

Grassroots

Democracy Matters

Theme : Working with Panchayats

Annual Report 2011

DHAN Foundation



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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 by adopting the following strategies:

- ✍ Promoting functional groups and village development forums, strengthening and guiding working committees to integrate with the Panchayat system.
- ✍ Facilitating preparation of multiyear 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.



Working with Panchayats Programme is implemented in 25 village Panchayats for strengthening the democratic practices of Panchayat institutions, integrating localised and informal Peoples' Organisations with the Panchayat systems for effective governance, and enabling them for undertaking various development works.

There are 1,489 functional groups in these Panchayats including SHGs of women, farmers, fishermen and youths involved in the process of democratising the Panchayat governance. The programme alone has promoted about 319 functional groups and the remaining 1,170 groups have been functioning there already. There are 26,954 members from these functional groups trained periodically on Panchayat systems and operations. In order to coordinate with the Panchayats as single body, these functional groups have been networked into Panchayat Development Associations (PDAs) in 21 working Panchayats.

Deepening the democratic practices

True democratic practices bring real democracy at grassroots level. The chief focus of the Programme is to find ways and means to promote democratic practices.

Panchayat Council Meetings

Conducting monthly council meeting with all the elected ward members is one of the mandatory functions for the village Panchayats. This is an important forum for the village Panchayats, where decision-making happens. The Programme has taken efforts to ensure that such meetings were

organised as planned and quality of discussion was enhanced. The PDAs have ensured regular monthly council meetings with enough quorums. Over 90 percent of the meetings were organised as scheduled. Wherever needed special meetings were also conducted.

Gramasabha meetings

Gramasabha is a Panchayat level forum where all voters are empowered to share their views, make clarifications and suggestions. Panchayats have been mandated to organise at least four Gramasabha meetings in a year. It was another important component for ensuring peoples' participation and it was a major thrust area for the Panchayat programme as well. With continued efforts there were visible changes in participation as well as conduct of the meetings. All the 25 Panchayats have conducted 2-3 meetings in addition to the mandated meetings to discuss on special agenda. In some places, the neighboring Panchayats could also follow this good practice.

Working Committee Meeting

Working Committee concept was introduced three years back at Panchayat level to strengthen its operations. The Panchayat Act envisages five committees at village Panchayat level for taking up specific tasks such as appointment, development work implementation, watershed/agriculture development, health and education. Also the Panchayats were empowered to set up need-based temporary committees. The working committee concept paves the way for the non-elected persons to take part in the Panchayat responsibilities. But in practice it could not pick up well. With continued efforts, the Programme has ensured at least 50 percent of working committees to meet and participate in Panchayat affairs.

Panchayat Parliament

Panchayat parliament was a novel idea experimented by the Working with Panchayats Programme. It is an informal forum to deepen the democratic practices in the Panchayats, where the Panchayat council members and other Panchayat level stake holders are brought to a forum and made

to deliberate on common village issues. It would function like a typical Parliament or Legislative Assembly session. This practice introduced by the Panchayat Programme was able to bring shared understanding between the Panchayat council and other stakeholders at Panchayat level. During this year 13 out of 25 Panchayats have organised such events.

Micro-plan for Panchayat development

Multi Year Micro Plan (MYMP) was an innovative participatory tool evolved by the programme. It is prepared at the grassroots level with the participation of people for Panchayat development, and accepted by everyone a 'People Plan'. It is a very good tool for the Panchayats to mobilize people, collect their views and make them involved in implementation. With persistent handholding of the Programme for the last seven years, it has now been integrated well into the Panchayat system. During this year, MYMP was prepared for all the 25 working Panchayats. The quality of the plan document got refined further and become more realistic. They were prepared timely and made available to the Panchayat during the first quarter the year itself. During this year, Rs. 57 million worth of development programmes against the plan of Rs. 108 million could be accomplished.

Updating of Voters list

In all the working Panchayats, steps were taken to update the voter lists and make it complete. It was carried out by the Panchayats with the participation of all the stakeholders at Panchayat level. The PDA associates have taken efforts to create awareness among the community and persuaded them to get involved in the whole process. Also, they have planned to update it in month of January every year. The updated voter list was placed for approval at the Gramasabha and was submitted to district administration.

Development focus

Panchayat, as primary institution has the role of implementing various development programmes

for the villages and ensuring civic services to the community. The programme has oriented all the 25 Panchayats to implement locally the Millennium Development Goals. Concerted efforts were made on ensuring primary education for all the children, insurance for all the men and women, electricity for all the households, employment for all the working population in these Panchayats. During this year, there has been significant improvement in accomplishing the goals set out for each Panchayat. Primary education has been ensured for all the eligible children in 15 Panchayats. Similarly provision of electricity and insurance has been accomplished for seven Panchayats. With the advent of Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGP), employment has been ensured for all the eligible people in 24 Panchayats.

All the working Panchayats have become nodal agencies for implementing Janasree Bima Yojana. They work towards covering all the families under this life insurance product. More than 1000 students have availed the scholarships to the tune of Rs. 0.7 million during this year and 26 death claims were facilitated.

MNREGP Experimentation

As stated earlier, MGNREGP has been taken as a potential area for addressing the issues of poverty, primarily unemployment. This programme provides wage employment opportunity for all the working people for minimum of 100 days. With the support of rural development department of Tamil Nadu Government, the Panchayat Programme has taken up an experiment in five Panchayats. The Programme can enroll all BPL families in this scheme, and arrange to incorporate MGNREGP activities within the micro-plan document. All the laborers have been covered under life insurance programme, savings bank accounts have been opened for all the workers and timely disbursement of wages ensured. The Programme has facilitated employment for 4.3 lakhs man days in 25 Panchayats during this year and Rs. 69 million has been disbursed as wages benefitting 730 families with 100 days employment.

Exposures to Panchayat presidents

DHAN as a resource institution in Panchayat programme has taken up an assignment from the Directorate of Rural Development, government of Tamil Nadu to arrange exposure-cum- training programme for the Panchayat presidents on Panchayat administration. During this year, 1300 Presidents in 24 batches got training under this programme, making a total of 1800 Panchayat presidents in 34 batches trained over the last two years.

Panchayat Education

The Programme continues to offer the Diploma Programme in Panchayat Management for the serving presidents, members and aspirants. During this year, the DPM course was organised for the Presidents in association with DHAN People Academy. About 110 Presidents from all over Tamil Nadu have undergone this programme with the sponsorship of Directorate of Rural Development. In addition, Panchayat education for students studying ninth to 12th standards was organised in four locations for 11 schools, covering around 850 students. Basic concepts of Panchayat were taught to the students. Similar orientation was given to over 1100 youths and 2700 SHG members.

Panchayat Movement

Panchayat movement was launched last year to reach more people and enable them to work on Panchayat affairs. So far 4635 members have been enrolled as members of Panchayat movement including the serving presidents, elected representatives and youths. The Panchayat movement publishes Panchayat Thoodhu, a quarterly vernacular magazine on Panchayat affairs. The Movement celebrates April 23rd, on the day when the 73rd and 74th amendment made in the Indian constitution, as Panchayat Movement day. Public meetings and rallies were organised to spread the awareness.

Voters' Day Celebration

The Movement also celebrated Voters' day by organising a number of awareness programmes highlighting the value of vote, importance of exercising voting right, individual's duty, reaching 100 percent polling. There were campaigns, cycle rallies and handbill distribution to mark the event.

Manual on Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act and Rules

Panchayat as a statutory body has well developed acts, rules, procedures, judgments and schedules to refer and follow. But many of the representatives at the primary level are not aware of such acts and procedures and there is no manual to refer. Hence the Panchayat programme has taken up the responsibility of compiling all the act, rules and procedures, with practical tips as a manual. A draft manual has been prepared and would be released soon.

Creating Panchayat President Relief Fund

After visiting the Panchayats in Kerala, a pioneer in Panchayati Raj System, five locations have initiated the President Relief Fund concept, and mobilised donations around Rs. 4000 – 5000 from individuals in each Panchayat. This fund has been kept at Panchayat level for use in emergency and disaster situations. Efforts would be made to increase this fund.

Working on self-reliance for Panchayats

To overcome fund constraints for implementing development programmes at village level, the Programme focused on increasing the sources of income of the Panchayats. This year, focus was on proper collection of house tax, water tax and other incomes. This resulted in the tax income during this year increase to Rs. 1.92 million for all the 25 Panchayats, which was 15-20 percent higher than the previous year. Similarly income from other sources was Rs. 2.37 million, which was 20-30 percent more than the previous year.



A mudra is a bodily posture or symbolic gesture. Mudra positions are usually formed by both the hand and the fingers. Mudras are a non-verbal mode of communication and self-expression, consisting of hand gestures and finger-postures, retaining the efficacy of the spoken word. It is an external expression of 'inner resolve', suggesting that such non-verbal communications are more powerful than the spoken word.

Democracy seeks to guarantee equality and basic freedoms; to empower ordinary people; to resolve disagreements through peaceful dialogue; to respect difference; and to bring about political and social renewal without convulsions. The democratic practices are guided by the mediating values such as trust, mutuality, solidarity, autonomy, independence, interdependence, self-governance, self-renewal, ownership, equality, equity, transparency, accountability, collaboration, negotiation, shared responsibility, and self-regulation. The mudras visualised here depict the expression of some of these values.

DHAN Foundation envisions a poverty free and democratic society. Poverty reduction and deepening grassroots democracy are the two overarching goals of DHAN. The Foundation promotes Peoples' Organisations owned and governed by the poor communities to achieve these goals. This report presents the Foundation's perspectives, principles and practices in deepening the grassroots democracy.



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