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PRIA

case study

October, 1996

Participation of Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha in Development

The 73rd amendment has institutionalised the commitment to participation by giving legal status to the Gram Panchayat and the Gram Sabha consisting of all adult voters. It has legally entrusted the Panchayat with the function of formulating their development plans. The Madhya Pradesh Act has specifically made it mandatory for convening Gram Sabhas four times in a year. The Gram Sabha thus provides a legal platform where members of the community adult come and participate in discussions/debates concerning the development initiatives of the village. The decision taken by the Gram Sabha as per the Madhya Pradesh Act are mandatory.

In early 1996 a local Voluntary Development Organisation (VDO) SAMARTHAN in collaboration with PRIA decided to work intensively in a few Gram Panchayats to strengthen the PRIs with the following objectives:

1. To promote people centred process
 - To promote peoples participation and involvement in decision making
 - Decision making at the Gram Sabha in a collective way
2. Linkage with government (build collaborative partnership for Panchayat development)
3. Promote effective women's leadership

Initially the Voluntary Development Organisation (VDO) decided to work in Jamunia Tank with the following strategy.

- To carry out a micro-planning exercise in the Panchayat involving all the stakeholders.
- This process done in participatory manner will ensure involvement of various sections of the community and major responsibility will be with the elected representatives.
- Process of planning as an intervention to increase Gram Sabha participation (emphasis on women and marginalised groups).
- Planning as an exercise for resource mobilisation (internal and external) and allocation.
- Develop leadership among the Panchayat members
- Develop partnership with others, like government, NGO, CBOs etc.
- Evolve systems, procedures based on practice and experience.

Jamunia Tank Gram Panchayat is a reserved Panchayat for backward class. It has a Female Sarpanch belonging to the backward class, and twelve Panches who represent twelve wards of the Panchayat. This Panchayat was primarily chosen because various micro level positive initiatives undertaken by the community have been accomplished and some are currently underway.

The infrastructure of the Panchayat includes a primary school, telephone exchange and child care centre. The main communities living here are called the Mewada, Meena, Khali, Rathore, Agarwal, Pandit, Gosaii, Harijan, Balia, kangi, Prajapati. Kumhar, Tyagi.

Participation In development

Construction of Village Drafts:

The need for construction of a village drain in Jamunia Tank which was articulated by the community many times in the Panchayat meetings. The estimated budget for the construction of the drain was worked out to be Rs.93,000/- by the community and Panchayat leaders in the Panchayat meetings. The community volunteering to contribute Rs. 50,000/- for its lion. This money was collected proportionately on the basis of land holdings and the poor contributed by providing labour. The remaining Rs.50,000/- was sanctioned by the district office under one of the district employment schemes.

Participation in Education

The key features of TLC were:

- This programme was targeting illiterate youth in the age group of 16-35 years age
- In each Panchayat such illiterate adults had to be identified
- The programme would then provide for books, slate, chalk and roller black board for each Panchayat
- The implementation of the programme was left to the Panchayat

Process of implementation of Jamunia Tank Gram Panchayat

- The Headmaster of the village school was involved in surveying the Panchayat. His survey revealed 223 adult illiterates in, October, 1996.
- Forty literate people were identified who volunteered to teach five illiterate adults each.
- It was decided to hold the classes between 8 P.M. to 10 P.M.
- The NGO working in the Panchayat was instrumental in motivating people to attend the classes. The NGO mobilised a group of youth and elderly people who went from house to house encouraging people to attend classes
- The Sarpanch along with other literate women of the Panchayat organised a door to door campaign encouraging women to attend classes. As a part of the campaign motivational songs related to literacy were sung
- Such mobilising techniques were continued for 20 days and surprise visits by the TLC officials and the NGO were conducted during the night to monitor the progress of the people.
- Meetings were organised periodically for rejuvenating such campaigns for motivating and monitoring.

At the end of the three months an evaluation of the illiterate people was undertaken. On the basis of this evaluation the Panchayat was able to achieve their target of the adult literacy programme.

Ability to Negotiate:

Active involvement in the process has increased the confidence and negotiation power of the Panchayat members as in the case of the women Sarpanch of Jamunia Tank Panchayat who, along with the Headmaster, demanded the facility of middle school in her Panchayat. As the school building belongs to the Panchayat, they threatened to disallow the government to run the school till the fifth class unless middle school was provided. Their demand was met by the district authorities resulting in a functional middle school (till standard VIII) in their Panchayat.

Participation in Gram Sabha Meetings:

The people are informed beforehand about the date and venue of the meeting by making public announcements in the village. Proceedings of the meeting get recorded by the Panchayat Secretary who is a government official.

Gram Panchayat (GP) Meeting

These are meetings conducted every month and are attended by the Panchayat members, Panchayat Secretary chaired by the Sarpanch. The issues discussed are usually pertaining to the development plans of the villages and issues to be placed before people in the Gram Sabha meeting. The proceedings of the meeting are recorded by the Panchayat Secretary. The Panchayat members are individually informed about the meeting by the 'Chowkidar' who gets the notification signed by him prior to the meeting. The meetings are usually held in the Panchayat Ghat. Sometimes the meetings are also attended by community members (as in Jamunia Tank Panchayat).

Participation in Informal Meetings:

The Gram Sabha and the elected members were also actively participating in informal meetings. Such meetings were mostly for planning of the development work to be organised in the Panchayats. In Jamunia Tank Gram panchayat innumerable informal meetings where the community was more actively involved were conducted. Participation in these informal meeting is more. During June 1996 to February 1998, 11 such meetings were organised. In Raipura such meetings were almost minimal, the participation of community in informal meetings was almost absent.

Participation of women

The two case studies reflect that the participation of women leaders in Jamunia Tank Panchayat was remarkable as compared to Raipura Panchayat. The Sarpanch of Jamunia Panchayat is a woman who took active part in the development process of the Panchayat. In Raipura Panchayat the participation of women panchayat members in both GS and GP meetings was nothing significant. Out of 4 women Panches, usually less than 50% attended the meetings. The reason for such a difference in the women leadership in the two Panchayats could be that in Jamunia, the Sarpanch being a woman has been able to mobilise the woman panches which is not the case with Raipura.

Output

1. Higher participation in Gram Sabha and Panchayat meetings.
2. Relevant discussion at the meetings. The main issues that are discussed in the meetings are as follows:

Problems faced by the community, how to address that problem like the communication problems during rainy season in the village, problems of poor elderly people, problems of daily earners, homeless people. irrigation, crop damage, crop loan etc. Discussions are also centred around how to address these problems. Bild find appropriate solutions. Common citizens as members of Gram Sabha are allowed to attend Panchayat meeting in Jamunia Tank. They discuss and plan for contribution, select beneficiaries of government schemes based upon discussion and needs of the person/family concerned.

3. Change in system and procedures at the government level. (District collector along with NGO and other government staff evolved the following systems and procedures for effective government functioning):

i. Plan and ensure cluster (5 Gram Panchayats) level meetings where all the .Panchayat level members and government functionaries attend, discuss and decide on various issues.

ii. Decided and fixed dates for fortnightly panchayat meetings so that local staff like RI, VLW, VAW, Health Worker, Anganwari Worker etc. who are looking after 4-5 GPs can attend the GP meetings.

iii. Instruct the above staff to work with GO. Follow up the decisions and report the action taken on the decision.

iv. Collector wrote an open letter to all Sarpanches in the district about various available government schemes, eligibility criteria, how and whom to approach etc. As a Result the budget for social welfare. Related schemes like welfare for the poor, maternity benefits, stipend for poor and meritorious students, housing for the homeless etc. utilised. Panchayat selected the right persons for these schemes.

v. At the district and block level institutions were given to all relevant officials to attend GS meeting even if it is held in the evening or night In many villages people find evening/night time more convenient for Gram Sabha meeting.

vi. Collector along with other staff spent time in the villages. They visit Jamunia and Raipura villages many times.

vii. Block Development Officer and other Staff have become quite supportive. This is evident with their visit, intervention with Panchayat members of Jamunia Tank and to some extent .Raipura. Prior to this effort, visits by the officials to Jamunia Tank was very infrequent but now they frequently visit the area and even send other staff to visit dos Panchayat.

4. Participation and contribution for development; in education and infrastructure development study and analysis of health infrastructure.

Critical Success Factors (CSFs)

1. Supportive Government policies, systems and procedures. Legislation alone is not the key to development, it needs to be backed by enabling policy decision.

2. Supportive and facilitative attitude of the government staff (along with Teacher, Panchayat Secretary, Health Workers) influence the Panchayat functioning.

3. A strategic focus of sensitisation training of field based staff at all levels will create more favorable conditions for Panchayats to perform more effectively.

4. Access to information about various government policies (procedures, programmes, schemes etc.) to PRI and community members and experience of other similar positive initiatives.

5. Positive linkage with PRI and community, community groups like youth, women, teachers, parents, farmers etc.

6. Participation people along with partnership approach.

Local participation is managed more effectively if local leadership (awareness and skill) is available as in the case of Jamunia Tank; high awareness level of PRIs and current development programmes, abreast of panchayat needs, ability to mobilise people working in close relationship with other Panch leaders, building close relationship with block, district administration, good support with Panchayat Secretary, resolving disputes of the panchayat, good communication skills, ability to accomplish things etc.

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PRIA (1996): Participation of Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha in Development



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