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Participatory Research in Asia

practitioner notes

Facilitating Grassroots Campaign on PESA and Decentralised Water Management

Campaign Overview

The people in the Schedule V tribal areas of Chhattisgarh face problems relating to access to regular and clean drinking water, and adequate water for irrigation. Under The Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas Act, 1996 (also known as PESA) and the Chhattisgarh Panchayati Raj Act, the responsibility of panchayats for the management of minor water bodies and that of the gram sabha for the management of natural resources which are within that village, is clearly specified. In Chhattisgarh, however, no rules have been framed to operationalise PESA and the panchayats and community's engagement in the management of water programmes, and the tribal community's management of minor water bodies in the Schedule V areas, is still far from a reality.

To address these gaps the Chhattisgarh Water Centred PESA Awareness Campaign was organised in two phases, between April-June, 2013, in four districts, which included Korba, Sarguja and Kanker Districts (completely covering Schedule V areas) and Rajnandgaon (partially covering Schedule V area).¹

Campaign Objective: The focus of the campaign was to enhance awareness among the tribal communities and the PRI members about the main provisions of the PESA Act, with special focus on water issues and the significance of gram sabha participation in water management. The campaign was also to be used as a platform to ensure interface between the government, elected representatives and the gram sabha members.

Campaign audience and coverage: The campaign was primarily aimed at gram sabha members, CBOs and traditional leaders and panchayat representatives of the intervening villages, panchayats, blocks and districts. It covered 80 villages from 40 panchayats across eight blocks and four districts. From each block, five panchayats and from each panchayat one to two villages were identified as the intensive site for the campaign. It was planned that 50 per cent of each village would be covered.

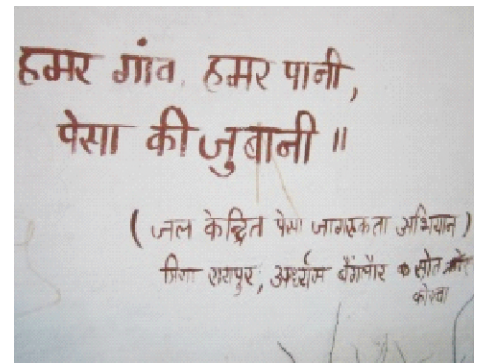
Campaign Design

The campaign had three distinct phases: the preparatory phase, the implementation phase and the follow up phase.

¹ Campaign was a joint initiative of PRIA, Arghyam, Social Revival Group of Urban Rural and Tribal-SROUT, DISHA Samaj Sevi Sanstha, Path Pradarshak and Jankalyan Samajik Sansthan.

(a) Preparatory Phase

- State level Planning:** The detailed plan and strategy for running the campaign were discussed in a one day meeting at PRIA Raipur, and a district wise plan was discussed and finalised. In addition regular communication and coordination efforts were made. Also, the preparation of IEC materials for the campaign was initiated at the state level. It included two posters, one pamphlet and banners on the importance of participating in the gram sabhas in Scheduled areas, and community participation in water management and PESA provisions. Along with this slogans were developed for wall writing and an audio was also prepared.
- District level preparatory activities:** Efforts to engage the government, PRI members, media, and other actors well before the main campaign activity included formation of a Campaign Committee consisting of members of the partner NGOs and volunteers from the community; informing the villagers about the campaign and the place where the community meeting was to be held at least three to four days in advance through home visits, via the Kotwar, posters, pamphlets and wall writings; and informing the District Collector, officials from the Panchayati Raj and water related departments, PRI elected representatives, media and civil society organisations and actors about the campaign, atleast a week in advance.



(b) Campaign Phase

The campaign included one day intensive awareness generation in each panchayat, where the **Jagrukta Rath** and community meetings were facilitated. Some of the key campaign methodologies used during the phase included:

- Structured inauguration of the campaign:** This provided visibility to the campaign, to engage multiple stakeholders and use the campaign platform as an interface event between the government, elected representatives and the gram sabha members.
- Jagrukta Rath (Awareness Chariot):** The **Jagrukta Rath** (a jeep or small van with awareness banners and loud speakers playing out campaign songs and slogans) was used to ensure that the outreach of the campaign message and information was effective, covering all the hamlets (tolas) of the intervening panchayats.
- IEC Material:** Information about PESA, relevant aspects related to the gram sabha in the Schedule V areas, and the role of the community in water management was shared with the help of brightly coloured posters and pamphlets/brochures.
- Community Meeting:** In each district 10 community meetings were organised during the campaign period. During these meetings structured information about the PESA 1996 Act, and the rights of the gram sabha members under the Act, with special focus on the management of water resources, were shared. In addition open discussions on the status of the gram sabha in the panchayat and the water related problems faced by the community were facilitated.



- **Jal Yatra (Water Rally):** In addition in Surguja District a **Jal Yatra** was organised after the community meetings. For the **Jal Yatra** two to three spots in the villages were pre identified by the community wherein water related interventions were required (i.e., check dams, hand pumps, dabris, dhondis). In these spots during the **Jal Yatra** the campaign participants took an oath that they would participate in the forthcoming gram sabha to discuss the need for the water structures.
- **Community Engagement:** Structured efforts were made to include community representatives like **mahila mandal** members, and youth groups to join the campaign as volunteers. The community volunteers helped to disseminate the campaign information during the campaign. In addition the campaign was able to mobilise the participation of other CSOs and social activists in the district to facilitate the campaign's activities.



(c) Follow up Phase

- After the campaign follow up activities were initiated in the four districts. In Surguja District during the special gram sabha in June, 2013 issues of water were discussed in two gram sabhas. In Rajnandga on, the secretaries and sarpanch were helped to hold meetings with the gram sabha members of two gram panchayats, and were made aware about their roles and responsibilities.

Key Achievements of the Campaign:

- Coverage of about 40,000 tribal citizens across 40 intervening panchayats, and four districts through this campaign; with intensive coverage of nearly 5000 citizens, through 80 structured community meetings.
- Signing of resolution letters by the tribal community members stating their commitment to attend the gram sabha meetings and work at the effective management and conservation of water resources in their panchayat;
- Concrete commitments made by the community to work on water issues;
 - *In Korba District in Binjhara Village the sarpanch and villagers resolved to raise the issue of the stalled tap water scheme in the coming gram sabha.*
 - *In Village Irganwa in Sarguja District, two community members donated land for the construction of dhondis and water tanks for the tap water scheme.*
- Creating an enabling environment to undertake future work on water and PESA in the intervening, as well as in the other districts of Chhattisgarh.



Tips for Practitioners

Building from the Chhattisgarh experience, we are enclosing some tips/lessons which will aid in facilitating similar grassroots campaigns.

- **Have a structured and strategic campaign design:** For planning any grassroots campaign, it is essential that it has a clear stated objective, which is drawn from the context and the felt need. The objective can have either or both dimensions of mobilisation as well as information dissemination. This will help frame a clear campaign message for the audience. The audience and coverage of the campaign also need to be clearly defined and should be realistic, in keeping with the time and resources available. The campaign design should include three distinct phases: the preparatory phase, the implementation phase and the follow up phase.
- **Invest in in-depth preparation:** For a successful campaign, the facilitating organisation's active presence and interventions in the field before the campaign are necessary. Prior preparation includes contacting the different stakeholders (the recipients of the campaign message, as well as supporters of your campaign) before the campaign. This would include the media (both print and visual). It also includes understanding the context of the village and the panchayat.
- **Ensure a community centred campaign for sustainable impacts:** Design the involvement of the community in the campaign process like deciding the time of the community meeting as per the community's convenience; getting volunteers from the community to facilitate campaign activities. This will create the community's ownership with the campaign process, help in meeting challenges of low participation, and create capacities within the community to facilitate similar campaigns in the future.
- **Use multiple and culturally appropriate methods:** It will help to use creative and multiple methods to meet the different information, as well as awareness needs of the community. While the IEC material helps in providing more structured information, culturally appropriate methods like the *Jal Yatra* had greater emotive connect with the tribal community. Similarly collective forums like the community meeting provide space for more intensive discussions while information dissemination mediums like the *Jagrukta Rath* created a wider outreach of the key campaign message.
- **Engage multiple stakeholders for greater, outreach and sustainability of impact:** Campaign strategy of engaging with multiple stakeholders like government officials, elected representatives, community volunteers, CSOs and the media will help in optimal utilisation of limited human and financial resources, getting information support, as well as enhancing the outreach of the campaign. It will provide space to undertake followup interventions of the campaign.
- **Build in sustained follow-up of the campaign:** While the grassroots campaign is an important means to facilitate information sharing and awareness generation, it is essential to plan structured followup interventions to sustain the benefits of the campaign.

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This publication has been brought out under the PRIA programme titled "Action Research on Implementation of Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA), 1996 in Chhattisgarh (with special focus on water)."

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