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PRIA

research report

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Finances of Panchayats: (A Study of District Rewari- Haryana)

Finance study

The 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution has cast a heavy load or responsibility on the three tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions. These responsibilities vary from planning for local needs to providing leadership to management of the tricky bus mess of finance. In our three years of working with panchayats in the state of Haryana one constant corn plain has been " Everyone talks about the powers that have been given to the panchayat but where are the powers and more over there is no money to do any work". Dialogues with the government officials also pointed to the fact that there has been no effective administrative and financial devolution to match the political devolution. A series of dialogues organised at the block level bringing Together the elected members of all the three tiers and the government officials brought to fore two issue one that there is no linking mechanism (of accountability) between the three tiers of PRIs and two the gram panchayats do not have the power to implement the plan that is prepared according to the needs of the people. In such a situation it became imperative that adequate data be found to trace the pattern of financial flow to the three tiers and in the process discover the various issues of accountability and people's needs.

Article 243G of the Constitution has given mandate to the state to endow the panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of "self-governance" Looking at the specific issues of finance devolution Article 243H states that the states have to empower panchayats to levy taxes. Toils, fees, cess etc. besides arranging for tax sharing. grants-in-aid and other measures to enhance their financial abilities. Yet the State Finance Commission report for the state of Haryana is still "awaited", the next panchayat elections are due in 1999. Perhaps the elected representatives are not being unreasonable when they question the entire objective of Panchayati Raj. In spite of being told that they can plan for Their needs, collect taxes. implement programmes they find themselves in the unhappy situation of being mere implementers of government schemes and programmes. The question that needs to be asked and explored is whether mere financial control will enable the PRIs to become institutions of local self-governance"? Have the drafters of the amendment been realistic in thinking that the 29 subjects 2 given under the 11th schedule can be fulfilled and managed by the elected representatives of the PRIs? Will mere transfer of staff of line departments lead to effective administrative devolution? What do the elected representatives of the PRIs feel and Think about these issues? The purpose of this study thus has been largely determined by the questions of the people we have encountered in our work with PRIs in nine states of the country namely Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, (Gujrat, Rajasthan, Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. The study has been undertaken mail these scares and it is hoped a plethora of rich data will be made available on a subject that has at present the least amount of data.

Design of the study

The study has tried to elicit both quantitative and qualitative information on financial aspects of PRIs. The information has been primarily collected through the use of semi structured questionnaires. The respondents include chairpersons. vice chairpersons and members of all three tiers of PRIs, Panchayat Secretaries, Block Development and Panchayat Officers, CEO of DRDA, heads of various line departments in the district and at times gram sabha members.

Study Area

The study was undertaken in Jatusana and Rewari blocks of district Rewari. The reason being that the field office of PRIA is located in the close vicinity of the area and there is an established relationship with the people and officials of that area. The Jatusana Panchayat Samiti is headed by a woman from a general caste and Rewari Panchayat Samiti is headed by a man from a schedule caste. In each Panchayat Samiti a sample of 12 (gram Panchayats was chosen for the study on the basis of women headed panchayats, panchayats headed by members of schedule caste and panchayats headed by men. One chairperson and one member was interviewed at each tier. Details of the sample are as follows:

Name of District	Name of Panchayati Samities	G.P.s headed by women	G.P.s headed by men
REWARI Respondents:	Jatusana (headed by a woman from a general caste) Respondents: 1. PS chairperson and a male member 2. B.D.O. 3. Gram Sachivs	Perkhotampur (SC) Boria Kamalpur (Gen) Berli Khurd (Gen) Mohadinpur (Gen) Berli Kalan (Gen) Pehrajwas (SC) Halubera (Gen)	Jalusana (SC) Asia ki Gorawas (SC) Shadipur (SC) Nainsukhpura (Gen) Tehna Dipalpur (SC)
1. Zila Parishad chairperson and member 2. CEO, DRDA 3. Heads of line departments	Rewari (headed by a male from a schedule caste) Respondents: 1. PS chairperson and a woman member 2. B.D.O. 3. Gram Sachivs	Hansaka (Gen) Karnawas (Gen) Bikaner (Gen) Kalaka (Gen) Tarapur Istmurar (Gen) Kamalpur (Gen)	Bamber (Gen) Mirpur (Gen) Sunaria Asadpur (Gen) Gangacharya (Gen) Bharsana (SC) Saharanwas (SC)

The Process

The process of information collection began with a meeting with the CEO of DRDA. Rewari there after over a period of 2 months information was gathered from 24 grant panchayats, two panchayat samitis and 14 line departments. In Most cases 2-3 visits had to be made as sometime- the sarpanches were not available and all other times the heads of the departments were not available. Collection of data pertaining to the gram panchayats under study from the gram samitis at the block office was the most time consuming as numerous visits had to be made and the last of the data came in as late as end July. The ensure process of obtaining information from the blocks and the line departments have us a fair idea of the "hardships" that the elected representatives were talking about. However, the support received from the office of the DRDA was exemplary in terms of access to information and support rendered towards the collection of information from the line departments. The process of analysis has also been very thorough and it is hoped that further sharing of this information and the ensuring discussion will enable us to look the information in perspective and make changes if needed.

Pattern of flow of funds to elected bodies: An Analysis

1. Zila Parishad

From the information available at this level it is revealed that the zila parishad so far has received a grant of Rs 6.80,000 in 1997-98 under the PRI Gram scheme of government of India based on the recommendations of the 10th finance commission. The chairperson and member both claim that they have no information on the funds that are diverted through the URDA and that the recommendations of the Z.P. are not taken into account. It is another matter that the utilisation certificates for tile grant received in 1997-98 have still not been received and that the money was divided between the 13 members without any plan.

The Zila parishad has, the power to levy certain taxes as well as collect certain fees out so far the Rewari Zila Parishad has not made an attempt to generate its own resources through these means.

The chairperson and the member interviewed feel that the ZP is totally alienated from the decisions of the DRDA and that until they become involved or are at least consulted before any decision on the disbursement of money is taken the idea of local self" governance will remain just that an idea. It is further suggested that the District Planning Committees should have an increased representation from the elected representatives and that it should meet regularly so that a comprehensive district plan can be made.

The Zila Parishad has drawn up a plan for the district for 1998-99 to the tune of Rs20,78,25,000. The plan has been submitted to the Panchayat directorate but the plan is not based on any field level information or reflective of the people's needs "we do not have the skills to make such an extensive plan for that purpose our representation on the district planning committee should be increased and the committee should meet to make a comprehensive plan as it is the committee hardly ever meets ". This brings to fore the issue of planning. Article 243G in the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act specifically provides local self-government institutions to take up the responsibility of preparation of plans for economic development and social justice. As of now the Zila Parishad finds itself ill equipped for planning and the fact that the District planning Committee also is unable to plan for the district: as a whole in an integrated manner requires some introspection.

II. Panchayat Samities

The information available reveals that there is a vast difference of income between the two panchayat samities. Jatusana panchayat samiti (which is smaller of the two with only 62 Gram panchayats) gets a much larger share of state and central resources. The reason cited for this vast difference was that this block comes under the model block scheme of the government of Haryana. However further inquiries on the issue revealed that the government of Haryana had a model Gram Panchayat Scheme but there has never been a Model Block scheme of that the said block has been receiving greater share of resources because of political considerations (it has been the constituency of Rao Birender Singh and Rao Inderjit Singh). The following table shows the status of funds available to the 2 panchayat samities over the last three years:

Availability of financial resources	Rewari (Male chairperson)	Jatusana (Woman chairperson)
Income funds and own resources 95	Rs 84,79,517	Rs 1,00,07,652
Income funds and own resources 96	Rs 95,77,300	Rs 1,01,46,268
Income funds and own resources 97	Rs 65,83,945	Rs 43,86,786

The chairperson and members of Rewari Panchayat Samiti are totally unaware of financial transactions that take place in the block office in fact they did not know even about the PRI grant installment and its disbursement.

The women members find themselves in a worse condition, as even in the meetings that are held their voices are seldom heard. "I asked the BDO why we are called for the meetings and why were we elected if all we have to do is put signatures against numbers and statements we do not understand", says a member of the samiti.

It is, a commonly held view that the state politicians deal directly with the Gram panchayat sarpanches therefore the panchayat samiti and zila parishad are more or less redundant and that the next panchayat elections will bring in those people who have strong political linkages.

The case of Jatusana panchayat samiti is not very much different. The chairperson is illiterate though very sharp in her observations and aware of her rights; However in spite of that their knowledge of the financial dealings is very limited. "Meetings are held but what is the use of attending them every thing is done by the BDO, now I just take my monthly allowance and sign on the papers that are sent to my

residence through a chokidar. I know that the maintenance of the office building is done with our resources and that the jeep is for our usage but I never get the jeep if I have to go on a tour of my constituency. They ask me to sign the petrol bills and any other bill that needs sanction "says the embittered chairperson of the samiti, Similar thoughts are echoed by the members as they find themselves unable to exercise the powers vested in them by the state panchayat act.

Once again, the issue of planning at block level continue to be a neglected area, neither of the samities have made a plan in the years gone by and nor do they feel that they can do so considering the fact that meetings are irregular, controlled by the administrative staff and access to information is limited. Both the panchayat samities rate their relationship with the officials as "poor" and express the view that unless the views of the panchayat samiti are taken into account while making disbursement decisions the allocation of finances will continue to be biased and politically linked. Some members of the panchayat samities felt that each member of the samiti should get funds allocated for his/her constituency as this would also ensure accountability.

While the chairperson of Rewari placed the need of his samiti at 7.5 crores annually (the figure assumes importance in the light of the fact that the panchayat samiti on an average has been receiving Rs 82,12587 annually, the chairperson of Jatusana declined to make a guess as she felt that without a proper planning meeting it was not a good idea to hazard a guess.

On the whole information reveals that even though the state act has made political devolution a reality (that too to an extent), in the absence of financial and administrative devolution the exercise of this power continues to be minimal. Planning and accountability mechanisms need to be put in place along with financial and administrative devolution before PRIs can begin to function as institutions of local self-governance.

III. Gram Panchayats

Information has revealed that on an average a gram panchayat had an outcome or Rs 2,09,428 in 1995, Rs 2,45,912 in 1996, and Rs 1,40,572 in 1997 (figures are inclusive of state and central funds and panchayat's own resources). The drop in 1997-98 is explained as a result of cut in state expenditure due to the losses suffered because of prohibition.

Financial resources of gram panchayats

Year	Mean	Count	Maximum	Minimum
Income 95	Rs 2,09,428	24	Rs 7,23,001	Rs 20,142
Income 96	Rs2,45,912	24	Rs 6,47,204	Rs 55
Income 97	Rs 1,42,171	24	Rs 4,90,718	Rs 3894

In the course of information gathering we came across gram panchayats that were very organised in the way they generated resource's for their needs and those that did not have a clue about resource generation (internal or external).

CASE 1: Effective generation and utilization of funds

Bodia Kamalpur is a village of approximately 400 household with 1,200 voters. The gram panchayat is headed by a women sarpanch with 8 panches. The sarpanch is illiterate and 69 years old, all the work related to the panchayat is done by her son who is a retired Air Force officer. The family has land in the village, a shop and a house in Rewari (they belong to the Ahir caste) and the reason why the lady stood for elections is because the seat was reserved for a woman and because the family wanted to do something for the village. The pre-election manifesto of the sarpanch made some promises to the people which have been methodically fulfilled.

Gram panchayat meetings are held once a month and attended by all panches, the gram sachiv comes to the panchayat once in a while (the block has 62 gram panchayats, 14 sanctioned posts of gram sachivs and only 6 gram sachivs). Gram sabha meetings are also held twice a year as per the rules and regulation laid down in the Act. The up-sarpanch of the panchayat is an old man well respected in the village, he is thus very active member of the gram panchayat constantly supporting the sarpanch in the efforts for betterment of the panchayat. The women members of the panchayat are not very active but they come for the meetings and support the sarpanch in the works undertaken by the panchayat.

The panchayat has 15 kilas of land that fetches Rs 50-55,000 annually for the panchayat and there is an income of about 5-6,000 from chulha tax (house tax) collected by the panchayat. In addition to this the panchayat has been extremely effective in accessing funds available to the panchayats under various government schemes and programmes. The panchayat has also been able to gather money through community contributions and collaborations with education department for undertaking various works in the gram panchayat. This has been due mainly to the constant efforts of the sarpanch and panches who visit the block office and DRDA office in Rewari regularly for information on available, schemes and programmes (the gram sachiv comes to the panchayat only once a month therefore the only way of obtaining current and detailed information on government schemes is through frequent visits to the block and district offices).

"When the new panchayat took over on 16 January 1995 there was a balance of only Rs 35 in the panchayat account", said the sarpanch but the panchayat has come a long way since:

Construction of school boundary wall

The work was started with a meeting of tbc teachers and parents in the school, with their consent and collaboration work on the boundary wall was started from the money in the PTA fund. There after Rs 50,000 was received under E.A.S. Rs 1,00,000 was taken from the building fund of the school with the permission of the head master, Rs 1,25,000 was given by a minister who had come to the panchayat for construction of school rooms, Rs 60,000 was given by the D.E.O., one room was constructed with the money received as contributions from the community and the rest was put in by the panchayat, Thus the boundary wall of 2,800 feet was completed, necessary number of rooms were added so that the school may be upgraded and on 5.09.97 the school was upgraded to 10+2.

Today the school has a total of 1,600 students and the panchayat is working towards securing a separate building for the primary school, there are plans to convert the Panchayat ghar into a primary school with necessary modifications.

Water Supply

The panchayat through its unstinted efforts was able to get Rs 40,000 from the MLA/LADS funds and added Rs 10,000 from the panchayat fund for the construction of 2 water tanks. Another Rs 50,000 was received under the MP/MLA fund from Col. Ram Singh which was used for a pipeline to supply water to the school. The Panchayat has 6 water tanks which supply water in the village, the pipeline laid by Health and Public Works Department to supply water to 100 tap connections does not have any water. In any addition to this Rs 40,000 that was available to the panchayat under the Million Wells Scheme was lying in the block office from the time of the previous panchayat, this was utilised for a tube well near the pond for sweet drinking water.

Paving of streets

According to the sarpanch this is the only panchayat in Jatusana that has not received any government grant for streets since the government schemes came into existence. Therefore, the gram Panchayat called a gram sabha and a map was prepared for laying of streets, detailed estimates were made and the plan was submitted to IIRDF, Chandigarh for a total of Rs 9,55,000 of which 3 lakhs have been sanctioned after numerous visits to the district and Chandigarh. Work on the street will begin shortly.

Future Plan

The sarpanch has collected resolutions from 8 neighboring gram panchayats for rectifying the water problem common to the area because of non-availability of water in the canal made for the purpose of irrigation by the government. The sarpanch wants to follow this up with appropriate authorities.

The panchayat also wants to complete laying of streets and construction of a separate building for the primary school in the village.

In addition to this there are plans to pursue the facilities of a PHC for the village and neighboring gram panchayats.

In contrast were a number of gram panchayat that are unable to generate resources either because of factionalism within the panchayat or because of official and political apathy. The questions that may be raised from the following case are 1. Can the admission facilitate effective functioning of a panchayat led by a schedule caste sarpanch? 2. In a situation where gram panchayat meetings are held on paper with quorum but where a panchayat is unable to implement any plan or carry out any development work due to severe caste conflict, what role can the gram sachiv play?

CASE 2; What can the, administration do?

Gram Panchayat Perkhotampur is situated at a distance of barely 1 km, from the block development office in Jatusana. It is a relatively large village with approximately 375 households and a total of about 1,500 voters. Even though the population of harijans and backward castes is dominant in the village, traditionally the land and resources as well as political power in the village has been controlled by the upper castes i.e. Ahirs and Punjabis. As the gram panchayat was reserved for a women and schedule caste person as per the new Panchayati raj act, in December 1994 a schedule caste woman was elected sarpanch of the panchayat. Today the panchayat has 8 panches of which 3 are women. The post of a up-sarpanch is also held by a woman from the upper caste. The gram panchayat is plagued with severe problems of division based on caste rivalries with the result that in the last three and a half years hardly any work has been accomplished in the panchayat. The sarpanch is not able to muster the quorum required for undertaking any development work in the panchayat, the panchayat fund has a balance of almost 6 lacs in the bank account. Accessing funds under various government schemes and programmes is also becoming a problem because the block office contends that the panchayat is unable to utilise the money already available with it. The panchayat has an annual income of about 1.5 lacs from lease of land (22 kilas), The gram panchayat has seen 'six gram sachivs come and go in the last three and a half years, the block office knows of the happenings in the panchayat but is unable to intervene, the people stand divided in caste lines and well the sarpanch finds herself alienated and unable to function. The panches want that each panch should be given finds for undertaking work in their respective wards and since under the existing rules and norms this is not possible the panchayat suffers and important issues of water, paving of streets and drainage of water remain unresolved inspite of enough financial resources.

Another aspect of flow of funds that is receiving close scrutiny is the amount that is reaching the panchayats headed by schedule caste sarpanches. The information reveal, that though the funds received by the schedule caste sarpanches are more than the general headed panchayats, utilisation and control of these funds is an issue worth looking at.

Year and head	Scheduled Caste (Mean)	General Caste (Mean)
Income State funds 95	Rs 52,207	Rs 24,500
Income State funds 96	Rs 31,333	Rs 35,392
Income State funds 97	Rs 99,500	Rs 20,415
Income Central funds 95	Rs 1,22,000	Rs11,42,494
Income Central funds 96	Rs 2,48,100	Rs 2,05,360
Income Central funds 97	Rs 57,000	Rs 1,30,550
Income own Resources 95	Rs 1,00,125	Rs 1,01,203
Income own Resources 96	Rs 84,155	Rs 56,722
Income own Resources 97	Rs 1,03,464	Rs 73,181

The table is very clear in depicting the fact that the gram panchayats headed by schedule caste sarpanches have been receiving more funds than the general caste headed panchayats but close scrutiny or the data also point; out that among these are a number of panchayats, suffering sever caste conflicts where funds are minimal and their utilisation even worse.

CASE 3: A case of official neglect and caste conflict?

Bhatsana is a small village inhabited primarily by members of the schedule caste 'communities, located at a distance of approximately 8k.m. from Dharuhera and 25 k.m. from Rewari, The dominant and affluent Ahirs live in their fields (known as dhanies) or in neighboring towns, land and trade is by and large controlled by this community. Prior to the present panchayat, the sarpanches also by and large came from this community with the result that development of the village is highly skewed in the favour of this community.

In days prior to the partition this was a Muslim village with the land being controlled by them. After the partition this land was allotted to people coming to India from Pakistan (at that time Punjab and Haryana were one state). With the passage of time and creation of Haryana, the land was sold to the people with the money in the area (in this case the Ahirs). The new owners of land began living in dhanies or the neighboring towns but the political and economic power continued to be controlled by them. With the coming of the 73rd amendment and the new Haryana Panchayati Raj Act, the new panchayat elected in 1994 for the first time had a schedule caste sarpanch (a man who actually lives in the village).

Today the panchayat is made up of panches (6 men and 3 women) and 1 sarpanch, or these the up-sarpanch is an Ahir (he died recently and the by elections are due soon). The village has one primary school; 2 anganwadies and a post office but that's about all the facilities enjoyed by the people. Houses of almost all schedule caste people are made of mud (kuchcha houses), all the streets are unpaved, there is no electricity in the schedule caste quarters and availability of drinking water is also a problem.

Gram Panchayat meetings have not taken place since two and a half years as seven panches submitted their resignations to the BDO almost a year and a half ago. They claim that no government official has visited the village since the elections. The elections to the post the sarpanch were also rigged claim that panches and gram sabha members, "The votes were counted four times, voters were eliminated till a tie could be reached between the two contestants, thereafter both the men were called to the block office and the sarpanch was decided by 'draw of lots' narrated the panches and some members of the gram sabha. "the present sarpanch is controlled by the ex-sarpanch and he has allowed the people of his community to encroach upon the panchayat land with the result that we are loosing out on the income that the panchayat had from the land so why should we support him" says the disgruntled member of the panchayat.

In the last three and a half years, the panchayat has only received money from 2 IAY houses and the income from panchayat land has come down from 10,823 in 1995-96 to Rs 57 in 1997-98. The official argument is that the panchayat does not have quorum therefore it is nit entitled to any government funds but the members of the panchayat argue that since 7 of the panches sent their resignation almost 2 years back why has not the administration accepted it? They further add that the Gram shachiv knows that the panchayat meetings are not held and neither is the gram sabha meeting, then how come the block administration has failed to take any action. The statement continues and the people of Bhatsana feel that the only way is the next panchayat election but will they have to wait that long for justice and what guarantee is there that the next panchayat will be able to resolve the critical issues of control and power facing the present panchayat?

In a district that is known as 'Ahirwadi' the status of sarpanches and panches from schedule caste community (mostly on reserved seat) is precarious to say the least. Where the panchayat is able to access financial resources and utilise them he/she either has the backing of political leader of the area or an up-sarpanch that belongs to the general caste, In such a situation the objective of restoration of power balance through reservations seems difficult to achieve. A case in the point is the sarpanch of gram panchayat Jarusana (the gram panchayat has received the largest amount of funds of the panchayats chosen for the study), Observations of his dealings with the gram sachiv and

patwari revealed that in reality his authority (Powers) exists only on paper. This is not to say that The administration is responsible for the situation but surely the administration can exercise a behavior that restores the dignity of the members belonging " the schedule caste,

Another aspect worth looking at is the percentage of gram panchayats that have not received state and central funds,

Year and type of funds	Percentage of GPs that have not received any funds	Funds received at the panchayat samiti level
Income State funds 95	39.1%	Rs 26,28,709
Income State funds 96	60.9%	Rs 6,77,938
Income State funds 97	65.2%	Rs 6,73,781
Income Central funds 95	30.4%	Rs 64,80,876
Income Central funds 96	21.75%	Rs 90,66,346
Income Central funds 97	69.9%	Rs 46,84,485

The table shows that state fond allocations to panchayats and panchayat samiti have declined from a total of over 26 lakhs in 1995 to a total of just below 7 lakhs in 97. The, reasons given for this is that the state finances had dwindled in 1996 and 1997 due to the losses suffered because of prohibition. Perhaps worth inquiring is also whether there is a shift in the focus on rural development. The pattern of central funds also shows that there has been a decline at the samiti level corresponding to the percentage of gram panchayats that have not received funds. In 1996 when the central funds have been particularly high the percentage of gram panchayats that have not received funds has also reduced significantly.

If we break down the information on own resources and analyse it according. to men and women headed panchayats the following picture emerges:

Type of income	Male	Female
Taxes 95	Rs 1684	Rs 13,47
Taxes 96	Rs 1655	Rs 2002
Taxes 97	Rs 2088	Rs 1636
Fee 95	Rs 65,342	Rs 60,644
Fee 96	Rs 59,281	Rs 58,864
Fee 97	Rs 83,380	Rs 79,821
Other resources 95	Rs 7868	Rs 85,554
Other resources 96	Rs 12,642	Rs 10,352
Other resources 97	Rs 9470	Rs 14,952

In one respect the above table is encouraging that there is not a significant difference of performance between the men and women headed panchayats, but on the other hand the fact that women headed panchayats are getting a lot of their income through other sources needs to be examined. The other sources comprise mainly of sale of land, grant from state government and interest on the amount in panchayat fund. Does this difference signify any discretion on the part of the administration.

Awareness about finances

Available information shows that approximately 60%, of the sarpanches are aware about the income and expenditure of their gram panchayats while 40% do not have a working knowledge of the finances of their panchayats. Heartening to note here is the fact that the women are doing just as well as the men on this scene. 32% of the sarpanches were unable to respond to the question on the income and expenditure of their panchayat for the last year while 68% were able to give information on the

subject. However, the point worth noting here is that on being asked about the total income of the gram panchayat the sarpanches only took into account Inc income that is raised by the panchayat through its own responses. Thus, implying that income through state and central funds is seen as "not their own". This is also linked to the fact that the money that comes from funds is in reality spent by the officials a functionary of the block office and therefore the gram panchayats do not feel that it has anything to do with them.

Also, of significance here is the fact that almost all the panches were unable to respond to the question on their awareness about the finances of their gram panchayat.

Two pane the of gram panchayat Sunaria Asadpur were interviewed while the woman panch had never attended a panchayat meeting the male punch also did not know about the finances of the panchayat. In fact, they were totally unaware of the water shed development programme that was underway in their gram panchayat. "I stood for elections because I am a zamindar and it is matter of honor so what if I don't know anything" was the proud rejoinder of the male panch to the query as to why he had contested the elections.

In Gangaycha Jat the woman panch had never gone to the panchayat meeting because she was never informed of the meeting as she was out of the quorum.

In Bikaner gram panchayat the woman panch who won the election on an unreserved seat found herself totally alienated because she was not in the forum.

In Saharanwas the three women panches never attend panchayat meetings infact one docs not even live in the village, she stays in rewari.

In Bhatsana 7 members of the gram panchayats have resigned from the panchayat but the gram panchayat contmues its functioning.

In Perkhotampur the panches do not attend gram panchayat meetings because they not like the fact that a schedule caste woman has become the sarpanch due to reservations.

And in most gram panchayats a gram panchayat meeting means the signing of resolutions prepared by the gram sachiv and the sarpanch most of the times these signatures are obtained by the chokidar from their respective homes. In such a situation" what happens to the issue of accountability of gram panchayat members, am, what is the role of the gram sachiv and the administration.

Access to information

As mentioned above all the gram panchayats view only the resources generated through their own resources as their income. Thus is a serious issue, it may be seen to imply that the people do not view the government money as their own therefore to expect accountability on the same is difficult. The elected representatives do not know the exact amount and the schemes under which the government money comes (other than JRY and IAY), 62% of the elected representatives said that the officials, do not inform them about the availability of funds under various schemes. Only 38% said that they are informed and these are the people who spent most of their time in clock offices "just waiting for the money to come".

62% of the elected representatives said that. they ask the gram sachiv or BDO about the schemes under which money is released to their panchayats but they are not informed instead they are asked to sign on utilisation certificates and do supervisory jobs. Only 38% of the elected representatives said that they are informed of the schemes and the money that is released for their panchayat. The figures correspond to those of people knowing or not knowing about the finances. Therefore, it is an issue that needs to be looked at seriously.

If the PRIs have to become institutions of local self-government the elected representatives have to be able to get access to the information that is available at the block and district level and the administration definitely has a role to play in making it a possibility.

Accusations of corruption and stories related to it abound in the government offices and, gram panchayats so we decided to ask if there is any difference between the money that is sanctioned for a particular work and the amount that is eventually spent, 76% of the respondents said that there is no difference but 24%, said that there is a difference and that a certain percentage of the money is taken by the J.E. and other block officials. Perhaps the issue needs to be examined as well.

Planning at gram panchayat level

The new act lays that the gram panchayat will prepare a plan for social justice and economic development but as is, known gram sabhas do not take place in most gram panchayats therefore the issue of planning assumes importance. On being asked if the gram panchayat had prepared a plan in the previous year 33% of the respondents said that they had prepared plan (usually for streets and construction of school rooms and water tanks) but these were accepted only after changes were made as suggested by the concerned officials. 25% said that they had prepared a plan but it did not receive any response from the concerned officials. 42% said that they did not prepare a plan.

Planning emerges as an area of concern at the gram panchayat level. One the gram sabha meetings do not take place and two most of the elected representatives do not have the necessary skills for planning. In most cases making of resolutions as per the availability of funds is called planning. In instance where the gram panchayat has made attempts at planning, they have had to face a lot of hardship vis-it-vis access to necessary information and cooperation from the concerned government department or technical persons. Add to this the fact that the gram sachivs also do not have the skills necessary for planning at the gram panchayat level so the question is where can the assistance be provided from?

Expectation and Reality

All the respondents were asked to determine the need of their panchayat vis-a-vis the amount needed every year for adequate functioning and plan implementation of the gram panchayat. The response can be seen and compared against the income of the panchayat for the last 3 years:

Head	Male	Female
Estimated need/money required for implementation of plan	Rs 3,42,143	Rs 5,32,852
Total Income in 1995	Rs 1,22,738	Rs 1,21,213
Total Income in 1996	Rs 3,31,140	Rs 1,51,133
Total Income in 1997	Rs 1,97,767	Rs 56,250

On an average a gram panchayat needs Rs. 4,70,869 as against the average of Rs 1,41,160 received at present.

The leaders of gram panchayats and other tiers suggest that the component of unties funds needs to increase and at the least the gram panchayat should be given information about the availability of funds for their respective panchayats at the start of each financial year, at least it will enable them to do the minimum planning required for the maximum utilization of the fund.

Pattern utilisation of funds

Available information shows that on an average the maximum amount in any given year is spent on the construction of roads, pavement of streets, culverts and drains where as the minimum is spent on maintenance of community assets and health and sanitation. On an average a gram panchayat spent Rs 68,586 on construction of streets, road, culverts and drains in 1995 and Rs 7752 on agriculture. The following table will give us an idea about the average expenditure by a gram panchayat in a year.

1. Average income of gram panchayat in 1995:	Rs. 2,09,428
Expenditure on rural Housing (IAY)	Rs 1,01,692 (13GPs)
Expenditure on roads, streets, bridges and waterways	Rs 68,586 (21 GPs)
Expenditure on Education (construction of school rooms)	Rs 68,586 (14GPs)
Expenditure on drinking water (water tanks, pipes)	Rs 55,156 (4GPs)
Expenditure on maintenance of community assets	Rs 43,750 (6GPs)
Expenditure on women and child development	Rs 43,114 (1GPs)
Expenditure on minor irrigation	Rs 40,000 (2GPs)
Expenditure on SC welfare	Rs 31,250 (4GPs)
Expenditure on health and sanitations	Rs 27,439 (16GPs)
Expenditure on other than 29 items	Rs 16,985 (21GPs)
Expenditure on agriculture	Rs 7,752 (7GPs)
2. Average income of a Gram Panchayat in 1997:	Rs 2,45,912
Expenditure on animal Husbandry	Rs 2,63,500 (1GPs)
Expenditure on Minor irrigation	Rs 1,57,835 (8GPs)
Expenditure on roads, culverts, streets, bridges, dams	Rs 1,31,911 (17GPs)
Expenditure on education	Rs 71,632 (11GPs)
Expenditure on rural Housing	Rs 54,000 (10GPs)
Expenditure on drinking water	Rs 31,681 (2GPs)
Expenditure on health and sanitation	Rs 26,267 (20GPs)
Expenditure on other than 29 item	Rs 17,492 (19GPs)
Expenditure on maintenance of community assets	Rs 900 (1GPs)
3. Average income of a Gram Panchayat in 1998:	Rs 1,40,572
Expenditure on Minor irrigation	Rs 1,14,000 (2GPs)
Expenditure on roads, culverts, streets, bridges, dams	Rs 79,022 (19GPs)
Expenditure on education	Rs 46,421 (8GPs)
Expenditure on SC welfare	Rs 31,300 (1GPs)
Expenditure on drinking water	Rs 25,170 (1GPs)
Expenditure on health and sanitation	Rs 21,009 (17GPs)
Expenditure on other than 29 items	Rs 9911 (20GPs)
Expenditure on agriculture	Rs 6576 (8GPs)
Expenditure on maintenance of community assets	Rs 2775 (2GPs)

Available information shows that the gram panchayat spend maximum of their resources on construction works and of that the most is spent on streets, school rooms and rural housing. A lot of gram panchayat income (own resources) is spent on something known as the 'other' head which includes furniture for gram panchayat usage, travel and payment of court fees, on an average the gram panchayat to an extent perform duties related to a maximum of 9 items from the 29 provided under the 11th schedule.

Emerging Issues

Most of the, funding available to the gram panchayats is, available in the form of 'ned' funds. They have many conditions, that need to be fulfilled vis-a-vis supply of materials, contracts, and most often the gram panchayats are required to play only a supervisory role.

The gram panchayat has powers to levy some taxes like house tax, tax on local markets, use of the natural resources within its jurisdiction like clay, water etc. but in most cases the gram panchayats do not exercise this power thus making themselves more and more dependent on government funding.

There's a great deal of expenditure taking place in the district directly by the various line departments of the state government but the decision-making power in these cases lies with the departments not the panchayats, yet it is local expenditure.

The block office controls information on availability of finances and management of finances. The information of income and expenditure of panchayats is not maintained systematically by the accounts department. The panchayats have to constantly run around in circles before they can access this information and make use of the schemes with the result that the panchayats that are close to the block office are the ones that get good funds or those whose sarpanches spend time in the block offices.

The gram sachivs are too few in number in each block to be able to discharge their duties properly and further more they are also not adequately equipped in the matters of finance management or planning for a panchayat needs thus encouraging the 'resolution culture' which is contrary in the spirit of the amendment which seeks to make panchayats institutions of local self-governance.

Contrary to popular belief men and women headed panchayats are faring equally well or equally badly as the case may be. Women are as aware about the finances of their panchayats as the men and at times more so. They are less hesitant in raising issues of corruption and question the existing status quo.

Planning is an area of deep at all the three tiers both for the panchayats and the administration. At district level the planning committee is more or less nonfunctional and skills needed for planning based on local needs are limited. Gram sabha meetings for planning hardly ever take place and information on what needs to be done is also very vague i.e. the elected representatives do not have clarity about the powers they have and how they can exercise them.

Audit of panchayat accounts are in an amazing disarray. Audited statements or accounts at block offices were impossible to come by. Concerned officials said that audit is done sometimes once in two years and at times in three years. The numbers and types of ledgers and registers mentioned in the panchayat abhiyan are hardly maintained in any gram panchayat or any other tier.

There are no working linkages between the three tiers of panchayats. The focus and agenda of each tier is different. While the panchayat samiti members feel they should be given constituency funds like M.P.s zila parishad members feel totally side lined and aspire to become MLAs. At all the tiers the focus is on the share and control over resources made available by the government but no one talks about their own responsibilities of resource generation. Adding to this confusion over resources is the fact that the SFC report is still in cold storage.

The term resources are interpreted as finance both by the elected representatives and the administration with the result that very little information is locally available about what natural and human resources are and how they can be used.

Last but not the least, the issue of role of the administration in the light of the PRI being promoted as institutions of local self-governance. Related to this role are the issues of control, access to information and capacity building.

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