

Annual Report 2009

Theme : Working with Panchayats



DHAN Foundation
Madurai



Working with Panchayats

The history of the village-level Panchayat institutions in India goes back hundreds of years. After independence, the Panchayat system was neglected. DHAN Foundation has realised that these institutions need to be vibrant and responsive to the needs of the people to bring about lasting progress, benefiting all. DHAN Foundation has launched a programme 'Working with Panchayats' to promote and strengthen the informal functional groups in the village to get involved in the Panchayat affairs. The programme integrates the existing traditional systems with the Panchayats to enhance the participation of the people and achieve synergy.

- Promoting functional groups and village development forums, strengthening and guiding working committees to integrate with the Panchayat system.
- Facilitating preparation of multi year micro planning for Panchayat Development by the community and make the working committees responsible for executing those plans.
- Advocating for enabling policies for effective decentralization through studies and publications, seminars and workshops.
- Promoting network of Panchayat Raj representatives at the Block and District level, and building their capacity in good governance.
- Creating awareness among the voters, youths, students on PRI, and ensuring benefits of the development programmes to reach the poor and vulnerable communities
- Strengthening the Gram Saba and making it a forum for performing social audit, and introducing e-Panchayats for open and transparent administrative system
- Enhancing the revenue for Panchayats through building corpus and undertaking income generating activities at village level.

The 'Working with Panchayats' theme is implemented in 25 Panchayats spread over five backward districts of Tamil Nadu, namely Cuddalore, Dindigul, Madurai, Nagapattinam and Theni. In addition to field locations, the programme coordinates a resource center, C-PAD (Center for Panchayat Affairs and Development) for enabling leadership capacities, thematic research, knowledge sharing, policy advocacy and networking.

Strengthening governance practices

The Programme focused on strengthening the institutions at Village Panchayats level during the year. Efforts were taken for ensuring community participation in the Gramasabhas, Panchayat council and working committee meetings. Leadership development in the primary level functional groups was given high emphasis. People's plan - 2009 was facilitated in all the Panchayats. This year, the respective Panchayat Administration

took up the responsibility for plan preparation and met the cost of preparation themselves.

As part of leadership development in working Panchayats, the Panchayat leaders were taken to model Gram Panchayats in Kerala for exposure visit. The experience was very much useful and enriching for the leaders. As a follow up of the exposure visit, in each village, the Panchayat council undertook special projects on development priorities such as "100 percent social security", "Hutless Panchayat", "100 percent electrified Panchayat", "Clean and Green Panchayat" and the like. Every village Panchayat has taken up one special project and the programme team helps them to achieve it.

Building Partnerships

The Programme made efforts to strengthen the relationship initiated already with the institutions working on Panchayat affairs. With RGNIYD, the

Panchayat team is involved in national level research project on 'Understanding Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of youth in Panchayat Raj Institutions'. In association with Rural Development department of Tamil Nadu, the Program has taken up training program on 'Role of NGOs in Development' to ten batches of village Panchayat presidents. With this initiative, the Panchayat theme would be able to develop relationship with more than 500 better performing Panchayat leaders and.

In addition, the Programme works jointly with the Rural Development Department to demonstrate National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in five selected village Panchayats in Tamil Nadu. Along with NIRD, the Programme has taken up an impact study of NREGS in Tamil Nadu in four districts of Tamil Nadu.

Experimentation

Referendum at hamlet level was tried out in Cuddalore district. Developing labor associations of NREGS workers was taken up. Also, the team has initiated the promotion of "Village Panchayat level Development associations", which comprises of all functional and primary groups within the village Panchayat boundary to serve as complimentary people institution to Panchayat council for effective administration of services. The Panchayat theme has initiated its works in an urban context. An exclusive project location to work with Madurai Municipal Corporation has been initiated.

Introduction of micro finance activity in all working locations created an opportunity to develop a Panchayat driven microfinance model. So far 65 microfinance groups have been promoted by the team.