

Dear friends,

The past two months have seen hectic campaigns during the local government elections in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. PRIA was involved in building awareness among candidates and voters on voters' rights, duties, electoral processes and norms, Dalit rights, sex selection, child marriage, dowry, gender-based discrimination and violence against women. PRIA has been successful in mainstreaming the issues and the campaigns carried out in collaboration with hundreds of civil society organisations in these states have created lasting impact on the candidates and electorate.

Sincerely,
Editor

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News

High-octane Campaigns Marked Panchayat Elections in Rajasthan

Thanks to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), there was high excitement in the recently held Panchayat elections in Rajasthan. NREGS has a large corpus of fund and Panchayats are the implementing agencies. This has led to more dynamism in the campaigns, especially those mobilised for election to the post of Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayats. PRIA in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) conducted a Pre-Election Voter Gender Awareness Campaign (PEVGAC) focusing on voters' rights, duties and gender issues in more than 500 Panchayats of the state.

[Read more](#)

NGOs Rendezvous with the Union Finance Minister

Setting a new precedent, representatives of NGOs like PRIA, Pratham, Pradan, Sadhan, Development Alternatives and HelpAge India met the Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee as part of the pre-budget consultation called by him. They raised the issue of improved service delivery rather than more allocation for various sectors in the budget.

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Urban Issues Yet to Become an Agenda in Governance

Representatives of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and urban governance experts at the National Round Table of CSOs on 'Inclusive Urban Governance: Challenges and Opportunities' called for a more aggressive campaign to realise the impact of the 74th Constitutional Amendment on urban governance. They asserted the need to ensure democratic decentralisation, upscaling of citizen participation and social accountability in urban local governance institutions, realising citizens' rights to basic urban services and inclusion of the informal sector in planning.

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Male-dominated Society a Challenge for Women to Realise Their Leadership Potential

Expressing her concerns on male-dominated society as a challenge for women to realise their leadership potential, Ms. Vibha Rao, Chairperson, State Women's Commission, Chhattisgarh, said that it is time for women to develop their leadership qualities and come forward to take their rightful place in the mainstream of society. Ms. Rao was speaking at the state-level workshop organised by PRIA at Aditya Hotel, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, 29 December 2009.

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Long Road to Devolution

Bihar is one of the states, which has devolved all the 29 subjects listed in Schedule XI of the Constitution to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The state has also completed the activity mapping exercise. However, because of poor devolution on the aspects of functionaries and funds, the impact is not substantial. These findings were based on a study of the devolution of functions, functionaries and funds in the health sector.

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Priacash Now Online

PRIA has launched <http://www.priacash.org/>, a website to disseminate information and generate awareness among people on the issue of sexual harassment at workplaces. It concurs with the launch of the Campaign Against Sexual Harassment (CASH) at the workplace. The website covers all aspects of sexual harassment such as its definition and impact, what constitutes the workplace, policy measures, how to form a Committee Against Sexual Harassment, capacity building on the issue, cases of sexual harassment, FAQs and resource materials.

PRIA and University of Victoria Launch Masters in Community Development



In a unique partnership with the University of Victoria (UVic), Canada, PRIA has launched a two-year Masters of Arts in Community Development (International). This professional programme, to be conducted by the School of Public Administration, UVic, will be supplemented by PRIA's practical insights and learning from the field.



[Read more](#)

Feature/Commentary

Helpline on Panchayat Elections

Mankmal Garg of Mokhampura village of Pali, Rajasthan was contesting for the post of Sarpanch for the first time. The Returning Officer rejected his nomination papers on the grounds that he had not submitted the no dues certificate along with the nomination papers. Garg sought the related information through the helpline established by PRIA for educating candidates and voters on the Panchayat elections in the state. The helpline provided information on no dues certificates, domicile certificates, the two-child norm, criminal antecedents and declaration of assets. Garg was helped with the information that only former Panchayat members were required to submit a no dues certificate. The Returning Officer accepted his error when Garg followed up on the issue with him, and his nomination papers were accepted. Garg won the election by a margin of 290 votes.

Spotlight

Mandatory Voting in Local Government Elections

Elections are an important feature of democratic polities. It is considered as civic responsibility and a citizen's duty to vote in elections. As voter participation in elections is a critical input in realising democracy, in many countries it is regulated by making it a citizen's right and duty. In some countries voting is mandatory. Belgium, Argentina and Australia are pioneers in introducing mandatory voting laws. Fines, sanctions, disenfranchisement, etc. are some of the measures adopted by these countries to ensure compliance in elections.

Recently, the state legislature of Gujarat amended the Bombay Provincial Municipal Corp. Act 1949, the Gujarat Municipalities Act 1963 and the Gujarat Panchayats Act 1993. The amendment made voting compulsory in elections to local self-government bodies, including Municipal Corporations, Municipalities and Panchayats. As per the amendment, if a voter fails to vote for reasons other than those prescribed in the rules, he/she may be declared a 'defaulter voter'. However, the amendment is silent about the consequences for a defaulter voter.

Gujarat is the first state in the country to formulate such legislation. Political parties are divided on the benefits of mandatory voting. Although some countries have made voting compulsory, they are unable to strictly enforce it. There is also the view that voter awareness campaigns would be a more effective measure to drive voters to the polling booth, rather than making voting mandatory.

Looking Ahead

Bridging Research and Practice on Strengthening Dalit Leadership in Local Governance for Ensuring Social Justice, IIPA, New Delhi, 23--24 February

In an effort to share and develop new knowledge, concepts, insights and practical innovations for institutionalisation of social inclusion through strengthening of Dalit leadership in Panchayats, PRIA in collaboration with Dr. Ambedkar Chair in Social Justice at the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) is organising a national consultation at IIPA, New Delhi, 23--24 February.

[Read more](#)

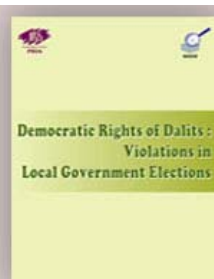
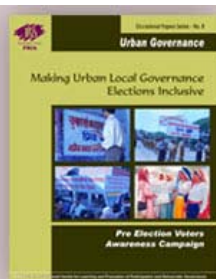
Resources

Democratic Rights of Dalits: Violations in Local Government Elections

Published by PRIA and the National Dalit Election Watch (NDEW), this is a pilot study undertaken in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan on the nature and extent of violations of Dalits' right to franchise and the right to contest elections during Panchayat elections.

Making Urban Local Governance Inclusive: Pre-Election Voters' Awareness Campaigns

This Occasional Paper published by PRIA highlights its experience in conducting the Pre-Election Voter Awareness Campaign (PEVAC) in several states in the country.



PRIA and Me



Unnati, Organisation for Development Education, began its activities in the state of Gujarat in 1990. Since the beginning, it has been committed to understanding and connecting grassroots work to advocacy about macro-level policies. It has been providing intensive support to a large number of initiatives in strengthening their capacities for project planning, monitoring and documentation. PRIA had by this time clearly established the relevance of Regional Support Organisations (RSOs) for empowering the grassroots and also the organisation. And it is this that led to the coming together of Unnati and PRIA.

The nature of Unnati's partnership with PRIA has been changing, as it happens in any relationship. What has been remained same is our joint quest to find answers to many developmental questions, dilemma and to look for future directions. Having joint project to work on an issue may not be a regular feature of the present relationship; however it does not come in the way of our joint developmental dialogue and strategising for making wider impact. I believe our collaborations mutually strengthen our individual understanding and skills, and overall our collective ability to make a larger impact in creating an inclusive and equitable society.

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