



Knowledge. Voice. Democracy.

PRIA

July, 1999

**Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions:
Joint Initiative of Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions
(PRIs) by PRIA & NCRSOs**

Contents

A. Goals

B. Progress

I. Linking Various Actors of Civil Society 3 to Strengthen the Process

II. Bottom-up Participatory Planning and Support in the Execution

III. Study and Documentation of the Process

IV. Strengthen Advocacy Efforts

C. Assessments

D. Lessons Learnt

E. Variations

A. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

A broad purpose of the strategic intervention has been developed based on the following principles:

1. Panchayati Raj institutions (PRI a common term for both rural and urban) are to be viewed as institutions of local self-governance. and not as mere implementers centrally-determined development programmes. Bottom-up comprehensive planning, based on micro-planning exercise, is to be the basis of self-governance. PRIs should not be allowed to become third tier of development administration.
2. Emphasis must be placed on active participation in decision-making by women (and other weaker sections) with a view to enhance their role, status and leadership in local self-governance
3. Interventions in strengthening PRI should focus on building, promoting and empowering new leadership of women, SC/ST and Dalits.
4. PRIs should assert their access to control over local natural and human resources, as well as other development resources being available with state and national governments.
5. Strengthening PRIs will entail clarity of their roles; systems of governance, accountability and transparency and interlinkages.

B, PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES

This section has been divided into four areas of interventions which are as follows:-

- I) Linking Various Actors of Civil Society to Strengthen the Process
- II) Bottom-up Participatory Planning and Support in the Execution
- III) Study and Documentation of the Process
- IV) Strengthen Advocacy

I) Linking Various Actors of Civil Society to Strengthen the Process

Enabling Panchayati Ra Institutions to play an active role in the decision-making processes at the Panchayat, block and district levels of governance. requires, besides directly strengthening Panchayats, a need to develop and strengthen linkages with other civil society actors. Planned interventions carried out by PRIA and its partner organisations towards this end are as follows:-

a) Linkages to Strengthen Gram Sabha

1. Formations of Gram Sabha committees at the Panchayat level

In Sajapur District of Madhya Pradesh, ongoing conflict of interest between the Panchayat and Watershed committees was observed by Lok Kalyan Parishad, a partner organisation of Samarthan. The partner NGO invited Samarthan to help build meaningful relationship between the two. In order to strengthen linkages between the two, a three day training programme was organised with the following objectives. ,

- To share knowledge about Panchayati Raj.
- To build a co-ordination plan of action for Panchayats and Watershed communities.

The key outcomes of the collective decision making were: -

- Pipe line was laid to bring water from a distance of about 2 km and stored in the community well to enhance drinking water facility at the village level. This helped poorer families to have access to drinking water as without any means of transportation. they had to fetch water from a long distance. I
- Improved internal road of the villages by putting morang and treatment
- Purchased a community TV to promote access to information to the common people repaired a temple of the village
- Watershed committee has agreed to pay from its funds for the development activities/plan of the Panchayat proposed in the financial year.

2. Formation of Gram Sudhar Committees

In Rajukhedi and Badnagar Panchayats in Madhya Pradesh, Gram Sudhar Samities were formed. Each Samiti comprised of 10 concerned Gram Sabha members of the village. The body discussed issues at the ward level with the community and placed these issues at the Panchayat meetings. It was planned that the Samiti will also help statutory committees in implementing decision. Besides, regular follow up meetings with the Samiti were organised.

The Samiti met Gram Sabha to prioritise certain issues like the repairing of the school building. The people along with the Samiti planned to discuss the issue in Panchayat where they will identify local resources and negotiate with line departments for the repair job. It was also planned that if there is a shortfall in the budget, the community will contribute.

3. Formation of Sattarkata (vigilance) Committees

The formation of Sattarkata Committee is a mandatory body under Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act to monitor, supervise and build transparency in Panchayat functioning. However, in most Panchayats either this committee has not been formed or dummy candidates have been put without people's consent. Efforts have been made to revive Sattarkata Samiti by conducting village meetings. In four Panchayat's, Makeri, Gangajali, Aduri and Tharusar twelve meetings were organised. This year it was planned that along with June Gram Sabha meeting in all the Panchayats, Sattarkata- Samiti will be formed. However, the government had postponed the Gram Sabha meeting twice.

4. Training and orientations with panchayat level women and youth groups

A collaborative training with NYK was organised in January, by Samarthan, to sensitise youth on the role of Panchayat about 25 youth representing Nehru Yuvak Kendra of Sehore participated in the training. This was an important intervention area to sharpen the perspective of the youth on local self governance and people centred development. Following the training, these youth plan to support and influence the process of democratic governance in their Panchayat and help build linkage with the department to access resources for development. Another similar five 'day workshop for the youth, was organised by Sanwtbm in Madhya Pradesh, in their areas of intervention. The main objective of this workshop was to discuss issues and perspective of local self governance as well as develop their skills in creative communication. The trained participants prepared scripts for conducting street plays on various themes to sensitise Gram Sabha especially during the Gram Sabha meetings in different Panchayats of Sehore Block. These street plays resulted in significant increase in the participation of Gram Sabha members in the meetings especially the women and poor.

5. Gram Sabha campaign by youth and women's groups

Involvement of youth groups and Mahila Mandals was sought, to mobilise gram Panchayats and gram sabha members to be active participants in the development of their Panchayats, by PRIA in Nahar block of district Rewari, Haryana. Several workshops were held to discuss the need for and strategy of increasing the participation of the different interest groups within the Panchayat, Subsequently a campaign was carried out by the youth and women, to empower gram sabhas in a large number of Panchayats in the block- People's growing involvement in Panchayat affairs, was clearly visible in villages like Guryani, where some youth and women, brought out their own BPL (below poverty line) list in response to their dissatisfaction with the list prepared by the Panchayat. Similarly in Surakpur Panchayat, the gram sabha women, on finding out that the Sarpanch had already held a gram sabha meeting without informing them, demanded for another meeting to be held in the Panchayat. As a result, a second meeting was organised by the Panchayat.

6. Formation of Vikas Samiti

In Ahal Panchayat of district Rae Bareli, Uttar Pradesh, one of the partner organisations of SSK. carried out several meetings and orientations between the gram Panchayat and gram sabha members to strengthen linkages between them for overall development of the Conned consisting of members of both gram sabha and gram Panchayat, with the objective of facilitating, supporting and monitoring the activities of the Panchayat. In order to carry out their responsibilities effectively, they have decided to meet on the 25th of every month.

7. Training of Mahila Jagrut Dal

In four Panchayats of Jawaja Block, District Ajmer, Rajasthan. Unnati and its partner organisation MMVS carried out training of women's groups. In all the four Panchayats, namely Naikala, Devanu, Sarvena and Nagarkheda ten women's group were formed. These groups attend monthly training

programme on Panchayati Raj issues. At the end of this meeting each women's group writes a letter about their own difficulties to the Sarpanch. The issues taken up were construction of road, installation of hand pump, soil erosion, sanitation facility, widow pension and maternity benefit. The exercise instilled confidence in these women and in the long run it will help to develop women leaders.

8. State level Mahila Sammelan in Haryana

Strengthening leadership of women in PRI's, was the theme around which a Sammelan was organised at Rewari district, Haryana by PRIA. Over 900 women leaders participated in this state level seminar, inaugurated by the State Panchayat Minister, and openly spoke about the issues and problems that needs to be addressed in order to strengthen their leadership. The process was initiated by sharing the findings of a study carried out by PRIA in that area, which clearly pointed out that an increasingly large number of women elected representatives were effectively taking their roles as leaders. Some of the critical issues that were brought out in the discussions and the sharing of experiences by the participants, was a need for women representatives to take on their roles more independently, move beyond being mere implementors of government schemes to an active participation in the governance of their areas and finally a need for greater support and sensitivity by the concerned government officials.

9. Mahila Sammelan organised in Rajasthan

Similarly in Rajasthan sammelan of elected women PRI members was conducted at Jawaja 104 participants inclusive of 62 women PRI representatives attended the Sammelan. The idea behind the conduction of Sammelan was to document the perceptions of various women PRI representatives on the functioning of Panchayats in Rajasthan since the inception of new Panchayat Act. The Sammelan provided a common platform for sharing of diverse and rich experiences of the women PRI representatives, government representatives and representatives from NGOs working towards strengthening Panchayats. The Sammelan was centred around the key enabling factors catapulting the growth of panchayats and impediments in the process of Self Governance. The members critically reflected their own experience in the last four years.

The rich and diverse experiences were documents to derive future insight towards evolving a working strategy to ensure meaningful participation of women PRI representatives in the process of Self-Governance.

10. Mahila Sammelan organised in Madhya Pradesh

Sarnathan initiated a network of women Sarpanch members by organising a meeting on the women's day i.e. 8th March 1998. The meeting reflected that women Sarpanches would like to form a network with the purpose of:

- Sharing of experiences and difficulties faced to manage their affair.
- Collectively raise the issues faced by them with district administration. and other bodies i.e, Janpad and. Zilla Panchayats.
- Build collective confidence to deal with socio-cultural difficulties at the Panchayat level to demonstrate their leadership abilities.

About 30 women leaders participated in the meeting. It was followed up by undertaking field visits in their Panchayats. There were two more meeting held to formalise the network. The network was planned to be utilised during the forthcoming election process to promote participation of women candidates in their Panchayats as well as in other areas also.

11. Networking with Nehru Yuva Kendra

In Haryana, efforts were made to collaborate with already existing network of NGOs and VOs in the region for strengthening PRI's. Networking with Nehru Yuva Kendra was concretized by preparing youth to observe Gram Sabha Meetings. This study of gram sabha provided valuable insights into the issues, problems and perceptions of gram sabha and gram Panchayat representatives in participating and organising gram sabha meetings respectively. Useful recommendations were brought out by a large number of respondents which are being documented for the purpose of advocacy and policy change.

12. Meetings with other actors of Civil Society

Efforts were made by SSK in Uttar Pradesh, to establish a continuous dialogue with others concerned with the process, especially the government officials. Meetings were held with prominent persons such as Director, State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD), the discussion with whom was also published in the Conn of interview in Panchayat Varta, State Election Commissioner, officials of the Directorate of Panchayati Raj of the Government of U.P. Participation was also ensured in the workshops organised by the UP Voluntary Action Network (UPVAN) and other organisation working at various levels on the issue of development of PRIs.

13. Training Programme for NGO staffs on PRI

In Gujarat, a training programme was organised during May 27-30, 1998 at GIDR, Ahmedabad. In all, 28 participants participated in the programme. The objectives of the training was to develop an in-depth understanding on PRI and develop skill to work on panchayats among the staff members of the NGO's present

14. Regional level consultation with New Partners

With the intention of involving more groups in the PRI strengthening activities of the state SAHAYI, conducted consultative meetings with the various groups such as Karshaka Reksha Samithy in Kannur on the 6th, 7th and 8th of July 1998 and with the Self Help Groups promoted by the Kutnnad Vikasana Samithy on the 13th and 16th of July, 1998 at Champakkulam and Ranankari. Fifty participants from Karshaka Reksba Samithy and 60 participants from Kutt nad Vikasana Samithy attended the meetings. All these groups expressed their willingness to work in their Panchayats in a co-operative and collaborative manner. These program ne were intended to improve the VOs understanding on Panchayati Raj and formulate some collaborative programme for strengthening their capacities. With these Consultative meetings SAHAYI could convince the VOs of the need and relevance of people's participation, role and responsibilities of VOs and SHGs in the developmental activities, future challenges and opportunities, importance of collaborative work and need of advocacy and lobbying SAHAYI succeeded in motivating the participants to take some bold initiatives in their operational areas. It was further decided to do some fq)low up action and collaborative awareness generation programmes later. .

15. In Jharkhand area of Bihar, PEARL organised four camps for traditional tribal leaders, women, youth and local VAs to explain the implications of extension of PRI in the fifth schedule areas. This process has gained much political attention due to impending Vananchal.

b) Interface Between the Three Tier

1. Workshop organised in Uttar Pradesh

In consonance with the strategy six interface workshops were organised by SSK in Urai (Jalaun), Jaunpur, Ghazipur, Pratapgarh, Banda and Ballia districts of the state of UP in association with its partner organisations. The theme of the workshops was "Panchayati Raj and Youth" in which about

300 participants including government officials, elected representatives of PRI media and representatives of various NGOs were present. The selection of the topic "as based on the premise that not only the masses in general but also youth in particular need to be sensitised about the performance of PRIs. This is primarily because of the fact that now when PRIs have been designated as "institution of local self-governance" there is a need to catalyse and stimulate these institutions.

The main objectives of the workshop were as follows:-

- O To bring the elected representatives of the three tiers of PRIs, the government officials, the media persons and representatives of NGOs/VAs on a common platform.
- O To make the district administration aware of the problems of the elected representatives.
- O To sensitise the youth on the issue of Panchayati Raj
- O To make the district administration aware of the efforts made by the NGOs in the process of preparation of more plans by the Gram Panchayats

2. Three District level Conferences organised in Kerala

In Kerala, the program was intended to identify the major issues/problems and possibilities of co-ordination and collaboration among the personnel in the three tier system and the possible ways of strengthening the functioning of the self-governance institutions. Towards this end (three district level conferences (in Thiruvananthapuram) were organised for discussing the linkages across the three tiers of PRIs in Kerala. The programme was attended by a total of 125 gram/block/Panchayat presidents/vice-presidents/standing committee chairmen/secretaries and government officials. '

The participants said that this was a unique occasion for them to come together and interact and to identify the problems which hinder the effective functioning of the PRIs, especially the aspects of co-ordination and collaboration in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes among the gram/block/ district panchayats.

Some of the problems highlighted and the remedial measures suggested by PRI members are summarised below:

- There is no integration among Gram panchayats, Block panchayats and District panchayats especially in the case of planning, implementation and monitoring.
- Planning is not decentralised.
- Block Panchayat and District Panchayat members are not regularly participating in their respective Gram Sabhas.
- Delayed consent/technical sanction from District Planning Committee/Block Level Expert Committee is a major barrier in plan implementation.
- Partiality of DPC/BLEC members.
- PRI functionaries lack holistic view of planning.
- Almost all the Panchayats have developed schemes/projects on the basis of inaccurate data.
- Lack of adequate and efficient staff in PRIs.
- Non co-operation of line department officials.
- Non-Functioning of beneficiary committees.
- Communication gap among the three tiers is one of the major factor which hinders the smooth functioning of PRIs.
- Most of the projects taken by Block Panchayats and District panchayats in collaboration with Gram Panchayats are not completed due to the non co-operation of one of the tiers.

Follow up

Based on the suggestions of the participants, we are planning to convene similar meetings in other districts and at the state level in the coming periods. A district level conference on this topic in

Kasargod/Kannoor is proposed during the next quarter. We have planned to publish a response based on the outcomes of these deliberations.

c) Other Initiatives

I. Planning for election process for Civil Society interventions

Considering the opportunity that MP was going for second round of Panchayat election in May-June, now postponed, systematic planning with the supportive voluntary agencies had started in December 1998. The first meeting with about 20 Voluntary agencies was organised in January 1999 primarily to build a common understanding and a strategy of intervention. The meeting reflected the following:

- There is a need to orient voluntary agencies on their active participation in electoral process and its long term role in social change process.
- Capacity building of the organisation and their staff to deal with such sensitive issue with care, and also to provide relevant information with clarity.
- Building interlinkages with the machinery involved in conducting elections from state level upto Panchayats to promote fair and effective election process.
- Intensive support to the priority community candidates and women in selective Panchayats.
- Extensive information support to a large number of Panchayat through information resource centres.
- The meeting was followed by regional level consultations with the support of networks in Gwalior, Chambal, Rewanchal and Malwa regions to involve large number of organisations in the process.

2. Strengthening Kishori Panchayats in Bihar

During this period, CENCORED continued and expanded their work on Kishori Panchayat and organised training orientation programmes for NGOs working towards promotion and strengthening of people's organisation. A collaborative link was also established with local UNICEF office and Nehru Yuvak Kendra.

II) Bottom-Up Participatory Planning And Support In The Execution

a) Micro-Planning

The concept of micro level planning involving people in plan formulation and implementation is not new; right from the days of community development programme, people's role and participation has been stressed. Yet in practice putting people in the centre of planning process has remained a dream. The eighth five year plan made an attempt to deal with this shortcoming by recognising the need to involve people in the process of development through micro level participatory planning. This concept of power- to the people was given definite shape with the passing of the 73rd amendment to the Constitution, which gave formal recognition to the Panchayati Raj institutions at village, block and district levels to function as third tier of government. With a basic belief in people's capacities to play an active role in their own governance, PRIA and the NCRSO's initiated micro-planning in several Panchayats across the country, focusing on people's access to and control over local natural and human resources and inclusion of the disadvantaged sections and their active participation in this process.

1. Sehore District Madhya Pradesh

The ongoing activities under Micro Planning were strengthened primarily to consolidate the learnings as well as to complete ongoing micro plan implementation before the end of the financial year.

In Panchayat Jamunia, the construction of the culvert (Pullia) was completed. In Raipura Panchayat the finalisation of pavement is in its final stage. Panchayats had been able to collect Rs.16,000/- for the construction of the drain as without good drainage system. the road ' pavement will have very limited

life, utility and cleanliness. The road construction has involved about Rs.20,000/- of the Panchayat, community contribution of Rs.20,000/- and Samarthan has contributed Rs. 11,000/-.

In Hasanpur village of Raipura Panchayat, the community has contributed and influenced Panchayat for the construction of road which is about 2 kilometres long. The youth especially took initiative and mobilised local resources in terms of labour and material. The Raipura Panchayat also contributed about Rs. 7000/- for the micro plan for the village.

2. Expansion of Micro Planning Activities

The experience of Sehore has been expanded in other project areas in Madhya Pradesh with the partner voluntary organisation. Few of the intensive efforts are the following:

(i) Brass, Gohad

Micro planning in Panchayat Kathawn Hazi of Gohad Block was initiated in October 1998. Initially Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods were utilised for generating information on the development issues and to promote collective analysis process. The process, has resulted in collective actions by Gram Sabha forming working committees.

Outcomes:

- A monitoring committee has been set up to ensure regular functioning of the primary school and formal health services in the Panchayat.
- To bring water for irrigation purpose in their Panchayat from the nearby canal, they have planned in concrete terms and will discuss with the irrigation department and district administration.
- Cleanliness drive has been launched within the village to improve their environment.

3. Microplanning in Haryana

Based on its experiences of carrying out participatory bottom-up planning in two Panchayats, Dhana and Khetavas in District Jhajjar, PRIA undertook a similar initiative in District Mahendergarh. Inspired by the process, Jan Sewa Kendra, a voluntary organisation based in Mahendergarh District took the responsibility of replicating it in their work area. This was viewed as a good opportunity for both replication of the earlier participatory model as well as to build the capacities of the local organisation undertaking this process in collaboration with PRIA.

The implementation process is in progress with the committee members taking direct responsibility for it. They are negotiating with the respective departments based on the plans formulated. Both Jan Sewa Kendra (the local V.O.) and PRIA continue to play a supportive role in this phase of implementation.

Outcomes:

- The entire process helped to bring the different sections of the community together and make decisions collectively for the development of the Panchayat. An increased involvement of the marginalised groups was observed as the process moved forward providing an opportunity for their issues and concerns to appear in the emerging plan.
- People's knowledge about their own Panchayat and wards was enhanced enabling them to identify the various issues and find solutions with the available resources.
- The process provides an opportunity for many people to actively take up responsibilities and assume leadership roles.
- The participatory bottom-up planning process helped build knowledge, skills, role clarity and solidarity amongst the Panchayat representatives who played a key role in taking the process forward.
- The process helped to enhance the capacities of the local VA and its members and build better relations between them and the community.

- Finally, it provided valuable insights to the PRIA team involved in the process about the existing dynamics of a Panchayat. New methods and strategies of community participation, leadership development and conflict resolution were learnt through this experience.

Constraints

• However a few limitations were present in the process. For instance, while the facilitators had a good understanding of participatory methods, they lacked the necessary budgeting and technical skills required for planning. However efforts are on to seek external assistance as well as to enhance PRIA's own skill and knowledge on the subject.

• Government functionaries were conspicuously absent in the whole process. Involvement of government functionaries right from the beginning would have ensured greater authenticity of the process as well as help to bridge the existing gap between the people and the government.

• Financial devolution to the Panchayati Raj institutions in Haryana is still a distant dream.

Lack of knowledge about the funds available to Panchayats through different schemes and secondly effective ways to utilise their own Panchayat funds makes Panchayats totally dependent on the government machinery. Although the participatory bottom-up planning process enabled the Panchayats to identify their own resources and match it with the need of the area, dependency on the government for implementation of the plan creates a lot of frustration and disillusionment

4. Micro-planning in Uttar Pradesh

In Rae Bareilly district, SSK's partner VA, Lok Mitra prepared the ground in three Panchayats or Ahal, Kachlutawa and Garhwa in Deeh Development Block so that the process of Microplanning can be initiated. Efforts were on to regularise Gram Sabha (GS) and Gram Panchayat (GP) meetings to ensure that meetings were actually held to transact their business as envisaged in the UP Panchayat Raj Act, Through informal talks, door to door visits, group discussions among the GS and GP members they were motivated to participate in the meetings.

The endeavour led to, regular organisation of the GS and GP meetings in which women, scheduled castes and backward classes and local actors like Mahila Mandals, Nehru Yuva Kendra, Yuva Mangal Dal and other functional groups in the villages participated to discuss their problems and come up with probable solutions.

5. Micro-Planning in Rajasthan

Gangajali Panchayat in Rajasthan was selected for Micro Planning. In this Panchayat PRA was done in four villages. This exercise set up a methodology for village level planning. Various PRA exercises has been done in five villages of Gangajali Panchayat. During the process Panchayat representatives and villagers actively participated and supported in sharing their problems and solutions. Through PRA reasons behind the conflict related to Primary Education, Land and Water became visible. The Micro Plans developed for Gangajali Panchayat and the process was documented. In this regard awareness level was increased. The major achievement was the Gram Sabha member and the Panchayat raised their part (60%) of the resource requirement in the Gram Sabha.

b) Information Resource Centres

One of the critical factors emerging out of the micro-planning process in all the states, was the need for information and a common platform for discussing issues of common interest. As a consequence, several Panchayat village information centres were initiated. Similarly Block, District and State Resource centres were set up in the areas of intervention. The following section highlights the nature and activities of these information and resource centres across the country.

1. Village Information Centre in Dhana Panchayat Haryana

Origin

The issue of "right to information" was brought up during the participatory bottom-up planning process carried out by PRIA in collaboration with the gram Panchayat and gram sabha members in Dhana village, District Jhajjar Haryana. Subsequently a two day workshop of interested gram sabha members and Panchayat representatives was organised by PRIA on the issue of information. This workshop provided a platform for discussion on several critical issues like water electricity which were a matter of concern for the entire community. Apart from resolving these issues through the discussions it was decided that a village information centre would be set up in the Panchayat which would provide relevant information as well as a platform for discussions on common Panchayat issues. A committee was set up consisting of two men and women from each ward, presidents of the youth and Mahila Mandali groups, Panchayat members of the respective wards and representative of local VA called CAVE. Having been involved in the process as facilitators and recognising this as a platform for sustaining people's participation in development, PRIA agreed to support this initiative.

Action

Following this another workshop was organised for the committee members in which some government officials also participated along with the Panchayat and PRIA members. Focusing on the objectives, activities and future directions of the Panchayat resources centre some clarity and consensus was reached. It was decided that the information centre would be set up in the village Chowpal.

Although the committee members had decided on the place for the village information centre, several people of the community objected. The reason behind this was that since women were disallowed from entering the Chowpal they would be unable to participate and avail of the facilities provided by the information centre. Based on their suggestion of having it in a common place equally accessible for all, the Anganwadi centre in Dhana was identified to its central location and the fact that it was a place easily accessible to women. Mr. Roshan Lal who had played a key role in the micro-planning process was selected unanimously as being responsible for the setting up and running of the VIC in Dhana.

Setting up of the VIC

After having decided the place, efforts were made by the community, Panchayat, Mr Roshan Lal and PRIA to set it up. Wall paintings with several slogans were made, pamphlets and posters etc. were put to make it attractive and conducive to learning. A one day meeting was organised at the centre to inform people of this and to seek their involvement in developing this information centre. The main activities of the VIC are:

1. to collect and disseminate information on government and non-government development schemes and programmes.
2. to organise workshops and trainings for the villagers on need based issues
3. to call meetings and hold large group discussions on the various matters related to their, Panchayat in order to enhance firstly their knowledge about the various activities being undertaken in the Panchayat and secondly their participation identifying issues of concern and seek out solutions collectively.

2. Panchayat Resource Centre – Himachal Pradesh

During this phase PRIA Himachal started their office at Maiti-Garoh in Kangra district. It is located at a distance of 10 kms from Dharamsala, the district headquarters. Materials related to PRI's were collected from the government (state, district and block administration) and also from NGOs from within and outside the state. Some of the materials collected are government orders, publications, reports, journals, address list of 2922 Panchayat, reports of various meetings held in the state, annual

reports etc. Linkage was established between the office and the surrounding Panchayats including the PRCs. Use of these materials were made by our partner organisations and the PRI representatives of our field lab.

There are 3 Panchayat Resource Centres functioning in Kangra district at Ambadi, Mehch:rna and Tatwani. A new PRC was started in Dadhamb Panchayat.

PRC-Ambadi

This centre has been functioning for over one 18 months. It is located in one of the villages of Ambadi Panchayat and is housed in one room of a shop owned by Mangat Ram. In fact Mangat Ram has taken responsibility for the functioning and management of the PRC. There are about 30 books and newsletters kept here. The people who frequent and regularly visit the PRC are the youth, including girls. College and school going students and a few educated men of the village come to the PRC. They find it relevant and meaningful. The availability of a daily newspaper attracts other people of the village too.

3. Panchayat Level Resource Centres in Kerala

SAHAYI already set up five Panchayat level information centres in collaboration with local VOs at Wayanad, Kasaragod, Trissur and Thiruvananthapuram. In these places the Panchayat Samithi members and local people entirely depends on the resource centres for PRI-related informations.

In order to upgrade the utility of the PRCs, symposia and discussions on Panchayati Raj and Rural Development were organised in collaboration with youth and women groups. SAHAYI collected latest government orders, circulars and other relevant information such as anti defection ordinance from government secretariat and Panchayat Directorate for the PRCs. SAHAYI team closely monitored the functioning of the PRCs, and provided necessary guidance and support for their smooth functioning.

4. Panchayat Resource Centre in Rajasthan

A Panchayat Resource Centre has been set up in Unnati's programme office at Jodhpur, Rajasthan. The objective is to provide educational and information support to PRI representatives or, member, concerned government agencies and other groups including NGOs at the regional and state level. In consonance with generating demand of access to information, a Panchayat resources centre is initiated. It is aimed that such resource centre would meet the divers« purpose of disseminating information to PRI functioning and common man on issues -elated to Panchayat and other common areas of concern related to development. For this, regular interaction dialogue with Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Zila Pramukh, Collector and District and state level higher officials and secretaries for starting Resource Centre in collaboration with Government. There is a positive response to this. Principally they are agreed upon providing space in the District Panchayat, Collectorate premises. The following information is being collected:

- List of various government schemes/guidelines
- BPL List
- List of reserved constituencies
- Voter list
- Newspaper clippings and analysis
- Gazette analysis and report to Panchayats
- Documentation of SC ST practices
- Government prodder
- Publications

- Reports
- Address list of 9185 Panchayats

Analysis of newspaper cutting (Rajasthan Patrika, Jodhpur edition) and official Gazette is going on to understand: i.e. extent of media coverage and government focus on PRIs.

5. Data Bank of West Kallada Panchayat, Kerala

As part of its Microplanning exercise, SAHAYI felt the need for generating a reliable data bank on the socio economic profile of the area for the formulation of micro plans. Based on this assessment it was decided to develop a data bank at the Panchayat level. It was discussed with the Panchayat Samithi members, officials and general public and finally based on the suggestions and requirements specified by various actors SAHAYI prepared a draft questionnaire. It was then supplied to different development actors at the Panchayat level and collected their comment, for improvements.

Later, the draft question there was finalised and an intensive two day training programme was organised for the women who were selected from the Panchayat for data collection. The PRI members also extended co-operation in data collection. Around 3000 families were covered in the survey. SAHAYI: PRI team members and other staff members facilitated and closely monitored the whole process. The programme gave a whole new direction to SAHAYI's micro planning process. In fact, it was also an educational and learning process for all those who were actively involved in the activity. The data generation process is still on and compilation and analysis will begin once the data collection is over.

In order to ensure the accessibility of relevant information to the people and PRI members, SAHAYI set up a block level resource centre at the PRI Field Office located at West Kallada Panchayat in Kollam district. A news board has been placed at Karali Junction, a central place where people accessible regularly. Informations like the financial statements of 1997-98, details of the projects implemented by the Panchayat during the period etc. have been displayed in the news board. It has been seen as an innovative method for information dissemination to the public. Now most of the local people can get informed through this notice board. This information service even motivated them to reflect on certain issues like Panchayat plans, selection of beneficiaries, etc. and to participate in the activities of the Gram Panchayat

6. Information Resource Centre at State and National Level- Madhya Pradesh

Samarthan has attempted to build Panchayat resource centre at the state level as well as at the Panchayat level. The initial efforts were started in Sehore district where youths in different Panchayats started operating information centre on Panchayats in an informal manner. These centres were primarily set-up for providing information to the Gram Sabha members about various Government schemes especially linked with Panchayats.

The learning of these centres reflected that a more broad based and formal system of information resource centre need to be worked out. After various consultations, a detailed list of information needs at Panchayat level were developed. It was also realised that effort should be made to make it self sustained in the long run. To maintain complete chain of information from the state level to the Panchayat level so that Panchayats have access to the latest information, it was decided that at a later date, information resource centres need to be linked with E- mail facilities.

One of the information resource centre was established in Goliad Block of District Bhand with BRASS voluntary organisation in February 1999. It has been formally designated as block level Panchayat resource centre as a pre-test to expand the coverage in the state in future. The centre is quite in demand and during the period of preparation for Panchayat elections, it had provided extensive information support to the potential candidates of the block by providing nomination forms and helping them fill up correctly, '

The State Resource Centre is primarily a repository of information on Panchayati Raj Policies, administrative decisions, financial allocations and variety of research and learning documents on Panchayati Raj issues in M.P and other states. The information centre at the state level has been systematised and formally announced and a large number of organisations are using services of Samarthan's information centre.

7. State Resource Centre in Rohtak Haryana

Based on the increasing demand for information and advocacy efforts at the state level, PRIA has started a State Resource Centre on Panchayati Raj in district Rohtak, Haryana. The main objectives of the Resource Centre are information collection and dissemination as well as creation of a platform for discussion and dialogue on the issue in the State. At present efforts are being made to collect, document and create an extensive data base on Panchayati Raj in Haryana. Initiatives, information and changes on the issue from other areas is also being documented. Furthermore strategies for wider dissemination are being evolved.

8. National Resource Centre on Panchayati Raj

As regards national support linked to information dissemination, PRIA is working to establish a National Resource Centre. PRIA acquired a number of publications related to Panchayats from the government and other sources and disseminated the same to over fifty organisations working on the issues of Panchayati Raj.

III) Study and Documentation Of The Process

Several significant national and state specific studies were carried out by PRIA and the NCRSO's, which have been highlighted in this section. The findings have been shared widely, at the national and State level for wider awareness and advocacy on the issue.

a) Panchayat and Finance Study

To understand the state of financial devolution to PRIs, a systematic study was initially undertaken in 7 states (U.P., M.P., H.P., Haryana, Rajasthan, Orissa and Kerala). One district, two Panchayat Samiti and couple of Gram Panchayats in each PS were selected for this study.

Study findings

1. Despite allocations from the Central Government, PRIs do not receive their budgets in time. All state governments and several Zilla Parishads keep those funds with them to meet their own need. **The Planning Commission should ask the Central Government to directly transfer these funds to different tiers of PRIs in the first quarter of financial year.**
2. Various state governments and Union Territories prepare their 1999-2000 annual plans for discussions with the Planning Commission. The Commission can enquire about the consultations, if any, they have held with PRIs in preparing these plans. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment requires bottom-up planning by Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samities and Zilla Parishads, to be consolidated by District Planning Committee (DPC) as mandated in 74th Constitutional Amendment. **The Planning Commission should ensure that each state/UT, government delegation provides details of constitution undertaken with PRIs and confirm the formation and effective functioning of DPCs.**

3. The study report highlights the tied nature of central and state funds sent to the PRIs. This makes it impossible for them to implement locally relevant development programmes they attach priority to. **The planning commission should ensure that at least 50% of the funds marked for PRIs by central and state government are not tied to an existing scheme.**
4. Finally, the PRIs have no jurisdiction or functional control over their forests, land, water or mineral resources. The state governments have assigned non-buoyant and largely irrelevant taxes to them. **The Planning Commission should ensure that PRIs have functional control over natural and physical resources and significant taxation powers to mobilise their own resources.**
5. The declaration of 1999-2000 as the year of 'GRAM SABHA' is a strategic one. Our experience shows that Gram Sabhas need enormous support to strengthen themselves. Empowerment of Gram Sabha & will ensure accountability of Gram Panchayats and promote locally relevant development. **Legislative reforms and accountability of delivery systems are needed for empowerment of Gram Sabha.** Our experiences suggest the need for dissemination of information to Gram Sabha on an ongoing basis (as reflected in our work of Panchayat Resource Centres).
6. Budget proposal (1999-2000) for additional transfers of funds to PRIs needs to be viewed in the context of a study of 'Finances of Panchayats' that we presented during a National Seminar on February 23, 1999. It is our experience that state governments and Zilla Parishads do not release funds received from Central Government in time for Gram Panchayats to implement their plans. **We would suggest that Central Government may consider mechanisms for direct and timely transfer of funds to PRIs each financial year in the first quarter itself.**
7. Budget proposal to implement Education Guarantee Scheme and primary health care through Gram Panchayats are admirable. However, our experiences show that accountability of education and health staff to PRIs is a crucial issue. Unless government staff responsible for health and education are brought under the administrative control of Zilla Parishads, Panchayat Samities and Gram Panchayats (as appropriate tiers), these proposals will not be implemented effectively. **National Human Development initiative requires urgent reform in the government**
8. In the course of our work, we recognise the crucial role that voluntary organisations and other committed individuals can play in informing, supporting and enabling PRIs to perform their functions effectively. This is particularly so since government officials and agencies do not want to surrender their own power and control in favour of PRIs. **An important strategy in this regard that you may consider is to ensure that PRIs have control over natural, physical and mineral resource under their own jurisdiction.** This will enable PRIs to increasingly mobilise their own resources, and not be totally dependent on transfer of funds from central and state governments only.

b) Study on Women's Leadership

A national level study on "Leadership of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions" was carried out by PRIA and its partner organisations in 9 states. While the national report of the study is still in the process of being compiled some of the state level findings are as follows

Kerala

- Most of the female members are the proxies of their husbands or political leaders. .
- Majority of the women PRI members have only basic educational qualification and little exposure in this field; so they are entirely dependent on their male counterparts or Panchayat staff.
- Majority of the women PRI members are not willing to improve their knowledge or skill. This is due to the fact that after household chores they hardly find any time to learn and attend the training programmes.
- Instead of empowering the women PRI members, most of the male PRI members are trying to weaken their interest in PRI-related activities by necessarily criticizing them.
- In certain gram Panchayats there exists a clash of interest among the women PRI members for president-ship of the Panchayat.

Haryana

- A majority of the women see family support as 'positive' and not 'interference'.
- More 'mother-in-law's' than 'daughters-in-law' are in Panchayati Raj Institutions
- All Zilla Parishad women representatives are educated and 80% Gram Panchayat women representatives are uneducated.
- Reservation opens up opportunities for widows in Panchayati Raj Institutions
- Women's participation is affected by political associations
- More than 40% women say they will contest again.

Himachal

- Overall, the women members get support and co-operation from the other PRI members in her Panchayat, whether male or female. In case of co-operation from government officials, like BDO, .IE. extension officers, line department officials. it was seen that besides the Pradhan, the ward members hardly get an opportunity to visit government officials.
- Majority of the women were eager to contest the next elections.
- The women mostly interact with the local Mahila Mandali of the village.

Some of the needs (for being a more effective PRI member) as identified by the women are listed below:

- Increase knowledgebase and awareness level through trainings, educational materials and by exposure visits
- Literacy
- Financial resources, specially for ward members and direct financial assistance
- Greater public support and co-operation
- Better linkage with government functionaries
- Greater devolution of power especially for the ward members.
- Good relationship with local politicians
- An increase in the honorarium received by the PRI members especially the Ward members. .
- Skills to analyse problem situation and taking the right decision

e) Study on People's Campaign in Kerala

SAHAYI made a study on people's campaign initiated by the Kerala State Government in connection with IX Five Year Plan. It was a rapid assessment among the members of the Gram Sabha, especially farmers, farm labourers., fisherfolk. Panchayat presidents, secretaries, media personnel, teachers, government officials and voluntary activists. Nearly half of the respondents were women and both rural and urban communities in the two districts of Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam were randomly selected for the purpose.

Suggestions:

- Capable people should be promoted as PRI members
- People should be continuously educated. Their awareness level should be improved
- Effective monitoring system and procedures should be evolved
- The Panchayat presidents should have adequate qualification and competence
- The Panchayat functionaries and officials should be given more training
- Gram Sabha should be convened more often
- Socially committed people should be identified and encouraged to play active role in PRI activities
- The ward member should visit each and every house
- The participation of women must be promoted
- Participatory evaluation/impact study should be conducted on every year's performance and the evaluators should be impartial persons and voluntary activists.

d) Study and Documentation of Participatory Micro Planning efforts

Micro-planning was one of the key areas of national support as part of the capacity building efforts. A national level workshop was organised to share the experiences on micro planning with PRI members. NCRSO's experiences of carrying out intensive micro planning exercises with the community contributed immensely to the process of providing clarity on critical issues in bottom up Panchayat planning and bringing forth issues that needs to be raised with the government to bring about policy changes. A consolidated document on the subject is under preparation.

e) Impact of training carried out by the State Training Institutes for PRI member in Haryana

The study examined the content, methodology and impact of training programmes so far conducted for the PRI members.

The study was undertaken in Ambala and Jhajjar districts of Haryana. It was spread over four blocks in the two districts and included interviews with 150 elected representatives, 20 gram sachivs and 6 BDOs.'

Select Findings:

- The learning materials given after or during the course of trainings need to be looked at critically specially if it is meant for the elected representatives. Timely production and a steady flow of updated training material is essential so as to sustain the learning process.
- The training institutes pointed out that without the active support from the policy and decision makers in the organisations from which the trainees are drawn, the training programmes cannot be organised in a more creative manner.
- The training programmes for elected representatives need more planning and follow up in order to be effective and sustainable.

- Follow up mechanism after the training programme is almost non-existent. Perhaps, the idea of newsletters and journals can be explored for the purpose.

Select List of Publications/Periodicals prepared

- Hamare Panchayat Vavastha
- Panchayati Raj- Apal .a Apana Raj
- Gram Swaraj
- PrajillWltra Ki Neev- Panchayat ke Chunav
- Ham. are Nagar Nikay:
- AapAurHum
- Dondi
- Vichar
- Sarthi

IV) Strengthen Advocacy Efforts

a) Dialogue with the Media

1) A one day workshop was organised at Ganna Sansthan, Lucknow. The participants were NGOs, media personnel and members of SSK. The purpose was twofold - to sensitise media about the reality of Panchayati Raj Institutions, its importance, its rationale and its functions in strengthening the Panchayats ; and secondly, to enhance better linkages between NGOs and media

SSK shared its field level activities and findings from the research studies conducted on various topics like the present situation of Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabha. functioning of Gram Panchayats, women's leadership in Panchayat. In the workshop SSK urged that the media should take more initiative in giving coverage to Panchayat issues and the NGOs on their part should make greater effort to contribute PRI based features to newspapers. The significance of reinforcing the linkage between the media and the NGOs was unanimously agreed upon by the participants.

2) A dialogue with the media, mainly press reporters of eight newspapers (both Hindi and English) and the PRIA team took place at Hotel Dhauladhar, Dharamsala. the district headquarters of Kangra. The meeting was an excellent opportunity for PRIA staff to interact with the local media personnel. The purpose of holding this dialogue was to sensitise and inform the media about the process of strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions, (PRIs) and to encourage them to write on the major issues.

During the course of this dialogue, PRIA's PRI programme perspective and strategy was explained to them with emphasis on activities that have been undertaken in Himachal Pradesh and particularly in the Kangra district.

The following newspapers were represented in the dialogue-Divya Himachal, Dainik Tribune, Jansatta., Punjab Kesri, Indian Express, The Tribune, Vir Pratap and Ajit Samachar.

b) Influencing Government Policy

1) Workshop on Participatory Planning towards Empowerment or PRIs (May 12- 13, 1998)

The above workshop was part of PRIA's ongoing efforts in strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions in collaboration with NCRSOs. Thus, the participants were mainly staffs of PRIA and RSOs.

The main objective was to consolidate the participatory planning exercises undertaken by each RSO in their respective states and to draw some lessons from these experiences. The workshop centred

around three main themes, the process of participatory planning, impact of participatory planning and issues and concerns regarding participatory planning

Towards the end of the workshop, papers were prepared by the participants based on the foregoing themes. The papers were a synthesis of participatory planning exercises carried out in the different states. A manual is under preparation.

2) Seminar on Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions In India. Participatory Planning towards Empowerment of PRIs (May 15, 1998)

The seminar was organised by PRIA and NCRSOs as a part of their ongoing programme of strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions. The purpose of the seminar was to share with a wider audience, the lessons learnt and the major issues and concerns related to participatory planning exercises which were undertaken by PRIA and NCRSOs in the nine different states of India.

Three papers were presented:

- Process of participatory Panchayat level planning
- Impact of participatory planning
- Panchayat level planning and implementation; issues and concerns

The seminar was chaired by Dr. N.C. Saxena, IAS, Secretary, Rural Development, Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment, Government of India.

Some of the major recommendations included in the presentation were that the concept of participatory planning be promoted through the ward-level meetings, flexible funds needed to be made available to Gram Panchayats, collection of taxes by all the three tiers be made mandatory and opportunities of learning through sharing be encouraged among Panchayat members.

In his address, Dr. Saxena described the "Gram Sabhas" as the critical unit of development and emphasised the need for empowering Panchayati Raj Institutions throughout the country. He said that the Gram Sabha should be made an independent decision-making body, particularly in the rural areas, for identification of beneficiaries for government schemes. He also emphasised the need for collaboration between the government and NGOs for strengthening Panchayats. Dr. Saxena also felt it necessary to conduct more studies and share the findings with the government,

3) National Workshop on Panchayat and Finance.

PRIA and the network of regional collaborating organisations, organised a one-day workshop on the "Status and Finalities of PRIs". Eminent persons from the Planning Commission and Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment participated as panelists in this workshop. Several voluntary organisations and Panchayat representatives were also present to discuss the issue and possible solutions. PRIA submitted a list of recommendations to be taken up for policy change vis-a-vis enabling Panchayats to function as units of self-governance.

Print and electronic media presented major findings to a larger audience. The synthesis report was sent to all the Members of Parliament, Ministers, Chief Ministers, Political Parties and Bureaucrats - requesting them to assert their influence in required policy changes - in the light of study findings. The NCRSOs and VAs are conducting advocacy campaigns at state and local levels respectively. Top political leadership was approached personally. The message reached to the Prime Minister, ex-PMs and to most of those matters in policy framing. The response from political administrative executives was very encouraging. Based on our study findings, as admitted by its Chairman in a letter to Dr. Rajesh Tandon, the Planning Commission constitutional task force to suggest measures to improve resources, participation and involvement of PRIs in national planning exercise. In response to questions from

some MPs, Parliament was to discuss finances of PRIs in the light of our study. However, it could not materialise as the Lok Sabha was dissolved before the due parliamentary debate.

Today, when Government of India has declared the year 1999-2000 as the Year of Gram Sabha, we hope to see major (pro-participation) policy changes at Union-and State-levels.

4) State Level workshops

In order to share the State level findings, several State and District level workshops were organised. These workshops were attended by a larger number of PRJ members of all three tiers, government officials, media, academicians, local politicians and several other civil society actors. Intensive discussions on the issue were followed by recommendations for policy change which have been submitted to the concerned authorities.

c) Advocacy for Tribal Self Rule

In Poshina Tribal Cluster in Khedbrahma Taluka of Sabarkanta District, Gujarat, many rounds of meeting were held with villagers informing them about the amendment of the Panchayat Act which gives rights to Gram Sabha on management of natural resources. During May, a meeting was held with the traditional leaders (Mukhis) to inform them about the advantage of the new amendment and how they can involve in local democratic process. Followed by this, a rally was organised during May 11-15, 1998, covering 36 villages of the region to inform about the new amendment.

d) Panchayat Bachao Abhiyan in Bihar : To press for election of Panchayats in Bihar, this campaign is going on for the past one year. It was initiated during June-August 1998 in which the following activities were undertaken.

- Protest day was observed in a rally before Patna High Court and a memorandum was submitted to the Chief Justice to be passed on to the Chief Justice of Supreme Court, appealing for early disposal of pending cases related to Panchayat election in Bihar.
- A meeting of Voluntary Organisations was organised at state level to discuss on the future of the agitation programme. It was resolved to adopt a policy of agitation right from village and Panchayat levels and make the villagers aware about the need for an early Panchayat election.
- Voluntary Organisations also organised numerous meetings, rallies and protests in their respective areas and successfully observed "Panchayat Bachao Pakhawara" (Save Panchayat Fortnight).
- Signature campaign was organised at the village level for the same cause.
- A rally was organised in Patna on 14th August 1998. Different slogans in favour of state Panchayat election were raised
- Another rally was organised at Rajghat, New Delhi which was attended by B.M.Tarlcunde, Rajni Kothari, George Mathew, along with representatives from various Voluntary Organisations of Bihar.

Through their Panchayat Bachao Andolan, (a movement for holding Bihar Panchayat election) they involved a large number of diverse groups and organised meetings in Patna and Delhi. CENCORED along with some other organisations filed a petition in the Supreme Court and mobilised individuals and organisations to support the cause. The campaign is on.

e) PRIs in Tribal Areas

Based on studies conducted in the states of Gujarat, Orissa, MP and Bihar, PEARL co-ordinated a workshop on issues of implementation of Constitutional Amendments to extend PRIs in fifth schedule tribal areas. Shri Bhuria inaugurated the seminar in Ranchi in February 1999. Reports of the seminar and its issues were widely distributed in the media and government. The campaign on this issue needs to be undertaken.

I) Other Advocacy Efforts

I) Strengthening Panchayat Karmis and KRPs for Effective Panchayat Functioning in Madhya Pradesh.

• Realising the fact that in large number of Panchayats, local youths who are graduates or twelfth standards have been appointed by Panchayat as Panchayat Karmis, there was a growing need for their orientation to understand Panchayati Raj amendment and operational skills to support the Gram Panchayats. These Karmis also required skills to manage minute books and accounts of the Panchayats. These 45 Panchayat Karmis have been oriented in district Sehore organising training camps in the following three clusters : Bilkisganj, Sehore Block, and Shyampur.

The impacts of the programme are reflected in the following manner.

- Panchayat Karmis could establish more functional relationship with Sarpanch to held in their administrative operations.
- Many of the disputes between the Panchayat Karmis and Sarpanch got resolved which were earlier repartee to the CEO for conflict management.
- The Panchayat Karmis identified around 18 active resource persons from Panchayats who were later oriented, the panchayat level to support activities of Gram Panchayats. These Key Resource Persons (KRPs) were helpful in planning campaign strategy for forthcoming elections. These resource person mobilised around 70 persons to actively help expand reach ii. Panchayats our interventions during elections.

2) Training of Pradhans and Up-Pradhans in Himachal Pradesh

The PRI-HP team was invited as resource persons in the training programme of Pradhans and Up-Pradhans, organised by the Government of Himachal Pradesh. Initially this training was undertaken in two districts - Mandi and Hamirpur. Since, PRIA has been working in Mandi district for the last 3 years, it was asked to take a few sessions in all the 10 blocks of Mandi district. The sessions were on various aspects of the new Panchayati Raj system including Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha, issues concerning social and gender justice, role of women representatives etc.

Subsequently PRIA was asked by the State Administration to conduct training programmes in Kangra District. So PRIA team organised 35 training camps in 7 blocks. Each camp was for a duration of 3 days. The time schedule on paper was from 10 am to 5 p.m. However, in the real situation these camps used to begin at around 10.30 - 11 a.m. and end by 3.30 p.m. The reason behind this was that the participants used to come from far of places with very few bus connections. Hence, they had to leave early in order to catch their buses.

It was decided that in each block, the camps would be organised in two phases with three camps each, thus totaling 6 camps in each block. On an average ward member of around 9-10 Panchayats were present in each training camp. Thus in each camp around 40 - 60 Panches were present. However, in case of Bhawarna block, in both the phases only one venue was fixed. In Lambagaon block the training for all the ward members was completed in one phase in three camps (detailed note on the experiences of these trainings prepared).

C. Assessments

I. Problems Encountered

Broadly speaking, three Types of problems are encountered during the period:

1. Bureaucratic and political support PRIs continues to a major impediment. Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana showed much less supportive climate than Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala. The political leadership in Bihar continued its defiance to hold Panchayat elections.

This dynamics has to be kept in mind to energise greater public pressure in these states in future. .

2. Implementation of Micro-plans continued to be slow and frustrating. This is partly because government funds continue to be scheme-tied and not available for local plans. It is also because of our insistence that all Gram Panchayats make their own contributions too. Changing government schemes requires major policy advocacy; and sustained motivation of Gram Sabha is needed for overcoming dependence.

3. Promoting women's effective leadership requires multiple types of interventions. But enhanced exposure, literacy and technical skills can help significantly. Future programme may have to take this into account.

II. Performance

Key illustrations of impact can be seen in the following areas:

1. The national government has constituted a Task Force (with PRIA as Convenor) on strengthening Gram Sabha. Its recommendations are being prepared through consultative process.

2. The Planning Commission and the Ministry of Finance have undertaken specific exercises to remove bottlenecks to Panchayat Finances following PRIA's study and advocacy efforts in this arena.

3. Each state level partner (in the nine states covered by this intervention) is recognised by local PRIs, most VAs and key government departments as the primary NGO with information, capacity and long-term commitment to engage in strengthening PRIs.

4. Major involvement of Mahila Mandals, Youth Groups, NYKs, V As, Media, students, etc. has been extensively promoted in several states to assure greater ownership of PRIs among the public.

5. The Information and Resource Centres are major innovative interventions in the process of energising local interest and support for participation in PRIs.

III. The major limitation encountered in the project is the need to build more staff capacity and resources for detailed documentation and synthesis of enormous range of lessons being learnt in the project in different states and issues.

D. Lessons Learnt

A comprehensive review of the project is ongoing and shall be ready by late August 1999. That should provide a range of insights into the experiences of strengthening PRIs.

E. Variations

With respect to the planned budget for 1998-1999, major variations are related to the changing nature of programme interventions. As the process of implementation of microplans was slower (due to constraints mentioned earlier) less resources were used in this head (serial no.2). As each partner is preparing a series of studies and using them for media dissemination and advocacy with the government at district, state and national levels, expenditure on serial nos. 3 and 4 has exceeded the planned amounts. Increase in communication costs (including photocopying etc.) is directly linked to the above.

Since the project is being co-financed by Government of India, SIDA, Ford Foundation and Bilance, it has benefited from reduced expenditures on salary.

Overall, the variation during the year was negligible.

© 1999 PRIA. The text may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes, provided credit is given to PRIA. To obtain permission for uses beyond those outlined in the Creative Commons license, please contact PRIA Library at library@pria.org. Please use the following citation:
PRIA (1999) Narrative report: 1998-1999 Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions: (Joint Initiative of Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) by PRIA & NCRSOs)



Participatory Research in Asia
42, Tughlakabad Institutional Area, New Delhi-110062
Ph:+91-011-29960931/32/33
Web: www.pria.org