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PRIA

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Capacity Building Workshop for Elected Panchayat Representatives

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List of Abbreviations

PRIs	- Panchayati Raj Institutions
PRIA	- Society for Participatory Research in Asia
NGOs	- Non-Governmental Organizations
PEVAC	- Pre-Election Voters Awareness Campaign
PRJA	- Panchayat Pratinidhi Jagrukta Abhiyan
SM	- Shiksha Mitra
SSA	- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
BDO	- Block Development Officer
UNICEF	- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNDP	- United Nations Development Programme

Executive Summary

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) seek to realize the goal of decentralized administration and decision-making by the people themselves, especially at the grassroots level. PRIs, the grassroots unit of self-governance, have been proclaimed as the vehicle of socio-economic transformation in 'Rural India'. Decentralization in democratic function and decision-making has been emphasized for quite some time now, as pure solution for better governance of India.

PRIs have been set-up in a three-tier system - Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad. The constitution proclaims that the panchayats have been established as 'units of self-rule'. They are also the next step towards 'constitutional swaraj'. We find that now at least legally and constitutionally the country's governance structure is directed below at the grassroots level, PRIs give us the right to a local economy. In UP, in the first meeting of the panchayat, the panchayat elected representatives asked, "If we have been given powers in our hands, then why are we not told about the budget?" In the first meeting itself it was demanded that they be told about the complete budget - how much money is being spent by the government in each district and for what purpose, what is the budget? Thus, we can see that Panchayats can be a powerful medium of information dissemination.

We tried and tried but failed to change the economic, political, education structures. But Panchayats are a glow of light in this all-pervading darkness. In the panchayats of Karnataka, women raised their voices that schools do not open on time and the children move around aimlessly. As soon as this happened the teachers realized that the headmaster has reached their doors and it won't do to keep the schools closed!

Panchayats are our voice, our strength and ensures of more visibility in the democratic process.

Introduction:

The document consolidating the learnings from workshop conducted by PRIA (Society for Participatory research in Asia) and Partner organization CENCORED and Bihar rural development department for capacity building of elected representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions. The objective, design, process etc. of the workshop has been explained below:

Objectives

The objective of this workshop is to come out with a common strategy for Capacity Building of Elected Representatives of Panchayati Raj.

The Workshop Design

Date: October 1st, 2002

Venue: SCADA Business Centre, Patna

Co-Sponsors: RD Department (Gram Abhiyantra Organisation & PR), Bihar
PRIA, New Delhi
CENCORED, Patna

Approaches:

- Panel Discussion and Dialogue
- Group Discussion
- Blueprint for Capacity Building Trainings

The Process

Mr. Sahini, PRIA initiated the proceedings by introducing the participants to the perspectives of PRIA. PRIA is a civil society organization based on New Delhi and is working towards local self-governance. It has been in a joint venture with CENCORED since 1995. Last year before Panchayati Raj elections an awareness campaign was initiated. PRIA and CENCORED are now looking towards a direction of strengthening PRIs through empowering elected representatives. PRIA's views on capacity building are that capacity is the ability to function. In relation to Panchayati Raj, functions and roles are at a number of levels. The need is capacity building of ward members or groups (elected representatives, women and Dalits) and of institutional capacity building. PRIA's experience is that capacity building is a process and it has many learning principles. Learning does not take place only through transfer of knowledge. Experiential learning is used in capacity building. We also believe skill building is based on learning and doing. The value of experiential learning is very high, learning process is dynamic in itself. PRIA's endeavor is towards capacity building through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Government, etc.

The 73rd amendment has made it constitutionally mandatory that the Gram Panchayat is responsible for social justice and local economic development.

The Present Scenario

The data available show that 43.53% is the literacy rate in Bihar, the percentage of women who are illiterate is 63.43% at the primary education level, 66% drop-out is there after Class V. No drinking water is available in 90% of the schools. There are only 10% schools where toilet facility is available. Literacy is dependent on infra-structure, the data on health and nutrition depicts a poor scenario. Child mortality ratio is 78:1000 and 23% of the kids weight is 2.5 kg at birth, 63.6% women are anemic.

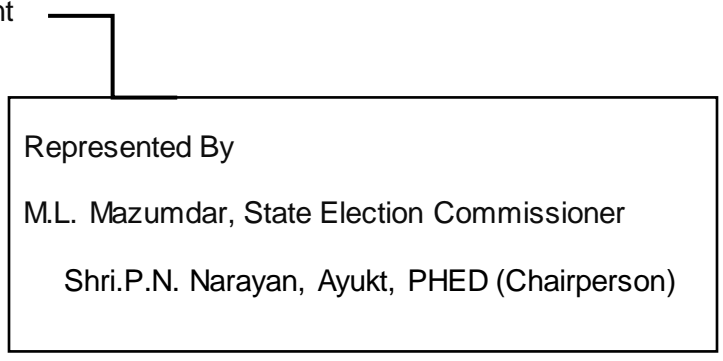
Challenges

If we base our work on the above data, then mobilization will be in the right direction. Service delivery should be performed efficiently and accountability should be there. In case of natural disasters, we should ensure how Panchayats can tackle the situation. We need to start the campaign on this basis. Thereafter there was a presentation on the perspective of PRIA and CENCORED towards Panchayats and on Pre-Election Voters Awareness Campaign (PEVAC) and Panchayat Pratinidhi Jagrukta Abhiyan (PRJA) by Ms. Shalini Bijlani (PRIA) and Mr. Vishwamohan (CENCORED).

Views of the Distinguished Guests towards Capacity Building for Panchayati Raj Institutions Elected Representatives

The Process - Panel Discussion & Comments from the Participants

Government



It has been after a long gap of 23 years that Panchayati Raj elections were held. At the time of election, enthusiasm could be seen among women. No one could have thought that in Bihar so many women would contest and win. Out of the 128000 elected members, 1/3rd are women. For the society's development woman's role is vital. NGOs work with the women in the villages are essential. Mr. Mazumdar said that he foresaw the role of women in family planning. NGOs should

be encouraged to go in for advocating about family planning. There is a need to talk to the women separately. One could maintain a list of pregnant women in an area with details about date of delivery, post-natal care and visits, and regularly encourage them that they should go for a family planning. It is better to bring up one child well rather than have more children and not bring them up properly. An elected representative who is a woman will be able to advocate better once she realizes the significance of this. Each NGO should take up one village to teach women about the importance of Family Planning.

The fact that they are being encouraged to live a better life will be enough for the women to follow lead. Health aspect especially on sanitation will be enthusiastically welcomed by the women, as they have to face many humiliating situations. The women can then pressurize the Panchayats and the ward members to work towards this. As we know, in Bihar the Panchayati Raj elections were held after overcoming great many difficulties. As compared to last time, there was less violence. The people of Bihar came forward to participate enthusiastically in this election. From our historical perspective, institutions (grassroots level) are becoming barriers towards a decentralization process. Shri. P.N. Narayan said that India's identity lay in her informal way of living due to the influence of religious institutions. To make a success in the Panchayati Raj, NGOs are really helped; our aspirations after the elections should also succeed.

When we look at the bigger canvas, in the community of nations, India is playing a big role, no one can deny it! But we have less faith or credibility in the state and the system. This is due to the complicated process of the judiciary. The credibility of the treaties, economic institutions, and the play of nation is in serious danger, all this thanks to an antiquated judicial system. This can happen in local self-governance also. The country is not where it should be. Our state governance is based on checks and balance. 103rd amendment does not believe in Indians. For e.g. the Bihar Cabinet had passed an order that the Mukhiya and the Panchayati Raj will look after the drinking water facility in the villages. For this a fund of Rs.3 crore was allotted. It has been four months now but only 25%-30% have received this fund, this is because of the institutional weakness and the greed found in the public and government sector people. Here NGOs have a very big role to play.

Some of our programs are like the PMGY in which Rs.25 crore through Panchayati Raj for long plan maintenance has been passed by Bihar Cabinet. A detailed process through a committee was submitted and passed by the Panchayati Raj department, but the file is still shuttling in the finance department it is all because of our mentalities. There should be some departments in the government to enforce accountability as per the law. As a public servant we spend public money, but we should feel responsible for it too and keep in mind the objectives of a public institution and of democracy. Laws are for proper implementation, not hindrance. In my view, NGOs can

understand this at the conceptual level and can change this attitude - they have a big role to play in this. Vitroquil, a sociologist has said - "Any free society requires more responsible disobedient and less irresponsible obedient." This principle can be best implemented by NGOs.

It has been more than a year now since PR was implemented; Mr. Dasgupta highlighted the experience since the elections:

1. Rural population has a lot of expectations from the elected representatives. It is our duty, especially those in the government to fulfill these expectations. It is no longer the prerogative the RD /PR department. All the departments are responsible for it.
2. For PR system to become efficient, Gram Panchayats should work efficiently - the responsibility is not in the pockets of few but of all the people at all levels. Gram Sabhas should be implemented and hindrance in the paths should be cleared.

NGOs/VOs play a big role in this empowerment process. The roles that they play are –

1. Sensitize rural population: They should feel a part of it and contribute towards it. In every state in the past 50 years, programs are run by the government and the expectations from them are high. The problem being faced is that initiatives from the civil society are dismal. We need to do something about this.
2. NGOs should increase public participation in self-governance: There seems to be some insensitivity and personal greed for not increasing the power of the local government.
3. Literacy has to be generated: We need to empower the hands of the NGOs.
4. Shiksha Mitra (SM) – Gram Panchayat have been given right to keep a SM for a period of 11-month contract. If the performance of the SM is not up to the mark, then the contract can be terminated. There is a provision for 45000 SMs at the primary and secondary education level. To make this successful, awareness about this has to be given to the local public and the Gram Panchayat level.
5. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) - Under this separate literacy centers need to be established.
6. For ensuring drinking water and sanitation facilities, help from the NGOs is required.

Whenever a new system becomes operational, problems do arise. Sanitation programme is presently being done in 4 districts through UNICEF. If drinking water is affected, mortality and morbidity will rise; a big campaign needs to be undertaken. Many NGOs are engaged in capacity building. We would like to use their skills in awareness generation of rights. A big training programme has to be organised, where government servants and elected representatives will be trained in this new system to bring a change in attitude.

NGOs need to assist in the capacity building with the Government. Mr. R.K. Singh wondered how PRIA can do this. Where is 'their' network available? for demonstration, an NGO can take up one sub-division consisting of 4-5 panchayats. Look at the programmes need to be implemented, the problems being faced in the process and the kind of support needed from the government for development in those 4-5 panchayats. Mr. Singh felt that a panel of state government and NGOs can work together. An approved document from the government to remove people's misconception should also be generated. Most of the elected representatives are ignorant about rules and proceedings.

Media

Mr. Tapas Chakraborty, Senior Correspondent, Daily Telegraph. He established his views with two incidents that he narrated:

A Tale of Two Mukhiyas

In Bihta on 12th Jan, post-election, a newly elected Mukhiya came to the Block Development Officer (BDO) as he was not getting the necessary funds for development programmes. He was sandwiched between enthusiastic people and the institutional barriers. In the meeting he left in anger as he realized that again he would not be released the money. Later he came back and talked to the BDO. He demanded the money and then an altercation took place, the consequence being the BDO took out his gun and shot the Mukhiya. The case makes us realize that the vested interests have hijacked the whole purpose. Is it all a farce and? nothing more? How positive are the elected leaders working? Another Mukhiya from the Mushar community, Rajesh Kumar, who was a farm laborer, was elected from Arrah. He received no funds for three months; the only thing he received was a sackful of rice. He was initiative and decided to rather set his priorities straight; he got an embankment built as his area was a flood prone zone. Thereafter he got local support to get a road built through the village till the main road. He is an illiterate but there is always a literate relative with him. He has had political exposure but knows that no one can take him for granted. Rajesh forces women representatives to come forward and take initiatives rather than their husbands or sons. He is synergizing, converging and mapping out the difficulties between multi-stakeholders. Thus, he is overcoming institutional barriers.

The role of the Media would be to highlight and thus encourage such endeavors. The role of NGOs can be that of developing the skill of Mukhiyas like Rajesh. Thus, the NGOs role would be intelligence development, bridging information gap and also maintaining good media relations.

NGO

Mr. Chandan Dutta, PRIA. He expressed that, Schedule 6 areas have local self-governance provisions. Meghalaya has 6 districts and autonomous district councils. In Jharkhand, there have been no Panchayati Raj elections but planning is already being done through trainings being imparted. UNDP with the government is giving trainings and preparing manuals for the effort. The BDOs are also being given training. Sloppiness has to be removed. Bihar is neglected and lacking in initiatives. In Sikkim, election is being called as per the schedule. The NGOs are being involved local self-governance, Panchayati Raj system, and role of Mukhiyas. These are some areas where trainings need to be imparted. The need is to make the stakeholders, real stakeholders. The initiation can be done from the different pockets.

Question Hour

With inputs by -
Ganesh Pd. Singh, Adithi, Manager Finance
Govind Sharma, Advisor, The Hunger Project
Ramesh, DPO, Madhubani
Sudhir Kr. Singh, DPRO, Banka

1. Literacy is required for capacity building. The panchayat elected representatives need to be made literate.
2. The GO and NGO relationship need to be improved.
3. NGOs should provide names of grass root organisations to the representatives so that they can turn to them for help.
4. Where the socio-economic structure is such that the 'haves' dominate (tutor policies) how can we implement a program at the PR system at the grassroots level?

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