

Philosophy in Practice

Theme : Working with Panchayats

Annual Report 2007

DHAN Foundation
Madurai



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DHAN Foundation initiated a new theme on “Working with the Panchayats” in the year 2003. Though the 73rd Constitutional amendment focused on promotion and active functioning of the Panchayat Raj Institutions as a third layer of Government, Panchayats have till now failed to emerge as a third layer of Government even up to the minimum expected level. The main objectives of the new theme in the experimentation phase are i) Promoting and strengthening of village level institutions as functional groups in the Panchayat to ensure people’s participation ii) Sustaining the Panchayat institutions to access resources and reduce its dependence on the State and iii) Integrating the existing traditional systems with the Panchayats to enhance the participation of the people and achieve synergy.

Institution Building

The Panchayat theme has its operation in 24 Panchayats covering 118 hamlets and a population of 15,300. The people in the selected Panchayats who are above 18 years old were organized into 1458 Panchayat Development Groups (PDGs) with a membership of 26,897. It includes 1217 functional groups organised by other NGOs with 21,132 members. So far 52 Village Development Forums (VDF) have been promoted. VDF is a forum constituted at hamlet level; it guides and mobilizes the people to take part in the Panchayat activities. In all 24 Panchayats Working Committees (WC) have been promoted. WC is a mandatory forum legally promoted at Panchayat level. Five committees are envisaged for each Panchayat namely Appointment committee, Works committee, Development committee, Watershed

/ Agricultural committee and Education committee. These committees are empowered to implement the work and monitor the work within their Panchayat boundary

Primary focus was given on strengthening level of community participation in Gram Saba, facilitating democratic meetings, strengthening primary groups and promoting the Panchayat level Working Committees in all working Panchayats. The program team has demonstrated model Gram Saba meetings in five Panchayats. Working committees were given orientation in 15 Panchayats. During the year, Panchayat Parliament was tried out in the Kameswaram panchayat of Nagapattinam District. The local community participated enthusiastically in it. The experience was enriching both for the community as well as the team. Some operational issues were solved there itself. Also the people could realize the practical problems of Panchayat administration through this exercise; it also demonstrated the procedures and process of Parliamentary system to the community.

People’s Plan & Implementation

The team continued to strengthen the people centered – Micro planning with community participation. The plan would be prepared in the first quarter of every year and it would be approved by the respective Gram Saba for implementation. The Panchayat team members would follow up the plan implementation and resource mobilization. During the year, focus was given to ensure timely completion of Plan and Increase the Quality of Plan document. Even with the regular follow-up on an average 30 per cent of the Plan got achieved, except Kameswaram Panchayat, where about 65

percent of the plan got achieved. Getting a legitimate recognition and approval for the plan document from the state and district administration was a great challenge for the team.

To facilitate the Panchayats to attain self-sufficiency in terms of resources, initiatives were taken up to create Rs. 24 lakhs worth of assets and help them to make meaningful investment. It was done in the coastal locations of Cuddalore & Nagapattinam districts. In other three locations the team has followed up closely to ensure that the revolving fund given in the last year got utilized properly. Out of 15 Panchayats, four Panchayats have generated profit out of the revolving fund. .

Capacity Building

The team has designed and implemented a package of training for imparting Panchayat Literacy to community. Intensive Voter's Training was conducted in all the hamlets to coincide with the Panchayat Elections in Tamil Nadu. The response was encouraging; people have gained awareness about their rights and duties relating to Panchayat election. After the Panchayat election, training to newly elected representatives were organized and the basic orientation on Panchayat sector were given.

The team took an initiative to demonstrate transparency in the governance and make the Panchayat system to be accountable to the community. The team negotiated with all the Panchayats to disclose financial details in common places, and

present the details of income – expenditure details in Gram Saba meetings. Six Panchayats accepted the idea readily and disclosed the details. Similarly efforts were taken to refine the list of Below Poverty Line (BPL) families in all the Panchayats, the lists prepared with the participation of the community were subsequently approved by the Grama Sabhas to make it a legitimate list of BPL families.

Policy Initiatives

For advocating policy towards facilitating devolution of fund, functions and functionaries to Panchayat Institutions our theme established an exclusive centre called as C – PAD (Centre for Panchayat Affairs and Development), which will act as a resource centre for local governance and decentralization by conducting workshops, publishing a News letter and communication materials. During the year C – PAD facilitated a workshop for Panchayat presidents to consolidate field issues on existing Government schemes. News letter titled "Panchayat Thoodhu" was launched.

Panchayat theme jointly with the DHAN People Academy conducted Diploma in Panchayat Management. The course material and content got refined. The programme has initiated collaboration with Rajeev Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development, Tamilnadu, through which approximately 100 Panchayat representatives would get connected apart from the representatives of the Panchayats, with whom the programme is currently working.



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***"Love worth learning, learn flawlessly
Live by that learning thoroughly."***

- Thirukkural (391)

