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PRIA

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Gram Sabha Mobilisation

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Gram Sabha is a constitutional body consisting of all persons registered in the electoral rolls of a village Panchayat. It provides a political forum to people in the village to meet and discuss their common problems, and consequently, understand the needs and aspirations of the community. Gram Sabha is also a forum to meet, discuss, debate and analyze the development and administrative actions of elected representatives and thereby, ensure transparency and accountability in functioning of the village Panchayat. Thus Gram Sabha, an epitome of participatory and direct democracy, is the only body, which provides valuable inputs to Gram Panchayat to lead local government effectively. At the same time Gram Sabha also acts as watchdog in the interest of village communities by monitoring the functioning of the Gram Panchayat ¹.

However, in actual practice, the Gram Sabha has not risen to the expectations of the lawmakers and spirit of the Constitution of India. The socio-economic and political realities of Indian villages are not so conducive that just passing of legislation will bring desired changes. Even today almost two third of villagers are functionally illiterate. Their illiteracy is crippled with prevailing caste and gender biases. The rigid caste hierarchy has traditionally excluded dalits and other backward castes from the realm of political decision-makings. The powerful patriarchic norms still restrict women to participate in public arena. That is, on average, almost three quarter of population in every village had been traditionally excluded from socio-political decision-makings at local levels.

The Constitutional (73rd) Amendment Act and consequent conformity State Panchayati Raj Acts have great potential to challenge traditional power structures through formation and functioning of the Gram Sabha and Panchayats. These Acts, though necessary, can however play just facilitative roles in this regard. Thus

- (i) People should know about importance and functioning of the Gram Sabha.
- (ii) Knowing the importance, they should feel the need to participate in meetings of their own Gram Sabha.
- (iii) When they participate in the meeting, every citizen should get equal opportunity to influence the decisions of Gram Sabha.
- (iv) And finally, Gram Sabha decisions should be implemented so as to sustain participation and interest of people in relevance and effectiveness of the Gram Sabha

That is, unless all citizens do not get equal space for informed and effective participation in deliberations of Gram Sabha, Panchayati Raj Institutions cannot function in participatory, accountable and transparent manner. Panchayats can bring desired betterment in the lives of villages only when they listen to the Gram Sabhas and Gram Sabhas meet, deliberate, decide, demand and monitor regularly.

¹ PRIA (1997): Papers Presented on Gram Sabha in Research Workshop organized by PRIA, New Delhi

PRIA and its Partners provide topmost priorities to strengthening the Gram Sabhas. Making citizens and their groups aware about importance of Gram Sabhas and make them interested in the affairs of Gram Sabhas have been one of the most important components of PRIA's interventions from 1995 onwards. The present paper is based on participatory experiences of Gram Sabha Mobilizations undertaken by PRIA and its thousands of Partners in 12 states of the country over last 10 years. This paper is divided into five sections. Section one provides socio-legislative nuances of Gram Sabhas for understanding the importance and need of Gram Sabha Mobilization. Section two describes various methods and tools used in Gram Sabha mobilization to encourage citizens to effectively participate in the meetings of Gram Sabhas. Finally sections three four and five are devoted to the impacts, leanings from the field and actions required.

1. Gram Sabha: Socio-Legislative Nuances

Gram Sabha elects representatives of Gram Panchayats, intermediate Panchayats and district Panchayats. The physical boundary of Gram Sabha is coterminous with that of the village Panchayat. Thus a Gram Sabha may comprise one or more revenue villages. The spread and population of a Gram Sabha varies from state to state. Accordingly average numbers of villages in a Gram Sabha (Panchayat) vary from 11.5 in West Bengal and Orissa to 1.2 in Haryana. While an average Gram Sabha in Kerala comprises 30,000 people, the average size of a Gram Sabha is around 1000 persons in Uttar Pradesh. Even within a district, socio-economic structures of villages are not same. Caste and gender dynamics play differently in different localities. However, experiences suggest that there are certain common issues, which transcend all regional, social and political variations. These issues can be clubbed into 5 categories.

(a) Legislative Gaps and Procedural Perplexities

Most of the states have neither spelt out powers of Gram Sabhas nor have laid down any procedures for the functioning of these bodies² For instance, the Jaws in most of the States prescribe that at least two meetings of the Gram Sabha should be held in a year. Unfortunately, the minimum has been interpreted as maximum. The provisions related to quorum are confusing and prone to the manipulations by persons in powerful positions. It may be surprising to anyone to know that the people or their representatives practically do not decide agenda of meetings of Gram Sabhas. The state government often fixes these agendas in advance. Some state acts do provide for powers to the Gram Sabhas to identify beneficiaries to be covered under different development schemes. This provision though expresses faith in the Gram Sabha but at the same time it also restricts and undermines the role of Gram Sabha. Gram Sabhas has been converted into Beneficiaries Sabhas³. The functional relationship between Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat has not been clearly spelt out in most of the states. Moreover, Gram Sabha decisions may or may not be binding to the Gram Panchayat.

² PRIA (200 I) : Rai M, et al edited " The State of Panchayats: A participatory Perspective", Samskriti Publications, New Delhi

³ PRIA (2000): Panchayati Raj Institutions: A balance Sheet

In most of the states the territorial jurisdictions of Gram Sabhas are fairly large. It is impossible to convene a single Gram Sabha for many revenue villages. Even if a meeting of such large Gram Sabha takes place, quality and levels of participation get affected.

Status of Gram Sabhas in Different States						
S.No	Name of the State	Average no. of villages in Gram Sabha	No.of Meetings per year	Quorum (out of total electorate)	Functions* Devolved	Total No. of Functions• devolved
1.	Andhra Pradesh	1.50	2	1/3	1/2/3/4/5	5
2.	Assam	4.30	4	1/10	5	1
3.	Bihar	6.00	2	1/10	1/ 2/ 3/ 4/ 5/ 6/ 7/ 8/ 9	9
4.	Goa	4.20	4 Ordinary & 4 Special	1/10	1/ 3/ 4/ 6	4
5.	Gujarat	1.40	4	1/10	1/ 2/ 3/10	4
6.	Haryana	1.20	2	1/10	1/19/10/11	4
7.	Himachal Pradesh	7.30	4	1/5	5/ 6/ 8/ 9/12	5
8.	Kanataka	10.70	2	1/10	1/2/3/4/5/6/7/8/10/11/2	10
9.	Kerala	1.40	4	1/10	1/ 2/ 3/ 4/ 5/ 6/ 7/ 8/ 9/11/12	II
10.	Madhya Pradesh	4.10	12+4	1/3	1/12/13/10	4
11.	Maharashtra	1.70	4	15%	1/12/3/11/12	5
12.	Manipur	4.00	Not available	1/10	3/ 5/16/ 7/ 8	5
13.	Orissa	11.50	2+4	1/10	1/2/4/11/12	5
14.	Punjab	1.20	2	1/5	1/ 4/ 6/7/ 8/ 9	6
15.	Rajasthan	5.00	2	1/10	1/2/3/5/6/7/8/9/10	9
16.	Sikkim	3.20	2	1/10	1/ 3/ 5/ 6/ 7/ 8/ 9	7

	Tamil Nadu	1.30	4	1110	11213/5/6/7/81\0/12	9
18.	Tripura	1.00	Not available	1/8	1/3/10	3
19.	Uttar Pradesh	1.50	2	1/5	5/ 61819	4
20.	West Bengal	11.50	2	1/20	5,6,9	3

***FUNCTIONS:**

1. Examine annual statements of accounts/ audit report, audit note and replies to them.
2. Discuss report on the administration of the preceding year.
3. Review program of work from the year/ any new program/ consider and scrutinize the existing schemes and kinds of activities/ Scrutinize the completed works and all kinds of activities of the Gram Panchayat.
4. Consider proposals for fresh taxation or for enhancement of existing taxes.
5. Selection of schemes/ beneficiaries/ locations and identification of beneficiaries for the implementation of various development programs.
6. Mobilize voluntary labor and contribution of kind and cash.
7. Undertake programs for adult education and family welfare with in the village.
8. Promote unity and harmony among all the sections of the community.
9. Seek Clarifications from the Mukhia and members of the Gram Panchayat about any scheme/ income and expenditure.
10. Consider the budget prepared by the Gram Panchayat and the future development programs and plans.
11. Maintain a complete register for all development works undertaken by Gram Panchayat or any other department.
12. Approve Village plan.

Source: PRIA (2004): Fact sheets prepared for the First National Round Table held at Kolkata on 24-25 July 2004 convened by the Ministry of Panchayati Rai, Government of India

where almost thousands of citizens are required to sit together and discuss the developmental issues for their fairly large Village Panchayat. Though some of states like Orissa, Rajasthan, West Bengal and HP have legally divided Gram Sabhas into smaller units⁴, namely Palli/Ward/Up Gram Sabhas; many states have yet to realize this gap.

(b) Social Exclusion

Indian villages are highly politicized, divided on caste and class lines. Here men have say in most of the decisions and women remain at the periphery. In normal circumstances if a Gram Sabha meeting is organized, women and lower caste men would not come to this meeting unless they are prompted to come. Even if they come, they will sit in one corner

⁴ PRIA (2004) : State Thematic Reports on PRI Programme

and would not raise their voice unless supported to do so. So, the legislative order (progressive provisions of the Seventy-Third Amendment Acts) cannot be realized unless social prompting and social support is provided to marginalized sections. Unfortunately, except some civil society initiatives, no institutional support mechanism exists to encourage and support dalits and women to effectively participate in the Gram Sabha meetings

(a) Lack of Public Education

Parliament passed amendment act and state legislatures brought necessary changes in their existing Panchayat acts so that these acts conform to mandatory provisions of 73rd Amendment Act. Neither Union government nor State government bothered to prepare people for new realities of local self-governance. Panchayats are not new to Indians. Everyone knows about Panchayat through his or her own experiences. Unfortunately experiences of pre-amendment Panchayats had been mixed. Majority of people did not know the difference between present constitutional and democratic Panchayats and not so democratic Panchayats of Past. This dangerous information gap is not at the level of ordinary citizens only. Even people in powerful positions do not know implications of the 73rd Amendment Act. This is very common in government officials who are supposed play very important role in the success of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Because of affirmative reservations, almost one million women and more than half million from lower castes have been elected to Panchayats. They do not know about their roles and responsibilities as elected representatives. Citizens find it difficult to distinguish between Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat. And past track records of governmental initiatives provide very bleak statistics. The most optimistic estimates suggest that less than one percent of elected representatives are provided basic orientation during first year of their election.⁵

(b) Apathetic Citizens

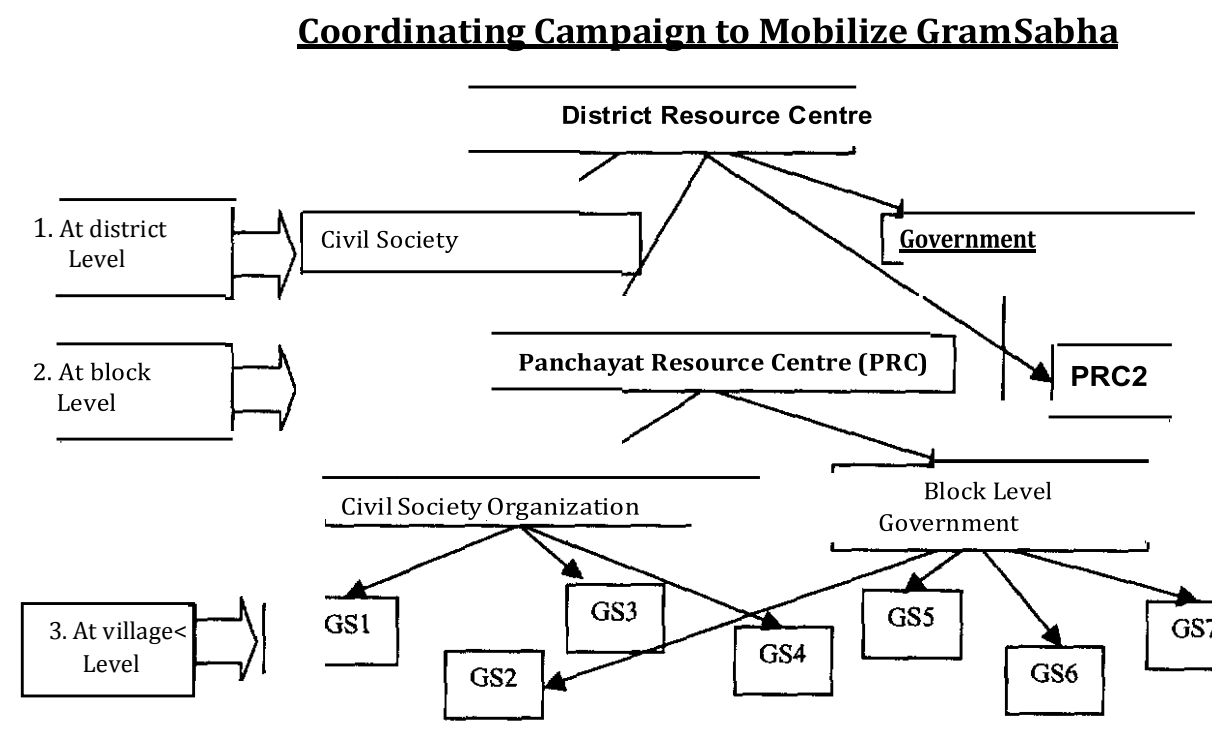
History of dependence syndrome and ignorance about importance of participation in Gram Sabha meetings make citizens apathetic. The natural question asked by an ordinary citizen is, "What benefit I will receive if I participate in Gram Sabha meeting?". If Gram Sabha can not deliver the basic needs of its citizens, why should one spend time and energies in its meeting?

It has been found in almost all states that just after Panchayat elections when first Gram Sabha takes place more people participate in the Gram Sabha with new expectations. However, with the passage of time, when they realize that Gram Sabha is unable to deliver, the participation level dwindles down. It connotes that Gram Sabha should be made genuinely effective so that it provides effective forum for people to influence decisions related to local economic development and social justice.

⁵ PRIA and Partners experiences and crude data available with State Institutes of Rural Development, nodal training institutes for Panchayats

1. Methods of Mobilization

PRIA and Partners are engaged in Gram Sabha mobilization since last ten years. During this period many methods and strategies have been employed to undertake this campaign to reach to maximum mass of citizens with minimum available resources. For any



campaign, the first and foremost strategy relates to developing mechanism to deliver the contents of campaign. Multi-level platforms of Civil Society Organizations have been found to be very effective in undertaking campaign. PRIA delivers its programmes through an integrated system of District Resource Centres (DRCs) in district, State Resource Centers (SRCs) in states and National Resource Centre (NRC) in PRIA at Delhi. The DRCs are synergizing and coordinating hub centers. At Gram Sabha levels many methods and tools have been used to make people aware and encourage them to participate in Gram Sabha meetings. Some of them are

- Orientation Programs:** In this method the information related to the functions, powers, responsibilities, legal entitlements, decision making, importance of participation of women and dalits are disseminated to the participants. This program is conducted during half to one daylong workshop. It is followed up by periodical sensitization. The participants of these programs are elected representatives of gram Panchayats, SHG women, Youth groups, Panchayat committee members, etc.
- Wall writing:** The salient features of gram sabha are displayed on the walls in common places of the villages. In this method the letters used are large in size (font) and attractive colors are used. Messages are also conveyed pictographically.
- Kalajathas:** Cultural programs with the focal theme of importance of popular participation in gram sabha and also the various aspects of gram

sabha are covered. This is conducted in the form of Nukkad Nataks, Pad-dangal, Folk Songs, Puppet shows etc.

- (d) **Posters and Pamphlets:** The information dissemination in connection with gram sabha is done through fixing of posters in the common places and also distribution of pamphlets.
- (e) **Yatra:** Rathyatras and Pad-yatras are organized in order to sensitize people and disseminate the information related to gram sabha.
- (f) **Meetings:** Small group and informal meetings with the members of the women groups, citizen collectives, youth clubs are also done.
- (g) **Audio/Video Cassettes:** Short duration video films were also shown in the villages, which conveys the message of gram sabha and its features. Songs are also played through public address system, which exclusively covers gram sabha.
- (h) **Panchayat Mitras:** This concept is exclusive in the state of Himachal Pradesh where these Panchayat Mitras meet the GS members personally and mobilize them to participate in the meetings in more effective way. The target groups are mainly women and dalits who had been historically kept away from the mainstream of participation.

Coverage of Gram Sabha mobilisation in some states during 2004-05

S.No	Name of the State	No. of Gram Sabhas Mobilized
1.	Andhra Pradesh	72
2.	Himachal Pradesh	110
3.	Gujarat	50
4.	Kerala	501
5.	Bihar	151
6.	Uttaranchal	120
	Total	1004

Source: State Thematic Reports (PRIA, 2005)

2. Impacts of Mobilization

(a) Enhanced Participation, specially of Women and Dalits

Wherever Gram Sabha mobilization campaigns were undertaken, it has been found that their participation levels have increased both in quantitative and qualitative terms. This increase varies from marginal to significant proportions. Women prefer to participate in the groups. So, wherever formal or informal women associations are vibrant, women participation has increased significantly. For example women SHGs in Andhra Pradesh, Nari Networks in Haryana and Mahila Mandals in H.P played significant roles in enhancing women participation in 'mobilized' Gram Sabha meetings. Though it is difficult to generalize but a sense of gender solidarity and comfort has been observed in many places in the sense that women headed Panchayats attract more women participation in their Gram Sabha meetings.

Somewhat same trend had been noticed in case of dalit participation. For example, in Sabarkantha region where Samajik Nyay Manch (an association of dalit CSOs) is active, participation of dalits- were higher and more effective in comparison to the Gram Sabha meetings in other places. With support from PRIA, Khap (caste) Panchayats of dalits in Mahendragarh district of Haryana helped its members to effectively participate in voters list update. It intends to enhance dalit participation in forthcoming Gram Sabha meeting during May-June 2005.

Community Based Monitoring and Social Monitoring have become effective as the issues and implementation of different schemes and programs quality are very much assured as the members demand in the GS meetings. The domination of the officials have been reduced as they GS members have become very active and started questioning the line department officials who come to attend the GS meetings.

Despite all odds, it has been experiences that people do want to participate once they know 'whys' and 'hows' of participation. And when they participate, Gram Sabha discusses real issues ranging from social justice to economic development of the village.

(b) Silent Social Revolutions: Challenging Old and New Power Structures

Constitutional compulsions have coerced men of higher caste to strategically align with their lower castes counterparts and women. This strategic, unholy and unequal alliance has resulted into proxy women and dalit panches/sarpanches. Traditional power structures, with the support from Panchayat Secretaries and other government officials, manipulate constitutional mandate and rule by proxy. The elected women and dalit candidates works according to whims and fancies of those who 'sponsor' these candidates.

Mahila Mandal Challenges Pradhan and Secretary of Bahttu Panchayat in HP

On 2 October 2004 special gram sabha was called for the verification of BPL list based on the BPL survey undertaken last year with a purpose of identification of beneficiaries. It was observed by the mahila mandal during their monthly meetings that the villagers of the ward no-3 &4 that the number allocated to the poor families were not correct and those who deserved were not found to be there in the list. They raised this issue in the gram sabha on that particular day but the Panchayat Pradhan and the government observer had not shown any interest to the concern. Responding to the issue the Panchayat executives stated the reason being non-availability of time with the people sitting there. The ward resident then wrote a letter to the SOM and highlighted the matter in the Newspaper and also met with the district administration. The District administration in its response directed the concerned BOO to recall the gram sabha meeting within 15 days. The ranking allotted to the families were again reviewed with approval of the gram sabha members and all the women in the Mahila Mandals made it sure that the deserving families were included in the list

But when Gram Sabha mobilizations ensure regular and systematic meetings of Gram Sabha, automatic checks and balances take place. Such mobilizations have not only enhanced participation and systematize Gram Sabha meetings but have also facilitated building of new leaderships of women and dalits. These Gram Sabha meetings start silently challenging unjust behaviours (untouchabilities, atrocities on women) of Caste and Patriarchal systems.

Panchayat Raj in many places is turning into Sarpanch Raj. Sarpanch and secretary of Panchayat exercise all powers of elected body of Panchayat. Even elected Panches find themselves redundant and irrelevant. But Gram Sabha mobilizations have helped Panches to play their responsible roles as people's representatives. They start questioning the conducts Sarpanches. That is why many times many sparpanches perceive that Gram Sabhas mobilization are threats to their own monopolies and many times hegemonies

c. Enhanced Quality of Deliberations in Gram Sabhas: Issues Addressed in Gram Sabha Meetings

Most of the time government imposes agenda for Gram Sabha meetings and so discussions in such meetings are restricted to selection of beneficiaries for certain schemes. But it has been found that people prefer to discuss issues related to their daily lives. Women often raise social issues and issues related to women. However, the major issues that are addressed in the GS meetings are mainly the livelihood issues or development issues or issues associated with basic needs and facilities.

Discussing IRDP Survey in Gram Sabha, HP

The Gram Sabha Sokhni Da Kot proceedings began around 1 :00 p.m. as the Pradhan and the observer were waiting for the quorum to be met. The best arrangements for the Gram Sabha were to be seen at Sokhni Da Kot. The Panchayat office being too small to accommodate more than a few people, the Panchayat had set up a shamiyana and laid down carpets in the ground in front of the Panchayat. They had also made the provision of a mike, so that there was no need to shout to get heard. Arrangements for refreshments had also been made.

Once the quorum was met, the Pradhan and the observer started the proceedings by explaining the questions and scoring of the IRDP survey form. The people were asked to raise objections if they felt that the numbers allotted to anyone were incorrect. One by one, the Pradhan started announcing the names of the surveyed individuals and the numbers allocated to them. After each announcement, everyone was asked whether they had any objections. In most cases no one had anything to say. However, in a couple of cases a few people raised objections to the scores given. They claimed that the concerned individual was prosperous, while the score allotted to him/her was too little. Verification of such cases was undertaken at that moment itself by reconfirming answers to all the questions from the concerned individual. Example: Do you have a telephone connection, a scooter etc. Answers to these questions were noted down and the objections jotted in the gram sabha proceedings. Village living is like family living where everyone is aware of the material possessions of the other. Answering questions at a public platform like the gram sabha created a covertly coercive atmosphere forcing the alleged to answer honestly. There were a few cases of names of non-existent individuals being included in the IRDP survey list as well. These names were noted down in the proceedings register, to be deleted from the list altogether. In this manner, the Gram Sabha of Sokhni Da Kot progressed in an orderly and organized manner. The earnestness with which the Gram Sabha proceedings went on is evident by the fact that the proceedings continued for three days until everyone's name was announced and objections I no objections registered. In all there were 235 cases of objections were sorted out there in the gram sabha meeting.

Gram Sabha meetings also discuss specific issues like Voters list update (MP, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Haryana) for Panchayat elections, Birth-Death Registration and Sanitation (Bihar), Alcoholism (Haryana), widow pension (Uttaranchal).

3. Issues for Advocacy

- (i) Gram Sabha should be conducted in complete transparent and

participatory manner (so that Sarpanch or Secretaries could not hijack it). Modalities of Gram Sabha meetings, quorum, agenda, postponement etc must be elaborated and disseminated to every Panchayat member. The time and agenda of the GS meeting has to prepare by the GPs not by the block office as is the practice currently. The resolutions passed in GS meetings must be made binding to Gram Panchayats and the line department

- (ii) In many circumstances, Husbands or In-laws or Higher caste persons preside over meeting of Gram Sabha in place of women or dalit sarpanch. This is often done in collusion with government officials. Government must make unambiguous and stringent rule to punish guilties.
- (iii) Gram Sabha must oversee functioning of Gram Panchayat as well as other agencies (users committees, NGOs, etc) working in its physical area of jurisdictions. There is no scope to check the implementation of MPLADS and MLALADS programs. The utilization plans for these funds should be lined to demands of the Gram Sabhas in that region.
- (iv) Progress reports of all works being undertaken by different agencies should be periodically shared with the Gram Sabha. During such sharing these agencies must make note of Gram Sabha suggestions and these suggestions must be incorporated.
- (v) If all women GS meetings are made mandatory (Mahila Gram Sabhas in Maharashtra, for example) before general Gram Sabha then issues related to women can be addressed in a more effective way.
- (vi) The representations of the government officials have to be restricted for the GS meetings. Their participation should be limited so that they could not hijack proceedings of Gram Sabha meetings (Gujarat and to an extent in Haryana)
- (vii) Gram Sabha meetings can take place in fruitful manner only when
 - There are institutional mechanisms to make people aware about the importance of participation (campaigns supported by governments)
 - Institutional measures are taken to divide larger Gram Sabha in functionally possible units like Ward Sabhas
 - Functional relationship between Gram Sabha and other bodies (Gram Panchayats, CSOs, Project Specific Committees etc) are institutionally defined and delineated on paper in clear-cut terms.

4. In Lieu of Conclusions

Realizing the importance of Gram Sabha, National Round table Conference of Ministers of Panchayats from states of India and Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj resolved in Kolkata on 24th July 2004 that *"Whereas this conference is convinced that Gram Sabhas are the foundation for participatory democracy and good governance:*

Therefore it resolves:

1. **to create the environment** and conditions necessary for participation by the voters in the villages and hamlets through:
 - a) defining Ward Sabhas where meaningful participation is possible;
 - b) fixing frequency and periodicity for the meetings of the Ward Sabhas and Gram Sabhas;
 - c) ensuring that voters at the Ward level have continuous access to information on the meetings of the Ward/Gram Sabhas and the agenda to be taken up such meetings.

2. **to enable Gram Sabha** to function as a watch dog on the Panchayat by
 - a) mandating the association of Gram Sabhas in all major aspects of decision making and specially those decisions which relate to
 - i. need assessment before public expenditure is undertaken for development and poverty alleviation;
 - ii. identification of beneficiaries to be covered under the schemes of poverty alleviation;
 - iii. authorization of issue of 'Utilization Certificates' for funds allocated to different projects of Panchayats

3. **to empower Gram Sabha** so that
 - a) all plans of the Panchayats (for economic development and social justice) require the approval of Gram Sabhas;
 - b) the accounts of the Gram Panchayat are subject to social audit by Gram Sabha;
 - c) that natural resources (water bodies, forests, wastelands, minor mineral, commons) at the local level are subject to management and control of Gram Sabha

4. **to take steps and devise mechanisms** so that women voters in each Gram Sabha are enabled to 'voice' their needs and priorities at the Gram Sabha meetings"

These resolutions are historic and reflect the consensus and concerns of the Union and State governments. They reinforce the fact that unless Gram Sabhas are not made strong, Panchayats cannot become transparent accountable and responsive local self-government.

But unfortunately the most important component of Panchayat Raj system is the most neglected one. In these circumstances, initiatives undertaken by PRIA and its Partners to mobilize Gram Sabhas are very significant. These campaigns have enhanced quantities and qualities of participation in Gram Sabha meetings. But it has happened only in intensively intervened areas, which is a drop in ocean of requirements.

Moreover, even at smaller scale, how long these programmatic interventions go? What are threshold stages when we can say that such campaigns are not required? This may be a bit difficult to answer in present circumstances. But it can be certainly asserted this is one the most relevant components of strengthening PRIs programme. **PRIA** must keep pursuing this agenda with others so that Gram Sabha Mobilization become part and parcel of all programmes (whether

governmental or non-governmental) being undertaken at village levels.

Government and other agencies too have successful experiences of undertaking campaigns like Polio eradication, etc. Weak Gram Sabha is worse than polio for Panchayat system and grassroots democracy. So, it requires greater attention and resources. Government and civil society must realize the need of working for strengthening of the Gram Sabha. Studies after studies and review committees after committees have suggested that we can't do anything good without citizens' participation. And there is nothing better than to strengthen Gram Sabha for institutionalizing citizens' participation in sustainable manner.

Gram Sabhas are foundation of Panchayati Raj system. Unless this foundation is not strong, whole structure will crumble down with the passage of time. Government and Civil Society should come together to strengthen participation in legislatively effective Gram Sabhas. Citizens should be sensitized and encouraged to raise their demands through Gram Sabha. At the same time, state Acts should genuinely and legislatively empower Gram Sabhas and the PRIs so that Gram Sabhas guide, support and monitor functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

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