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PRIA

April 2000

Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions in India PRIA & PARTNERS



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PRIA is an international centre for learning and promotion of participation and democratic governance. It promotes people centred development initiatives within the perspective of participatory research, the essence of which is, "Knowledge is Power".

An area of PRIA's programmatic work is strengthening institutions of local self-governance. The overarching mission of the Centre for Local Self-Governance is to contribute towards making Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Municipal Bodies effective institutions of local self-governance.

Box 1:

PRIA's Perspective on Local Self Governance (PRIs & Municipal Bodies)

1. PRIs and Municipal Bodies are to be viewed as institutions of local self-governance, and not as mere implementers of externally determined development programmes.
2. Bottom-up comprehensive planning, based on micro-planning exercises, is to be the basis of self-governance. PRIs should not be allowed to become the third tier of development administration.
3. Emphasis must be placed on active participation in decision making by women and other weaker sections to enhance their role, status and leadership in local self-governance.
4. Intervention in strengthening local self-governance should focus on building, promoting and empowering new leadership of women, Dalits and scheduled tribes.
5. Institutions of local self-governance should assert their access to and control over local natural and human resources as well as their entitlements to be made available by state and Central governments.
6. Strengthening institutions of local self-governance will entail developing an understanding of their roles, systems of governance, accountability, and transparency and inter-linkages.

Strengthening institutions of local self-governance has been a continuing programme of PRIA and its partners over the past five years. After the Strategic Review of PRIA's work in 1999, the programmatic work was divided into different clusters, each thematically focused on a key constituency. As a result, PRIA, along with its partners, made a long-term commitment to engage with issues of local self-governance for at least the next 10 years. The programmatic activity, which focused on self-governance, was institutionalised by setting up a Centre for Local Self-Governance. Within the perspective to strengthen PRIs and Municipal Bodies as effective institutions of local self-governance, the Centre's mission is to work towards promotion of policies, institutions and capacities that strengthen the voice and participation of the disenfranchised sections of society. It is the Centre's belief that informed, empowered citizens can participate in deepening democracy, with respect and tolerance for plurality and diversity.

LOCAL SELF GOVERNANCE MISSIONS

Large-scale interventions simultaneously aimed at repositioning programmes in collaboration with the Network of Collaborating Regional Support Organisations (NCRSOs) to assure:

1. Motivation of citizens and facilitating their participation in self-governance through education and knowledge support
2. Comparative programmes of research and action to enable collective learning, capacity building and advocacy in the future
3. Information to be systematised and translated into local languages and complemented by websites to address *panchayats* as well as Municipality issues in an integrated perspective

Phases in the programme on strengthening PRIs in India:

Together with NCRSOs, a joint action programme on multi-sectoral strategic interventions for strengthening PRIs in India was started in 1995.

JOINT ACTION PROGRAMME ON STRENGTHENING PRIS BY PRIA AND NCRSOS

First Phase

During the first phase covering the period of 1995-1997, the programme had five components:

1. Orientation, training and educational support;
2. Preparation and dissemination of educational material;
3. Micro-planning or bottom-up planning;
4. Research and documentation; and
5. Influencing Government

This intervention was reviewed in 1997 and in the light of field insights and experience, the programme were restructured for the second phase.

Second Phase

In the second phase (1997-2000), the programme design consisted of four inter-related components:

1. **Directly Strengthening PRIs:** This is a significant component of the strategic framework, where each partner is to work intensively with a select number of Gram Panchayats focusing on at least one block in a district. This field lab is to be the basis of learning, experimentation and innovation as well as a place for dissemination of new ideas to other actors. Directly strengthening PRIs will move from working at the Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha levels to also establishing linkages with Panchyat Samiti and Zilla Parishad at the district level.

The major activities under this strategy include the following:

- a) Capacity building initiatives, including training, dialogues at the district and block levels to strengthen interaction, improve awareness and understanding, and motivate action.
- b) Continuation of bottom-up micro-planning exercise in a cluster of Gram Panchayats in the block. The lessons learnt from this is to be shared with other partner Vas. Continues process documentation of the experience and lessons learnt to be strengthened to provide for sharing lessons and creating multiplier effect of innovations. Exposure visit for Gram Panchayat leaders,

women leaders, Dalit *panchayat* leaders and others to be supported to strengthen learning and diffusion of innovations.

- c) Setting up of resource and information centres at the block level. Each partner in this programme (PRIA and RSO) is to convert itself into a State Resource Centre. Likewise, in collaboration with selected VAs who have committed to work on strengthening PRIs, resource/information centres to be set up at block and *panchayat* levels
- d) Preparation of learning materials, awareness raising documents and other forms of information dissemination to be a significant component of this strategy.

2. **Promotional interventions:** The second strategy is more extensive promotional intervention. Direct work in the field by each partner and a select group of VAs would be supplemented with simultaneous strategy of promotional activities on an extensive level in each state. Key target constituencies are new Voluntary Agencies, Nehru Yuva Kendras, women's groups, college students and other such associations. Sharing of information and perspective building on PRIs will encourage them to engage themselves in the strengthening of grassroots democracy.

The various activities include:

- a) Structured and well prepared dialogues at the district level with the Zilla Parishad and Government functionaries to focus on improving their role in supporting effective functioning of village level Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha
- b) Work directly with media and build relationships on an extended basis, so that continuous ongoing public education of this important issue is carried out through the media, and important areas for intervention of policy makers are highlighted and projected from time to time.
- c) Structured support will be extended to those partner VAs who are willing to engage themselves in micro-planning initiatives.

3. **Research and Advocacy:**

- a) There is a need for pursuing a more systematic and intensive research exercise to document experiences on the issues of the functioning of Gram Panchayats and its accountability to the Gram Sabha, with new leadership of women and Dalits and the linkages between Gram Panchayat and the other two tiers of governance on the one hand, and government functionaries and departments on the other. Devolution of financial resources and autonomy to local bodies to mobilise other resources is another area of research.
- b) Each partner is to carry out research within a common framework at the state-level and engage in direct sharing of results to improve advocacy at the state level. Simultaneously, national level synthesis of research findings to be undertaken to influence policy at the national level. Dissemination of research findings for wider public education to be an integral and important activity.

4. **Networking:** This is primarily aimed at strengthening networking among leaders of PRIs, women leaders and others working on strengthening PRIs at the village, block and district levels. Support to build such networks, share experiences and extend mutual support to each other to be provided by PRIA and its partner RSOs. Such a process may result in greater and more intensified pressure from below at the block, district and state levels.

PRIA and its partner organisations further systematised and analysed their programmatic strategies during the year under review (1999-2000). The interventions covered 12 states—Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Maharashtra and Kerala, over a varying scale. The initial work was started in Tamil Nadu. The work involved a range of actors, including RSOs, VA partners, government agencies and officials, CBOs and elected representatives in *panchayats*. In this work, PRIA (and its network) received very significant support from the Government of India in the Ministry of Rural Development.

By April 1999, the programmatic interventions by PRIA and its partners in this phase had covered more than 15,000 elected representatives of about 1,500 Gram Panchayats in more than 100 Zilla Panchayats by involving about 300 voluntary organisations. Many new partners were joining PRIA in this process, as it expanded the outreach of such interventions during the second phase in 1999-2000.

ACTIVITIES (1999-2000)

The main activities undertaken over the last one year included pre-election voters awareness campaigns, capacity building of elected representatives and voluntary organisations, facilitation of micro-planning, setting up of *panchayat* resource centres, information dissemination, policy advocacy, research, preparation of educational materials, strengthening of Gram Sabhas, organisation of Mahila Sammelans, workshops, seminars, publication of newsletters and bulletins. The details of all activities are described in the intervening sections of this report.

A. PROGRAMME INTERVENTION IN THE STATES

1. DIRECT STRENGTHENING

Under this programme, it was envisaged that each partner would work intensively with a select number of Gram Panchayats focusing on at least one block in a district on its own. This cluster of Gram Panchayats was to act as field labs. The approach was to be that of action research providing rich experiences and basis for experimentation, innovation and learning. Further, these focal *panchayats* were to emerge as exemplars for other *panchayats* as well as other actors in the environment.

Some of the major activities under this strategy included mobilising participation for Gram Sabhas, establishing Panchayat Resource Centres (PRCs), capacity building, micro-planning and the preparation of educational material.

Participatory Planning and Mobilising Gram Sabhas

PRIA and NCRSOs have been engaged in carrying out participatory micro-planning exercises in several states. According to our perspective, participatory bottom-up planning is to be the basis of local self-governance. The main purpose of these pilot micro-planning projects was to demonstrate people's participation and involvement in formulating village-based *panchayat*-level plans. It was a learning process for the NGO staff involved.

In micro-planning, a village or ward is taken as the unit of planning. In this participatory form of planning, the planners are themselves the implementers of the plan, unlike the conventional top-down approach where plans were made elsewhere. In this form of planning, the social sector issues like health, education, women's development etc., are also taken into consideration. There is a need for local resource mobilisation from various sources, since micro-planning can never be successful by being dependent on government schemes. Micro-planning with peoples' participation is perhaps one of the most important ways of strengthening Gram Panchayats.

In Haryana, PRIA facilitated the participatory micro-planning in the Balaicha Gram Panchayat of Mahendragarh District, in collaboration with its partner organisation, Jan Seva Kendra. In several meetings with the community groups, villagers undertook participatory needs assessment and prioritisation. Irregular water supply was identified as a problem requiring immediate solution. To overcome this problem, the suggestion from the community was to build a water tank that could store water even for the lean season. The community mobilised a part of the resources needed and PRIA contributed a part. However, a change in the governments' schematic pattern led to delays in securing full funding for the project and its completion. In Gujarat, UNNATI, identified two clusters of *panchayats*—in the Bavala Taluk (in the five Gram Panchayats of Shiyal, Dharaji, Devedthal, Zamp and Rasam) of Ahmedabad District, and the tribal Poshina area of Sabarkanta district (in the five Gram Panchayats of Ajawas, Dantial, Kalikankar, Chandrana and Ambamhuda). Several meetings were organised to enable villagers to recognise the importance and need for their active participation in PRIs. Activities undertaken in Bavala, in collaboration with the Gujarat Research Organisation Unit for Planning were mobilising Gram Sabhas, activating effective functioning of the *panchayat* bodies and the formation of the Matdar Committee (Voters Committee). In Poshina, meetings

were conducted to disseminate information on the accountability of representatives as well as government functionaries towards the community and to promote active participation of villagers in the entire process. These activities were conducted by UNNATI with its local partner, Nav Deep Pragati Yuvak Mandal. A micro-planning exercise was conducted at the Dantral Gram Panchayat. As a result, community interest was generated, skills of the people were enhanced, and links with government officials at the Taluka and State Level was established.

In Rajasthan, UNNATI identified two clusters of Jawaja in the Ajmer District and Pugal in the Bikaner District. Besides facilitating meetings, assistance in research, documentation and monitoring was provided in collaboration with Shanti Maitri Mission (SMM) in Pugal and Magra Mewar Vikas Sansthan (MMVS) at Jawaja in Ajmer. In Mandore Block of Jodhpur district, mobilising participation in Gram Sabhas, information and awareness generation about issues for Gram Sabhas was accomplished with the collaboration of the Mahila Jagruti Dals (women's awareness groups) that were constituted in 10 villages.

In Uttar Pradesh, Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra (SSK), in association with Lok Mitra undertook initiatives to conduct regular meetings of GP, to strengthen Village Education Committees (VEC) and promote participation in Gram Sabhas. These activities were undertaken in Rae Bareli and Ghazipur Districts.

In the process of facilitation of the preparation of micro-plans by the field based partner organisations with Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha members, certain difficulties were faced. These were related with the techniques of PRA, use of the information collected before the planning process, etc., as a result, it was decided that a Refresher Programme should be organised for the partner organisations. This was organised in May 1999, in which 20 Vas participated.

In Himachal Pradesh, a workshop for strengthening PRIs was conducted in Shimla by PRIA. The participants were representatives of NGOs, elected members, *mahila mandals* and youth groups. The objectives of the workshop were (a.) to develop a shared understanding for the need to strengthen PRIs and (b.) to the role of micro-planning and Panchayati Raj Resource Centre in strengthening and ensuring participation of Gram Sabha members.

A one-day workshop on micro-planning orientation was organised by the Rural Technology and Development Centre (or RTDC; one of PRIA's partner organisations in Himachal Pradesh) on January 12, 2000. The workshop was supported by the District Administration, Mandi, 'Mandi Saksharta Samiti' Block Development Office, Sadar. The participants were representatives of Gram Panchayats, Upagram Sabha representatives and volunteers of Mandi Saksharta Samiti from Baggi, Dador, Kummi, Sakroha, Gagaj, Bhadyal, and Behna *panchayats* of Mandi district. The relevant learning materials were provided by PRIA.

An orientation workshop in Mandi was jointly organised by RTDC and PRIA during March 28–30, 2000. The purpose of the workshop was to share our own experiences in creating a *panchayat*-level micro-plan, as well as to interact with the other NGOs from the state for their experiences in conducting micro-planning exercises or their understanding of the concept of micro-planning. Another purpose was to chalk out a plan of action for participants to incorporate collective planning concepts and practices in their area of work. The participants were mainly from organisations like the Energy Environment Group (Una), Samaj Seva Parishad, (Kangra), Chinmaya Tapovan Trust, (Kangra), RTDC (Mandi), PRIA (Kangra), and Surbhi (Sirmaur). Also present were the Chairperson of the Mandi Zila Parishad, a member of the Zila

Parishad, Mandi, and members of the Himachal Gyan Vigyan Samiti. The workshop was inaugurated by Shri DD Thakur, Chairperson, Zila Parishad, Mandi district. The residential workshop was held at the Panchayat Bhavan, Mandi. The entire workshop was based on the sharing of experiences of the people present at the event. Some of the micro-planning experiences shared included:

- Kehar Panchayat Plan, Mandi district
- Khalwahan Panchayat Plan, Mandi district

Each organisation prepared their action plan for micro-planning. A core team of NGOs was created—to mainly lobby with the government on various issues related to the Panchayati Raj. This core team consists of nine NGOs, including PRIA and some elected PRI members, especially members of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayat Parishad. The core team included NGOs like SUTRA, RTDC, Navrachna, SRDA, Himalaya Bachao Samiti, SAVE, HJVSS, PRIA and HGVS. As a follow up to the workshop, the following actions were planned:

1. Meeting of the core team to decide on the follow-up action, which includes lobbying with the government, coordination and collaboration with the other NGOs in the state, to be organised in mid-April
2. Organisation of a state level convention at CTT
3. Organisation of a training and orientation workshop on micro-planning for NGOs of Himachal Pradesh
4. PRIA will be taking out a poster on micro-planning, in collaboration with partner organisation, RTDC

PRIA has been involved with RTDC since 1996 in the preparation of a detailed, people-centred participatory planning process in Kehar Panchayat, Mandi district. The co-ordinator of RTDC is also the Pradhan or President of the Panchayat. The planning process took over a year, and after the plan was approved by the Gram Sabha, it was submitted to the other tiers of governance, concerned government departments, the Chief Minister, the Governor, and the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, etc. However, for a year, no action was taken by the government in terms of funds disbursal for implementation of the plan. It was after a year that the plan received recognition from the government along with the release of a certain percentage of the fund for implementation purposes. This was mainly due to the constant meetings and dialogues that took place between the Panchayat representatives and the state and district level administration. RTDC also had a major role to play in this regard. Today, the Government of Himachal Pradesh has been greatly sensitised and has accepted the model of participatory planning that was undertaken in Kehar Panchayat. In fact, the staff of RTDC and PRIA were also resource persons in the trainings that were organised by the state government on micro-planning for all the blocks.

Box 2:**State Government of Himachal Pradesh to Adopt Local Level Planning**

On October 27, 1999, an important decision was taken by Himachal Pradesh Council of Ministers regarding people's participation in local development. This decision was circulated vide the Rajpatra No. PCH-H(3)2/96-210-25 dated 5/11/99. It was decided that *gram panchayats*, *mahila mandals*, youth groups, farmers associations, NGOs and other *gram sabha* members will prepare micro-plans based on their needs and priorities. Following their approval in *gram sabha* meetings, these plans will be sent to the DC and related departments for further actions. Through the DC, the Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj will implement these plans under the LDP, Employment Assurance Scheme, DCP/SDP, the SSF relief fund, etc. About 75% of the fund will be used under these schemes. The attendance of the school staff, health institutes, animal husbandry dispensary, Aganwadi Centres, selecting locations for public taps or hand pumps will be checked by the Panchayat, PS and ZP. The attendance report will be sent to the concerned departments at the district level. To the extent that the Panchayat will be selecting and appointing Panchayat functionaries. Ideally, this is an important step in strengthening PRIs; but in reality, there are gaps.

Analysis of Government Notification on Micro-planning in Himachal Pradesh

1. According to the government notification, 75% of LDP, DCP, EAS, Relief Fund, small savings prize money will be disbursed according to the micro-plan. In the month of November, however, within a month of the announcement of the above Rajpatra, Rs. 15 lakh was given to MLA Fund to be disbursed according to the concerned MLAs. It is to be seen whether these funds will be utilised for the plan prepared by the people.
2. The LDP has been almost abolished and DCP is being abolished too, while the EAS Fund is a centre-controlled fund. The powers for preparation and implementation of micro-plans by *panchayats* have been given, but the schemes that have been allotted for these interventions either do not have the money, or are in process of being abolished.
3. The *panchayats* will prepare the micro-plans and send them directly to the DC without being consolidated at the Block or District levels. According to the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, No. 184, however, *panchayats* will send their micro-plans to the PS. After being consolidated at this level, they will be sent to the District level, wherein they will be consolidated by the District Planning Committee (DPC). So far, however, a DPC has not been formed in Himachal Pradesh. The roles of the Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad are to be assessed in this case.
4. According to the Act, all the 15 departments should present their annual plans in the GS for approval before rolling out the work. No state department has taken any steps to act according to the Act, however.
5. Conducting and preparing a report on micro-planning typically involves a minimum period of two months, and hence, there is a need to postpone the last date for submission of micro-plans from March 31 to May 30, 2000.

In Kerala, SAHAYI organised meetings in areas where it had initiated micro-planning exercises—West Kallada and Kollam. These meetings sought to involve farmers, Panchayat Samiti members and government officials in an effort to initiate integrated farming in the Panchayat area.

In Odisha, Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD) initiated micro-planning efforts in the Garedipanchan Gram Panchayat of Balipatna Block. In addition, local information was collected from 50 villages of the Baligaon Gram Panchayat in the Boipariguda Block of Koraput district, for sharing with the local communities for participatory planning.

In Madhya Pradesh, Samarthan expanded coverage in Sehore through micro-planning efforts under the Watsan project, covering 127 Gram Panchayats consisting of 294 villages. Detailed micro-planning exercises were conducted along with 10 partner organisations in 67 villages.

Box 3:

Learning from the Micro-planning Process in Madhya Pradesh

1. A ward is taken as the basic unit of planning and action (as in Kerala's people's plan campaign)
2. The concept of Key Resource Persons (KRP) utilised so extensively in Kerala is being used with modifications. KRPs are identified from among Panchayat representatives, Panchayat *Karmis* and other villagers. The KRPs act as facilitators in the planning process.
3. Issue-based plans are prepared by the people with the facilitation of KRPs. Specific components indicating people's contribution, government/*panchayat* contribution, and if necessary, Samarthan's contribution are identified. Implementation plan is built into the process.
4. Active linkages are established with the concerned government officials during the process, primarily to ascertain available resources.
5. Proposals are submitted to the Janpad Panchayat, concerned department and Samarthan.
6. Although Samarthan's contribution is meant for gap-filling, it is utilised to keep the momentum going and avoid frustration among the people.
7. The role of youth, particularly at the implementation stage, is strongly emphasised.

Based on the joint experiences on micro-planning, certain suggestions have come forth to make the planning process a reality at the *panchayat* level. Some of these are given below:

1. There needs to be dissemination of authentic, relevant, and timely information at the ward level
2. Standing Committees at the *panchayat* level need to be activated
3. There is a need to focus on mobilisation of local resources
4. There is a need for allocation of resources, based on the plan prepared by the people, and the need for community resource mobilisation

Box 4:

Empowerment of Gram Sabha Through Micro-planning

Empowerment of Gram Sabha is possible through micro-planning. In the near future, four Gram Sabhas will be made mandatory at the Constitutional level, with each Gram Sabha meeting having a specific function.

In the first Gram Sabha, the village plan is to be approved, followed by beneficiary selection in the second meeting. The third meeting will be mainly monitoring of plan implementation, followed by social audit in the final meeting.

Capacity Building

Capacity building of various actors involved with PRIs is a very important activity of this joint intervention for strengthening PRIs. Various strategies have been adopted by relevant organisations on capacity building, with emphasis on women and other weaker and marginalised sections of the society.

As part of the capacity building exercise, trainings of elected representatives were undertaken in several states. In Himachal Pradesh, in collaboration with the state and district administration, PRIA had conducted as many as 50 training programmes covering all the blocks of Kangra and Mandi districts. Nearly 4000 elected representatives of Gram Panchayat Samitis were trained. This training proved to be especially helpful for the ward members who had not had such an opportunity earlier. In Uttar Pradesh, Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra organised three, one-day training session for Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas. Seventy-five persons participated, of whom 33 were female. The training was based on the concept of local self-governance. Three training programmes were held for male and female representatives of 14 Gram Panchayats and their Village Education Committees. Two were held in Lucknow, where male members participated; while the third was held at Auriaya where female members attended as well. This was a part of the work that SSK did to 'provide resource support' for Lokarpan, a Catholic Relief Services (CRS) partner organisation, for activation and functioning of Shiksha Samitis at the Gram Panchayat level in the Auraiya district of Uttar Pradesh: Through Lokarpan, a field based NGO, CRS is involved with 15 Gram Panchayats in Biduna and Sahar blocks of the Auraiya district.

In Kerala, SAHAYI conducted a two-day intensive training for PRI members at Harippad, Alapuzha District. Thirty-five elected representatives, including presidents and vice-presidents from six *panchayats* participated, of which 14 were women. The training included skills related to preparation of reports and minutes, effective communication, leadership styles and accounting procedures. Two leadership programmes were also conducted—one in Parappa, Kasargod District, and the other in Alapuzha. So far, SAHAYI has completed 130 programmes in 14 districts to

strengthen Gram Sabhas. Altogether, 8,000 Gram Sabha members have participated in these programmes. The scope of the training includes the Panchayat Raj Act, along with the rules, power and responsibilities of Gram Sabha members, the importance of people's participation in various stages of planning, Ayalkkootom, and the concept of decentralisation. Experience sharing of the participants and group discussions on field realities were common features of these training exercises.

In Odisha, CYSD, along with Lok Vikas, organised three, four-day training and orientation workshops for elected women representatives of PRIs of the Badachanda Block, Jeypore District. Nearly 37 elected representatives took part in the programme. A training programme for elected women representatives from local communities in Boipariguda Block of Koraput District was also organised. The CYSD's PRI cell conducted orientation-cum-awareness programmes for people in general and *panchayat* representatives in particular so that the significance of participation in Palli (ward) Sabhas and Gram Sabhas could be recognised. Some details are given below:

CYSD's PRI cell organised a seven-day programme for the training of trainers on Panchayati Raj for community organisers and field co-ordinators of NGOs during May 17–23, 1999, with the following objectives:

1. To orient the co-ordinator and community organisers of NGOs about the evolution of the Panchayati Raj system
2. To acquaint them about the powers, functions and duties of elected bodies on Panchayati Raj
3. To discuss and analyse the present functions of elected members (both men and women) of Panchayati Raj organisations
4. To facilitate participants to organise awareness programs on Panchayat Raj in their respective operational areas
5. To focus on the organisation and role of Palli Sabhas and Gram Sabhas

A total number of 25 participants from different voluntary organisations operating across seven districts of Odisha participated in this training programme. They were mainly village animators, field co-ordinators, community organisations, project co-ordinators, senior programme consultants and SHG workers of different NGOs.

As part of participatory training, all the participants were given equal importance to share their ideas, queries, expectations and experiences during the entire programme. Several resource persons were invited to deliver lectures and facilitate the discussion history of the Panchayati Raj, Gram Sabha and Palli Sabha, along with devolution of power, funds allocation to the Panchayati Raj, responsibility of women members, scheduled area Act, the role of a trainer, etc., during the programme. Each participant was also given the chance to take a session as a trainer on relevant topics. They were given enough resource materials to become effective for the session.

At the end of the training programme, the participants expressed their views as follows:

1. They had acquired vital, need-based information about ongoing programmes on Panchayati Raj,
2. The programme also provided information on Scheduled Area Act,

3. It equipped them with adequate knowledge for disseminating information within their own operational areas

Lok Vikash, a partner organisation of CYSD's PRI cell, organised training/orientation of four days' for the elected women representatives of Badachana Block, Jajapur District, Odisha. In the first training programme, 37 elected female members of Siha, Darpan, Kamalia Samian and Salpada Gram Panchayats of Badachana Block participated from May 4–7, 1999, at Bhagabati High School, Siha. On the last day of the training, i.e., on May 7, an Interface Workshop was organised by government officials, local villagers and training participants to bring better co-ordination among them to strengthen local self-government.

The second training programme was organised by Lok Vikash from June 18–21, 1999, at Chhatia of Badachana Block. Thirty-five participants, including Ward members, *Naib Sarpanches*, Samiti members from Baini, Bandalo, Paria and Champapur of Badachana Block of Jajapur District. Lok Vikash also organised a few training programmes in Dharmasala Block of Jajapur District. The third training programme on the three-tier Panchayati Raj system was organised at the Araha Gram Panchayat office for a duration of four days from September 8–11, 1999. A total number 35 participants, who included *Sarpanches*, *Naib Sarpanches*, and Ward members comprising 10 men and 15 women of Aruha, Tharuthal, Mahisara and Haridaspur Gram Panchayats had participated in the programme.

The organisation also conducted another training programme from September 24–27, 1999 for 34 participants, comprising 32 female and two male representatives from four GPs of the above block, viz., Badkano, Chormuhan, Patpur and Merjapur. A one-day programme was organised on September 29, 1999, by the same organisation for the elected representatives and representatives of savings group (thrift societies) of five Gram Panchayats of the Badachana Block—namely Salpada, Samiyana, Kaimatia, Singha and Darpan. A total of 65 men and nine women representatives participated in the above programme.

In the said programme, the contents of Letter No. 12692 (30), dated August 8, 1999, issued by the Panchayati Raj department of the State Government of Odisha for bringing about transparency in the Panchayati Raj system by the way of availability of information and inspection of available records were discussed, and a plan formulated. A copy of the above letter was circulated among the participants. According to this letter, all members of the GPs were to be informed about the development schemes, projects and activities by displaying the same in the notice board of the GP office, schools and Anganwadi centres.

Another programme was organised by the above organisation on similar lines on September 30, 1999, for the representatives of the six Gram Panchayats of Chettia, Bandala, Bairi, Bantala, Chamapur and Parias of the above block. A total number of 55 elected representatives participated in this programme.

In Rajasthan, PRIA, along with the district administration, had conducted training programmes in three blocks of Sikar and Jhunjhunu. A total of 500 women elected representatives as well as women Gram Sabhas were trained. Other than training, dialogues and workshops were also organised for women members of all the three tiers and the concerned government officials.

In Madhya Pradesh, Samarthan conducted legal training for Gram Sabha members at Sidhi. Thirty-five women Gram Sabha members participated in it.

The following were the different activities undertaken:

1. TOT on Panchayati Raj animators of various NGOs of Sehore (March 13–15)
2. Samarthan acted as the resource facilitator for training 25 animators from small Vas of Sehore District
3. Participation in workshop/training/collaboration/visits
4. Workshop on local self-governance in South Asia (November 24–26, 1999). In this workshop, *panchayat* representatives from different South Asian countries participated. Besides India, the other participants were mainly from the nations of Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Apart from Samarthan staff, two women panchayat representatives took part and shared their experiences. From Madhya Pradesh, two *panchayat* representatives—including Geeta Rathore, the Sarpanch—of Jamunia Tank Panchayat along with a member of the Janpad Panchayat, Sehore Block, shared their experiences as elected *panchayat* representatives. Participants from other countries too shared their experiences. Samarthan was invited as a resource agency to provide a comparative picture of the country presentations on the power structures at the community level.
5. Participation in the National Workshop on the Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Natural Resource Management (February 2–3, 2000), New Delhi, organised by the Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development, wherein the primary focus was on Panchayati Raj issues. Samarthan's experiences and learnings in preparation of a status report were briefly shared.
6. Sharing of civil society intervention in Panchayati elections at Lucknow (March 7, 2000). Samarthan staff shared the experiences with the staff of SSK and UPVAN.
7. Support to CYSD in preparation of tool kit participation
8. To find exemplary models of community participation, the Samarthan team facilitated and supported CYSD in their visit to Sehore and Indore. The purpose of the effort was to build a website on various experiments on community participation. The experience of Samarthan with youth groups in Sehore has already been placed on the website.
9. Legal training for Gram Sabha members at Sidhi (December 12–14, 1999). Samarthan was involved in the second phase of the legal training of 35 women Gram Sabha members.

Development Audit

Samarthan is working with EDA rural systems in a project of 'development audit', which EDA has undertaken for the World Bank and the State Government of Madhya Pradesh, as a pilot project of the DPIIP project of the State Government of Madhya Pradesh. This pilot project is aimed at testing the DA as a tool and evolving simple methodologies so that it can later be used by Panchayats for assessment of development in their areas.

In the first phase, Samarthan will conduct the DA in two Panchayats in its project area, Sehore—namely, Jamunia and Semaladangi. In the second phase, the same will be conducted in villages where the DPIIP project is going to be launched, and the findings will be related to the DPIIP project. A three-day workshop was held from

March 6–8 in Bhopal to launch the DA project. The first phase was completed before May 15.

In Gujarat, UNNATI conducted training programmes for NGO staff. Twenty-seven personnel of Sarathi Sansthan, Panch Mahal, went through a three-day orientation course on local governance. Personnel of the Rajpipla Social Service Society underwent a three-day training on Tribal Self Rule.

In Himachal Pradesh, an orientation workshop for strengthening PRIs at Shimla was conducted from October 28–30, 1999. The participants were representatives of NGOs, elected members, *mahila mandals* and youth groups. The objectives were— a.) to orient them to the need for strengthening PRIs; and b.) to make them understand the role of micro-planning and the Panchayat Resource Centre in strengthening and ensuring participation of Gram Sabha members.

PRIA's maiden attempt to build linkages with different stakeholders in District Sirmour was conducted over July–September 1999. Based on these meetings and interests created with different stakeholders of Sirmour District, a two-day workshop was organised during February 3–4, at the Municipal Conference Hall at Nahan, Sirmour. This was organised with support from YUMDIIA, Sirmour, and NGOs working with the local youth. The workshop was attended by VA members, elected members, intellectuals, *mahila mandals* and youth groups. The objective was two-fold—to share PRIA's experience of strengthening PRIs in Himachal Pradesh for the last five years, and to sensitise other developmental actors to the realities of PRIs.

In Himachal Pradesh, capacity building initiatives were undertaken for carrying out micro-planning. This was organised by the Department of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development, State Government of Himachal Pradesh. The trainings took place mainly at Himachal Institute of Public Administration (HIPA) at Mashobra, Shimla District. Certain training workshops were also organised at the Panchayati Raj Training Institutes at Mashobra and Baijnath in Kangra District.

The first training programme was organised during December 6–10, 1999, when eight blocks were selected as pilot blocks for the introduction of micro-planning. These were Mandi Sadar and Drang of Mandi District, Nagrota Bagwan and Kangra of Kangra District, Dharampur and Kunihar of Solan District, and Shillai and Nahan of Sirmour District. These trainings were organised for all the 72 Blocks of the state and the participants were mainly Block level government officials like SEBPO, Panchayati Inspectors, Panchayat Secretaries, LSUs, Gram Panchayat Pradhans, NGO representatives, etc.

In the training programmes organised at HIPA, some of the resource persons were PRIA staff. This was mainly because of PRIA's rich experience of carrying out participatory micro-planning in Kehar Panchayat, Mandi District, along with its partner organisation, RTDC. A series of trainings were conducted from January to March 2000, in which PRIA staff acted as resource persons. The content of the trainings were mainly on the need importance of micro-planning and the role of *panchayats*. However, the major emphasis was on how to make the planning process participatory and people centred, especially involving the economically weak and marginalised sections of the community.

Information Dissemination through Panchayat Resource Centres

In the last phase a lot of effort went into information dissemination through posters, pamphlets, simplified versions of state acts, newsletters, etc.; but, a vast majority of

the elected representatives still do not have the adequate information to carry out their duties and functions in the efficient manner.

Timely, relevant, authentic and the right kind of information flow is an important element for the effective functioning of Panchayati Raj bodies. One method for this purpose is setting up Panchayat Resource Centres (PRCs) at various levels, as self-managed entities. Such Information Resource Centres have been set up in some states in partnership with RSOs or local partners. In Uttar Pradesh, SSK promoted PRCs to play the role of support organisations. CBOs/VAs were linked to the PRCs to enable them to take up issues related to *panchayats*. These PRCs also published newsletters highlighting region specific issues. They also organised workshops, meetings, seminars and training programmes.

In Gujarat, UNNATI took the lead in setting up PRCs at the Taluka level in collaboration with the government. A PRC has been established at Ahmedabad in the Ahmedabad Zilla Panchayat premises. It services the two talukas of Daskroi and Siti, covering 100 Gram Panchayats. In Madhya Pradesh, the 'Right to Information' provision has been enacted. The main effort of Samarthan is to provide easy and simplified information to the people. The strategy is to promote PRCs at the village level, Block Resource Centres (BRCs) at the block level, along with a Regional Resource Centre (RRC) and State Resource Centre (SRC) at Samarthan's office in Bhopal.

Samarthan has attempted to build a PRC at the State as well as Block levels. The initial effort was limited to Sehore. The first full-fledged Block level PRC started in Gohad Block of Bhind District with a partner organisation, BRASS. As soon as it started functioning, it caught the imagination of the masses because of the impending Panchayat elections. At present, it covers 88 *panchayats* of the area. The instant success of the pilot project made a case for its expansion. Hence, four more PRCs were started in Ambikapur (Sarguja District) with RIDE, in Sidhi with Gurukul Siksha Samiti, in Janjgir Chappa with Srijan Kendra, and in Gwalior with Bal Mahila Vikas Samiti (BMVS).

These centres have almost all the information about Panchayat related activities and government schemes. Though their focus is on Panchayats, efforts are being made to provide other demand-based information and other assistance like drafting of letters for government officials. The enthusiastic response of people towards these centres point to its utility. The plan, therefore, is to further establish more information centres across different regions of Madhya Pradesh.

The State Resource Centre (SRC) is a repository of information on Panchayati Raj policies, administrative decisions, financial allocations and a variety of research and learning documents on Panchayati Raj issues of Madhya Pradesh, as well as other states. The information centre at the state level has been systematised and is being updated on a regular basis. The information package on Panchayati Raj issues, Panchayat elections, various governmental schemes, and some formats, have been developed. These packages have been given to Block level information centres. Plans are afoot to further simplify governmental plans and translate them in the local language.

In Haryana, seven new Village Information Centres (VIC) were inaugurated in two Blocks of two districts—viz. Ratia Block of Fatehabad District and Kalanaur Block in Rohtak District—during this period. The unique characteristic of these VICs is that they are mostly run by women. The role of VICs is to disseminate information around the village about government schemes, act as a centre for conducting meetings,

debates, and create awareness about Gram Sabhas, elections and amendments to the law.

In Ratia, Self Help Groups are being mobilised under the SGSY scheme. The role of the VICs is mainly to mobilise and motivate the people, especially the youth and women, to form Self Help Groups. Training for these groups are mainly given by Block level officials. The role and responsibility of the PRC is mainly to facilitate the process.

Box 5:

In Haryana, VICs have been visualised as centres where:

1. All village level information and data regarding village population, number of schools, available facilities, people below the poverty line, etc., are available
2. Information about government schemes, provisions in the Panchayati Raj Act, rules and regulations, etc., are made available for Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat members
3. Debates, meetings, planning, etc., are carried out. Also a place where government officials from different departments can congregate and talk about their functions
4. Mobilisation and awareness about Gram Sabhas, elections, new amendments, etc., are carried out

Box 6:

Committee to run a VIC in the Basana Gram Panchayat of Rohtak District, Haryana:

A committee has been formed to run the VIC in Basana Panchayat, Kalanaur Block, Rohtak District. This committee consists of three members from each ward, a total of 33 members from 11 wards. The three members are the *Ward Panch*, a member of the youth club and a member of the *mahila mandal*. These members are responsible for conducting meetings in their wards. They have also collected money from each ward to form a common VIC account. This money will be used for the daily running of the VIC, honorarium for the person-in-charge of the centre, refreshment costs, etc. This committee organised a five-day orientation camp, where the resource persons were mainly members of the Nehru Yuva Kendra .

The VIC at Basana has organised trainings for women, especially on income generation activities. One such training was organised on candle making.

In Himachal Pradesh, PRCs are functioning in five *panchayats* of Kangra District. The purpose of these PRCs is mainly to serve as library-cum-reading rooms, a centre where talks, lectures, demonstrations, etc., can take place. These PRCs are based at the village level and are managed by local community members.

Panchayat Resource Centre at Tatwani

A survey regarding the Women's Awareness Camp was conducted in Tatwani and Kahwwal villages to identify the need for awareness. A *mahila mandal* meeting was held on May 20, 1999.

The PRC at Dohab was initiated with the help of the Panchayat, the youth and *mahila mandals* of Dohab after the Vikas Utsav 1999 was over. A meeting was also held with the local youth to orient them on the use of PRCs. The PRC at Ambadi, Village Dola, needed religious books, books on the life of leaders, books on self-employment, information for government jobs, own infrastructure with a guest room and a person to look after the needs of the PRC. Nine Self Help Groups were formed and members are trying to link it with banks.

A meeting was held at the PRC in Lapiyana on September 7, 1999, with the ex-Pradhan about opening a resource centre. It has initiated a positive response. Vikas Utsav was jointly organised by PRIA and partner organisation, SSP, at Dohab on April 3, 1999. This was the second in the series. The objective of the Utsav was to create awareness among people for Panchayati Raj, to honour two women PRI members for their outstanding contribution to village development. The programme was attended by more than 275 people from Dohab Panchayat and its vicinity.

The monthly meeting of Shine Star Club Dadhamb took place on August 20, 1999. The agenda of the meeting was the need assessment of VRC, financial resources, memberships of the club, picnics, etc.

Initiatives in Promoting PRCs in Rait Block of Kangra District

On December 6, 1999, an individual meeting with the Upa-Pradhan, Pradhan and Mahila Mandal Pradhan was held at the PRC in Bhaled. This was to initiate the

process of opening a PRC at this Panchayat. The importance of Self Help Groups were also discussed. The highlight of the meeting was the villagers' perception of outsiders. They mentioned that so far those who came once did not come back again.

Note: *This Panchayat is in a remote area of Rait Block. Although only 18 km from the Rait Block, the non-availability of public transport and the thick forest area have virtually cut off the region from the main Block. Even from the nearest bus stop, this Panchayat is 3 km away with a steep climb uphill.*

Initiatives in Promoting PRCs in New Blocks of Kangra District

Meetings were conducted with *mahila mandals* of Marouho and Daroh Panchayats for PRCs and participation in Gram Sabha meetings on March 14 and 16, respectively. On March 23, a meeting took place at Garh Ward of Garoh Panchayat with MM. The concept of the PRC, its use and link with development was shared with all participants.

Initiatives in Promoting PRCs in New Districts

On November 26, 1999, a meeting was organised at Dera Baba Rudra by the Energy Environment Group, a partner who has decided to work on information-based resource centres of PRIs. A meeting was organised at Bhadsali on March 9, 2000 to orient elected members, intellectuals and *mahila mandal* members of 10 *panchayats* to orient them to the need and importance of information and its link with PRCs. The focus of development cannot remain restricted only to physical development and the need of other kind of development for the *panchayats* were emphasised in large group discussions. The participants were from the *panchayats* of Saloh, Vadehra, Kangar, Dharampur, Saisowal, Padoga, Khadd, Ishupur, Panjavar, and Nangoli. The Zila Pradesh Chairman and Panchayat Secretary were also present.

Given below is a case study of one of the PRCs functioning in Kangra District:

Box 7:

The PRC at Dhardhamb, Kangra District, Himachal Pradesh: The role of a Sign Star Club, a local community-based organisation

Dhardhamb is a picturesque roadside *panchayat* located 10 km from Dharamsala, the head quarters of Kangra District in Himachal Pradesh. The mainstay of the local economy, as with most *panchayats* in the state, is agriculture. In the summer months, paddy and maize are grown on the terraced fields; and in winter, wheat is produced. The Dharamsala–Chambi State Highway curves around the edge of Dhardhamb, and along its roadside are a couple of shops selling general goods, the *panchayat ghar*, a schoolroom, and an open field where boys can be seen playing cricket in the evenings. It is here that villagers meet each other and talk, passing the time while waiting for a bus or gathering around the water tap where women fill their earthenware jugs. Here, on this roadside, there is a one-room brick building that houses Dhardhamb's Village Resource Centre, and the office of Sign Star Club, the community-based youth organisation, which has taken on the responsibility for the VRC.

Dhardhamb's VRC (community members have decided to call their information centre a 'Village Resource Centre', rather than a 'Panchayat Resource Centre' in order to reflect the range of local needs that it caters) came into existence in March 1999.

The story of Dhardhamb's PRC is very much the story of its prominent youth organisation, Sign Star Club. Understanding the history and activities of the club is crucial to understanding the current state and future prospects for the VRC.

The Sign Star Club officially began in January 1997. The village of Dhardhamb has a long history of organising cultural activities, such as traditional Ramlila performances, traditional dances, and competitions. In 1996, a group of young people organised a sports day in memory of one of their friends who had recently passed away. The sports event was a success, and the group then went on to become a registered club, the Sign Star Club (SSC). Initially focusing on cultural and recreational activities, the group has since undertaken work in the areas of sanitation, social work, village development, plantations, blood donation, and health check-up camps. Today the club has 39 members, with both women and men equally active. Its members are all young, with professions ranging from agriculture and teaching to business and entrepreneurial activities. They are an educated, articulate group who talk freely about the problems of their village and speak of 'seva', their desire to serve their community. The members of this club each contribute a small sum for its maintenance at its monthly meetings. Some of the projects undertaken by the group, particularly those in the realm of rural development, attract funds from the District and Block level administration. In recognition of the good social work accomplished by SSMC, funds for the new PRC building have been provided by the local MLA. In the village of Dhardhamb, the group is seen as efficient, trustworthy, and able to get things done. The Gram Panchayat sometimes calls upon SSC's members to help in organising the visits of political leaders or other official events.

The idea for a PRC in Dhardhamb came from PRIA staff, who introduced the concept to the Gram Panchayat members in one of their monthly Panchayat meetings, in February 1999. The *panches* showed some interest; the Up-Pradhan (who is also a member of the SSC) suggested that SSC would be an ideal group to maintain the PRC, and a meeting between SSC and PRIA staff was subsequently held in the *panchayat ghar*.

From the beginning, the members of SSC had their own vision for the resource centre. As noted earlier, they insisted that their centre be known as a 'Village Resource Centre' (Gram Sansadhan Kendra, Dhardhamb) and that it contain books pertaining to a range of the village's needs—everything from agricultural information to books on competitive exams. The VRC functions as an evening reading-room and lending library. SSC members take turns being 'on duty' at the VRC, issuing books and answering visitors' questions. SSC also plans to make the VRC a place where workshops and educational events take place. In particular, Kewal Sharma, President of SSC, notes that they want to have some programmes specifically geared towards illiterate community members, "So that they can find use in the VRC, too."

PRIA initially provided the basic materials for the VRC, such as books on Himachal's PRIs, PRIA bulletins, books on rural development and women's empowerment. Samaj Seva Parishad, a local NGO has also contributed books, including collections of folk poetry in the local Pahari dialect. PRIA provides the daily newspaper, Punjab Kesri. The Club has also taken up the responsibility for adding new books and materials to its collection.

The members of SSC enjoy good relations with the Gram Panchayat for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Panchayat's Up-Pradhan is also the Director of the club, and so a natural link exists between the two groups. In addition, according to Kewal Sharma, the Gram Panchayat will call upon SSC's members to help them with special activities, such as organising events and rallies. In the winter of 1998, when the Gram Sabha was adjourned twice for not reaching the required quorum of 5% attendance by villagers, the Up-Pradhan called upon SSC to help mobilise people to come to the meeting. The third meeting reached its quorum.

Despite these friendly relations between SSC and the Gram Panchayat, there is no formal link between the Panchayat and the VRC. Asked about the participation of Gram Panchayat members in the creation and maintenance of the VRC, SSC members simply say, "They have no interest in the VRC." Some Gram Panchayat members have themselves come to the VRC to borrow books on the Panchayati Raj system. In fact, the book most often issued is the *Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act*. The VRC is seen as a community space, a place where villagers can go to obtain information on a range of subjects.

In Rajasthan, UNNATI has set up PRCs in two clusters, at Jawaja and Pugal. The former centre caters to 10 Panchayats, but plans are to upscale by reaching all *panchayats*. The latter provides information to 30 villages.

In Kerala, SAHAYI established one State level PRC (Trivandrum), one district level PRC (Kannur) and six grassroots level PRCs. In addition to the information dissemination, the resource centres provided consultancy services to elected representatives and others functionaries of *panchayats*.

1. **Strengthening State PRC:** A perspective building workshop was organised, the objective of which was to increase the utility of materials/information available in the SRC. To help PRI members, Vos, task force members, etc., as well as to understand various socio-economic issues and *panchayat* related activities, to motivate them to visit the SRC during seminars and afterwards.

SAHAYI organised two consultative meetings on January 5 and 17, 2000, at the State PRC. The first programme was meant for voluntary development organisations and SAHAYI's partner organisations. Twenty-five organisation leaders participated in the programme. The next programme was organised for the benefit of VO leaders and other developmental actors of Tamil Nadu. Twenty-five participants from Kanyakumari, Tuticorin, and Gudalur districts of Tamil Nadu participated in the programme.

These programmes have increased the utility of available materials in the state PRC and improved the understanding of the participants on various issues related to the Panchayati Raj.

As follow-up of this two perspective building State level programmes for PRI members, Task force members and VO representatives will be organised on March 20 and 27, 2000, at the State PRC. The topics of these perspective building programmes will be social audit and *panchayat* election procedures.

Another activity was to strengthen infrastructure facilities and data base of the resource centre; to provide up to date information by making available new books and subscribing to periodicals; to improve the information dissemination service.

Book purchase on various topics/subjects was one of the major activities during the reporting period. In order to strengthen the database of SRC, SAHAYI collected sample information from different state government institutions, like the Kerala Institute of Local Administration, Panchayat Directorate, Planning Board, and the Municipality Directorate. The collected information were then compiled and arranged category-wise for speedy identification and retrieval. In addition to this, more furniture racks, rotating display stands, etc., have also been purchased and set up.

The above mentioned activities have improved the infrastructure facilities and strengthened the data of SRC. A functional SRC equipped with full-fledged database was one of the immediate results, apart from the networking of SRC with Panchayati Raj and related institutions, effective storage and speedy retrieval of information. Another activity related to PRC was dissemination of information through news bulletins and journals to make information accessible to various strata of the rural community; to share current and updated information with different SRCs, NRC and other institutions.

During the reporting period, SRC disseminated current and updated information related to PR and other aspects through news bulletin (*Swayambharanam*) and journals (*Voluntary Action*). In addition to this, SRC has been collecting and distributing copies of government circulars/orders and other documents to DRCs, PRCs, Vos and PRIs. This mode of information dissemination has improved the accessibility of information, which has enhanced the involvement of Vos and Gram Sabha members in PRI activities. The disseminated information has enriched the knowledge base of a large number of readers on various themes related to Panchayati Raj. Information has also been dissemination through printed and electronic media.

2. **Strengthening District Resource Centre:** The purpose is to increase the utility of information available in the centre; to help different actors understand various socio-economic issues and *panchayat* related activities, and to motivate various people to visit the resource centre.

During the reporting period, the District Resource Centre (DRC) at Kannur organised a consultative meeting of VOs on October 15, 1999, and one district level workshop of PRI elected representatives on January 13, 2000. Forty-five Panchayati Raj orientations for task force members, Anganwadi teachers, women's organisation leaders, youth groups, parent-teacher associations, Self Help Groups, and local level resource persons of people's campaigns, etc., were organised in different *panchayats* of Kozhikode, Kannur and Kasarkode districts. The DRC has established good rapport with several Gram Panchayats, Block Panchayats and District Panchayats of the northern districts. SAHAYI team members visited 70 *panchayats* of Kannur District and held dialogues with elected representatives and other PRI functionaries. During the *panchayat* visits, the team members gathered valuable information regarding the functioning of the Panchayat and document them for further learning and sharing.

The immediate result were increased utility of the available information in the DRC, improved understanding of various actors on PR and related aspects, improved participation and commitment of marginalised sections in PRI activities, speedy dissemination of updated information. The follow-up will include networking with SRCs and other agencies, information collection/ compilation/ analysis and dissemination, organising intensive training programmes for PRI functionaries, and organising experience sharing events, etc.

3. **Strengthening Panchayat Level Resource Centre:** One activity was organising dialogues with PRI and Gram Sabha members. The purpose was to create an opportunity for Gram Sabha and PRI members for coming together, experience sharing and discussing major issues and concerns related to *panchayats* and help them make use of the available facilities.

Every PRC organised two dialogue/debates during the period, involving PRI elected representatives and Gram Sabha members, i.e., a total of 12 dialogues. The PRCs also helped their concerned Panchayat in plan formation, Gram Sabha/ Ayalkootam organising, promoting people's participation in the developmental activities of *panchayats*, beneficiary committees' information, plan implementation, supervision and evaluation of various schemes, beneficiary selection, etc. These activities have improve the participation and involvement of local citizen's groups in PRIs, as well as improved the accountability and transparency of PRI functionaries.

Factors for sustainability of PRCs:

1. Collaboration possibilities with government and civil society organisations will towards self-managing PRCs
2. Need for formal structures and forms for information collection, storage and dissemination
3. Cost recovery will lead to financial sustainability
4. Need to identify minimum and maximum functions at all levels

Preparation of Educational Material

During the second round of Panchayat Elections held in some states, PRIA and its partners developed educational materials for use in the Pre-Election Campaign (PEVAC). In Haryana and Rajasthan, five posters along with two sets of pamphlets were developed and printed. In order to reach the non-literate populace, regional language audio cassettes were also produced, using local folk characters and idioms. UNNATI (Rajasthan) brought out a booklet explaining the election procedures. Called '*Margdarshika*', it proved useful to the District Administration in orienting its own staff for Panchayat election duties!

In Himachal Pradesh, a brochure on 'Participation in Gram Sabha' was published for dissemination in new areas. A twin poster on '*Gram Sabha Ke Na Hone Ke Kaaran*' and '*Gram Sabha Ki Meeting Kaise Bulaye*' was developed in joint collaboration with local partner organisation, Energy-Environment Group (EEG), Una. A concept note on PRCs was written in English and translated into Hindi for wider dissemination.

In Rajasthan, UNNATI also published '*Panchayati Raj: Ek Parichay*', which gives the basic information of roles and responsibilities of elected representatives. In Madhya Pradesh, for the purpose of voter awareness campaign, Samarthan brought out two publications, a manual entitled, '*Prajatantra Ki Neev : Panchayat Ke Chunav*', which describes in details the technical and other aspects of the electoral process, and a shorter version of the manual, '*Panchayat Chunav: Kuch Jaroori Baten*'.

In Uttar Pradesh, SSK, developed and printed three posters and four pamphlets for use in the Pre-Election Voter Awareness Campaign. This was done in anticipation of the elections in May–June, 2000. It also brought out a manual titled, '*Panchayat Chunav: Matdata Jagaran Hetu Mukhya – Mukhya Baatein*', which details out the process to be followed by contestants at the Gram Panchayat, Kshettra Panchayat and Zilla Parishad level. A manual titled, '*Uttar Pradesh Panchayati Raj Vyavastha*', was also brought out with the objective of serving as a comprehensive document containing statutory provisions related to Panchayati Raj in the state. A bulletin, '*Panchayat Varta*', published by SSK, focuses upon issues related to the decentralisation process initiated by the state government.

In Gujarat, UNNATI prepared booklets on '*Amendment in Panchayat Act for Tribal Areas in Gujarat-Provision and Suggestions*'. Video cassettes titled, '*Raj Kareng*' and '*Gaon Nahin Kahi Panch Kaa*' were reprinted and made available to organisations like UNFPA, SIRD and VIKSAT. In Kerala, SAHAYI published information related to Panchayati Raj and other aspects through a News Bulletin, *Swayambharanam*, and a journal, *Voluntary Action*. As educational material for motivating the local populace to participate in Panchayati Raj, SAHAYI produced more copies of an audio cassettes consisting of nine Malayalam songs. The themes of the songs include decentralisation, Gram Sabha, *Ayalkkootto*, people's

participation, women's empowerment, participation in planning and leadership, etc. These audio cassettes were widely disseminated.

In Odisha, CYSD had published two issues of '*Gram Swaraj*', a newsletter related to Panchayati Raj issues in the state. A book on Urban Local Self Governance in Oriya titled, '*Odisare Sahara Bikasha O Swayatha Sanstha*', covering the problems that urban bodies experience in Odisha, has also been published by CYSD.

Pre-Election Voters Awareness Campaign

During the period from January to March 2000, three states went to polls and had the second round of Panchayat Elections to all three tiers of governance. These were Rajasthan (January 29 to February 4), followed by Madhya Pradesh and Haryana (March 12 and 16, 2000).

PRIA together with UNNATI (Rajasthan) and Samarthan, designed and implemented a campaign to generate voter awareness before the elections.

The main objectives of the campaign were to:

1. Mobilise voters to exercise their right to vote; choose the 'right' candidate and resist dummy candidates
2. Encourage women and Dalits to contest elections on their own and enhance participation of women and weaker sections in the election process
3. Provide information about the election process and procedures

Table 1: Pre-Election Voters Awareness Campaign in Three States

Content	Haryana	Rajasthan	Madhya Pradesh
1. Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The village/for the campaign districts were selected on the basis of the village composition in terms of – minority groups (scheduled caste), level of literacy and distances from the block office. • New districts were also included on the criteria of close proximity to covered district and for future scaling up plans • Choice of these areas were also discussed with state level NGOs, and institutions working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked with partner organisation – UNNATI and other local organisations to initiate the programme on Strengthening PRI, to develop joint intervention plan for campaigning. • Areas were selected on the basis of proximity to district headquarters, earlier work in the area, backward panchayat and underdeveloped panchayat. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted workshop in January and April with partner and Voluntary agencies to formulate common strategies of intervention. • Campaign (intensive) was in areas that (Samarthan) had already been working, while extensive coverage (through material and information dissemination)

	on Panchayati Raj for effective coverage and spread.		was done in areas that Samarthan had yet to cover.
2. Area of Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts covered = 12 • Total number of district = 19 • Gram panchayats covered = 600 • Percentage covered = 10% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts covered = 17 • Total number of district = 31 • Intervened gram panchayat = 846 • Percentage coverage = 8% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts covered = 33 • Total number of district = 62 • Intervened gram panchayat = 3818 • Percentage coverage = 12%
3. Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the state level • Youth club/anganwadi members, NGOs • PRIA's partner organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the state level partner organisation. • With government officials • With media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the state level (CASA) • With partner organisation • With government and media
4. Methods used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community meetings • Distribution and pasting of posters and pamphlets • Playing of audio cassettes in public places • Mobile van using audio cassettes • Cycle/women/tempo rally • Training volunteers • Electronic coverage • Slogan writing • Nukkad sabhas (singing of folk song with particular message) • Padayatra 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution and pasting posters and pamphlet • Slogan writing • Puppet show and kala jathas • Small village meetings • Distribution of manual (Margdarshika on election procedures) and audio cassettes • Bicycle rally using audio cassettes • Electronic/media coverage • Training volunteers • Padyatra 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Village / group meetings • Distribute of booklets – "panchayat sabha vikas", information in folders with information and others • Pasting posters and pamphlets • Slogan writing • Panchayat rath yatra • Street plays • Media coverage

<p>5. Lessons learnt</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to influence local media for extensive coverage of the pre-election campaign. • Campaign should be conducted well in advance. • Follow election rules and keep local administration fully informed. • Production of appropriate communication material necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permission needs to be taken from government authorities when using their premises. • Information about the campaign needs to be made available to the block officer beforehand. • Observe election rules. • The campaign team intervention must be sensitive to and respect the cultural ideology prevalent in the state. • Campaign should be planned and conducted well in advance (before the nominations). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The campaign should be conducted much before the election; at least 3 months before. • Due to their involvement in election process, the numbers of people in the village meeting dwindled • Role clarity a must before conducting campaigns.
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2. PROMOTIONAL INTERVENTION

The second strategic area was promotional interventions. A set of activities that would promote the perspective and practice of self-governance was envisaged to supplement the efforts/impact of direct strengthening. The objective was to target key constituencies like new partners (VAs), Nehru Yuvak Kendras, women's groups, college students and other such associations that may act as vehicles to spread the perspective and be inserted into the democratic process. Media was seen as another significant segment for active collaboration. It was proposed that by working directly with the media, durable relationships may be built, which could be utilised to spread the information across a larger audience. This was to serve the two-fold purpose of facilitating public education and keeping the issue of local self-governance in the mainstream of public debate.

Structured support was to be provided to partner VAs willing to invest their energies in micro-planning and bottom-up programme initiatives. Thus identifying and supporting partner VAs for replicating the efforts of the network was to be a component of promotional activities.

Some of the activities undertaken during the year are as follows:

- In Gujarat, UNNATI conducted a state level consultation on Gram Sabhas. This was done with NGOs, research institutions and experts at Ahmedabad on May 28, 1999. Nearly 38 NGOs from different parts of Gujarat participated in the consultation. Issues such as regular meetings of Gram Sabhas, education and awareness, and capacity building of Panchayat functionaries were taken up. The Secretary of the Panchayat Department showed interest in the inclusion of the Right to Information in Gujarat Panchayati Raj Act, in line with Rajasthan and Kerala. Cluster level meetings were also organised for the elected representatives of all the three tiers in Ahmedabad, Kutch and Bhavnagar to widen the understanding of the status of PRIs in Gujarat.
- In Rajasthan, UNNATI conducted review meeting after the PEVAC to share the field experience of members during the campaign. This was conducted in Jodhpur.
- In Uttar Pradesh, SSK organised training programmes at Ballia District on revisiting micro-planning. Twenty partner organisations participated.
- In Madhya Pradesh, Samarthan conducted TOT in Bhopal and Hoshangabad. They provided support to CYSD in preparation of a tool kit for participation.
- In Odisha, CYSD participated in a TV panel discussion on '*Lokana Hataku Khyamata*' (Power in People's Hands) for Doordarshan, Bhubaneswar. CYSD also prepared a script, for 13 episodes in Oriya, on 'Panchayati Raj System and Empowerment of the People'. These episodes aim at disseminating Panchayati Raj related information to the people of the state. Each episode is of 10 to 15 minutes' duration.
- In Kerala, SAHAYI was involved in a consultative meetings with Panchayat secretaries and line department officials. This was organised on September 27, 1999, at Thiruvananthapuram. The purpose of the consultation was to share the issues in the functioning of PRIs, to identify the existing problems/barriers and to find solutions and remedial measures to solve the concerns, and thereby pave the way for the formulation of effective policies and procedures to improve the existing conditions.

Some of the emerging issues identified were as follows:

1. In the Panchayati Raj mechanism, the Gram Panchayats are highly over-burdened with work. In spite of this, they lack adequate staff to carry out their responsibilities on time
2. Lack of engineers and other technical persons in Gram Panchayats has delayed the implementation of developmental activities
3. Non-availability of adequate training support to PRI staff members
4. Non-integration of various line departments with PRIs
5. The guidelines for beneficiary selection issued by Planning Board/Local Administration Department were not practical
6. Most of the functionaries working in PRIs were not competent to fulfil their present duties and responsibilities in an effective manner
7. Tax collection in various local bodies has been seriously affected, as the officials concerned were engaged in other assignment. As a result, the collection of a *panchayat's* own funds has drastically reduced

8. Non-accessibility of relevant and up-to-date information to various actors has led to malfunctioning

A workshop on women's leadership in PRIs was conducted for discussing and debating the findings of a study.

In Haryana, a *Mahila Sammelan* was organised in the new district of Fatehabad on December 28, 1999. The district has five blocks with 224 panchayats. The objective of the *Sammelan* was to bring recognition of women's issues at a wider level, strengthen links between different players, i.e., Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha members, government department officials, youth groups and media. The *Sammelan* also served to develop a better understanding about Panchayati Raj among women. Extensive media coverage highlighted most of the issues. A workshop was conducted on the Pre-election Awareness Campaign with state organisations to discuss and finalise a plan for the campaign.

Box 8:

MAHILA SAMMELAN (December 28, 1999)

Fatehabad is a new district of Haryana that was earlier a part of Hisar. PRIA's intervention started in this district from September 1999, on receiving an invitation from the District Development and Project Officer on strengthening people's participation in Gram Sabha meetings with special focus on women's participation. As a follow-up of that intervention, we started working intensively in Ratia Block with 49 *panchayats*. PRIA formed a rapport with the Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha members. In some villages, *mahila mandal* groups and five village information centres (VICs) were established, and women volunteers came forward.

Women gave their immense support in the intervention. To provide a platform to the women to help express their concerns, a *Sammelan* was organised. The women in this Block felt that this was an opportunity to not only meet other women, but also to share their views, experiences, interest, concerns and to plan for future strategies in a collective way.

The underlying objective of the *Sammelan* was:

- To bring recognition to women's issues at a wider level
- Strengthen links between different players, i.e., GP and GS members, especially women, government department, officials, youth groups and media
- Develop better understanding about Panchayati Raj among women
- Help sensitise district administration more accountable to the people

The invitees to this *Sammelan* were elected representatives (*sarpanch* and *panch* members), Gram Sabha members, *mahila mandal* members, ADC, DDPO, BDPO, Panchayat Samiti Chairpersons, Zilla Parishad Chairpersons, CDPO, Dean, Home Science College, Hissar Agricultural University, journalists from Fatehabad and Rohtak, Citi Cable and PRIA representatives.

It is worth mentioning that 2,500 women from 25 villages attended the *Sammelan*. During these meetings, the objective of the *Sammelan* was explained and three cloth pieces of three colours were distributed. On them were written:

- The main concerns of their villages (such as water, school, toilets, etc.)
- What would they do to resolve their problems
- Their expectations from the District/Block administration to help them solve the problems

Some of the issues highlighted and brought forward by women during the *Sammelan* were:

- Attitude of the government officials with whom they interact have resulted in experiences that requires to be addressed. Support from top officials has come through, but more recognition and support is desired from officials such as Block Development Officer and Gram Sachiv.
- Women leaders have multiple roles to play, their role at home, going to work in fields and additional responsibilities of village development. The women heads would appreciate if they were required to visit the Block office less often, and if the officials may render their help. In addition, the women also voiced the need for certain financial assistance for travelling to the Block office.
- The women suggested increased allocation of flexible (untied) funds to the Panchayat Samiti. This resource may be utilised in creating more awareness amongst the people in the village especially the women regarding the developmental activities according to local needs. In a way, they felt it is most likely to result in increased interactions between the two tiers of *panchayat*, wherein the people can dialogue with officials regularly. Increased interaction, in their opinion would not only benefit the people in resolving their problems and needs with the concerned official, but also help the officials to explain their positions with any kind of constraints they may face. It will help bridge the gap existing between the two tiers in terms of communication and accountability with its positive impact on the local development of the village. The women hoped that the officials may grow sensitive about the expressed needs of the people through such mechanisms. In the absence of such structured programmes, a communication gap may arise and reinforce certain mind-sets to prevail, creating mistrust in people.

- Another salient understanding articulated by the women is that a holistic development as a concept may be promoted in terms of social and economic development. At present, the existing social customs as *purdah* system does not allow women to contest elections. They emphasized on the need for education for both man and women. In addition they strongly pointed out the need for *sarpanches* and *panches* to be given assistance in becoming literate, lest they should fall prey to any eventuality, especially concerned with signing papers whose consequence may be undesirable. They brought forth their experiences of working with Gram Sachivs and facing undesirable consequences.
- A need for community owned and initiated development work was expressed for resolving common problems through *panchayats*. People's initiative would help instil confidence in the potential and resources within the village and seek solutions therein. The people it was hoped would grow independent of the state in certain matters where they can help themselves. The women strongly vocalised the need for women heads to help their village move from dependency to self-sufficiency.
- Women's entitlement to basic political rights, as an opinion was expressed in this gathering. Women, constituting half of the population, deserved adequate representation in governance structures, a belief largely supported by women here in the *sammelan*. Some women inspired by other vocal women heads, resolved in this gathering of 2,500 women to contest from unreserved seats. At the end of the *Sammelan*, women expressed solidarity in women-related causes; and a significant realisation of not being alone in this struggle, encouraged many to combat impediments facing women's leadership.
- In the end, the women requested for a positive attitude towards women heads and accept their leadership. The women having stepped into governance in large numbers seek the support of all. In this regard, they acknowledged certain shortcomings and challenges and appreciated the need for guidance and support of people around them to strengthen them in their efforts to work for their village.

Feedback from the women regarding the *Sammelan* brought to light the significance of such programmes being conducted from time to time and help women gain from other's experiences. Here they felt that women could vocalise without hesitation and learn from other women. Some confidence emanates from talking, sharing and debating on issues, which they probably could not express in a candid way, in their village. This gathering of women helped them to receive support and endeavour for developmental initiatives. They were hopeful to help people to break their mind-sets regarding women's leadership found detrimental to their effective functioning.

As a follow-up activity of the *Sammelan*, it was decided that the pre-election voter's awareness campaign for the Panchayat Elections will be carried out in Ratia Block, where the focus will be on motivating and supporting women to contest elections not only from the reserved seats, but also from the unreserved seats. As a result, the PEVAC was undertaken in 30 villages of Ratia Block. Due to PRIA's intervention, there was also a women's polling agent during the elections in Alika Village of Ratia Block in Fatehabad District.

Another issue that emerged from the *Sammelan* was that there is a general lack of information in the villages, especially among the women. Thus, a need was expressed for the availability of timely, relevant and authentic information, which will then help in empowerment of the people, especially women. As a result, six VICs were set up in Ratia Block, out of which five are being managed by women volunteers. Each PRC caters to 3–4 Gram Panchayats.

In Himachal Pradesh, Kangra-based organisations, ERA Khundian, SWERA, Jawalaji, Nav Nirman Kalyan Samiti, Darkata and Friends Club Rey were sought to be enrolled in the network for strengthening PRIs in Himachal Pradesh.

3. RESEARCH, DOCUMENTATION & ADVOCACY

This is the third strategic area of intervention. Research and knowledge building is one of the core strategies in our intervention on strengthening institutions of local self-governance. It entails engaging in critical and systematic study of issues and institutions, which encourages or discourages citizens from participating in democratic processes. Comparative programmes of research and action have been initiated to enable collective learning, capacity building and advocacy in the future. Some of the areas of research have been—(a.) functioning of Gram Panchayat and its accountability to Gram Sabha, (b.) new leadership of women and Dalits, (c.) linkage between Gram Panchayat and other two tiers of governance and government functionaries/departments, and (d.) devolution of financial resources and autonomy to local bodies to mobilise resources.

In Rajasthan, the impact of pre-election voter's awareness campaign was analysed and documented in order to determine the extent to which the campaign attained its objectives. In Himachal, a study was conducted on recent developments after the implementation of the revised Mineral Act 1973, of panchayats adjacent to Dhauladhar range; for minerals in the Bawrna, Rait and Nagrota Bagwan Blocks, specifically in the *panchayats* of Ichichi Khas, Dari, Pasu, Dagwar, Chatedu, Gagal, Jhikli Ichichi, Mator, Dugiari and Manadr. This study sought to find the links between PRIs and effective protection and management of governance there need to be greater financial independence. One source of a *panchayat's* own income is from locally available mineral resources. The Manjhi and Manurna Khuds near the above-mentioned *panchayats* are rich sources of sand and stones that are a source of income for the *panchayats*. Based on the Mineral Act of 1973, an ordinance was issued in 1999, which gave powers to the government to take over the work related to minor minerals. The purpose of this study is to analyse the changes in the financial condition of the *panchayats* after the implementation of the Act.

Gram Panchayat Ichi Khas in Kangra District has its own source of income by auctioning locally available resources like sand, stones and *bajri*. The Panchayat has a 200-metre long boundary with Manjhi Khud, where all these natural resources are available. Earlier, every year in the month of February, the Panchayat would auction the minor resources for a year. As a result of this, in 1995-1996, 1996-1997 and

1997-1998, the Panchayat earned revenue to the tune of Rs. 17,750, Rs. 21,000 and Rs. 13,000, respectively. The total income of the *panchayats* during these years were Rs. 23,427, Rs. 25,590 and Rs. 15,756. Thus, the *panchayat's* own income from Manjhi Khud was 76.5%, 82.06% and 82.5%, respectively. In Kerala, SAHAYI, conducted three case studies during the period: two were on the functioning of Women Panchayat Presidents and the third one was a study on the best performing Panchayat in the state. The three case studies were developed and the learning were disseminated through news bulletins and interactions with groups and individuals.

In Gujarat, a profile of elected women representative at district and Taluka level was developed. Four districts—Surat, Ahmedabad, Sabarkhantha and Dahod—represented by a Block each, were selected for this study. In Rajasthan, UNNATI analysed and compiled news related to Panchayats in '*Rajasthan Patrika*' from 1994-1999, 350 items from news articles, editorial, and readers columns were compiled. The analysis revealed that the media based its reporting largely on government announcements and hand-outs. However, media was prompt in reporting corruption and fraud.

In Uttar Pradesh, a study on women's leadership was conducted to highlight their status, perceptions of whom they represent and specific requirements for serving as effective leaders. Field level consultations also took place in four districts—Lucknow, Almorah, Saharanpur and Ghazipur—with the objective of preparing the Uttar Pradesh poverty and social monitoring system. In Madhya Pradesh, Samarthan collaborated in developing a Panchayat Finance study on behalf of UNICEF. They also conducted a study on the status of women in PRIs in Madhya Pradesh.

In Odisha, CYSD published the second part of the book '*Janile Jiniba*'. Three issues of the quarterly newsletter, '*Granswara*' were printed during this period. The newsletter is circulated among leading villagers, local organisation leaders, Panchayat members, presidents of Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Panchayat, local newspaper editors and NGOs working on Panchayat issues. Two research studies—(a.) on women PRI members, and (b.) finances of Panchayats were also undertaken. In Haryana, PRIA conducted a study on the functioning of Gram Sabhas. This was done based on observation of actual Gram Sabha meetings. Some of the findings based on the study are as follows:

Lack of awareness among the Gram Sabha members and also some of the Panchayat representatives regarding the purpose of the Gram Sabha meetings or their roles in these meetings.

Lack of confidence in Gram Sabhas as people will only want to attend a meeting if they think that it is of direct and practical benefit for them. This is particularly true of the daily wage earners who have to sacrifice a day's earning to attend the meeting. Moreover, some members are reluctant to attend subsequent such meetings. Another reason why people lack confidence in the Gram Sabha meeting is that the resolutions taken in the meetings are hardly ever implemented.

Internal dynamics of Panchayats and ongoing problems in the *panchayats*, the political interference, caste conflicts and gender discrimination are barriers to the effective functioning of Gram Sabhas. In particular, power struggles between the *Sarpanch* and the *Up-Sarpanch* are a common occurrence.

Meetings are held at an inconvenient time. The summer meeting, which has been fixed on April 13, falls during the peak harvesting season, which is not convenient, particularly for agricultural labourers.

Venue of Gram Sabha meetings is not convenient. The Gram Sabha meetings are sometimes held at a place which may not be convenient for certain sections of the

community. Often times, a venue pre-determined by the BDPO is changed by the *Sarpanch*. Another problem is that the BDPOs have been scheduled meetings at the village *chaupal*, a place where women traditionally cannot enter.

Improper procedure of the Gram Sabha meeting. Most Gram Sabha meetings are not conducted according to the given procedure. The agenda is normally not prepared prior to the meeting, meetings are generally not held at the designated place and time, the register quorum for the meetings is hardly ever fulfilled (often the *sarpanch* adds the signatures of those who have not attended the meetings to the register).

Prevailing socio-cultural practices. The working of a Gram Sabha is affected by socio-cultural practices. This is most clearly seen in terms of gender relations. When a male member acts as a proxy for a female *Sarpanch* in the Gram Sabha meeting, this has consequences on women's participation in the meeting as a whole.

Report on the Status of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the States

PRIA and its partners, especially those based in States which had the second round of panchayat elections, were involved in studying the status of Panchayati Raj Institutions after five years of functioning (ever since the enactment of the 73rd Amendment Act). Reports on status of Panchayati Raj Institutions have been prepared for Rajasthan (Unnati), Uttar Pradesh (SSK), Madhya Pradesh (Samarthan), Haryana (PRIA).

PRI Status Report for Rajasthan: This report is a fact sheet of the last five years of Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan. The first draft of the report is complete. In this report, certain burning issues of PRI in Rajasthan have been scrutinised. Some of these issues read as status of women and Dalit leadership in Panchayats, PRI functioning, *panchayat* finances, NGO initiatives to strengthen Panchayats, Panchayats in media, etc. To include the experiences of Panchayat representatives in this report, four district level consultations were held, where the participants were provided a common platform to discuss their five year' experiences. In the last chapter, future challenges to strengthen the PRIs have been discussed. The report will be released in a state level consultation.

Based on the study by Unnati, access to information is the major problem faced by representatives of PRIs at all levels. As regards the women representatives of all three tiers, participation in meetings at the district level is very high in comparison to the other two tiers. However, in the general sense participation of women in governance is still not acceptable to the community. Around 90% of the representatives are not familiar about the financial status of the panchayats. The high level of ignorance has been observed among male and female members alike.

PRI Status Report for Uttar Pradesh: Regional Consultation meetings were organised at Dehradun on June 20-21, 1999, and Haridwar on June 27-28, 1999, to gather information about the present status of PRIs in the western and hilly regions of Uttar Pradesh, these consultations were a part of process of collection of information for the Status Paper on Panchayat Raj Institutions in Uttar Pradesh. In Dehradun, there were 15 and in Haridwar, 20 participants. The participants comprised representatives of NGOs, Panchayats and Panchayati Raj Officials. The participants discussed the state of affairs prevailing in the Panchayats of their respective areas.

As an outcome of these meetings it can be said that there are qualitative differences in the working of *panchayats* in these two areas as compared to other areas of Uttar Pradesh, the inputs gained are being used in the status paper.

PRI Status Report for Madhya Pradesh: Madhya Pradesh was the pioneering state in implementing the 73rd Constitutional Amendment and conducting the first

Panchayat Elections in 1994. The Panchayati Raj system has constantly evolved in the past five years supported by a strong political will and innovative government. Significantly, the Panchayat system in Madhya Pradesh has been dynamic and is constantly responding to the responses from the field. In this process, the Panchayati Raj Act of Madhya Pradesh has been amended several times.

A general feeling in the field is that all power and authority is vested in the *Sarpanch*. The whole Panchayati Raj system has become too dependent and focused on the *Sarpanch*. Often, it is referred to as *Sarpanch Raj* and not Panchayati Raj. The *Panches*, who are also elected representatives, have no, or very little, powers. As a result, the concept of collective governance and responsibility suffers. The institutional linkage between the three tiers of Panchayats is weak. The only link between the three tiers is of resource flow. The other linkages, like approval of beneficiary lists, etc., have not been able to functionally bind the tiers together. Even the process of fund flow is unsatisfactory.

A Gram Panchayat is constituted of two to four villages in several cases. The village of the *Sarpanch* becomes the focus for all developmental activities, and the dependent villagers are neglected. Similarly, one Gram Sabha for all the villages, discouraged people from dependent villages to participate in the Gram Sabha. Another problem area for Gram Sabhas is the present agenda for the meeting given by the government.

The linkage between nodal development agencies and development departments of the government, like Rural Engineering Service and the Forest Department and the Panchayats should be institutionalised. In addition, the various government committees formed in the villages like the Forest Committee, Watershed Committee, and Education Committees, to be linked with the Gram Panchayats so that the latter gets the undivided attention of the government.

The Panchayat system despite the State Finance Commission and all centrally sponsored schemes has had to work in a resource crunch situation. The Gram Panchayat still look towards the government for resources. The Panchayats believe that providing resources to the Gram Panchayat is the responsibility of the State. In addition, despite decentralisation, the Panchayats still do not have adequate powers and the authority to generate resources.

On preliminary examination, it is deduced that the reservation for women in the Panchayats has apparently had little impact. Innumerable number of cases of inactive women *Sarpanches* and proxy male *Sarpanches* for women seats will indicate in this direction. However, several women representatives have become more confident and assertive.

In the field, very often it is felt that the Panchayat system, which has a larger mandate, has limited itself to implementation of government schemes and programmes for rural welfare and development. The only difference in the implementation of these developmental projects is that earlier the bureaucracy was responsible for its implementation, which is now being done by *panchayat* representatives. The Panchayats identify themselves so closely with the government schemes and programmes that they act as extensions of the government.

For long-term comprehensive development, it is important that the Panchayats pay attention to the micro planning processes. For the planning process, the government should provide the necessary technical support.

PRI Status Report for Gujarat (1995-2000): This report is an attempt to capture the experiences of the past five years in the State of Gujarat. It is based on the stories from grassroots, particularly how the newly elected leaders and people have worked in their own panchayats. The aspects of PRIs, which have been discussed in this report, are profile of elected representatives of PRIs, functioning of PRIs, Panchayat finances, women representatives in *panchayats*, Dalit leadership in *panchayats*, initiatives taken to strengthen PRIs and *panchayats* in media.

Women representatives in *panchayats*: According to a study by UNNATI, the women are relatively more educated and demonstrated fairly good understating of issues (mainly women representatives of Bhavnagar district). However, they need access to relevant information to be able to function effectively. They feel that in the absence of information, they stand the danger of being manipulated by the Talati and others in position of power. In the Panchmahal region, which is mainly tribal dominated, illiteracy is a major hindrance in understanding *panchayat* matters. This is the main reason why women hardly participate in *panchayat*-related matters. The women also expressed their concern about the indifferent attitude of the Panchayat male members including male colleagues and Talati, which resulted in a high number of no-confidence motions against them. It is a general perception that women are not capable of participating in politics. But there are instances like Ramilaben Desai, the President of Zilla Panchayat, Ahmedabad who faced no-confidence motion five times. However, each time she fought back and emerged as a winner.

Regarding status of Gram Sabha in Gujarat, it has been observed that peoples' participation in the Gram Sabha meetings has been on the downside. The main reason for this is that the resolutions passed by the Gram Sabha are seldom implemented. The villagers, who have to forgo a day's wages to attend Gram Sabha meeting find it meaningless. A study conducted by UNNATI indicates that the involvement of the elected representatives in the Gram Sabha is very low. However, there are exceptions as has been illustrated below:

Gram Sabha Demands Accounts for Nani Charoli: In the Gram Panchayat Nani Charoli, Fatehpura Taluka, District Dahod, the villagers forced the *Sarpanch* to call a Gram Sabha and present the details of activities undertaken in the Panchayat. On the insistence of the villagers, the *Sarpanch* of Nani Charoli was forced to call a Gram Sabha, where the villagers demanded that the details of all the activities and schemes implemented by the Panchayat be presented openly before all the villagers. When the *Sarpanch* read out the list of activities, the villagers noted down the details. In the meeting, the villagers demanded clarification on issues on which they had doubts of misappropriation. They demanded that the receipt of the money collected through contribution from all the households for electricity connection in the village be produced before the Gram Sabha. When the *Sarpanch* failed to produce the receipt and give any clarification, he fled from the meeting.

The Nani Charoli incident is an example of using the Gram Sabha meeting to enhance transparency in functioning and enhancing accountability of the Panchayat towards the public.

A research study on '*Woman's Leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions*', a study on woman's leadership in PRIs was undertaken by PRIA and its partners in six states. A total of 800 elected representatives were interviewed in Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh. The study brought out numerous interesting findings about the present status of women members. The research findings suggest that women are coming out from the shadow of male dominance. With the passage of time and interventions in the form of training and orientation as well as exposure, elected women representatives are taking on their responsibilities in a coherent manner.

Some of the findings of this study are as follows:

1. Most of the women are first time entrants in the field of formal politics. Their decision to contest the elections was largely influenced by their husbands, especially in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Odisha. Very few women were actually aware of what the elections meant and the decision to contest was thrust upon them.
2. Quite a few of the women who were elected have strong political connections through marriage or their maternal family. They represent the upper class within the village. Wives and daughters were pushed into the governance machinery only because the seats were reserved for women and the men of the family, who traditionally held sway over local politics, found their powers slipping away.
3. Local communities and *mahila mandals* also mobilised women into contesting elections.
4. Most of the women who stood for elections and won were in the age group of 25-40 years. At this age, child bearing and rearing responsibilities are considerably lessened. In Haryana, approximately 70% of the elected women representatives were found to be over 40 years of age. In the context of this state, where the average age of marriage is 18 years, most of the elected representatives fall into the category of mother-in-laws. By and large, daughter-in-laws have been kept away from political process and unmarried daughters do not find themselves in the voter's list.
5. Women do not fully understand the roles and responsibilities of their posts and therefore the amount of time they have to spend on non-household work is minimal.
6. Majority of the women felt that they would like to re-contest the elections mainly because they saw a growth in personal self-esteem because of the election. In addition, the training imparted to them as elected members made available information and knowledge about the *panchayat*, their village and the world around them and opened up many avenues. Moreover, their role as *Sarpanch* or Chairperson has enabled the women to overcome some of the social barriers such as the *purdah* system or sitting with men. This has made them more confident.

Box 9:**Profile of Elected Women representatives in Panchayats**

- Majority of the women are in the age group of 35-45 years
- Proportion of unmarried women is negligible
- Only 20–40% of the women are literate
- Incidence of joint and nuclear families are almost the same
- Less than 20% of the women are heads of 'domestic' households
- About 40% of the women members work in the fields
- The educational and economic backgrounds of chairpersons are better than the ordinary members of the different tiers of PRIs
- More than 20% of the women members come from families of past PRI members
- About 40% of the women have stood for elections on the insistence of their husband, and 20% due to community (caste), etc.
- Of the women feel that there is a visible change in their status within their family after having been elected
- About 60% of women said that they would encourage women to stand for elections. These same women hope to contest for the PRI elections again

Study on Financial Devolution to Panchayats

Financial status of Panchayats have considerable variations across states. The only mandatory provision dealing with financial aspects of PRIs was constitution of State Finance Commission (SFC) in every state of review financial positions of PRIs in that state.

The first ever SFCs in almost all states have submitted their reports to respective state governments. The state governments have taken action on these reports. All the state governments have accepted these reports in their partial or modified forms. Majority of the SFCs have made recommendations regarding tax assignment, tax sharing, own tax revenue, non-tax revenue, untied grants, tied grants, expenditure assignment, distribution of state/Central funds across PRI tiers, and loans from the government and other financial institutions.

Own revenue is one of the measurable indicators of financial sovereignty of the institutions of self-governance. Own revenue of a *panchayat* consists of income from two sources—tax revenue and non-tax revenue.

In every state, the PRIs are completely dependent on funds from Central and state governments. This dependency of PRIs on the state government is more than the state's dependence on Central government for fiscal purposes. However, the quantum of grants from Central and state governments to *panchayats* has increased significantly over the year. However, most of these funds are tied in nature.

As part of advocacy efforts in Bihar, a Panchayat Bachao Abhiyan was initiated by CENCORED during June-August, 1998, in which the following activities were undertaken:

1. Protest Day was observed in a rally before the Patna High Court and a memorandum was submitted to the Chief Justice of Supreme Court, appealing for early disposal of pending cases related to Panchayat Elections in Bihar.

2. A meeting of Voluntary Organisations was organised at state level to discuss the future of the agitation programme. It was resolved to adopt a policy of agitation right from village and Panchayat levels, and make the villagers aware about the need for an early Panchayat Election.
3. Voluntary Organisations also organised numerous meetings, rallies, protests in their respective areas and successfully observed 'Panchayat Bachao Pakhawara' (Save Panchayat Fortnight).
4. A signature campaign was organised at the village for the same cause
5. A rally was organised at Patna on August 14, 1998. Different slogans in favour of state Panchayat Elections were raised
6. Another rally was organised at Rajghat, New Delhi, which was attended by BM Tarkunde, Rajni Kothari among others along with representatives from various voluntary organisations of Bihar and Delhi.

Box 10:**Campaign for Panchayat Elections**

A mass *dharna* was staged on June 25 before the Patna High Court demanding immediate Panchayati Raj elections in the state. An early disposal of the Bihar government's appeal in the Supreme Court, which has resulted in the stalling of the elections was also demanded. About 200 people, including 50 women, from different parts of the state participated in this *dharna*.

The Bihar Panchayat Bachaon Abhiyan, an umbrella organisation of various like-minded groups from Bihar, called a press conference at Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, on August 20, 1998, to demand a long awaited Panchayat poll in Bihar. Addressing the conference, VM Tarkunde, emphasised the need for speedy disposal of the cases pending with the Supreme Court and holding Panchayat Elections in the State as soon as possible.

Next day about 300 activists from various parts of Bihar and a number of prominent citizens of Delhi staged a day-long *dharna* at Gandhi Samadhi, Rajghat, to press for these demands. A Jan Panchayat was also held with VM Tarkunde, Rajani Kothari and Dr George Mathew as judges. The panel listened to the complaints and ruled as follows:

4. NETWORKING

The fourth component of the programme design is to strengthen networking. It was proposed that networks of leaders of PRIs, women and other actors would be built. These networks would be supported and nurtured by PRIA and the RSOs. The objective of building such networks is to develop a pressure group of further the agenda of local self-governance.

In Gujarat, apart from strengthening old partnerships, new associations have been forged by UNNATI. Collaboration has been established with the state government in setting up PRCs. A state level committee formed under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister to review the right of common property and land resources, was provided relevant information on the issue of *panchayat* rights on grazing land.

1. People's struggle for Panchayat Elections in Bihar must continue
2. The Supreme Court should clear all the pending cases related to Bihar Panchayat Act and hold elections at the earliest
3. The signature collected from a large number of people of Bihar demanding immediate Panchayat elections in the state should be handed over to the Honourable Chief Justice of Supreme Court

The people sitting on dharna were addressed among others by Kuldip Nayar, a noted veteran journalist and Rajya Sabha member. He assured the gathering that he would raise the issue of the long delayed Bihar Panchayat polls in the next session of the Parliament.

In Rajasthan, 36 NGOs working with UNNATI, on a common strategy during PEVAC, reinforced the network. Cluster level meetings were organised at Barmer and Kota, and government officials from Zilla Parishad and district administration attended them. This helped forge new relationships with government functionaries at the district level. A need for state level interface with the state headquarters has been clearly expressed and requires a prompt response. In Uttar Pradesh, contact was intensified with government officials and NGOs in SSK/UPVAN network to work together on the Voters Awareness Campaign leading to Panchayat Elections.

In Madhya Pradesh, a network with Panchayat representatives (*Sarpanch* and *Panch*) of Sindh Block, covering 112 *panchayats* was developed with the objective, of information sharing, and as a platform to press for policy change. In Gwalior/Chambal region, Samarthan made efforts to renew and activate a network with 15 voluntary organisations in Bhind district, through regular legislation.

In Odisha, a network of VAs /NGOs called Sanhati is in existence, of which CYSD is a leading member. The network has been spearheading advocacy efforts for a more pro-devolution Panchayat legislation. In Himachal Pradesh, the focus has been on dialoguing and networking with the state government to bring about changes in the policies for enabling *panchayats* to function as institutions of local self-governance. As a part of this work, PRIA has been a member of several committees constituted by the state government. PRIA is one of the NGOs represented in the Committee set up to consider Amendments to the State PR Act. Several meetings were organised in this regard and certain important decisions were taken.

PRIA was also largely responsible for sensitising the state government on up-scaling of micro-planning and making it mandatory for all *panchayats* to formulate their own Panchayat Development Plan. The Himachal Cabinet circulated the decision (NO. P

CH –H(3)2/96-210-25) that Gram Panchayats, *mahila mandals*, youth groups, farmers associations, NGOs and other Gram Sabha members shall prepare micro-plans based on people's needs. After the approval of the Gram Sabha, the plan should be sent to the District Collector and related departments for further actions. Department of Rural Development through the District Collector shall implement the plans under LDP, Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), DCP/SDP, SSF relief fund. PRIA has facilitated the process by providing training to Block level government officials, NGOs and PRI representatives, mainly the *Pradhans*. The state government has also constituted a state level committee to monitor and review the functioning of Panchayati Raj Training institutes at Baijnath and Mashobra. PRIA has made a member of the committee for the Panchayat Raj Training Institute at Mashobra in Shimla District. The Chairman of this Committee is the Commissioner-cum-Secretary (Panchayats). Other members are Director and Special Secretary (Panchayats), Director (Agriculture), Director (Horticulture), Dy. Director (Panchayats), District Panchayat Officer, Shimla, and the principal of the Panchayati Raj Training Institute, Mashobra, Shimla District. One of PRIA's partner organisations, Chinmaya Tapovan Trust, is a member of the Panchayati Raj Training Institute at Baijnath, Kangra.

During his budget speech in 1999, the Union Finance Minister has declared the year 1999-2000 as the year of the Gram Sabha. In pursuance of his policy pronouncement, the Ministry of Rural Development constituted a Committee to evaluate the extent to which the states have empowered their *panchayats*. The Committee was recommended the release of the final instalment of grants under the EAS to states based on its assessment of the extent of devolution to PRIs. PRIA was a member of the Committee and was able to provide a grassroots perspective on *panchayat* devolution in various states through its network of partners.

(Detailed RSO reports are available in the Annexure)

B. NATIONAL PROGRAMME

1. Study on Women's Leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in six states (Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh)
2. Study on Status of Financial Devolution in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra
3. Programmatic Review of Panchayati Raj Programme
4. Study on Women PRI Members in West Bengal
5. Prepared a Study Report on the Panchayat System in West Bengal
6. Team members actively co-ordinated the Task Force set up by the Government of India, on 'Empowerment of Gram Sabhas'. The report has been submitted to the Government of India.

The Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, constituted a Task Force, "To study the structure and function of panchayati raj in the country". This task force was under the chairmanship of Shri Babagowda Patil, Union Minister of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development. The task force comprised six sub-groups, studying different aspects of PRIs. PRIA was invited to participate as a point person of the first sub-group of the task force that looks into the issues of "Empowering the Gram Sabha". The chairperson of the sub-group was Shri MP Prakash, Minister for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Government of Karnataka. Based on extensive consultations conducted with a wide variety of actors across several regions, the sub-group observed that participation in Gram Sabha was rarely wholehearted, or adequate in terms of numbers. Thus, even in the largely attended meetings of the

Gram Sabha, extending over a group of villages are not representative of all the section of the rural society.

Gram Sabha as a political institution is at a very elementary phase of evolution in many parts of the country. In the sub-group's view, a Gram Sabha is an institution that basically articulated the needs and aspirations of the rural people or a method of mobilising the community of participation in the development programmes. A Gram Sabha should be empowered to act as a check against the abuse of power by the *panchayats* and other levels of governance; as a watchdog to protect the community interests and common property resources; forum for distributing the benefits of the government programmes among different sections of rural society. The Gram Sabha should, more than any other level of *panchayats*, give the rural community a sense of political fulfilment by becoming an institution for channelling people's participation in the democratic and developmental process.

Some of the recommendations of the Task Force are:

The agenda of the Gram Sabah should be of interest to the bulk of its membership. It must cover a range of subjects that vitally affect daily affairs, like the management of village schools, village water supply schemes, the functioning of the primary health centres and Anganwadis, maintenance of land records, opportunities for improving agricultural production, functioning of the public distribution system, etc. The Gram Sabha should not merely act as a recommendatory body or a debating forum for the people. The views expressed and the decisions taken in the Gram Sabha should compel the Gram Panchayat to redress the grievances of the people or to fulfil their legitimate demands.

Jurisdiction of the Gram Sabha should be such that it should be easy for all the voters to assemble without having to spend more than 30 minutes to one hour in covering the distance to reach the venue of the Gram Sabha. In addition, the effective strength of the Gram Sabha should not normally exceed a few hundreds of people so that the Gram Sabha does not become an unwieldy gathering incapable of any meaningful deliberations.

Holding Gram Sabhas simultaneously in all the villages in the country or a state is neither easy nor desirable. If the deliberations in the Gram Sabhas have to be meaningful, it is essential to ensure the participation of many functionaries of government departments in their meetings.

The empowerment of the Gram Sabha involves both a process of political awakening and a measure of administrative organisations. It cannot be achieved merely by enacting legislation and issuing guidelines. A sustained movement for a period of at least five years should be organised to educate the people and to train the elected representatives and officials to internalise the potential of Gram Sabha as an institution of participatory democracy.

1. Half-yearly, joint PRI programme review and planning workshop was organised on August 29 and 30, 1999. Another PRI review and planning meeting was organised from February 15–19, 2000.
2. For the purpose of policy advocacy, a National Roundtable on strengthening PRIs in India was organised by PRIA and its partners on February 18, 2000, at FICCI Auditorium, New Delhi. The purpose was to share experiences of PRIA and NCRSOs over the last five years on strengthening PRIs in India. It was also to share insights with a wider

audience to influence public discourse and policy outcomes. During the Roundtable, a paper entitled, “PRIs – A Balance Sheet”, was presented, followed by discussion between the various actors present such as the elected representatives of all the three tiers of PRIs, Government officials and NGO members. Some specific issues related to Gram Sabha, women in *panchayats*, micro-planning and finances of PRIs were raised. The event was covered by the media.

3. The Annual PRI Review and Planning Meeting took place from February 15-18, 2000, at PRIA. This was organised by PRIA and was attended by all the partner organisations from 13 states. The purpose of this review and planning meeting was:

4.
 - To share experiences of multi-sectoral strategic intervention of PRIA and NCRSOs of the last five years since 1995
 - To draw lessons from our past experiences
 - To involve new partners from intervened states as well as new states in the joint collaborative effort of PRIA and NCRSOs in strengthening PRIs in India

During the three-day workshop, discussions and presentations were held on the following themes:

- Pre-election voters awareness campaign in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh
 - Micro-planning
 - Information dissemination through SRC–PRC linkage
 - Capacity building
 - Policy research and advocacy
 - Urban governance
5. PRIA's and its partners interventions were promoted to a large extent with the support of the media, both at the state as well as national levels. The media played a vital role in expanding the sphere of educational promotion to a much larger area- as in the case of PEVAC, in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana. Press conferences as well as field trips to individual states were facilitated to highlight important issues and concerns of the local community. Media support to the PEVAC was organised by setting up a national media task force.

C. NEW INITIATIVES

Andhra Pradesh

PRIA's direct intervention in strengthening PRIs in Andhra Pradesh was started during this period. PRIA has its office at Hyderabad. During this period, a study was conducted on “Functional and Financial Status of Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Institutions: An evaluation”. The object of the study was to analyse the function and financial status of PRIs in the post 73rd Amendment period. In Andhra Pradesh, the study was conducted in East Godavari Zilla Parishad (ZP), within which four Mandal

Praja Parishads (MPPs) were selected along with 24 Gram Panchayats (six from each MPPs).

West Bengal

Certain studies were conducted in West Bengal. One was “The Panchayat System in West Bengal”. This monograph seeks to present an overview of the structures and processes of the third generation *panchayats* in West Bengal against a brief backdrop of its colonial past and post-colonial experience before the advent of the present Left Front Government in the state. An attempt was made to identify the characteristic features of the pre-set *panchayat* system coupled with innovative institution building initiatives in West Bengal and to assess the performance of the *panchayats*, particularly Gram Panchayats, in the light of empirical research studies.

Maharashtra

A study was carried out in Maharashtra entitled, “Financial and Functional Status of Maharashtra Panchayati Raj Institutions: A Case Study of Beed District”. The objective of this study was to understand and analyse the financial and functional status of Maharashtra PRIs in the light of the 73rd Amendment Act. The study was undertaken in Beed District, which is one of the poorest and drought prone districts of the state. The study analyses the income and expenditure pattern of Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayats. In the Beed Zilla Parishad, Ambajogoi Panchayat Samiti was selected within which nine villages came under the study. These studies gave an overview of PRI finances and shed light on the Income generation, assigned revenues, and grants, along with various issues and concerns. It points out the weaknesses and internal contradictions that are hindering PRIs from functioning smoothly. The study tries to put forth some suggestions and recommendations as to functional devolution, human resource development, financial development and institutional decentralisation.

Some of the finding of the study are as follow:

- The Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) funds do not go to the Gram Panchayats directly and the Panchayat Samiti maintains JRY accounts. Owing to this, the Gram Panchayats are losing control over a major proportion of their income.
- The state government is using Tenth Finance Commission (TFC) grant for the immediate needs of the line departments. The objective of the TFC grant is to provide an additional per capita income of Rs. 100 to the *panchayats*.
- The role of the Zilla Parishad as a basic unit of development in the planning process is minimal. The statutory District Planning Committees have not been formed with PRI representatives as its members. In fact, the District Planning and Development Council (DPDC), which is headed by the Collector, while the Zilla Parishad Chairman and CEO, are members. Thus, the control of the state government has been institutionalised in this process. The annual plan for the district as a whole is prepared by DPDC and not the DPC.
- The DRDA, which is responsible for the central and state sponsored developmental programmes, is almost independent of the Zilla Parishad. The only link between the Zilla Parishad and the DRDA is the CEO of Zilla Parishad, who is the Chairman of the DRDA and the staff is drawn from Zilla Parishad on deputation. The DPDC distributes the grants almost equally between the Zilla Parishad and DRDA. Around Rs. 120 crore was spent by the

DRDA of Beed District for each financial year from 1995-1998. This was more than the expenditure of the Zilla Parishad.

- There is very poor and inconsistent tax collection at the Gram Panchayat level. The house tax decreased by almost 10% from 1996-1997 to 1998-1999. On an average, the total income of a Gram Panchayat is around Rs. 1.0 lakh. The main reason is generation of income from own sources is low, especially from the *panchayat's* properties. Non-tax income is only 5% of the total income. An increase in non-tax income will be of considerable advantage to the PRIs since it gives autonomy to take decisions in the development process.

Uttaranchal

Intervention in strengthening PRIs in the hills of Uttaranchal has been taken up by the Himalayan Action Research Centre (HARC). HARC is working in two block—Naugaon Block of Uttarkashi District and Dasholi Block of Chamoli District.

D. EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME

The second phase of the programme was evaluated by a team of external evaluators in mid-1999. The review team held discussion at the national office as well as visited the Regional Support Organisations (RSOs) in the respective states. It recommended scaling up of the programme to achieve a minimum critical mass in the existing states and expansion of the programme to new states. Its report placed a great emphasis on understanding the inter-linkage between the three tiers of *panchayats*, and in extending/ linking the experience in PRIs with 'urban governance'.

The four components of the strategic mix, i.e., directly strengthening PRIs, promotional interventions, research and advocacy and networking, together combine to exhaust all that civil society initiative could possibly consist of. These are mutually reinforcing and together are capable of creating the desired impact. Each one is relevant in itself as well as a component of larger strategy.

Need for scaling up has been one of the major recommendations of the review team. As per the information available, in terms of objectives and programmatic coverage, PRIA's PRI initiative is the only one of its kind undertaken from the civil society. This uniqueness and the impact it is able to make combine together to justify the need for scaling up. Even if the most desirable impact is made in the *panchayats* covered so far, the same would not be noticeable in the overall perspective of the state. Thus, there is a need for scaling up of coverage to achieve a 'minimum mass' that would force them to be noticed. This may force citizens in other *panchayats* to believe that the *panchayat* dream is achievable, and it would create a mass of *panchayat* bodies that would act as a significant pressure group in influencing policy.

E. ASSESSING IMPACT: WHAT DIFFERENCE HAS BEEN MADE?

In attempting to assess the impact of the NCRSO activities over the year, it has to be admitted that the numbers are still small compared to the scale and spread of Panchayats. The strategic mix of activities can be seen as addressing only the tip of an iceberg, in a sense the large mass underneath (in terms of local level inertia, institutional indifference and Civil Society apathy) could help sink the whole intent of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. Limitations of scale notwithstanding, it could be maintained that the programme activities during the year have:

- Provided opportunities for learning from a 'hands on' engagement with issues of self-governance
- Utilised the learning gained to develop material for communication, for information dissemination
- Promoted serious engagement by a wide variety of civil society actors, with the issues of local self-governance
- Helped create networks of elected representatives, voluntary agencies and institutions for consultation and mutual reinforcement; PRIA along with its partners in the joint initiative have established a direct network of over 500 VAs who are working on the issue of Panchayati Raj in about 14 states. These VAs directly work with 20,000 elected members and another 30,000 are reached through dissemination of educational materials
- Provided platforms for voicing demands which could influence public policy outcomes
- Helped synthesise and systematise knowledge through research; several state and national level research studies were carried out, the findings of which have been shared with a wider audience
- Enabled appropriate policy responses from the institutional framework. In fact, the state governments have recognised PRIA and the NCRSOs as resource and education support organisations in the state, in the process of strengthening PRIs. As such, PRIA and its partners have been included in many government initiated committees both at the state as well as the national level. For example, PRIA is a member of the committee to review and monitor the working of one of the Panchayati Raj Training Institutes in Himachal Pradesh

In attempting an evaluation of the impact of its activities, the Centres position could be likened to that of the fly in Aesop's Fable, which sat upon the chariot wheel and said, "What dust do I raise". With all respect to Aesop, raising dust is not an activity entirely without value. There is a clear need to clear the dust, which has settled upon institute and mind with regard to participation and governance. Again if sufficient number of 'flies' could gather and sit upon the chariot wheel, the dust raised could be considerably greater—a multiplier effect.

Without a sense of false modesty, PRIA and its partners can claim significant contribution towards building an environment where institutions of local self-governance are recognised as part of the permanent edifice of Indian democracy. The fact that the second round of elections (to PRI's) was held in Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan despite considerable hurdles, offers concrete evidence that the lack of political will can be overcome by popular enthusiasm for participation in governance. The scale of the elections campaign, the wide variety of methods employed to attract votes, the massive turnout of voters, are confirmation that Panchayati Raj is of special value to the masses of people whose interface with institutionalised governance has been so discouraging and exclusionary. The stand taken by some of the state election commission in taking up cudgels on behalf of timely elections, even at the risk of confronting state governments, is perhaps symptomatic of the changes in institutional mind-sets.

It is extremely gratifying to note the positive collaborative support (in the area of creating an enabling environment for institutions of local self-governance) which has

been provided by the Ministry of Rural Development, in the Government of India, as well as several state governments.

The other significant area of impact relates to the widening of political space for participation by women and other socially marginalised sections of society. A study of Women's leaderships in PRIs (PRIA, 1999) covering six states noted that:

- About 25% of elected women representatives observed a visible change in their status within their family after they had been elected
- About 60% of the women (elected representatives) said that they would encourage women to stand for elections
- A similar number of women (60%) were contemplating contesting PRI elections again

The change in the perceptions of the elected women representatives is staggering, given the limited opportunities available in a patriarchal social system. Perhaps, equal, if not more significant, is the impact that women representatives have created by providing role models for other women; like a small pebble cast into a still pond, the ripples would persist and widen. Case studies documented (PRIA and NCRSO's 'Participatory Bottom-up Planning', a report on national workshop, 1998) have already established the fact that most women saw their work within Panchayats as empowering and as a period of self-growth, similarly, new leadership of Dalits has emerged at the grassroots level, by breaking the traditional barrier of the caste system.

Finally, the impact of PRIA and its partners work in strengthening self-governance can be assessed in terms of its contribution in influencing the present discourse on devolution and decentralisation of Governance, of the need to enable participation in development. Several state governments have taken initiatives to make block transfer of funds to Gram Panchayats so that they can undertake expenditure in accordance with locally determined priorities. In West Bengal, the entire process of land reforms (and the consequent social transformation) was piggy backed on vibrant *panchayats*. Even those who view PRIs in instrumentalist terms, recognise that efficient delivery of services and the accountability of the delivery system cannot be seen independently of each other, and that *panchayats* offer an institutional framework for linking the two. Local development projects (donor supported) in their search for sustainability of developments processes, have been focusing on *panchayats* as the continuing institutional framework which combines the possibilities of political change with potential for accountability and transparency.

In conclusion, PRIA and its partners in the programme to Strengthen Local self-governance can look back upon their work in the year 1999-2000 with a sense of satisfaction and with renewed confidence in their ability to take up the challenges that lie ahead.

F. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Phase III of the Programme for Strengthening Local Self-Governance

Based on the review of Phase II of the programmed followed by recommendations and findings of the Review team the programme strategies of the third phase have been designed and finalised.

For the purpose of the programme in the year 2000-2001, the states have been segmented into three categories:

1. Category I: where second round of the elections have already been held or are going to be held shortly. The states are Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.
2. Category II: where elections will be held by end of this year (September – November). The states are Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala.
3. Category III: where elections are not due till mid-2001. The states are Bihar, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

The programme activities are broadly divided into four areas:

1. Intensive support – in each state the RSO/PRIA will identify a few districts for intensive coverage. In the selected districts, a block will be identified for 100% coverage (all Gram Panchayats, and all elected members in the block)
2. Extensive support – this will be more in the form of support to other organisations and partners in the state through information dissemination, organisation of workshops, publication of newsletters, etc.
3. Research and advocacy – this will include documentation of local processes, besides conducting field level research studies.
4. Programme co-ordination

Besides this, at the national level, a National Resource Centre will be set up which will be electronically linked with the State Level Resource Centres. The national programme will also include research and programme documentation.

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