

Annual Report 2008

Theme : Working with Panchayats



DHAN Foundation
Madurai



New Themes

Working with Panchayats

DHAN initiated a new theme “Working with Panchayats” in 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 dependency on the State, and iii) Integrating the existing traditional systems with the Panchayats to enhance the participation of the people and achieve synergy.

Five years of rigorous experimentation at the grassroots level has resulted in evolution of a set of programme components to take forward the learnings from experimentation for replication. The seven program components called, “IMPACTS” have been evolved with clear cut goals and activities. Institution

building, multi year micro planning and implementation, policy advocacy initiatives, addressing poverty, capacity building, transparency in governance, self-sufficiency are the programme components.

Building institutions

The Panchayat theme is implemented in five backward districts of Tamil Nadu namely, Cuddalore, Dindigul, Madurai, Nagapattinam and Theni. The works have spread over 24 Panchayats covering 118 hamlets and 19,974 eligible voters have been organised into 1,131 Panchayat Development Groups, of which 893 functional groups.

Village Development Forums (VDF) have been promoted in 52 hamlets. The VDFs guide and mobilize the people to take part in the Panchayat activities. Five working committees promoted in each working Panchayat for appointment, works, development, watershed/agriculture, and education have involved in work implementation and monitoring legitimately within the Panchayat boundary

Program components getting shaped

Programme standards for the key programme components, such as micro planning process, democratic practices like gramasabha, Panchayat council meeting, working committee mechanisms and capacity building were developed based on earlier experiences.



In Kadamalai Mayiladumparai Panchayat Union, based on the request from district planning cell, the team carried out micro planning process for the whole block comprising 17 Village Panchayats.

To ensure social security cover to the families in the working Panchayats, Janashree Bima Yojana (JBY) scheme of LIC of India was introduced to 2,000 poor families. In some of the Panchayats, the Panchayat institution itself took up the role of a “Nodal agency” for implementation.

The idea of Panchayat Parliament was done for one Panchayat. To disseminate the Panchayat literacy to school children and inculcate the values of democratic practices the idea of Balar Panchayats (Panchayat simulation exercise) were organised in Nagaapattinam and Kadamalai locations. Efforts were taken to network all the Panchayat Councils to learn from each other. Revolving fund support of Rs. 15 lakhs was provided to take up need based activities by the Panchayats.

Documentation and publication

The Panchayat theme made efforts to document the initiatives, learnings and outcomes of the experimentation, so as to design programme components for replication. A four page Tamil newsletter “Panchayat thoodhu” focusing on grassroots experience and policy leads has been launched. Proceedings of the one-day Panchayat leader convention organised by the theme as part of Madurai Symposium has been consolidated and published. A brief note on social audit and Panchayat parliament based on the field experience was published. Write-ups reflecting field learnings in democratizing Panchayats were prepared and published in the popular Tamil newspapers.



Positioning of Panchayat theme

Initiatives were taken to collaborate with Rajiv Gandhi National Institute for Youth Development, Catalyst trust, Round table for development in Tamil Nadu, Grameena Patana Kendram (GPK) in Kerala and Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD) in Orissa. A proposal to enroll 2,000 Panchayat leaders for the Diploma in Panchayat Management course has been submitted to the Ministry of Rural Development. Based on the request from the Department of Rural Development, the theme has worked out a draft note for making amendments in Tamil Nadu Panchayats Act for eviction of encroachment and safeguarding the Panchayat tanks.