for IGPRS to become a part of lobbying groups which advocate for capacity building for Panchayat leaders. Also, it takes generations of trainings and complementary activities to have elected women as prime trainers. Institutional mechanisms and intensive resource support is needed especially as devolution is still in a continuum and new training needs keep emerging. Expecting the women’s federation to take up the issue is also difficult as the federations have not matured and the ones which are prominent are working on party lines.

The impact assessment of the trainings is another huge exercise. Especially, when such numbers are involved and there are different levels of impact. It is one thing to conduct and impart trainings but it is another thing to see

that they result in a behaviour change. Training alone cannot accomplish a transformation of Panchayats. Based on the experience of many NGOs, trainings need to be substituted with on-site supports and accompaniment.

A new record has been set in the country, by with Rajasthan emerging as the first State to have achieved total coverage within three months of PRI elections, making it possible to achieve the goal of “Training for All” Goal in keeping with the Policy recommendations of the National Training Policy. 1.25 Lac PRI Leaders from Zila Pramukhs to Wardpanches & CEOs to Gram Sevaks have been exposed to basic orientation within three months after elections.

# Strengthening capacities of Gram Panchayats for habitation level planning and integrated Village Development Planning

## *Intercooperation\**

The genesis of the partnership with Bonthi Gram Panchayat is anchored in the long history of Swiss support to districts in North Karnataka for natural resource management (NRM) and participatory watershed development. This partnership was initiated in 2005.

Bidar is one of the less developed districts in Karnataka (600 kilometres from the state Capital). In close cooperation with Bidar Zila Panchayat a remote Panchayat called Bonthi was identified to work with. Bonthi is a Group Panchayat of 4 revenue villages spread over 10 kms with extremely poor development indicators. Historically, Bonthi functioned as a semi-autonomous *Zamindari* under the *Nizam* of Hyderabad and till today feudal relations are prevalent which are highly discriminatory, towards women in particular. The Panchayat is 60 kilometers from the District Headquarters and till 2005 there was no tarred roads to reach the villages. Communication links were almost absent. As the population is linguistically and culturally Marathi, the residents are an alienated minority in Kannadiga state with have limited employment opportunities. Agriculture, a main source of livelihood has suffered from low productivity. Low levels of literacy, high levels of poverty, poor NRM and limited access to government schemes were the underlying reasons to select this Gram Panchayat (GP). the need to work here. An order from Government of Karnataka enabled the partnership with Bonthi Gram Panchayat for 'Bonthi PRI Pilot Project' which was managed by Intercooperation (IC).

The Zila Panchayat (ZP) had the responsibility to monitor progress and disburse funds to the Gram Panchayat. GP had to conduct meetings, approve village action plans, delegate work to

sub-committees, request funds from the ZP, transfer funds to sub-committees, prepare progress and reports. Myrada, the supporting NGO, led the capacity building of GP, SHGs and sub-committee members and provided overall facilitation. The sub-committees had to prepare micro-plans, finalise action plans, support implementation, maintain accounts, submit fund request, issue fund utilization certificates and report progress.

### Aims of the project:

- Empowering Gram Panchayat by providing untied funds; opportunities for bottom up planning; implementation using largely local human resources and farmer friendly technology.
- Deepening democratic processes beyond the Gram Panchayat to the village/hamlet level.
- Working on a pilot and from the experiences, replicating best practices on a larger scale.

Planning exercises were conducted in hamlets at three levels, with a focus on overall need assessment; a detailed annual plan, sub-sets of the overall plan (like NRM and income generation for which funding was available) and special plans for long-term pressing problems like drinking water. The idea was to have a People's Plan working through village level NRM sub committees functioning under the supervision of the Bonthi Gram Panchayat with gender, class and caste balanced representation. Gram Panchayats members from the village were ex-officio members of the sub-committees. A cadre of community resource persons were mentored to provide support to the sub-committees. All Planning exercises and decisions were made in the

Gram Sabhas (56 village gram Sabhas recorded). Process of work entailed:

- Community Resource Persons assist the sub committees in field level planning and consolidation
- Discussion and approval in Gram Panchayat
- Linking community needs to programmes of the Government
- Sharing plans at Steering Committee at Zila Panchayat Bidar
- Direct Fund Flow to Bonthi Gram Panchayat
- Human resources: SHG members, 86 sub-committee members, 12 CRPS, 20 GP members, Zila and Taluka Panchayat officials, 4 Resource NGO Staff and 2 Intercooperation staff .

Successful implementation of NRM based plans for all villages that cover 2500 hectares adding nearly 400 hectare additional area for cultivation. Nearly 81,500 person days generated. The Panchayat has been able to construct 12 Check Dams, 3 Percolation tanks and 1 bridge cum barrage through other government funding and completed 100 Farm ponds under NREGA. There are other plans like constructing bore wells, open wells, percolations tanks in the pipeline. Today Bonthi Panchayat has 12 Community resource persons who are capable of managing such programmes and a cadre of 100 community members well versed with the process of participatory planning. Gram Panchayats shoulder large developmental responsibilities and deliver. Gram Sabhas have become legitimate spaces for inclusive, accountable and transparent governance.

From 2005-2009, the project funded an amount of 1,50,00,000 rupees, of which 25 lacs went to the NGO. The Panchayat too generated 13.5 lacs in three years.

The project reiterated the need for capacity building and facilitation support that Gram Panchayats need in order to progress. The NGO's charge was one sixth of the total budget which is less than the government rate. There has been an involvement of poor, landless and public investment in private lands for common development. Making sub-committees has ensured participation at the lowest level. A cadre of trained community members has also resulted. The above points make the programme need based, efficient and inclusive. Sustainability and replicability are only possible if the skills that the community members have acquired get tapped, used, strengthened and made available to other Gram Panchayats. The sustenance of energy and commitment of the communities towards the collective activities will be tested after the next panchayat elections.

Inter-cooperation, through an internal assessment has itself concluded that more efforts could be invested towards addressing gender concerns. The political empowerment was high such that the sub-committees negotiated with the Gram Panchayat members at every stage and continue to do so. Many sub-committee members plan to contest for the next round of elections.



# Democratizing participation below the Gram Panchayat through Standing Committees

## *Melli Dhera Gram Panchayat Unit, South Sikkim\**

The elected leaders, particularly the President of 22-MELLI DARA PAIYONG Gram Panchayat Unit - located in the South Sikkim - took the initiative to increase widespread participation and engagement of people in the everyday development work of the village. It has been an attempt to form and functionalize 10 Standing Committees in this Panchayat. These are not mandatory bodies according to the Panchayati Raj Act in the state but has been embraced by the people and the elected representatives helping in better management, governance and transformation.

Panchayat representatives increasingly felt the need for more helping hands and they could identify a section of population, like the youth and the people retired from government services who had time and skill sets which could be tapped. Also, it was felt that if the Panchayat wanted to make Participatory plans then they needed to delegate and divide responsibilities to the lowest level. It was also felt that there were some issues which often got marginalized and now needed to be brought to the forefront so that the Panchayat could develop holistically. The Standing Committees were positioned to work within the Panchayat, for and with the public and were to elicit involvement of the Line departments.

Standing committees were an answer to several concerns: utilizing unemployed people with potential; involving large population in development process; covering different issues and sharing the responsibilities that were shouldered by the elected members alone.

The steps to formation of a Standing Committee were:

- Identification of important areas for intervention (One time activity)
- Nomination of the Chairperson
- Selection of members by the Chairperson
- Nomination of the concerned Line Department Functionaries as Secretary
- Notification from Gram Prasashan Kendra (Annual Activity)

Tasks of a Standing Committee included:

- Recommend activities to be taken up
- Provide expert/technical inputs
- Monitor the ongoing schemes
- Review activities after every 3 months

The standing Committees formed in 22-MELLI DARA PAIYONG Gram Panchayat Unit were:

1. Education, Social Value and Religion
2. Agriculture and Horticulture
3. Women & Child Welfare, Health & Sanitation
4. Village Tourism, Revenue & Employment Generation
5. Animal Husbandry & Public Distribution System
6. Forest & Wildlife
7. Literature
8. Sports and Youth Affairs
9. Self Help Groups & Small Scale Industries
10. Water Resource Management

The Gram Panchayat even started a monthly Newsletter to showcase the work and invite public opinion. The Standing Committee currently is working on the Vision Document of the Gram Panchayat.



As a result of the work of the ten Standing Committees, within one and a half years, there has been a drastic improvement in the participation of the public in the developmental process and Gram Sabha. The Panchayat has received an award of the Best Performing GPU in the State. The model is being recognized and replicated. It is possible to adapt this model as it is simple and based on people's choice and priorities. It is also something that the Panchayat has been able to integrate after drawing inspiration from an exposure visit to Panchayats in Kerala.

The Panchayat has been able to win the faith and trust of people and raised 1,25,000 rupees internally. Even though the State government has not yet authorized tax collection, the Panchayat will provide other services to people and hopes to raise up to 5 lacs in the coming year. One of the other requirements is of human resource especially with specialized skills. The Panchayat wants to make Standing Committees so significant that professionals take pride in joining them and serving the people.

Despite slackness in some Committees as the membership is purely voluntary and the fact that the committees are not supported by an Act, the body could lose its validity and become defunct once the Panchayat member change. But the fact is that if an initiative has been taken without the provision of an Act and is doing well because it serves a need in the development cycle, then such concerns are not so important. Sometimes committees are formed because of an Act but then have no roles or functions. At least here the committee is purely on people's initiative which is the key to its sustenance. Validating it through an Act is important but so is the space for such initiatives which may serve a far important purpose than modalities which are mandatory. This has displayed that with charismatic leadership a lot can be accomplished, without having any conducive guidelines or orders.

# Strengthening administrative and governance systems of Gram Panchayats

## *Grameena Padana Kendram\**

Grameena Padana Kendra is a voluntary group supporting Panchayats in Kerala. GPK has worked intensively in two panchayats of Karakulam and Nellanad and supported the panchayats to effectively manage and administer the subjects devolved from the state government to the panchayats in Kerala. It emerged as a group to support the functioning of the local panchayats in the area. The GPK was tasked with creating adequate institutional support to the local governments in Kerala keeping in view the lack of institutions and the lackadaisical attitude of political and administrative officials towards panchayats and the absence of adequate tools towards ensuring transparency, quality service and grievance redressal.

Towards support to the Karakulam and Nellanad panchayats, GPK in consultation with the Panchayat representatives and community members has evolved a series of tools and practices towards enhancing greater transparency, accountability and more effective service by the government offices reporting to panchayats. To enable this, GPK undertook a Participatory Institutional Appraisal and used activity research tools for assessing the existing scenario and interacted with various stakeholders to develop remedial measures to make the panchayat office more responsive to the community needs. Administrative Monitoring System and Citizens Charters have been evolved for ensuring effective functioning by the offices under the panchayats for service provisioning to the community. On the demand side, GPK has worked with the community to make Gram Sabhas more effective and sought to mobilise neighbourhood groups, increase participation of women, engaged with youth/children and facilitate community based organisations. Specific tools have been developed such as Performance Audit reports,

Administrative reports, service delivery guidelines, citizen's service charter, review report of transferred institutions/office, plan documents, watershed based master plan, income-expenditure statements and social audit reports. These are all shared at the special Gram Sabha.

Citizen friendly communication facilities such as information boards, right to information boards, attendance boards and complaints boxes have been installed. Panchayats in Kerala generate revenue through taxes and a transparent tool informing people about tax collections, tax waivers is publicized for each ward and citizens scrutiny of tax payer's enlistment is encouraged in the Gram Sabha. Speedy settlements of arrears are undertaken and these activities have seen an increase resource mobilisation for the Panchayat. Grievance Redressal systems have been set up and publicized.

Institutional Service Delivery guidelines have been evolved for Agriculture, Veterinary, Fisheries, Village Extension, Engineering, Schools, Aanganwadis, Primary Health Institutions and the Panchayat office and making them publically available so that everyone is aware about the position, roles and responsibilities, task execution system, monitoring and reporting system. Clear understanding helps citizens approach the right officer and it also helps official to understand their technical role of supporting the Panchayat office.

GPK feels that the process has good response and acceptance with a higher rate of people's participation. Panchayats have become stronger and people accept that panchayats can play a significant role in the delivery of services. Creating the administrative and management systems has also helps in managing institutional, infrastructure and human resources available at the local level. Engagement with local voluntary experts and facilitators supported the research centre for

effective citizenry engagement. Sectoral integration and service quality assurance has made citizens recognise panchayats as effective local governments and increase the community sense of ownership over the govt. offices.

However, significant challenges do remain- partial devolution results in frequent transfers of govt. employees and reorienting new ones take time and effort, the support of the State govt. for such innovations is not very high and it thus becomes difficult to replicate such initiatives. Having said this, this initiative has now expanded to 63 panchayats across the state which has Panchayat front offices and 28 of them have institutionalised such management systems.

KILA is now taking this process forward since 2005. The process is not only increasing in numbers but also deepening as more offices are taking this forward. Panchayats seem keen on this and GPK acts only as facilitator with the financing done by the Panchayats.

The model though interesting and successful, raised a few questions with respect to its adaptability. Since the model is structurally very elaborate and complex, it may not be applicable in areas where Panchayati Raj has not evolved – both, at policy and at grassroots. Instead of looking at the model as a whole, it can be broken into several parts which can then be adapted to different contexts. The multiple tools promoting transparency, inclusiveness and accountability provided a gamut of options to choose from. The role of NGOs as a pool of individual activists providing human resource to support the Panchayat was seen as an innovative approach. But there were questions on how to ensure that the voluntary professionals are not acting on behalf of the community? According to GPK, even today in Kerala, the functionaries are controlled by the government so the services fail to be people centric. This has been an attempt in the direction where people can get involved in service delivery as well as social justice. The processes helped people to understand the possibilities and adapt systems, tools and mechanisms for strong local self governance.

# Strengthening Gram Panchayats to take up natural resource management and conservation and development of sustainable habitat norms

*Maithri\**

Maithri, an NGO, started operations in Central Kerala in 1998 on Natural Resource Management and Panchayati Raj with focus on Marginalized communities. Today it is operational in five districts, catering to the needs of 300 Gram Panchayats and 17 Urban Local Bodies. Despite Kerala being the benchmark in decentralization and devolution, it has not been away from the ills of centralized economic development. The forest cover has reduced from 44.4% in 1950 to 9% in 2004 and the rivers have become seasonal. There has been a severe decline in agriculture, resultantly food security is severely compromised. Excessive Sand mining in seven rivers in Greater Cochin area have lowered the river bed as well as water table (Bore wells go down from 80 feet to 1050 feet in 15 years) and paddy areas are below sea level. Land fragmentation has caused neglect of ponds and top soil depth further renders the land unproductive.

Maithri worked towards:

- Revamping the natural systems to cope with the impacts of climate change
- Capacitating the Panchayats to manage their own natural resources and for project handling
- Sensitizing the community against the changes in micro climate and environment
- Coordinating different stake holders to develop revival systems
- Adopting locally feasible alternatives

The work began by sensitizing the community towards Changes in Micro-Climate & Environment. The forums used for discussion and information dissemination were the Neighborhood groups as subset of Gram Sabhas. Members were farmers, house wives and office bearers of the Panchayat. Through social surveys, resource mapping and action research, long term and short term plans were made at the Neighborhood group level. Panchayat level resource centre were made to help people understand data related to water levels climate and realize the growing ecological problems.

From planning to implementation, Gram Panchayat body was involved. Special attention was paid to involve community at large especially the minorities. The neighborhood groups and watershed committees owned and managed the entire process and had their Bank Accounts as they were managing the finances also. (Major Funding Agencies: SDC CapDeck; WGDP; Gram Panchayats themselves; GWD; ANERT; Social forestry; RSVY; DoA; KFRI; NABARD etc.). When it came to audit, Maithri ensured first it was audited before others. This ensured a two-way accountability.

Four broad areas were monitored to assess progress: Increase in area under food crops, Increase in water table, Increase in funds mobilized by PRIs and number of projects executed. Targets for up scaling up have included: First zero fallow land block of the state; Achieving food security in grain production in the block; Improving paddy productivity from 3.5 t/ha to 6 t/ha and Giving security and dignity to farm labor. There continue to be challenges, some them being :

frequent change in policies, government officials, Panchayat members; turnover of community leaders; local conflicts and conflicts with agencies; distress selling/mining/conversion of land etc.

Achievements:

1. Neighborhood group as owners of natural resources in that area
  - Short and long term Plans prepared
  - Processes established
  - Tools developed
  - Institutional set up fine tuned
  - Developed local team supporting the PRIs
  - Resources mobilized
2. Resource centers have been well developed and they providing facilities and human resources
3. Agriculture improved and paddy revived
4. Ponds revived and wells replenished

The question that comes is how neighborhood groups got legitimacy or was it only there till Maithri was facilitating. Maithri was very conscious of getting the space for neighborhood groups legitimized so it looked at the Kerala state act where neighborhood groups are an optional mandate. The Gram Panchayat drafted a bye-law and dedicated its work to the neighborhood group. One Gram Panchayat has a population of 25000 and each ward has 500-700 people so certainly Gram Panchayat is too big a unit and so is a ward. Such spaces helped to get people represent their hamlets which often does not happen at the Gram Sabha and Ward Sabha level.

Maithri had two crucial roles: Capacity building of Panchayat representatives and neighborhood group members as well as Converging resources from multiple agencies. Besides this it facilitated participatory planning which is what makes the programme sustainable. But in the light of some schemes like Haryali which do not take Panchayats into consideration, there is a doubt if the Panchayats will be referred to. There have also been attempts to insure that Gram Panchayat is accountable to people and neighborhood groups, the neighborhood groups are accountable to Panchayats, people and donors, Maithri is accountable to people and donors. Finally it has been a process with clear indicators due to which it has been easy to see the efficiency and impact.

Finally, the project has been set in the larger politico-economic context of growing land degradation, water crisis, climate change and increased vulnerability of traditional livelihood. It has tried to overcome some of the challenges and created awareness towards environment sustainability.

# Organising and streamlining the functioning of Jaagratha Samithis in Gram Panchayats

## *Centre for Rural Management\**

Kerala represents what India as a whole aspires to be. Certainly, it is touted as a case where women have made long strides and boasts of the highest female literacy, a positive female: male ratio, low maternal mortality and a better average age of marriage than the rest of the country. It also has Govt. supported programmes like Kutumbashree and sees women in public action. However, the participation of women in politics is still a cause of concern. This, is matched with the increased violence against women, domestic violence, dowry, violence at the workplace, rape and trafficking.

It is in this context that the Jaagratha Samitis (JS) have become functional in a number of panchayats across the state. The JS were constituted across the state on the initiative of the Kerala's Women Commission. They were designed to reduce the distance between women in the villages and the commission.

The Govt. of Kerala issued orders to set up District Level Committees for redressal of atrocities against women and to protect women's rights in 1997. This was followed by an order setting up Panchayat Level JS headed by the Presidents of respective panchayats with 15 members (with 2/3rd being women) including all women elected representatives of the panchayats and other nominees representing scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, youth, women, agricultural labourers and those from women's organisation being nominated through the district committee. This was further amended and the new guidelines stipulate that the Gram Panchayat JS, under the President of the Panchayat should have the Circle Inspector/Sub Inspector of Police, an elected women

Panchayat representative, a woman lawyer nominated by the Panchayat, a woman social worker or counsellor from SC/ST communities, and the ICDS Supervisor as the convenor. The members are to be nominated by the Panchayat itself.

The JS has the potential to act as a catalyst for effectively engaging women at the Panchayat level as it is a visible forum towards addressing concerns of women and children. It acts as a vigilance committee and creates a forum for local solutions to problems faced by women. It lends itself to local activism and creates a platform for local "policing". Moreover, given its role as a arbitration mechanism, it is effectively seen as a quasi-legal body and empowers local governments and makes panchayats women friendly. The JS are administratively financed from local Panchayat funds from the women component plan created by each Panchayat in Kerala.

However, there are certain concerns-and JS have become vibrant only in some areas of Kerala in addressing women's issues. In other areas, even when JS are formed, they have not been effective. Experience has shown that even the effective JS interpreted their roles differently-while some acted as quasi-judicial bodies, others performed as alternative dispute settlement and arbitration forums while some others as a forum for gender awareness and sensitization. Some JS have been formed independently while others are supported by civil society institutions like SDC-CapDeck and CRM. JS in the latter cases have been able to address various issues but this lends itself to the issue ownership as well as capacity and competencies. CapDeck supported JS have shown a higher success rate and performance (Pananchery and

Kumaly). Just the establishment of a JS is clearly not sufficient and additional efforts need to be made. In the Pananchery case, a baseline survey on gender status and issues affecting women was undertaken followed by a awareness campaign around JS safeguarding the rights of women. Some other panchayats also used the same process. These pilots are now being up scaled through capacity building of JS members through KILA (the state training institute of Kerala).

Besides, the activities in the field, SDC-Capdeck and the Kerala Women's Commission have undertaken periodic sharing meeting and regional seminars in which various JS members can exchange ideas. The up scaling of the JS is being now done through the capacity building programme of KILA as well as through the development of uniform guidelines through a consultative process for the state as a whole.

*Classification of cases brought to one GP for a year:*

Nature of Complaints / Cases		No of cases settled	269
Total Cases/Complaints	371	Referred to High Courts	7
Civil	123	Referred to Police	63
Criminal	117	Transferred to District Administration	2
Family Issues	126	Referred to the Gram Panchayat	2
Suo Moto	1	Referred to the Family Court	1
Financial Matters of SHG	4	Cases being followed up	27

The number of cases being filed to JS initially went up but the momentum is now slowing down in some panchayats.

The presentation flagged of various issues for further reflection based on the learnings and observations thus far. The performance of JS in different panchayats shows variation and institutional support seems to play a significant role in this. Effectiveness of JS has to seen in terms of capacity and effectiveness to handle complaints, empowering women and strengthening panchayats. Furthermore, there is a need to identify additional support as well as assessing if the JS, with other complimentary initiatives, can actually play a significant role in cultural and societal arrangements that influence a woman's status and in women's empowerment.

## From the discussants

The first thing to recollect is that when the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment was being debated, there were two broad expectations that it set forth for the Panchayati Raj Institutions, “Panchayat will be making developmental plans for economic growth and social justice.” For economic development, we need to see if the real decentralization of funds, functions and functionaries has happened and are Panchayats in the position of delivering services. Secondly, has anything being done for inclusive development of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other minorities. While there is a need for changes to happen from the top, there is a lot that can happen on the ground which we have seen from the examples presented in the workshop.

### Engagement with Political Parties

The Election Commission has not taken on the task of pre-election voter’s awareness prior to Panchayat elections and has no plans of doing so. It is the civil society, who feels the need for it and thus, needs to strategize. From 70s when the work of organizations focussed on economic empowerment, to the 80s where social empowerment took a priority, to the 90s when political empowerment became a strong agenda, the quality engagement with people and government has evolved. In the presentation by PRIA and SSK, it was evident that the focus was on voter’s awareness but what is really needed is to have the right candidates. In a country where criminalized politics is crippling development, it is important to have the right people elected as representatives. For this, one thing that NGOs cannot escape is political parties. Whether it is in the most developed local governance state of Kerala or poorly decentralized state of Gujarat, political parties cannot be avoided. Even Mahila Rajsatta Anadolan which has federated elected women across the state of Maharashtra has been concerned over this

issue. The challenge is how to engage with political parties and what lines to draw. But staying in a dilemma will only make non civil society counter-productive. To engage with local politics, NGOs need to educate themselves, device some dos and don’ts and then create forums to communicate concerns to political parties. If increasing devolution, political parties will also realize the need to make themselves relevant and will feel the need to work with NGOs.

### New Roles for NGOs

NGOs too need to redefine their roles all together. The nature of funding is changing; Corporates are stepping into so called social development and Panchayats are getting larger chunk of funds under schemes like NREGA. Instead of worrying whether Panchayats are prepared to handle the funds or not, NGOs should carve a new role of facilitation and service provisioning for Panchayats to be able to fairly, transparently utilize the growing funds that they will be responsible for expending. Preparation of the the Panchayats for how to use money can only be tested comes when real money comes. Just as most NGOs have learnt to handle large funds only when they have actually received them, Panchayats too will learn best and fastest only when they receive funds. The case of VDF provisioning in Kutch and support to Bonthi Panchayat in Karnataka, has enhanced the self-esteem of Panchayats with the availability of funds and some degree of freedom to use the funds. However, when too high quantum of fund are made available without adequate preparedness, there is always a fear that it intimidates people and increases the distance between people and the elected representatives. But if we look at countries like Africa where 60% of development budget comes from external aid, then there is a threat of harming the local institutions more



than it strengthens them. What is needed is an organic process and infusion of funds and systems at an organic pace.

One of the key links in the presentation by THP, KNNA and IGPRS is that they are different ways of building capacities of the Gram Panchayat to perform their roles better. The relevance of the training programs and whether they match the extent of devolution needs to be checked to assess the use value for the trainee. In the absence of the Line Departments working and coordinating closely with the Panchayats, built capacities of the elected representatives are not optimally utilised.

The work of NGOs is getting increasingly schematized and with more central schemes coming to Panchayats directly, there is a fear that larger governance agenda will take a back seat. NGOs need to give continuous inputs so that Panchayats do not become contractors of scheme implementation. Perhaps the NGOs can play a coordination role so Panchayats can be more effective in service delivery.

### **Quantity of Tools/Methodologies**

Grameen Padana Kendram and Maithri discussed a whole gamut of tools and methodologies that have been institutionalized in Gram Panchayats to improve the systems of governance. Some may argue that the developed local governance calls for more complex systems and processes especially as Panchayats have greater roles of service delivery. Some may also say that too many complex webs of governance systems could confuse people. It may become intimidating for the poor than supportive. The NGOs involved in facilitating such systems need to also reflect how effective they are for a poor widow or a poor farmer to get benefits from the development schemes.

### **Working on Governance requires Strong Indicators**

NGOs working on political empowerment, are very often engaged with three things: strengthening leadership; strengthening citizenship and empowering the disadvantaged. But when all three are taken up simultaneously, care needs to be taken that one is not at the expense of the other. In order to work on governance issues development of strong indicators are needed: 'Is society taking up political issues ? are women going beyond 33% or 50% of the reserved seats? are just some of the questions that need to be asked on a regular basis.

### **Traditional Structures: Obstacle and Teacher**

There are various hegemonic forces that the local governance needs to deal with, if it wants to be effective. These, as seen in the THP presentation could be from traditional structures like traditional Panchayats (caste Panchayat in case of North India or Fisheries Panchayat as in case of Tamil Nadu and Kerala that play an economic role). It is clear that such Panchayats are autocratic, patriarchal and extremely discriminatory but in most cases they continue to have legitimacy. Their decisions continue to impinge on people. This is because the concept of individual citizen is fairly western and people particularly in rural areas continue to live by community based identities. Traditional Panchayats uphold such identities. They are old, have resources, social legitimacy and power. These can be institutions to also learn from before they are dismissed. E.g. it is interesting to see that they are often quicker in their responses towards meeting the needs of their communities in the event of a calamity since they have systems of governance and delivery that have evolved over decades based on their experiences and the needs of their community members.

## **Decentralisation is a long lasting Process**

From individual challenges of a Dalit woman Sarpanch facing caste and gender discrimination; to systemic challenges due to lack of governance reforms to structural challenges which threaten the very essence of democracy, Panchayats have a series of issues to confront. This is illustrated in one such case of Especially when we look at the process of *Saamras* which is institutionalized by the state of Gujarat and is a complete anti-thesis of decentralization. Presentations from Kerala, Gujarat and Maharashtra discussed that the larger forces of centralization, economic liberalization and globalization pose huge challenges for Panchayats as these forces have the potential to negate local contexts and ecological sustainability.

In the case of setting up of Special Economic Zones, Panchayats have been totally sidelined. When Panchayats are given compensation for land acquired from them, they fail to realize the long term economically and ecologically unviable and unsustainable situation they put themselves in. In Kutch, industries are drawing from Panchayat resources and there are cases of Panchayats are getting taxes of as much as 80 lacs. The issues of industrialization and climate change have to be integrated in the efforts non governmental organisation are making with Panchayats.

Looking within a time perspective, we understand that 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment is quite recent compared with the number of years people have lived, governed and participated differently. While in 15 years a lot could have happened, it has been difficult because of the pace at which government has devolved and the pace at which Gram Panchayats have evolved as governance institutions. But there have been some excellent examples of efforts by NGOs, donors and government. It needs to be pointed out that when it comes to Panchayats most NGOs expect huge standards of accountability because the mentality is still

top down. When our attempts have the Big Brother syndrome then we tend to dis-empower Panchayats which is something to caution from. We all know that good governance is difficult to achieve and equally difficult to measure. We need to reflect internally also.

## **Panchayats need Governance Structure**

Coming back to the point of marginalizing Panchayats, at the time of any disaster, Panchayats are surpassed by NGOs, Corporates and Government. The question in THPs presentation is also why people don't go to Panchayats at the time of disaster. Their reply is that Panchayats do not evoke the faith that other units of governance do. Besides elected representatives, who do Panchayats have as human resource? So unless Panchayats get a governance structure, they will continue to get sidelined. In Sikkim's case we can see that the Panchayat has tried to develop a structure which can provide services to people. In case of Kerala, Panchayats have evolved different mechanisms and involved different service providers to be able to become indispensable strong governance units. Examples like VDF show that good governance is possible and there are alternate ways of NGO, donor and Panchayat to come together. This is even visible in case of Grameen Padana Kendram where individual activists as an NGO come together to provide services to the Panchayat.

## **People's Participation is Key**

The success of devolution lies in the quality of people's participation. Gram Sabhas have been identified as potential spaces for this but there is a need to go deeper than the Gram Panchayat level for real change to happen. Steering Committee in the Sikkim example, sub-committees in the Inter-cooperation example, Neighbourhood groups formed by Maithri, citizen charter and institutional management committees formed by Grameen Padana Kendram show the ways

one can go at deeper level in Panchayats. Even grievance redressal spaces, opportunities for the minorities like Mahila Gram Sabha show the possibilities of more inclusiveness.

### **Good Practices: The Process is important**

When we look at a good practice, the important thing to get communicated is the process. How did we do it? Only then it can be made widespread. But then it is not just the practice but the conditions that need to be replicated. So we need to ask: will it work here with minor changes? If the reply is

negative, then it may be an island of excellence but not a good practice. But it can also be seen that a practice, although it isn't replicable, can still be good, maybe just for one region or a few regions (not for every region). Therefore, replicability is not an ideal criterion. A better criterion would be **relevance**.

It is more on identifying elements of a good practice which can be replicable for another context, but not to replicate the practice as a whole to another context.

## Final Discussion

The last session of the workshop tried to find answers to some of the issues that were flagged in two days. Broadly there were two issues: **what constitutes a good practice and what should be the changing role of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs)?** The discussions helped to reflect on the two issues and to arrive at some common understanding.

### Group 1: What defines a good practice in the context of local self governance?

- With respect to the four criteria used to discuss the different good practices – sustainability, replicability, effectiveness and accountability / inclusiveness - it was agreed that they were useful but needed further clarifications what the terms mean. E.g.:

Effectiveness: Should it include efficacy of time, cost, resources, personnel etc.

Accountability: Who is accountable to whom? On what?

Replicability: A practice cannot be replicable but still remain a good practice; A more suitable better criterion would be relevance.

- It was agreed that not all good practices need to fulfil the same criteria but there should be some non-negotiables.
- In this sense, The criteria have to be flexible based in the context and some of them could be:
  - The practice should be relevant to context: historic, present and future. It should be a well informed practice
  - It should be based in real needs and have a bottoms up approach. It must be owned by the people, empower them and enhance their capacity. It must provide legitimacy to local Panchayats and strengthen the existing local institutions of governance

- It must be inclusive towards the marginalized and be a holistic practice
- It must converge stakeholders and show good possibilities of partnership
- It must have clear indicators and deliverables. It must be measurable in terms of the outcomes and impact
- It must generate learnings for the future
- It must be ecologically sensitive and sustainable
- There should be a reciprocity of accountability
- It should be an efficient practice. It must be cost effective
- It must have possibilities of replicability

On the whole, the processes should be Panchayat lead and energize people. It must create a sense of political citizenship.

### Group 2: What should be the changing role of NGOs in the field of local governance given the fast changing development context?

- NGOs have to engage with political parties, first by educating themselves, then by engaging and dialoguing with them and then by informing the political parties about the new roles they can play with increasing devolutions. Every political party has different subject based cells/fronts. Engaging with them will enhance our understanding and scope of work.
- NGOs must not think that Panchayats are not capable of spending money, instead create a new role of facilitation to Panchayats for better service delivery.
- NGOs must play a role in integrating the work of Line Departments and Panchayats in their support to local governance.

- As Panchayats are getting money under central schemes, the agenda of holistic development may take a backseat. This is where the NGOs should come in and check sectoral or compartmentalized tendencies of scheme based development. NREGA is a good opportunity to engage with Panchayats in a facilitative role.
- While earlier the focus was to reach to the Panchayats and mobilize Gram Sabhas, now the focus should be going a level deeper. NGO interventions need to be more innovative towards involving the citizens.
- The capacity building interventions must be in tandem with the extent of devolution.
- District Planning Committee should be the central point of convergence

## The way forward: suggestions for LoGIn

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**The participants took the initiative of making a few suggestions for SDC to consider taking on board in its work in the future for supporting decentralisation and local governance. These were:**

- The change of SDC's role: Less funder, more knowledge exchanger is valued
- There is a need to support exchange between Panchayats, federations of EWRs, etc. all over India
- Panchayat to Panchayat Programme: should be widened across the country as it has definitely shown positive results, e.g. Sikkim: Formation of standing committees: Idea came from a Panchayat to Panchayat exchange visit to Kerala: Sikkim didn't replicate the system from Kerala, but adapted it in a modified way, fitting to the Sikkim context
- There is a need to focus on qualitative research and documentation
- Any strategy to institutionalise some good practices should also include the SIRDs
- There is a growing need to support the evolution of forums of Panchayati Raj Institutions

## Workshop Evaluation

Some responses from the participants were:

What I learnt	Suggestions for future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to engage with local bodies independently</li> <li>• Need to engage with government institutions</li> <li>• Need to have interventions cross cutting sections of society</li> <li>• Developed a better understanding on decentralization</li> <li>• Learnt new dimensions to decentralization</li> <li>• Realized that it is possible to accomplish a lot by directly working with Panchayats</li> <li>• Learnt about experiences of others</li> <li>• Learnt that I am not alone</li> <li>• Learnt about many good practices and got many practical ideas which can be integrated in my work</li> <li>• Learnt about the emerging challenges and the need for NGOs to revisit their role</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Such workshops should be organized every six months</li> <li>• These practices should be seen in changing times</li> <li>• Such programme for Gram Panchayat representatives of different states should be organized</li> <li>• Exchange workshops across South Asia and between India and Switzerland</li> <li>• Organize Panchayat to Panchayat visits</li> <li>• Need to cover topics under 74<sup>th</sup> CAA and PESA</li> <li>• Develop a Bank of Good Practices</li> <li>• Form networks of Best Practices</li> <li>• Conduct interface, research and other exchange</li> <li>• Initiatives for exchange and action research should be taken</li> <li>• More engagement with the documenters before the report is finalized</li> </ul>
What I liked	What I did not like
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional diversity</li> <li>• Interesting Methodology</li> <li>• Respectful facilitation</li> <li>• Participatory ethos</li> <li>• Lively and interesting programme</li> <li>• Free learning environment</li> <li>• Good time management</li> <li>• Initiatives by SDC and the results that they have yielded in the field</li> <li>• Meeting interesting people</li> <li>• Meeting old friends</li> <li>• Learning about gamut of work in the field of local governance</li> <li>• Quality of discussions were very enriching</li> <li>• Excellent hospitality</li> <li>• Felt at home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hectic schedule</li> <li>• Tight schedule</li> <li>• Too much packed in too little time</li> <li>• Over luxurious</li> <li>• Prices of the venue</li> <li>• Limited scope to speak and answer questions</li> </ul>

## Annexure 1: Programme for the Good Practices Workshop

**Day 1, 24th August 2009**

Time	Topic	Organisation
0930 1030	Welcome and Opening Note Introductions	SDC
1030 1130	Pre Election Voters Awareness Campaign (PEVAC)	PRIA and Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra
1130 1230	Federating locally elected women representatives at the State Level	Mahila Rajsatta Andolan & RSCD
1230 1330	Federating locally elected women representatives at the District Level	Kachch Mahila Vikas Sangathan
1330 1400	Discussants' Feedback on the morning session Presentations	Panel of Discussants
1400 1500	Lunch	
1500 1600	Strengthening Gram Panchayats to integrate disaster preparedness in village level micro planning	The Hunger Project
1600 1700	Strengthening Gram Panchayats through provisioning of untied Village Development Funds.	Kachch Nav Nirman Abhiyan
1700 1800	Decentralised Training Provisioning for elected representatives and frontline functionaries	IGPR & GVS
1800 1830	Discussants feedback on the presentations made post lunch	Panel of Discussants



## Day 2, 25<sup>th</sup> August 2009

Time	Topic	Organisation
0900 0930	Review of previous day/ Other Announcements	SDC
0930 1030	Strengthening capacities of Gram Panchayats for habitation level planning and integrated Village Development Planning	Intercooperation
1030 1130	Democratizing participation below the Gram Panchayat through the setting up and empowerment of Standing Committees.	Melli Dhera Gram Panchayat Unit, South Sikkim
1130 1230	Strengthening administrative and governance systems of Gram Panchayats	Grameen Padana Kendram
1230 1300	Discussants' Feedback on the morning session Presentations	Panel of Discussants
1300 1400	Lunch	
1400 1500	Strengthening Gram Panchayats to take up natural resource management and conservation and development of sustainable habitat norms	Maithri
1500 1600	Organising and streamlining the functioning of <i>Jaagratha Samithis</i> in Gram Panchayats	Centre for Rural Management
1600 1630	Discussants' Feedback on the Presentations made in the Post lunch session	Plenary
1630 1730	Open Session & Next Steps	Plenary
1730 1745	Evaluation and Closure	Plenary

## Annexure 2: List of Participants (24th – 25th August)

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## **Annexure 3: Scheme of Presentation**

- a. Overall Context (1 slide)
  - b. Rationale/Justification/Reasons/Purpose for which the Experience/Practise was needed to be introduced (1 slide)
  - c. Description of the Experience/Practise (4 slides) (indicators for c.:What does it intend to accomplish, Who are the concerned stakeholders, What are the processes entailed, What are the resources required etc)
  - d. Resources required (1 slide)
  - e. Achievements / Outcomes Achieved/ Indicators of success (1 slide)
  - f. Challenges/Critique (1 slide)
  - g. Current Status (1 slide)
  - h. Any other information (2 slides)
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## **Annexure 4: About Login**

### **Local Governance Initiative South Asia – LoGIn South Asia**

#### **BACKGROUND**

One of the key pillars of SDC's work in South Asian countries is to strengthen local governance and decentralisation. One of SDC's key initiatives is to encourage knowledge exchange and cooperation between countries in the South. Among the offices of the Swiss Cooperation Offices in the South Asian region and its partners in recent years a demand emerged to support an exchange programme on decentralisation. An Independent Evaluation commissioned by SDC in 2007 furthermore encouraged a stronger cooperation with Swiss actors. There was also a clear demand from the NGOs that SDC works with, that more knowledge should be exchanged and information available from not only countries in the South but also from countries of the North. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj in India put in a clear demand for exchanges of knowledge and experiences of practices of federalism with Switzerland. These demands and issues lead SDC to start the 'Local Governance Initiative (LoGIn)'. The project supports local governance and decentralisation in India, but also other South Asian countries where it is present, namely in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The project equally supports knowledge exchange between countries in the South and between Switzerland and the countries mentioned above.

#### **GOAL**

The overall goal of the project is to promote accountable, transparent and inclusive decentralised governance in South Asia, which allows greater involvement of the citizens in leading and managing local development while assigning priority to the needs of the economically weaker and socially marginalised groups of society.

#### **APPROACHES**

- The project focuses on promoting regional knowledge exchanges on relevant decentralisation issues in the countries in South Asia, where SDC is present as well as between countries in the South.
- The project also entails consolidation and capitalisation of experiences in these areas supported so far in India.
- The experiences and the lessons learnt will be transferred to relevant actors and policy makers, which should lead to the emergence of strong associations of elected representatives. This should also feed into multi stakeholder platforms to do policy research and advocacy.
- Through collaborative research and exchange programmes the exchange of experiences and lessons is promoted. The project focuses on supporting the exchange between Switzerland and South Asia on good practices relating to strengthening federalism, direct democracy and to promoting fiscal devolution.

## EXPECTED RESULTS

- Relevant stakeholders in India and the region are aware of experiences and key learnings from the projects supported by SDC on decentralisation and local governance and are able to implement them in their programmes.
- The process of fostering knowledge exchange in the field of local governance across countries of South Asia is institutionalised.
- Multi stakeholder platforms of civil society organisations and select federations of elected representatives in India undertake policy research, disseminate knowledge, policy advocacy, and promote the scaling up of good practices emerging from decentralisation projects supported by SDC.
- Swiss experiences in direct democracy and fiscal decentralisation and good practices relevant to the subcontinent are known to relevant actors in South Asia.

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