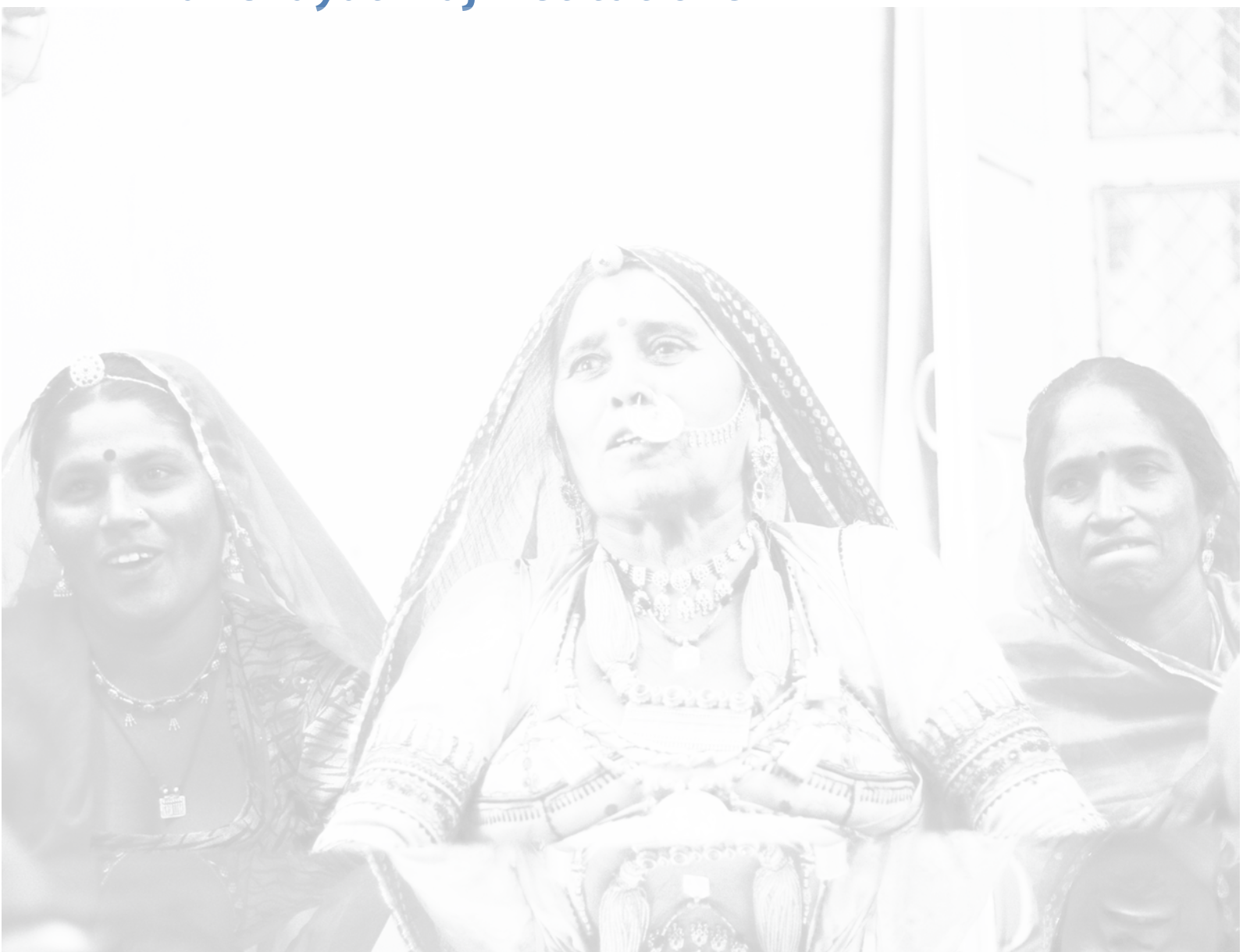


# From Reservation to Participation

Capacity Building of Elected Women Representatives and Functionaries of Panchayati Raj Institutions



## Acronyms and abbreviations

AAAS	Aamhi Aamchya Arogya Sathi	MREGS	Maharashtra Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
AIR	All India Radio	NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife	NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist	NREGS	National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
BPL	Below Poverty Line	OBCs	Other Backward Castes
BDO	Block Development Officer	PATH	Participatory Action for Tribal Heritage
BMM	Bock Mahila Manch	PDS	Public Distribution System
CBO	Community Based Organization	PESA	Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas
CF	Cluster Forums	PEVAC	Pre Election Voters' Awareness Campaign
CSO	Civil Society Organization	PIC	Panchayat Information Centre
DMM	District Mahila Manch	POWER	Panchayati Raj Orientation of Women Elected Representatives
EMRs	Elected Men Representatives	PRAJA	Panchayati Raj Jan Abhiyan
EWRs	Elected Women Representatives	PRC	Panchayat Resource Centre
FIR	First Information Report	PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	RTI	Right to Information
GP	Gram Panchayat	SBMA	Shri Bhuvneshwari Mahila Ashram
IAY	Indira Awas Yojana	SC	Scheduled Castes
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services	SCRIA	Social Centre for Rural Initiative and Advancement
IDF	Integrated Development Foundation	SHG	Self Help Group
IEC	Information, Education and Communication	SSK	Sahbhagi Shiksha Kendra
ISED	Institute for Socio-Economic Development	ST	Scheduled Tribes
JGVS	Jan Gramin Vikas Sanstha	TOT	Training of Trainers
LRG	Local Resource Group	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
LSGI	Local Self-Governance Institution	VAW	Village Agriculture Worker
MDMS	Mid Day Meal Scheme	YASHADA	Yashwant Rao Chavan Academy of Development Administration
MFP	Minor Forest Produce	ZS	Zilla Samiti
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly		
MPPS	Mahila Panchayat Pratinidi Sangh		

## About this report

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A million women have been elected at the village, block and district levels, following the landmark 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India (1992), reserving 33 percent of the seats in *Panchayati Raj* Institutions for women.

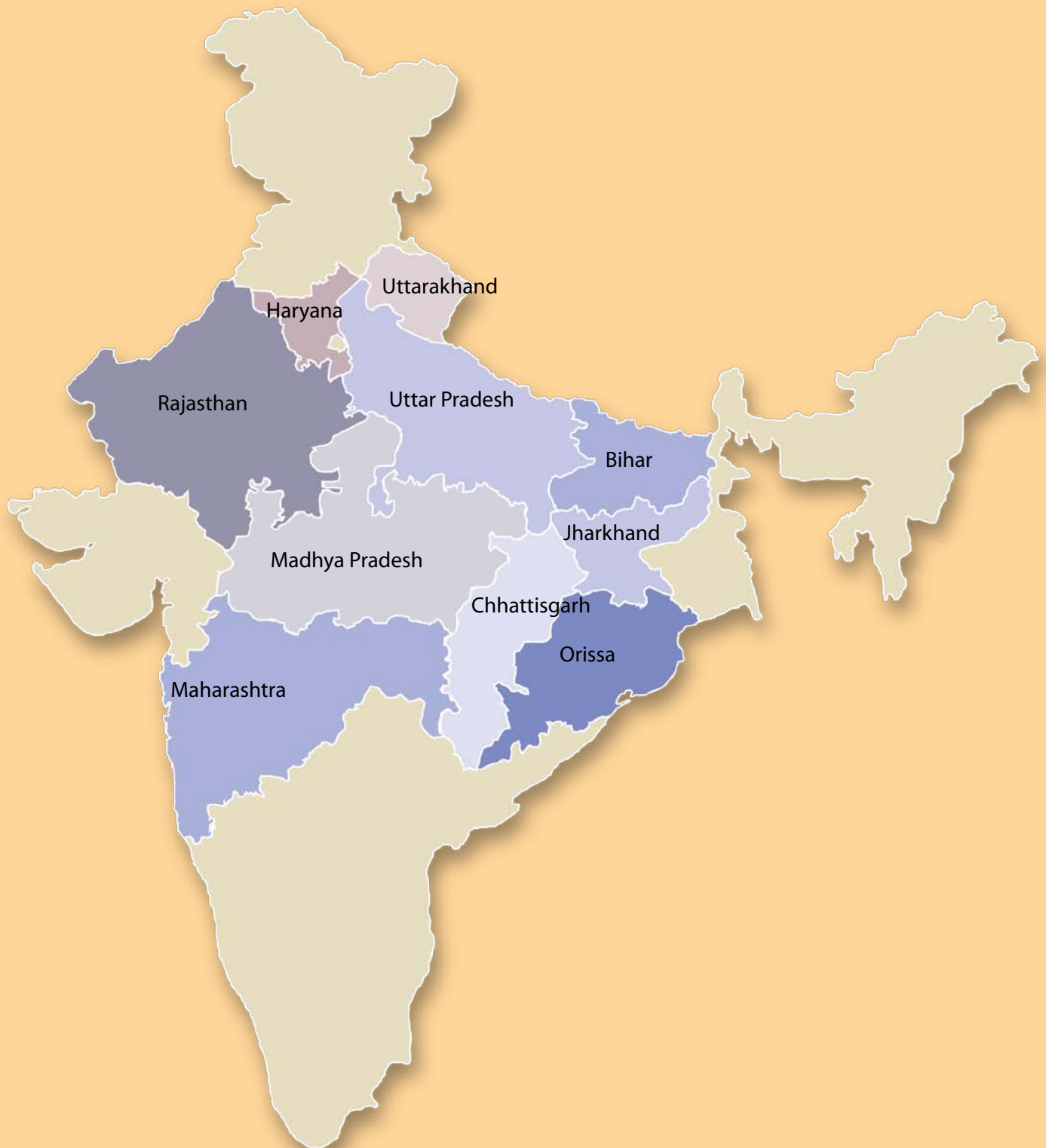
The process of decentralization has provided representation but representation does not necessarily lead to participation. Women still face a number of challenges for their engagement in political spaces such as inadequate education, lack of financial independence, burden of productive and reproductive roles and opposition stemming from entrenched patriarchal views. Training, therefore, has emerged as a critical concern for facilitating their effective participation.

This document brings together the lessons emerging from the 'Capacity Building of Elected Women Representatives and Panchayat Functionaries' project of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), India. The publication highlights the critical importance of training for improving the performance of elected women representatives, based on the experiences from 10 states across India. The present document presents successful strategies for mobilizing women, building their capacities and ensuring their effective participation in governance structures.

It is hoped that this document will be useful for practitioners working with elected women representatives and will complement UNDP India's overall endeavour to build capacities of government, locally elected representatives and communities to undertake more participatory and equitable development planning.

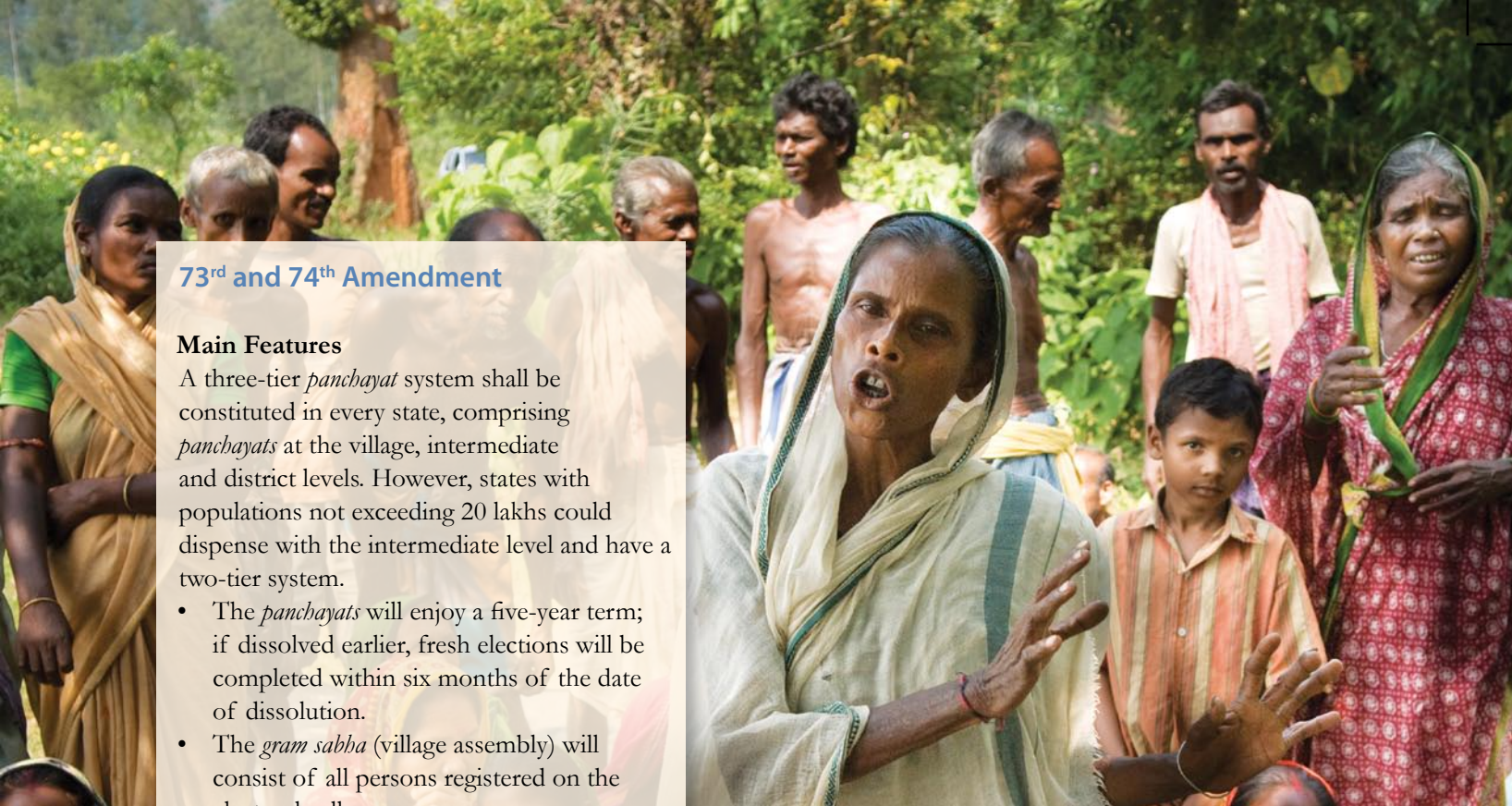
This document would have not been possible without the cooperation from partner organizations in the 10 states, Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), Mahila Chetna Manch (MCM), officials from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and UNDP. Special thanks to Nandini Oberoi for collating the report based on inputs received from the partner agencies.

## States covered under the Project



4

*Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Map not to scale.*



## 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment

### Main Features

A three-tier *panchayat* system shall be constituted in every state, comprising *panchayats* at the village, intermediate and district levels. However, states with populations not exceeding 20 lakhs could dispense with the intermediate level and have a two-tier system.

- The *panchayats* will enjoy a five-year term; if dissolved earlier, fresh elections will be completed within six months of the date of dissolution.
- The *gram sabha* (village assembly) will consist of all persons registered on the electoral rolls.
- In the directly elected seats of members in all *panchayats*, there will be reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), in proportion to their total population in a *panchayat* area, and one-third of these seats will be reserved for women belonging to these groups. Of the seats to be filled by direct election in every *panchayat*, there will be not less than one-third reservation of seats in *panchayats* for women, including the seats reserved for SC/ST women.
- The offices of Chairpersons in the *panchayats* at all levels will be reserved for the SC/STs and women as the State legislature may decide, provided that not less than one-third of the Chairpersons' positions shall be reserved for women. Likewise, there will be reservation in the offices of Chairpersons in *panchayats* at all levels for members of the SCs and STs, in proportion to their population in the state.
- The Governor of the State will appoint a State Finance Commission to review the financial position of the *panchayats* and make recommendations regarding the principles which should govern the distribution of the taxes, duties, tolls and fees between the State Government and the *panchayats*.

Source: Report on Women in Panchayats, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, 2008

## Key Strategies

### Introduction

The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India provide the legal basis for direct democracy at the local-level, both in rural and urban areas. The amendments stress the need to bring people belonging to marginalized groups into the political process by reserving seats for women and for people belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SC)<sup>1</sup> and Scheduled Tribes (ST)<sup>2</sup>. It is envisaged that by mandating not less than one-third of the seats for women in local government bodies, the governance process at the local government level will reflect the voices of women and the concerns and issues that confront them. This has resulted in 247,115 elected *Panchayats* (locally elected self

1 The Scheduled Castes are notified in a separate schedule of the Constitution of India. People belonging to Scheduled Castes have been at the lowest end of the Hindu social caste hierarchy, based on birth and have been disadvantaged for generations.

2 Scheduled Tribes refer to communities listed in the Constitution of India as such, because they reside largely in areas that are designated as part of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution. Their social and economic backwardness stems from their long term habitation in geographically remote areas.

*Low literacy levels, absence of education and limited or no exposure, all lead to a lack of confidence and many women are unable to comprehend the true spirit of decentralization and recognize the opportunities that it provides*

*The capacity-building project focused on elected women representatives. One district in each of the 10 states was chosen by the respective organizations as the unit of intervention*

government bodies) in the country, which contain more than 2.8 million elected representatives. Of these elected representatives, more than 1 million are women<sup>3</sup>.

However, this aggregate figure tells only part of the story. While *representation* is adequate (as per the norm of one-third of all seats) *participation* is less than adequate. While it is relatively easy to legislate representation, it is more difficult to create conditions suitable for participation. Experience indicates that representation does not automatically lead to participation.

A number of factors limit the active engagement of women in the political sphere. First, deeply entrenched stereotypical norms relegate women to the domestic space, with severely restricted engagement in public affairs, an area largely dominated by men. Second, caste and class restrictions and the patriarchal system and mindset pervades the political space provided to women. Women are still not recognized as political entities and their perspective is seldom seen as integral to the design and delivery of services. The third factor is the lack of exposure of women themselves to politics and the absence of any experience in exercising their political responsibilities. Low literacy levels, absence of education and limited or no exposure, all lead to a lack of confidence and many women are unable to comprehend the true spirit of decentralization and recognize the opportunities that it provides.

Factors such as these, that deter the effective participation of women, led to the initiation of the project **Capacity Building of Elected Women Representatives and Functionaries of Panchayati Raj Institutions** by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), Government of India and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) India, from 2003 -2008. One district each of the 10 selected states (Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh) was chosen. Specifically, the project aimed to:

- Build capacities of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) for effective functioning and setting of women's agenda.
- Institutionalize mechanisms to strengthen capacity building of EWRs to better understand and perform their functions.
- Mobilize community and strengthen processes of constituency building to enable women to articulate their voices and participate in the electoral process.

The project activities were implemented through Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to harness their expertise in mobilizing women and creating awareness of issues at the grassroots level. For each of the 10 states, one CSO was identified based on the demonstrated work experience on local governance issues in that area.

The capacity-building project focused on EWRs and *panchayat* functionaries. One district in each of the 10 states was chosen by the respective organizations

<sup>3</sup> <http://pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=50131>

as the unit of intervention. In some states, the entire district was covered through a combination of intensive (covering the entire block by conducting a range of activities) and extensive (covering the district through dissemination of information and educational material) methods, while in others only a few specific blocks were covered.

The following partner organizations were identified to carry out activities in the project districts.

### CSO partners in project districts

	State	District	CSO Partner
1	Bihar	Muzzafarpur	CENCORED
2	Chhattisgarh	Rajnandgaon	Participatory Action for Tribal Heritage (PATH)
3	Haryana	Rewari	Social Centre for Rural Initiative and Advancement (SCRIA)
4	Jharkhand	Palamu	Integrated Development Foundation (IDF)
5	Madhya Pradesh	Dewas	Samavesh
6	Maharashtra	Gadchiroli	Aalochana
7	Orissa	Anugul	Institute for Socio Economic Development (ISED)
8	Rajasthan	Jodhpur	Unnati
9	Uttarakhand	Tehri Garhwal	Shri Bhuvneshwari Mahila Ashram (SBMA)
10	Uttar Pradesh	Ghazipur	Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra (SSK)

In addition, Society for Participatory Research In Asia (PRIA, Delhi) and Mahila Chetna Manch (MCM, Bhopal) were identified to provide handholding support to the partners.

### Strategies for capacity building

The overall project strategy was designed to bring women into political structures and support their participation in politics, by organizing campaigns and training programmes to prepare women to discharge multiple roles, enabling them to link local priorities to the planning process. The CSOs adopted a multi-track approach to achieve the project objectives. They were tasked with facilitating women's participation, inspiring them to lead the process of change in the district, strengthening the existing collectives and networking with them at different levels.

Within the overall objectives and the framework of the project, different organizations were mobilized to assist in the implementation. In Madhya Pradesh, the *Sakhi Manch* and Self Help Groups (SHGs) were pivotal to the programme, in Rajasthan, the Panchayat Resource Centres (PRCs) and community based units were critical, in Chhattisgarh, SHGs and community volunteer groups were extensively used and in Uttar Pradesh, local Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) were engaged in project execution.

The key interventions for building capacities of EWRs and other *panchayat* functionaries were: (1) environment building through the campaign approach; (2) building capacities of EWRs and other women leaders; (3) strengthening women's collectives and building networks; (4) activating the *gram sabhas* and (5) strengthening information dissemination mechanisms.

*The CSOs adopted a multi-track approach to achieve the project objectives. They were tasked with facilitating women's participation, inspiring them to lead the process of change in the district, strengthening the existing collectives and networking with them at different levels*

## Reservations for women

While the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution mandate that at least one third of the seats in the *panchayats* must be reserved for women, at least five states have increased the proportion of reserved seats to 50 percent. Bihar was the first state to do so in 2006 and was followed by Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. All these states have raised their reservation quota to 50 per cent. Sikkim has raised it to 40 per cent.

*PEVACs adopted innovative approaches to ensure that the message reaches the people, irrespective of literacy levels. Approaches were designed in a manner that was sensitive to the local ethos, work culture and differences in literacy levels*

## (1) Environment-building through the campaign approach

The design of the project activities in each state envisaged implementation over the five-year electoral cycle. Consequently, activities commenced with a Pre-Election Voters Awareness Campaign (PEVAC), which was followed by capacity-building interventions.

A campaign-based approach was adopted to influence peoples' perspectives on *panchayats* and local governance and to encourage them to participate in *gram sabha* meetings. In the pre-election period, campaigns were devised to motivate people to participate constructively in the elections, both as voters and/or candidates.

PEVACs, carried out both in intensive and extensive modes, sought to promote an enabling environment for free and fair elections, encourage increased participation of women and people belonging to marginalized groups (as voters and candidates), generate awareness among voters about the importance of exercising their right to franchise and encourage them to vote for women candidates. In the intensive mode, an entire block was covered through a range of activities; while in the extensive mode, blocks were covered largely through the dissemination of information and educational material<sup>5</sup>.

PEVACs adopted innovative approaches to ensure that the message reaches the people, irrespective of literacy levels. Approaches were designed in a manner that was sensitive to the local ethos, work culture and differences in literacy levels.

Some elements of the campaign approach were:

- i) **Awareness generation and perspective building:** These campaigns focused on the importance of people's participation in governance, the features of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act and the role of women in governance. Posters, pamphlets, handbills, inspirational songs, *nukkad nataks* (street plays) and *mashaal jaloos* (torch light processions) were organized in Haryana, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Uttarakhand. Graffiti, posters, pamphlets, and handbills also served to widen and diversify the process of dissemination<sup>5</sup>. Women were encouraged to contest elections, vote for women candidates and explained the significance of participation.
- ii) **Support in filing nominations and mock polling exercises:** In many states 'nomination camps' were set up to offer support to aspiring candidates, especially women. These camps provided information regarding filing of nominations, assisted in filling nomination forms<sup>6</sup> and encouraged women to contest from unreserved seats<sup>7</sup>. As a

4 In Uttar Pradesh, for instance, the PEVAC was carried out in 16 blocks of Ghazipur district, intensively in eight blocks, and in the extensive mode in the remaining eight blocks.

5 Street plays were organized in 56 villages in Madhya Pradesh, and poster exhibitions held in 94 villages. A Panchayat Jagran Yatra was organized in Maharashtra and similar campaigns were conducted in Chhattisgarh and Bihar.

6 This proved extremely beneficial for candidates with low literacy levels.

7 In Uttar Pradesh, nomination camps were set up in eight blocks and these were visited by 4,500 people seeking assistance to fill up nomination forms.



consequence, there were relatively few instances of invalid nominations being filed and an increase in the number of women who contested from unreserved seats. Mock polling exercises undertaken in Bihar and Jharkhand<sup>8</sup> served to generate awareness among voters and make them familiar with the polling process. After the elections, in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh, the partner institutions organized felicitation functions for the newly EWRs. This helped to create a positive impact, especially on the women who had won the elections.

- iii) **Mobilizing people to participate in gram sabha meetings:** Mobilization campaigns were conducted in Chhattisgarh, Haryana and Uttarakhand, in an effort to increase people's participation in gram sabha meetings. Printed material, highlighting the importance of gram sabhas, the role, powers and functions of the members, was distributed to create awareness.

## (2) Building capacities of EWRs and other women leaders

The basic premise of this exercise is the idea that informed and well-trained EWRs and leaders will be equipped to handle their roles and responsibilities independently and will be in a better position to participate effectively in panchayat affairs. Capacity-building approaches sought to enhance the understanding of women representatives and leaders about their role and responsibilities, the procedures and mechanisms associated with decentralized governance and the schematic interventions of the Government. Gender sensitization was taken up in some areas; activities included training programmes, perspective-building meetings, exposure visits, strengthening women's collectives and developing information dissemination mechanisms.

Several innovative and successful actions were taken under this sub-component of the project. Most states arranged exposure visits for the EWRs to other states, where the project was underway. In Rajasthan, information kiosks were established in the Panchayat Resource Centres (PRCs)<sup>9</sup>. In Madhya Pradesh workshops for women panchayat representatives and mahila sammelans (womens' gathering) facilitated dialogue and better coordination. In Haryana, the campaign involved street corner meetings, street plays and thematic songs. A series of six nagrik samvads (citizen dialogues) was organized on the issue of self and inclusive governance.

In Chhattisgarh, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh, gender sensitization training initiatives were organized specifically for elected male panchayat members.

8 The State Election Commission had notified the elections in Jharkhand in August 2005, but on September 2, 2005, that schedule was cancelled in view of an interim order of the Jharkhand High Court, which declared ultra vires certain provisions of the state's Panchayati Raj Act and the Panchayati Raj (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act. The matter is now pending with the Supreme Court <http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/node/42374>.

9 The PRCs were staffed on a rotational basis by men and women functionaries and provided cost effective support to the EWRs and to panchayats headed by women. The PRCs provided training and helped mobilize and catalyze participation in the gram sabhas.

*In many states 'nomination camps' were set up to offer support to aspiring candidates, especially women. These camps provided information regarding filing of nominations, assisted in filling nomination forms and encouraged women to contest from unreserved seats*

*In Haryana, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, gender sensitization training initiatives were organized specifically for elected male panchayat members. In Maharashtra and Orissa, the partner institutions' main strategy was to consciously include men in the training, wherever possible*

*In Uttarakhand, elected women members were given training as master trainers. This enabled them to mobilize other women ward members on issues of governance*

In Maharashtra and Orissa, the partner institutions' main strategy was to consciously include men in the training, wherever possible. The orientation programmes, which were organized for both men and women in Orissa, led to a district-level convention of women on *Panchayati Raj*. The convention led to capacity-building of EWRs and the emergence of a district-level women's forum. In Chhattisgarh, gender sensitization training programmes were held for EWRs; in addition, PATH also organized leadership training for EWRs and SHG members, training camps for the purpose of networking among elected women, SHG leaders and members of CBOs and refresher training to consolidate the knowledge and capacities of EWRs. A *Pratinidhi Pati Sammelan* (a gathering of husbands of EWRs) was organized by SBMA - the partner organization in Uttarakhand.

Personality, Perspective and Performance (the three Ps) were the core elements that were stressed in the structured training programmes conducted by UNDP's partner institution (SSK) in Uttar Pradesh. In addition, interfacing and handholding were other aspects of the capacity building approaches. *Samman samarohs* (felicitations ceremonies) of EWRs helped to defuse the political polarization within the village and build up the confidence of the members. Similarly the organization of *amna samna* (interface) meets between EWRs and the community enabled regular interaction to discuss local issues, the provisioning of services etc.

In Uttarakhand, elected women members were given training as master trainers. This enabled them to mobilize other women ward members on issues of governance. The partner institution in Madhya Pradesh produced training modules for the training of *saathins*, (village level professional women workers), *manch leaders* and EWRs. Training of trainers, orientation workshops, refresher workshops, exposure visits and the formation of an association of EWRs were the major capacity-building initiatives in Rajasthan.

### **(3) Strengthening women's collectives and building networks**

The interplay of several factors prevents women's voices from being heard, their needs being addressed and their active engagement in governance processes. The culture of continued subordination has rendered many women less than confident to exercise their public responsibilities. Coupled with the fear of being ridiculed and sidelined, this has been a major constraint to the active participation of women in governance. The linkages between EWRs and women's groups or movements are limited. Recently there have been some efforts at building networks of women, though these have been limited.

*Under the project, partner organizations facilitated the formation of women's forums and networks that developed a sense of solidarity amongst the women*

Under the project, partner organizations facilitated the formation of women's forums and networks that developed a sense of solidarity amongst the women. In some places, new forums and networks were formed by bringing together various self help groups/ women's groups and EWRs, while in other places existing networks were expanded and strengthened. The basic focus was on building the capacities of traditional and local associations of women and making them aware of governance issues. Such networks were federated at the block, district and state levels.

These networks have helped women gain collective strength and solidarity, a common platform to share experiences, increased recognition and voice and enabled dialogue and the sharing of experiences. A lot of ground work and a mix of interventions such as perspective building, training programmes and informal meetings was required to motivate women to form networks. In certain areas the partner organizations had to deal with additional constraints of caste and class in the formation of networks, particularly in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

In Bihar, the idea for the formation of a network emerged at a function organized by CENCORED, the partner institution for newly EWRs, to provide a platform to share experiences and build confidence. The network was called the *Mahila Jan Chetna Manch*. Similarly, the partner institution in Chhattisgarh utilized the leadership training programme that they had organized to plan for cluster/ network meetings, to work out strategies for establishing a platform for collective action. Block-level forum meetings were organized to develop bye-laws, discuss women's issues and build the level of coordination required to make the network sustainable.

*In Uttar Pradesh the networks acted as pressure groups and enabled women to raise their issues at various forums. Initiatives were taken through the networks to combat issues of alcoholism, women's health and related issues including violence against women*

These networks<sup>10</sup> were instrumental in performing a wide variety of functions. In Uttar Pradesh the networks acted as pressure groups and enabled women to raise their issues at various forums. Initiatives were taken through the networks to combat issues of alcoholism, women's health and related issues including violence against women. It was useful in monitoring the *Janani Suraksha* (women's safety) scheme (under which pregnant women are encouraged to visit the closest hospital for their deliveries), the work of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) and *anganwadi* workers, the Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDMS) and the Public Distribution System (PDS). The network has played an active role in convening *gram sabhas* to take up issues such as encroachment of public land; in some areas these networks succeeded in reclaiming the land and redistributed it among landless people. Another notable achievement of the

### Networks work

- Network formation helps create a platform, which brings together EWRs from different places and social backgrounds.
- Networks provide an opportunity for EWRs to share and learn from each others experiences.
- Women are able to identify their own capacity building needs and other important issues that they need to address so as to be able to contribute meaningfully to the political sphere.
- Women can collectively strategize and prepare action plans according to the felt needs of the community and implement them thereafter.
- Collectivization provides support to forum and network members and strengthens their determination to act as effective decision-making individuals in the social and political arena.
- Within the democratic setup, a group or a collective holds power. The networks thus act as pressure groups on the government and on civil society to make space for women's participation in the political sphere.

<sup>10</sup> Networks of women pradhans and panchayat members from different blocks have been established with support from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and UNDP as a part of the POWER (Panchayati Raj Orientation of Women Elected Representatives) project, since November 2007. Similar networks have also been created in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar.

## Education for girls: Women in panchayats make their mark

“*Hamara ek hi lakshya hai, Ghazipur ki har ladki school jaaye,*” (we have only one aim, that all the girls in Ghazipur should go to school) says Durgawati Devi, the *pradhan*<sup>12</sup> (chairperson) of Gurkuda village and a member of the Ghazipur Mahila Panchayat Pravidhi Sangh<sup>13</sup>. The common goal for 2008 is to see that every girl in their village is enrolled in school and does not drop out of school. They are being supported by an NGO called Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra, the state’s nodal agency for Panchayati Raj Orientation of Women Elected Representatives (POWER).

Tara Devi, a *panchayat* member from Mahuvi village, said, “We know that Ghazipur is a backward district, but we do not want any girl to remain uneducated. Every week, we organize meetings in the villages to make the people aware about the importance of education.” In Tara’s village, 123 girls are enrolled in school.

Geeta Singh, a *pradhan* from Anthoni village, added, “The network also supports girls who cannot go to school because of financial problems. Since some of the villages do not have government schools, we have enrolled them in private schools. We take care of their fees.”

While education ranks first on their priority list, closing down liquor shops and regularizing the public distribution system are some of the other goals these women pursue.

*Source: Extracted from The Indian Express, 7 July, 2008*

network has been to ensure the provision of basic education for girls in rural areas. Women were instrumental in ensuring better and more accessible education for girl children – an initiative that was commended by the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj<sup>11</sup> (see Box)

A district level forum of women leaders called *Shakti Parishad*, formed by SCRIA – the partner institution in Haryana – was actively involved in cases of violence against women. The members of this forum assisted women who were victims of domestic violence, social intolerance and economic injustice. In many instances, this network acted as a pressure group and lobbied with the relevant administrative bodies, legal offices, social and political institutions. The network was also active on issues of poverty reduction and access to information; along with other villagers, it was instrumental in rectifying the Below Poverty Line (BPL) list. Due to pressure exerted by the group and the village community, a special *gram sabha* was convened by the *panchayat* and the villagers were instrumental in rectifying the BPL list.

In Maharashtra, the network focused on women’s issues and ensured that at least 10 percent of the revenue of the *panchayats* was earmarked for women’s welfare. The network also organized a campaign called *Tanta Mukti Abhiyan* (freedom from violence) to build up pressure against domestic violence.

In Jharkhand, where *panchayat* elections have not been held, a federation of women SHGs has been formed and it plays a significant role as a pressure group to ensure the enforcement of the provisions

11 The group was judged as the best state network for the promotion of educational initiatives, by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

12 *Pradhan*, *sarpanch*, *mukhiya* are terms that are used for the chairperson of the Panchayati Raj Institution in different parts of the country. (Reference: Report on Women and Panchayats, 2008, MoPR)

13 This network, comprising of women *pradhans* and *panchayat* members from eight blocks (Maruda, Mohammadabad, Jakhania, Sadaat, Arachawar, Saidpur, Karanda and Ghazipur Sadar) was established in 2007, with support from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and UNDP as a part of the POWER project.

related to women at the village level. Similarly, existing networks were strengthened by partner institutions in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh as well.

In Uttarakhand, existing networks of women were encouraged to organize themselves into forums at the block level, so that they can participate effectively in the governance process. Here also the process of forming a network involved identification of active EWRs by the block level volunteers; door to door campaigns, regular meetings and field visits by volunteers to motivate women to participate in activities related to political processes. Once the forum started to take shape; block level workshops were organized to formulate the Constitution, formalize the forum, debate the agenda and discuss the need to provide a supporting role to the forum until a natural leadership emerged from within the forum.

In Orissa, women's forums were created at the cluster, block and district level and covered the entire district/ project area. The district-level forum formed the apex body, the block-level forums the middle level, and the cluster-level forums were at the bottom of the pyramid. Each cluster consisted of members from seven *gram panchayats* and this ensured maximum participation. It was envisaged that each and every woman would be a part of the forum, if not directly, at least in the decentralized system, consisting of the village, block and district level. To strengthen the women's forum, periodic district-level conventions were organized by the partner organization. Nearly 500 women from different *panchayats* of Anugul district gathered at the *Anugul sabhaghar* (community hall) to review the progress, interact with government functionaries and plan the future course of action. The fact that these women took out the time to attend the convention is an indication that they realize the importance of participation (see Box below). The network has helped women interface with government officials and build cohesion among community organizations.

### Anugul Convention: participation is the key

Forum members understand the importance of their presence at the meetings. Take the case of Manika Devi Patra, a ward member from Barsinghar. She says that on the day of the meeting, she wakes up an hour before her usual time, finishes her household chores and informs her family members about her meeting, to ensure that there is no problem during her absence. This enthusiasm was not evident before. Any invitation to a meet would elicit numerous excuses for absence, but over time, the women have understood the importance of their presence at the meetings. People like Manika Devi have shown others the way to handle their everyday problems.

Results of the confidence building measures being undertaken in the course of project implementation were seen in some participants who, when called to speak, confidently addressed the gathering. Another encouraging sign was evident when a woman from the village walked to the dais and handed over a petition to the District Collector. There was no sign of hesitation among the women when it came to asking questions from resource persons and government officials who were present at the convention. "This is perhaps one of the biggest changes in us," admitted Tulasi Nayak, an *ex-sarpanch*, from Paranga *gram panchayat*. She mentioned that when she assumed office, she was nervous to even utter a word at the *panchayat* meetings, but that seems to be a thing of the past. Today, she is at ease discussing common problems of her village as well as issues like pollution from sponge iron units in her district.

Once instilled, the urge for emancipation gives women courage and inspires them to forge ahead. So strong is the urge to be a part of the movement that women often borrow money in order to meet their travel expenses. One of the participants (who wanted to remain anonymous) narrated how she had tried to pacify her husband who was enraged when he found that she was attending a training programme in another place and was amidst strangers. The next time she had to attend a meet, she ensured that a cousin

escorted her home; so that she could give the excuse that her cousin was with her. Apart from elected representatives, the empowerment exercise has enabled many other women who had latent leadership qualities and an inclination for social work, but were unable to find the right avenues. Nurpamani Patra, president of a SHG from Muchurigadia, mentioned how she had always aspired to do something for others and said that the forum provided her an opportunity. “On my own, I could achieve little, but the convenience of a group has not only strengthened my determination but has increased my chances of success,” she says.

Asked to cite an achievement in her work, Rinu Pradhan, ex-*sarpanch* from Kandasar *gram panchayat*, said that when a couple from their village decided to separate because the wife was afflicted with leprosy, the *panchayat* ensured that the wife received adequate compensation. Usually, women in similar circumstances are simply thrown out of the house and left to fend for themselves.

There are several examples of how women have got together to find solutions to local problems; to help group members who are in need and have emerged as trend setters among the new breed of EWRs.

*Source: Extracted from Consolidated Report, ISED Orissa*

#### (4) Activating the *gram sabhas*

Empowering the community to enable people to participate proactively in the governance process was another aspect of the role undertaken by the partner institutions across states. Unless regular *gram sabhas* are convened, with the active participation of the villagers, the objective of decentralized governance cannot be achieved. A special effort must be made to ensure that women and people belonging to the disadvantaged sections feel empowered and motivated, so that they can voice their concerns and ensure that these are placed on the agenda and discussed. In the absence of such motivation, very few people attend or participate effectively in *gram sabha* meetings.

Awareness generation programmes, community mobilization activities and perspective-building programmes were organized by almost all partner organizations. Substantive educational programmes were adopted. For instance, in Rajasthan, a 15 minute radio programme in the local language was broadcast every week<sup>14</sup>, covering subjects like the role of *panchayats* in providing basic services and their monitoring, planning and budgeting, identification and verification of the BPL list, micro-planning, the significance of participation in the *gram sabha* and the *ward sabha*, domestic violence, legal provisions relating to the rights and protection of women, social practices and their impact on women. In Rajasthan, the broadcasts encouraged people to share their experiences and provide feed back through telephone helplines and postcard responses<sup>15</sup>. At the end of each episode, listeners were asked a question that sought their opinion on

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<sup>14</sup> A total of 120 episodes were broadcast.

<sup>15</sup> On an average, 28 postcards and 10 telephone calls were received each week; the postcards helped gauge the community's response to specific issues and the tele-help lines helped address these issues.

a particular issue or on some information provided during the episode. Prizes were awarded to the best responses. The issues which were identified then fed into the training needs assessment, which was taken up subsequently as part of the capacity-building initiatives. Similar tele-help lines were also used quite successfully in Haryana.

Since *panchayat* elections were indefinitely postponed in Jharkhand, it was decided to use the capacity building exercise to strengthen people's understanding and participation in National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). *Nukkad nataks* were organized to clarify a number of technical points regarding the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). The main features of NREGA were communicated to the people and aspects such as how to write an application for a job, whom to address and the value of compensation if employment is not provided within the specified time, were covered. Once again, the *nukkad nataks* were followed by feedback sessions, where queries were addressed. Street plays were also used in Madhya Pradesh to familiarize women with the procedures and conduct of the *gram sabha* and to encourage them to participate effectively in the *gram sabha*. Using the play format, women were asked to identify five problems on a priority basis. They were then asked to put this in the form of a proposal and given tips as to how to present it in the *gram sabha*. One woman was made the *sarpanch*, another woman the *patel* of the village and two others played the role of secretary and *gram sabha prabari* respectively. The play format was a very effective way of illustrating the functioning of PRIs to people.

A *yatra* (rally) was undertaken in Orissa, to familiarize people in the more remote areas with the features of NREGA. Audio presentations with the main features of NREGP were prepared in the local dialect, so as to be able to reach the widest possible audience.

A series of model *gram sabhas* were organized in Chhattisgarh to build awareness about the *gram sabha* and encourage more participation. These 'mock *sabhas*' demonstrated the methods and procedures of conducting a *gram sabha* meeting and helped to mobilize villagers to identify an issue which could be placed before the *gram sabha*. Door-to-door visits made in the pre-preparatory stage were followed by the organization of ward-level and group-level sub-groups to motivate villagers to participate in *gram sabha* meetings. Special focus was given to SHGs, *panchayat* members, traditional village leaders and leaders of CBOs. The holding of mock *palli sabhas* (assemblies at the level of a revenue village) and *gram sabhas* in Orissa by the partner organization helped women become more familiar with conducting meetings, noting proceedings and maintaining records. Women were also familiarized with government policies and circulars.

In Bihar, *kishore* and *kishori groups* (groups of young boys and girls respectively) comprising of adolescents in the age group of 14 to 19 years, were formed and these were used to motivate villagers to participate in the *gram sabha* meetings. The objective was to encourage young people to become aware of the democratic process and encourage them to participate in *gram sabha* meetings in the future.

In Maharashtra, special focus was given to strengthening the *mahila gram sabhas* (women's village assemblies). SHG members were motivated to actively participate in the *mahila gram sabhas*.

## (5) Information dissemination mechanisms

Information dissemination strategies that were adopted included formation of information centres, information *melas*, radio programmes and the establishment of PRCs.

Information centres were set up in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Orissa. At these centres materials and posters on *Panchayati Raj* and government schemes were displayed. Thirteen *panchayat*-level centres were set up in Jharkhand; each centre was provided with a radio to enable discussions on issues of current importance. Centres in Maharashtra were equipped

*Even as partner institutions followed a common strategy and approach, they developed tools, modalities and mechanisms that were specific to the local context and requirements*

with contact details of key government functionaries, literature on women's rights, and material on government programmes, especially on the Right to Information (RTI) and the NREGA. Computers installed in the information centres in Orissa encouraged and facilitated computer literacy amongst women. In Rajasthan also, the PRCs functioned as information and dissemination hubs. In addition to posters, pamphlets and calendars, a weekly 15 minute radio programme provided useful and interesting information to a large audience. A fictional character, *Paanchu Panchi* (a mythical bird), was used to carry the message of self-governance on posters and calendars and in short films. The PRCs facilitated training programmes and functioned as an interface between government departments and *panchayat* functionaries.

Information *melas* (fairs) in Haryana and Jharkhand provided another mode of dissemination of information and brought a range of stakeholders including elected *panchayat* representatives, teachers, government officials, SHGs and the media to a common platform.

Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials were prepared in Uttar Pradesh, in the local dialect with large fonts and pictures. These were very effective in meeting the information needs of neo-literate and semi-literate audiences.

Even as partner institutions followed a common strategy and approach, they developed tools, modalities and mechanisms that were specific to the local context and requirements. As a consequence, the project has been successful in building capacities, confidence and skills amongst EWRs and women's groups and has exerted a positive and catalytic influence on the local governance process. It has strengthened existing networks of women and helped to establish new networks.

The magnitude and scale of building and sustaining the effort required for participatory government is daunting. Equally daunting are the challenges faced by the local governance systems and by patriarchal social systems. These are compounded by practical everyday challenges faced by the teams in the implementation of these projects, everywhere.

## **Immediate Outcomes: Some successes**

### **Women assert their rights**

Capacity building exercises and the strengthening of women's networks were critical elements in the transformation of many EWRs from passive, non-participating members to confident, active and responsible members of the community. In Orissa, women who had so far been largely silent in public began to share and voice their concerns. Acknowledging this trend and the importance of women's participation, block-level officials provided forum members with space in the block office to conduct their meetings.

In Rajasthan, in several *gram panchayats*, women *sarpanchs* who had been denied their legitimate right to chair *gram sabha* and *panchayat* meetings

*Capacity building exercises and the strengthening of women's networks were critical elements in the transformation of many EWRs from passive, non-participating members to confident, active and responsible members of the community*



were enabled to do so. In fact inspite of the feudal, conservative and paternalistic environment that prevails in the state, *dalit*<sup>16</sup> women have been enabled to participate in PRIs, which is a remarkable success.

In Maharashtra, women organized successful campaigns to implement the State Government's avowed policy of registration of houses in the joint names of husband and wife and the inclusion of the name of the mother in all official documents pertaining to children. The women also succeeded in asserting their right to influence the utilization of 10 percent of the *panchayat* funds, earmarked for them<sup>17</sup>.

The most significant impact has been the solidarity established amongst women through the networks and forums. In a path-breaking instance in Orissa, a no-confidence motion was sought to be passed against the woman chairperson of the *panchayat samiti*. She was also the chairperson of the district *mahila manch* and the members of the *mahila manch* united crossing party lines, to ensure that the motion was defeated.

When women in Karond village, Bandi *Panchayat*, of Madhya Pradesh, realized that women wage labourers were being paid less than their male counterparts on the construction site of a dam, they took up the matter in the women's forum. They then raised it with the *sarpanch* and the secretary of the *panchayat*, who asked them to approach the concerned authorities, which they did. Though the work stopped for a few days, when it was finally resumed, equal wages were paid to both women and men.

These and a number of other instances from various project areas show that the capacity-building project has helped to empower women to demand their rights.

## Engagement of women elected members and leaders in panchayats

A key outcome of the project has been the increased recognition by women, both elected members and *gram sabha* members, of the importance of their participation and engagement. In Maharashtra, a 75 percent increase in attendance of women was recorded in the *gram sabhas* of several villages<sup>18</sup>. In more than half the *panchayats* in Rewari in Haryana, 65 percent of the EWRs participated in *panchayat* meetings, a 20 percent increase from 2004, the year when the project<sup>19</sup> was initiated. Similar increases in participation have been reported from the other states as well.

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16 *Dalit* in Marathi literally means broken. The term was popularized by dalit leader, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to reflect the situation of the millions of people within south Asia, who are systematically and institutionally deprived of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

17 When the fund was withheld, the women collected donations to organize a *maha charcha* (large debate). Later they were able to get this sum reimbursed from the women's fund, after the *sarpanch* intervened in the matter.

18 Interestingly, on one occasion, in Marakbodi village, while a large number of women turned up for the *gram sabha*, there were no men present at the meeting, except the *gram sevak*.

19 In 70 percent of the villages in Rewari, the participation rate varied from 15 to 160 women, significantly higher than the earlier norm of participation, which was between two to five women at a meeting.

*Some areas where the women have been active include monitoring of the public distribution system (PDS), the running of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), the Midday Meal Scheme (MDMS), and the identification of BPL families*

An interesting case was reported in Basala *gram panchayat*, in Anugul block of Orissa, where the Block Development Officer (BDO) refused to acknowledge a *palli sabha* because only women were present at the meeting. When he was questioned, he claimed that the *panchayat* manual does not recognize a *palli sabha*, where only women are present. However the *sarpanch* with the help of the forum members protested against this stand and lodged a complaint with the Collector, who intervened and decided in their favour.

### **Incorporating women's issues in *gram sabha* and *gram panchayat* meetings**

Efforts to bring women's issues to the forefront of the agenda of *gram sabhas* and *panchayat* meetings have been successful. For instance, in Rewari district of Haryana, which is noted for its adverse sex ratio, 15 percent of the issues raised in *panchayat* meetings related to female foeticide, dowry and domestic violence. Similarly, 25 percent of the issues raised in the *gram sabha* were related to women. In most villages, an average of four proposals in each *gram sabha* were proposed by women and taken up for action.

### **Monitoring of basic services**

Reflecting increased confidence and awareness, elected women members and network members have begun to monitor the functioning of *panchayats* and the departments within the purview of the *panchayats*, as well as the implementation of government schemes. Some areas where the women have been active include monitoring of the Public Distribution System (PDS), the running of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), the Mid-day meal scheme (MDMS), identification of BPL families, ensuring attendance of teachers in schools and the provisioning of services like water and roads etc.

Between 30 to 35 percent of the EWRs in Ghazipur district, Uttar Pradesh, visited government departments and discussed their concerns and grievances with the concerned officials. They have also built pressure on *panchayat* secretaries to ensure that schemes are effectively implemented.

In Rajasthan, elected women members monitored 36 schools in 12 *gram panchayats* and 93 *anganwadi kendras* (creches) in 25 *gram panchayats*. Participatory monitoring was undertaken in 62 *gram panchayats* in eight blocks of Jodhpur district.

In Jharkhand, village level meetings were held to discuss the different Government sponsored schemes. Before the *aam sabha* (general assembly) called by government officials to identify beneficiaries under different schemes like Dindayal Awas Yojana, Indira Awas Yojana (IAY – housing scheme for the poor), Annapurna Yojana (food security initiative), efforts were made to organize village meetings so that names of the beneficiaries were decided by consensus among the villagers. Such meetings improved the efficiency of service delivery by the Government.

Even though elections have not been held in Jharkhand, the members of the women's forum have been active in monitoring the programmes and schemes of the government. They identified areas where these schemes

were not being implemented correctly and where they suspected that corruption was prevalent. The women brought this to the attention of the Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), who agreed that the corruption had to be stopped. However, the persons against whom the women had complained took them to court; and the case is still on. The women maintain that they are fighting for their rights and they will continue to do so, regardless of how much money they have to spend or the threats they receive, a vindication of their new confidence.

## Women entering the political arena

The PEVACs enabled voters to make informed choices. Their success is reflected in the fact that there was a perceptible decline in the number of dummy candidates, and in the rejection of nominations. There was increased voter participation and a larger number of women contested elections on reserved seats, as well as from general seats. Women's collectives were instrumental in identifying potential women candidates and in helping them to file their nominations.

## The way forward

It is clear that the collaboration of partner organizations with SHGs, women's groups, trained citizen leaders and the people themselves, as part of the strategy of design and implementation, has added value to the project. Greater partnership between the government, stakeholders and NGOs can therefore make for effective interventions.

Training has been a valuable and core element of this capacity building project. Training must be seen as an ongoing process and should not be a one-time intervention. It is important to identify mechanisms that will support and strengthen the training process in the future. For example *Panchayati Raj* training institutions at the state level should involve experienced NGOs in their training programmes, especially for the training of EWRs.

Most of the partner institutions focused their interventions on women and only a few institutions directed their efforts towards gender sensitization programmes. While such interventions are needed on a continued basis, gender sensitization training programmes need to be provided on an even larger scale to both women and men. In general, men were not targeted in the interventions and this is a serious gap that needs to be addressed in subsequent initiatives.

Experience sharing of EWRs needs to be actively encouraged, wider publicity to success stories and greater exposure for women's groups through visits and *sammelans* is required. Documentation and record keeping are additional areas that require attention. Another major component that needs to be strengthened is the interventions that are specifically targeted at women belonging to marginalized sections (*dalits* and *tribals*). While some partner organizations did organize an interface with other *panchayat* functionaries at the block and district level and tried to reach out to academics and media persons, this aspect too needs much more attention.

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*Another major component that needs to be strengthened is the interventions that are specifically targeted at women belonging to the marginalized sections (dalits and tribals)*

While the women's networks have played a very important role in developing individual and collective leadership, sustained efforts are needed to consolidate and stabilize these networks and they need to be given formal recognition. Many of the concerns identified at the beginning of the project remain, since the project duration was too short to develop institutional mechanisms that can take into consideration factors like caste and class divides, patriarchal forces and the heterogeneous nature of the groups.

Yet, the interventions have contributed significantly towards building capacities and developing institutional mechanisms. Such interventions at the grassroots level, on such a scale can best be done by NGOs in the field. These interventions will need support in the near future, as more and more women candidates enter the political arena. To equip them to work constructively, an informed and sustainable framework needs to be created.

Building the capacities of women collectives has contributed immensely in developing leadership qualities among women. While the focus of most of the interventions was on building the capacities of EWRs, interventions also need to be scaled up to develop the capacities and skills of women's collectives and women leaders. This will ensure that the collectives form a support structure for EWRs and contribute to women's agency and their participation in governance structures.

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## ***Bihar***

### ***Muzzafarpur district***

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#### **Background**

Bihar is a landlocked state, located in the eastern part of the country. Bihar lies between West Bengal in the east and Uttar Pradesh in the west; to its north is Nepal, while Jharkhand lies to its south.

The Bihar plain is bisected by the river Ganga, which flows through the state from west to east<sup>20</sup>. The state has an area of 94,163 square kilometres and a population of 83 million. The population density is extremely high (880 people per square kilometre), compared to the average density of 324 people per square kilometre (2001), in the country as a whole.

Bihar is part of the fertile alluvial plain of the Gangetic valley and is well endowed with water resources due to the Ganga and its numerous tributaries. It is also rich in mineral resources and the main minerals that occur here are steatite, pyrite, quartzite, mica and limestone<sup>21</sup>.

The state has the lowest literacy rate in the country and the gap between the literacy rate for men and women is more than 25 percentage points. Only one in three women is literate and this reflects the limited access that women have to education and opportunities for growth.

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<sup>20</sup> See Government of Bihar website at <http://gov.bih.nic.in/Profile/default.htm>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*

Muzaffarpur district, with 4.5 percent of the population of Bihar, was chosen for the project intervention, and CENCORED was identified as the partner agency. The district has 16 blocks, Aurai, Bandra, Bochahan, Giaghat, Kanti, Katra, Kurhani, Marwan, Minapur, Motipur, Muraul, Mushari, Paroo, Sahebganj, Sakra and Saraiya and all these blocks were covered through extensive partnership with local NGOs.

Selected Indicators – Bihar, Muzaffarpur and India (2001)

	Bihar	Muzaffarpur	India
Population	82,998,509	3,746,714	1,028,737,436
Sex Ratio (women per 1000 men)	919	920	933
Population of Scheduled Castes (%)	15.70	15.87	16.20
Population of Scheduled Tribes (%)	0.90	0.09	8.20
Literacy Rate (%)	47.00	47.95	65.38
Men	59.70	59.10	75.85
Women	33.10	35.81	54.16

Source: Census of India 2001

## Challenges

In the 2006 elections, 50 percent of the seats in Bihar were reserved for women candidates. Awareness amongst the people about the *Panchayati Raj* system and its benefits was low and there was lack of knowledge amongst them about the election process in general and about the reservation for women in particular. In the past, money and muscle power, caste and religion have played a major role in elections. Many *mukhiyas* created trouble during the election; they 'put up' their wives as front candidates and tried to mobilize support based on caste. Compounding the many problems in Muzaffarpur district were poverty and illiteracy.

In the perspective building phase, getting women to come out of their houses was quite difficult. Even after the election, many of the EWRs were unable to comprehend that they had become leaders and carried certain responsibilities and accountabilities.

Finding a substantial number of local level volunteers and ensuring that they stayed through the duration of the project was another challenge.

## Strategies Adopted and Lessons Learnt

The involvement of grass roots NGOs, who were familiar with village politics and dynamics, helped in implementation of the programme.

**Formation of groups of young boys and girls:** Soon after the project began, it became clear that the engagement of the family and the husband in particular, was critical to the participation of women in the programme. Children played an important role in building the confidence of the women, by encouraging and assisting them. Groups of young boys and girls (called *kishore* and *kishori* respectively) were formed, in a bid to encourage participation of the parents at *gram sabha* meetings.

**Pre Election Voters Awareness Campaign (PEVAC):** It was necessary to give prospective candidates and voters the opportunity to utilize their right to franchise freely and without fear. PEVAC<sup>22</sup> facilitated the filing of nomination papers, persuaded people to exercise their franchise and upheld the enforcement of a model code of conduct. Incidents of violence and disturbances were fewer during the *Panchayati Raj* elections as compared to the Parliamentary and Assembly elections in Bihar. Felicitation ceremonies were held in Bihar, once the elections were completed. The occasion was used to congratulate the newly elected women representatives and publicly acknowledge their new status.

<sup>22</sup> PEVAC had been conducted in 2001, before the first panchayat election and had a very positive impact on the filing of nominations, the enforcement of the model code of conduct and the conduct of the election itself.

**Networking and creation of forums:** Networking between EWRs was attempted but was at a very preliminary stage and requires assistance to be sustainable in the long run. The EWRs needed support in their day to day activities and local resource persons played an important role in this regard.

The programme has shown that capacity building of EWRs should be a continuous process, requiring regular inputs, continuous monitoring and follow-up. Therefore the duration of such projects should be a minimum of five years or the project should have a provision for extension.

## Standing for justice

### **Kiran Devi, Sarpanch, Raghoi Panchayat, Block – Minapur**

Kiran Devi comes from an ordinary family. Born on 27 March 1984, her father (who worked in Delhi) wanted her to grow up and bring recognition and fame to the family. Her father named his daughter Kiran, after Kiran Bedi, the first woman IPS officer in India. Kiran Devi studied upto high school and got married in 1999. Her father-in-law was also a *sarpanch*.

During the 2006 elections, Kiran decided to contest for the post of *sarpanch* and even though there were seven candidates in the fray, she won the election.

Despite a number of constraints, Kiran is always available for her people, who come in large numbers with their problems. Along with 14 other *panchs* (members of the *panchayat*), she holds a *gram kachari* (village court) every Sunday. As soon as she receives a complaint, she interacts with the *panch* of the ward and looks into the reported complaints and writes up the report and submits it to the *gram kachari*. Both sides are requested to be present on the day of the *kachari* and they present their versions of the case. This is followed by a discussion between the *panchs* and *sarpanch*. In most cases a compromise is arrived at. In some cases, fines are also levied. The money collected from fines is used for relief work.

So far, Kiran has decided 115 cases, which have also been recorded and documented. None of the cases that have been decided by her have gone into appeal in higher courts so far. She is so well regarded that often even police officials discuss matters pertaining to her *panchayat* before deciding any intervention. Kiran's major concern is that the justice should not be delayed.

Kiran hopes for a society where there are fewer disputes and wishes that the disputes could be settled by mutual consent. She feels that petty quarrels should be immediately settled before they become big fights and cause for tensions in the village. Kiran is able to conduct the *gram kachari* regularly and manage her other responsibilities as well because she is fully supported by her larger family and by her husband. Kiran says she would like to be involved in development work as well and hopes to be an MLA one day.



## Chhattisgarh

### Rajnandgaon district

#### Background

Chhattisgarh was carved out of the north-eastern part of Madhya Pradesh and became a separate state in November 2000. Located in the heart of India, Chhattisgarh's shares its borders with six states of the country; Uttar Pradesh to the north, Jharkhand to the north-east, Orissa to the east, Madhya Pradesh to the west and north-west, Maharashtra to the south-west and Andhra Pradesh to the south-east. The geographical area of the state covers 135,000 square kilometres and the total population in 2001 was 20.8 million people (2001 Census). Richly endowed with resources like forests and minerals (diamonds, gold, iron-ore, coal, corundum, bauxite, dolomite, lime, tin and granite), the people hold the earth and its forests in high regard and esteem<sup>23</sup>.

The state has 16 districts and an urbanization rate of 20 percent, (less than the all-India urbanization rate of 27 percent). Chhattisgarh is one of nine states of the Union of India that falls under Schedule V of the Constitution, due to the high proportion of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the population. The ST population is as high as 31.8 percent (2001 Census) - the highest in any state in the central Indian tribal belt. About 90 percent of the population is dependent on agriculture for their livelihood.

<sup>23</sup> Extracted from *Chhattisgarh Human Development Report 2005*; see [http://data.undp.org.in/shdr/chhattisgarh/Chhattisgarh\\_AProfile.pdf](http://data.undp.org.in/shdr/chhattisgarh/Chhattisgarh_AProfile.pdf)



Mining has become the fastest growing sector of the economy and accounts for 13 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the state. A fall out of extractive industries like mining has meant the destruction of large tracts of land and forests and has led to unrest in the tribal heartland. Large parts of the state have seen conflict between the armed 'Maoists' and Naxals and the state armed militia of the Salwa Judum programme.

The district of Rajnandgaon was selected for the project and the partner agency identified was Participatory Action for Tribal Heritage (PATH). The district has nine blocks and 696 *gram panchayats*. Of

the nine blocks, the project covered four blocks - Rajnandgaon, Dongargaon, Mohla and Ambagarh Chowki (Chowki). The first two blocks are situated closer to the district headquarters, while the other two are located in the interior of the district and are under Naxalite influence. These districts are under PESA (Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas). About 60 percent of the district is forested and collection of minor forest produce is an important occupation for the tribal communities.

Selected Indicators - Chhattisgarh, Rajnandgaon and India

	Chhattisgarh	Rajnandgaon	India
Population	20,833,803	1,283,224	1,028,737,436
Sex Ratio (women per 1000 men)	989	1023	933
Population of Scheduled Castes (%)	11.61	9.93	16.20
Population of Scheduled Tribes (%)	31.80	26.63	8.20
Literacy Rate (%)	64.70	77.21	65.38
Men	77.40	87.17	75.85
Women	51.90	67.55	54.16

Source: Census of India 2001

## Challenges

At the commencement of the project, the major challenge was to persuade the EWRs to assume greater responsibility and play a pro-active role in the affairs of their *panchayats*. It was essential to explain to male family members and to male representatives on the *panchayats* that the participation of the EWRs would facilitate discussions on pivotal issues that affected the well-being of the community as a whole.

Organizing trainings and ensuring participation was a difficult task, because EWRs and other women had to be encouraged and persuaded to give up their domestic and *panchayat* duties to attend the training sessions, outside their villages.

In a number of *panchayats*, elected members were content to simply implement Government schemes and showed little interest in making their own plans or taking any developmental initiatives.

Raising local issues as part of the *gram sabha* agenda was often a major problem, as the agenda is pre-set by government officials and valuable time is lost in explaining government schemes and proposals, with little time left to discuss important local issues. The announcement of government initiated programmes and new schemes sometimes impacts the conduct of project activities and distracts the attention of participants from the training and capacity building programmes under the project.

Chowki and Mohla Blocks of Rajnandgaon district are Naxalite-affected; intimidation and threats prevented the villagers from participating in *gram sabhas* and *panchayat* activities. As a consequence, the PATH team faced stiff resistance and hurdles in their efforts to organize meetings, monitor *gram sabhas* and strengthen PRIs in these areas. This made the conduct of trainings both difficult and dangerous.

## Strategies Adopted and Lessons Learnt

Three broad areas were the focus of the programme: to enhance the capacity of EWRs, strengthen the PRI institutions and to achieve gender equity. Volunteers were used in each *panchayat*, as contact persons between PATH and *panchayat* representatives. The main strategies that were used to build the capacity of EWRs and women's groups were:

**Training and capacity building programmes:** A training needs survey was carried out in all the four blocks and PATH identified the factors responsible for the poor participation of women in public affairs. Subsequently, several types of training programmes were initiated during the course of the project. In addition to leadership skill development trainings and gender sensitization workshops, three-day residential trainings were organized to provide intensive training and sensitization to EWRs. These capacity building and training programmes have enabled women with low levels of literacy to function more effectively in their *panchayats* and understand their roles and responsibilities. Most women representatives in the programme have begun to manage *panchayat* affairs without help from their husbands, making the *sarpanch pati* (husband of the *sarpanch*) redundant in the targeted project areas.

**Formation of networks and clusters:** Networks of EWRs and cluster groups were created and these have enabled women to gradually enlarge the scope of their activities; in some villages they handle the Food for Work and National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP). In other villages, the issue of encroachment of land has been taken up by women representatives. Women's groups have been instrumental in stopping the sale of liquor and have also taken up the issue of males acting as 'proxies' for women *sarpanchs*, and announced that male *panchayat* representatives cannot take decisions on behalf of the EWRs.

**Setting up a Panchayat Information Centre:** A district level Panchayat Information Centre was set up to provide information on *panchayat* matters and guidance to the community and to young people to enable them to strengthen local self government in their areas.

The main learnings from the Rajnandgaon awareness campaign are:

Basic training on the role and functioning of PRI is instrumental in bringing women out of their assigned roles and spaces and helping them claim their rights and function effectively. Training should be a continuous and on-going process. Experience sharing, information dissemination and



exposure visits and *sammelans* (large gathering) must be an important component of any exercise that seeks to empower EWRs.

Women's networks are an important medium of empowerment and change and they should be given formal recognition. EWRs can play an important role in monitoring basic services in their villages, a role that they should be encouraged to pursue.

Better record-keeping and documentation methods are required, so that programmes can be adequately evaluated and shortcomings addressed.

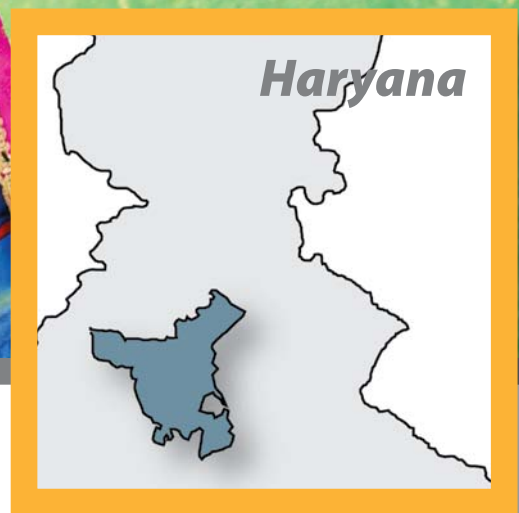
## Vindicating democratic functioning : from SHG member to *sarpanch*

### **Maltibai, Sarpanch, Bhedikala Panchayat**

Bhedikala *panchayat* is 10 kilometres from the headquarters of Rajnandgaon district. Before 2005, the *sarpanch* of the *panchayat* was a man. While it was common knowledge that he was corrupt, yet no one raised a finger against him.

In the 2005 *panchayat* elections, the Bhedikala *sarpanch* seat was reserved for a woman. The *sarpanch* therefore filed nomination papers for his wife. It was around this time that PATH had begun its pre-election voters awareness campaign. From this campaign, a candidate emerged - Maltibai Devangan, an active member of one of the SHGs. All that she knew of PRIs and their functioning was what she had heard at the training camp organized by PATH. Despite her lack of political experience and influence, she was determined to succeed.

The former *sarpanch* resorted to distribution of money and liquor to influence and sway voters. A meeting organized by the SHG, exposed the distribution of liquor and money and a First Information Report (FIR) was filed in the police station. Maltibai won the election. Soon after taking charge as *sarpanch*, she discovered that there was an unutilized balance of Rs. 25,000 of *panchayat* funds which had not been handed over by the former *sarpanch*. He was asked to provide details of the funds and their utilization, but did not tender the accounts. Maltibai did not give up and was determined to get both the balance sheets and the money that belonged to the *panchayat*. In the *Gram Swaraj Abhiyan* meeting organized in the district, she placed the matter before the (BDO). An investigation confirmed that the former *sarpanch* was indeed guilty of misappropriation and an FIR was filed against him. Subsequently, he refunded the amount of Rs.25,000 to the *panchayat*. With this action, the inexperienced yet committed and fearless Maltibai brought accountability to the functioning of the *panchayat* and confidence to the people, especially the women.



## **Haryana**

### **Rewari district**

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#### **Background**

Haryana became a separate state of India on 1 November, 1966. It has 1.37 percent of the geographical area of the country (44,212 square kilometres) and less than 2 percent of India's population. Haryana has grown and developed rapidly in the past three decades. Both agriculture and industry have seen high rates of growth and Haryana enjoys the unique distinction of having provided electricity, tarred roads and potable drinking water to all its villages. It is among the most prosperous states in India, with one of the highest per-capita incomes<sup>24</sup>.

Lying as it does on the northern trade route linking the Gangetic plain to Kabul and beyond, Haryana's embattled past has moulded the traditional institutions of its dominant groups. Despite the outward modernity and signs of the globalizing economy, its rural societies remain locked in a

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<sup>24</sup> See <http://haryana.gov.in/haryana%20state/haryana%20state.asp>

rigid social framework, in which caste and inter-caste *panchayats* control social relations, meting out punishment for violations of customary law and the caste hierarchy. Women and Scheduled Castes (19.3 percent of the population) have remained oppressed, *pardah*<sup>25</sup> is prevalent in many parts and persecution of boys and girls attempting to break the caste divide is common.

The low status of women is reflected in the highly adverse sex ratio in the state (861 women

for every 1,000 men). Haryana is one of the four states of the country where the child sex ratio (0-6 year age group) has declined drastically in the last two decades. Gender inequity is apparent in the gap in the literacy rate (a difference of over 20 percentage points) and in the enrolment of girls in school (24.2 percent of girls were never enrolled in school as opposed to 6.9 percent of the boys<sup>26</sup>). Although women are important contributors to the farm economy, particularly in livestock rearing and dairying, the workforce participation rate is only 28 percent. In the political sphere, representation at the state and national level is low but in the *panchayats*, women and women belonging to the SC community, both occupy more seats than those reserved for them<sup>27</sup>. Rewari district was selected for the programme. The partner agency was Social Centre for Rural Initiative and Advancement (SCRIA)<sup>28</sup>.

Rewari district borders Gurgaon to its east and north east, Rohtak on the north, Mahendragarh district to its west and Alwar district (Rajasthan) to the south east. The district is spread over 1,559 square kilometres and has two sub-divisions, Rewari and Kosli. It has five development blocks- Jatusana, Khol, Rewari, Nahar and Bawal<sup>29</sup>, which were all covered. There were 398 villages and 348 *gram panchayats* in the project area.

## Challenges

As the project commenced, the primary hurdle to be contended with was the lack of interest in the training courses amongst the EWRs. The highly patriarchal society in which the women live makes it difficult for them to find time for anything outside their domestic sphere. Household chores, including caring for the family and animals - fetching water, cooking and cleaning, health care,

Selected Indicators –  
Haryana, Rewari and India

	Haryana	Rewari	India
Population	3,712,319	765,351	1,028,737,436
Sex Ratio (women per 1000 men)	861	899	933
Population of Scheduled Castes (%)	19.30	18.87	16.20
Population of Scheduled Tribes (%)	00	00	8.20
Literacy Rate (%)	67.90	75.25	65.38
Men	78.50	88.45	75.85
Women	55.70	60.83	54.16

Source: Census of India 2001

25 *Purdah* literally translates to screen or veil. *Purdah* is the practice that includes the seclusion of women from public observation by requiring them to wear concealing clothing, by the use of high walls, curtains and screens erected within the home.

26 See National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2) 1998-99, Haryana, Indian Institute of Population Sciences (IIPS)

27 About 36.1 percent of the seats at the gram panchayat level were filled by women, in the 2005 election. In the SC category, the percentage of seats reserved for women is 47.5 percent and the number actually elected is considerably higher than that in the general category (MoPR, 2007).

28 SCRIA has been working in Khol block of Rewari district since 1979, while it was still part of Mahendragarh district. The organization is guided by the vision of sustainable rural development implemented by the rural communities themselves. SCRIA works in 1,400 villages spread across five districts of Haryana and three districts of northern Rajasthan.

29 See <http://rewari.gov.in/>

gathering fodder, take up considerable time and energy. In the few instances when EWRs were keen to attend the trainings, the men in their families strongly opposed their participation in the entire process. There was indifference among male PRI representatives to issues like inclusive governance and gender sensitization. They were only willing to participate in programmes that brought funds to the *panchayat* or schemes that involve substantial financial dealings

The pre-election campaign in Rewari faced several challenges and uncertainties. *Panchayat* elections were declared at short notice, which made the filing of nominations a hurried affair, especially for newcomers. When the elections were announced harvesting was in full swing, a busy time for everyone. An 'atmosphere of uncertainty' was created when the Government brought about sudden amendments to the *Panchayat* Act of the state, to prepone the elections<sup>30</sup>.

The non cooperation of Government officials in the interface dialogues, which were organized to foster multi - stakeholder partnerships was another indication of the lack of commitment to decentralized government.

Low literacy levels and the educational attainments of the EWRs<sup>31</sup> were a constraint that limited access to information, particularly from government sources. Many EWRs were forced to rely on male relatives for information and interpretation which meant they were unable to function independently.

## Strategies Adopted and Lessons Learnt

Intensive staff training and continuous feedback on strategy implementation: Field campaigns covered hundreds of villages in Haryana. Prior to the campaigns, a three-day pre-campaign workshop was organized with the resource persons, where objectives of the programme, logistics, events/schedule, implementation details, role of concerned resource persons, expected outcomes along with participants' profile were discussed. Post campaign, a one-day feedback workshop was organized. Programmes were reviewed on a weekly basis. Every alternate week an issue of concern was taken up for a two hour open discussion session with the team leaders. At every stage of the training, a training of trainers (TOT) programme was conducted and at the end of the training there was a feedback session. Internal reviews and planning for future initiatives were done on a fortnightly basis.

**Continuous impact assessment enabled mid-term course correction:** The partner agency demonstrated flexibility in implementing strategies that did not draw a response from key members of the target groups. The reluctance of EWRs to attend trainings specially convened for them and the lack of response on the part of elected men representatives (EMRs) on the issue of 'inclusive and accountable governance' led to a decision to change the strategy from direct training to awareness campaigns and 'hands on' practical trainings. Similarly, after a desultory attempt to organize gender sensitization trainings for male representatives in October 2005, the effort was dropped and work deferred.

**Reliance on people's institutions – the *Sangathans*:** Older *sangathans* (women's groups) set up by the partner institution SCRIA earlier, were among the most active promoters of the project's goals. They quickly understood the issues and were able to draw new recruits into their fold, to further project activities. These *sangathans* and their federations were able to make decisions and

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30 *The capacity assessment survey showed that over 90 percent of the members were not enthusiastic about training or development issues of any kind. Most had clearly refused to participate in any kind of training. This led to postponement of all the training programmes scheduled for elected representatives.*

31 *Many still rely on male relatives for information and interpretation. Illiteracy hampers their efficiency and independence in panchayat work.*

take action independently, with minimal support from the PIA.

**Community participation:** One of the innovative strategies adopted by SCRIA was the use of a tele-helpline<sup>32</sup> to connect EWRs and members of SHGs. This provided SHG members with direct and immediate access to EWRs and enabled them to raise issues of concern to them. This idea needs to be scaled-up and the use of technology to make information accessible to the people is one that needs to be pursued. The use of a wide range of volunteers from the project area provided a cadre of social workers, who could be relied on to sustain interest in the activities without personal gain or benefit. They were an invaluable aid to SCRIA teams which worked for three years to cover the entire district of Rewari.

The first phase of the programme focused on awareness creation. In the future, more in-depth information needs to be provided to EWRs on the functioning of local governments and their role in them. Technical expertise and information, village level planning, checking accounts and learning book keeping procedures should be part of the second level training.

Continued hand-holding is required by the EWRs, particularly in their interaction with district level functionaries. The networks and *sangathans* that were an important part of the strategy in Rewari need to be made sustainable. A common sangathan comprising of PRI representatives across districts is another idea that needs to be discussed and explored further. New strategies and methods need to be employed to deal with the resistance shown by EWRs in participating in trainings. The State Training Institutes need to involve CSOs in training activities.

The plummeting child sex ratio in Rewari is an area of concern and the EWRs can be motivated and mobilized to monitor this by ensuring proper records of pregnancies, abortions, births and deaths. Better record keeping in all future activities is required, so that better analysis of data can be undertaken.



<sup>32</sup> The tele-helpline was inaugurated in January 2005 and initially operated only on two days a week, for a few hours, but later it was open on all working days. The callers sought information regarding aspects of the election code, the process of filing nominations, the RTI Act etc.

## From sangathan leaders to activism at the panchayat level

### **Sheela and Kamlesh – Panch members, Berlikhurd Panchayat**

Sheela and Kamlesh belong to the SC community. Both of them are panch members in the same *panchayat* and the *sarpanch* is male. Sheela was a member of the Aarti sangathan started by DRDA and Kamlesh was president of *Laxmi sangathan*.

Both Sheela and Kamlesh are aware of the various Government departments and their jobs. They have received some training at the Nilokheri training centre. They used the RTI to elicit information regarding the PDS ration shop. Thanks to their initiative, the dealer now gives information regarding the ration received and dispensed. They have played a major role in restoring land to people belonging to the SC community (who had been allotted waste land in a land redistribution programme). The land was illegally grabbed by some powerful people in the village from them by using unfair means. The land was restored to its original owners only after the intervention of the Chief Minister.

Kamlesh and Sheela are active in their *gram panchayats* and attend meetings regularly. Schemes like Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), issues regarding provisioning of water and electricity, concerns of child marriage, dowry and alcohol consumption are discussed. For example, there was no electric transformer provided in the SC area, even though the rest of the village had electricity. Sheela went to the Electricity Board and after her repeated visits; a transformer for the SC area was sanctioned. However the *sarpanch* was not very interested in pursuing the matter and it was not commissioned. Finally 25 to 30 women, along with Sheela and Kamlesh, decided to sit on dharna (protest) in front of the office of the Electricity Board. Even then nothing happened. Finally the women approached the Deputy Commissioner (DC) who called the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) and instructed him to install the transformer. The people belonging to the dominant castes were enraged and tried their best to scuttle the installation. It was only after the intervention of a sympathetic lady police officer that the transformer was finally installed.

The women were happy and proud that their efforts had borne fruit. Most importantly they have realized that if they come together, they can make their voice heard and help improve their own situation and that of their village.





## Jharkhand

### Palamu district

#### Background

One of the youngest states in the country, Jharkhand came into being on 15 November, 2000. It is known for its mineral resources, including uranium, mica, bauxite, gold, silver, magnite, dolomite, fireclay, quartz, feldspar, coal, iron and copper. It is also rich in forest resources and has a forest cover of more than 29 percent<sup>33</sup>.

Jharkhand has a difficult geographical terrain and insufficient infrastructure; only 8,464 of its 32,620 villages are connected by road and only 14,667 villages have electricity<sup>34</sup>. The per-capita income is low and the literacy rate is 54 percent. About 26 percent of the people belong to the Scheduled Tribes and another 12 percent belong to the Scheduled Castes.

The Jharkhand *Panchayati Raj* Act was passed in March, 2001. The first ever *panchayat* polls in Jharkhand were scheduled to be held in 2006, but they have still not been held as there is a case pending in the Supreme Court.

Five blocks of Palamu district (Daltonganj, Chainpur, Satbarwa, Patan and Lesliganj) were chosen for the project. The partner agency that implemented the project was the Integrated Development Foundation (IDF).

<sup>33</sup> See <http://jharkhand.nic.in/index.htm>

<sup>34</sup> See <http://jharkhand.nic.in/about.htm>

## Challenges

In Jharkhand the *panchayati raj* system is largely non-existent. In this context, the implementation of government schemes is one of the biggest challenges for the state. In the absence of any elections and the consequent setting up of *panchayati raj* systems, it is no surprise that in Jharkhand people's participation in local government is extremely limited.

The main challenge faced by the project was that the people were not aware of their role. Women were unaware of the reservation for them in local government and the male

members of the community were reluctant to allow women to participate in *gram sabhas*. They were not open to the idea of women contesting the elections. The absence of a functioning *panchayati raj* system has resulted in the emergence of 'middlemen' between the people and the government, who facilitate the implementation of government programmes. This has often led to incorrect selection of beneficiaries and corruption in the implementation of programmes.

Participation at the *gram sabha* has been weak and the project tried to focus on increased participation at the *gram sabha* level. In many places, only the *gram pradhans* were identified. However they did not have any formal orders and as a result most of them did not have the power to take decisions. At the block level, the key person is the BDO and he/she is responsible for the implementation of schemes and programmes. However in the absence of the *panchayati raj* functionaries, participation of the people in development activities continued to be limited. Some guidance and handholding by local NGOs played an important role in furthering the required coordination between the government and the people.

The project aimed at sensitization of the community towards women's participation and the empowerment of women, so that they can participate meaningfully in decentralized governance systems, as and when they become a reality. The uncertainty regarding the holding of the elections meant that the project was largely limited to creating awareness and preparing the ground for subsequent effective participation of women. Creating awareness of NREGA and RTI were amongst the activities undertaken towards the later part of the project.

## Strategies Adopted and Lessons Learnt

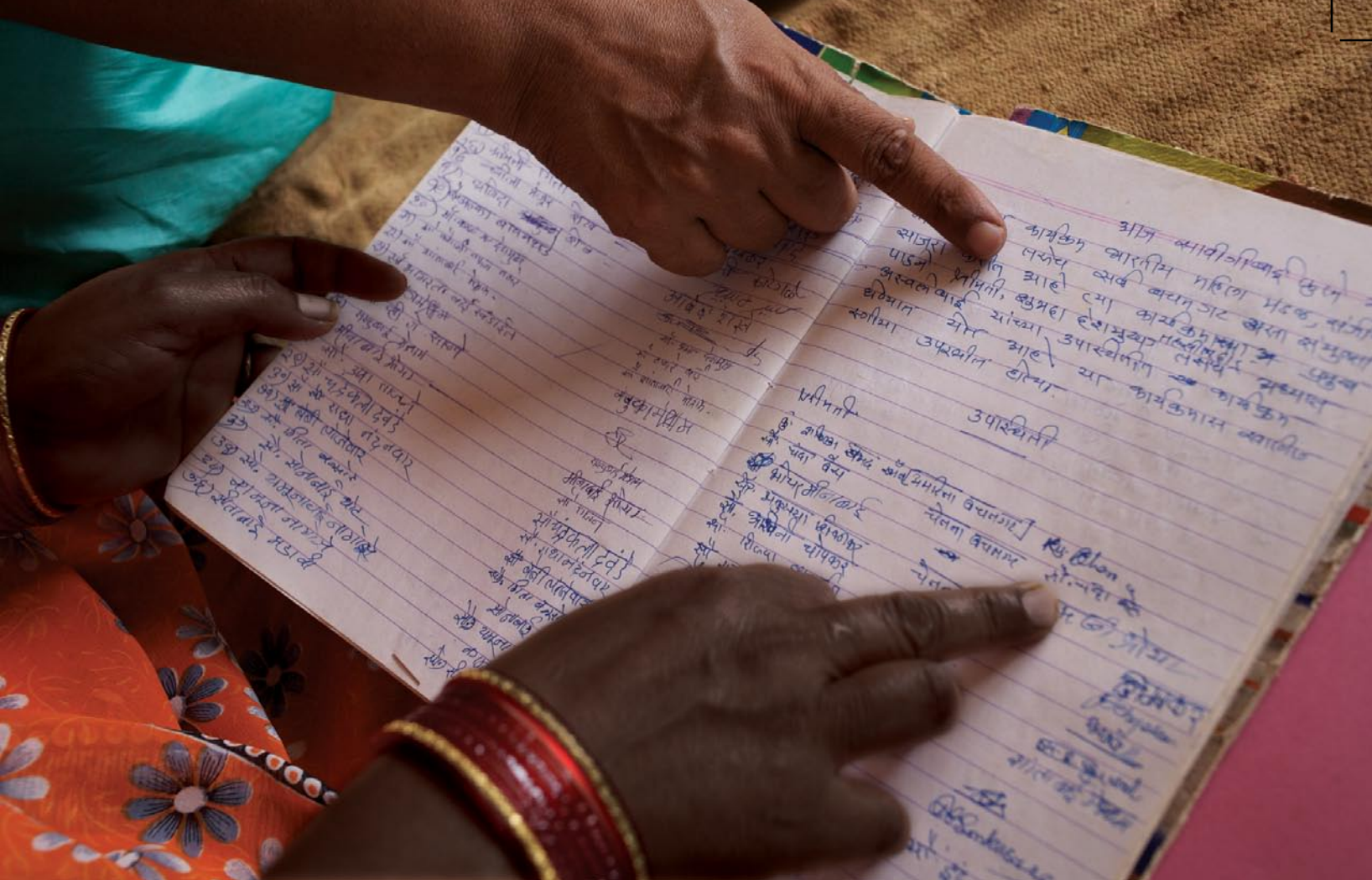
It was essential to create a gender sensitive environment to encourage women to function effectively in public spaces. Systems were created that helped to equip women and women's groups, so that they are able to better negotiate their entitlements from PRI resources and participate in decision-making. Several activities were carried out to create a favourable environment in villages, so that the community, particularly the women, can internalize the concept of PRI.

**Training and capacity building initiatives and awareness creation:** Trainings and workshops were undertaken for the *gram pradhans*, SHG and cluster members and programme functionaries. Some of the other activities undertaken for environment building were: *nukkad nataks* explaining

Selected Indicators –  
Jharkhand, Palamu and India (2001)

	Jharkhand	Palamu	India
Population	26,945,829	2,098,359	1,028,737,436
Sex Ratio (women per 1,000 men)	941	935	933
Population of Scheduled Castes (%)	11.80	25.72	16.20
Population of Scheduled Tribes ((%)	26.30	18.70	8.20
Literacy rate (%)	53.60	44.95	65.38
Men	67.30	58.91	75.85
Women	38.90	29.88	54.16

Source: Census of India 2001



the various features of NREGA, mock polling exercises to familiarize people with the electoral process, broadcasting of radio programmes focusing on PRI and the importance of women's participation in PRI<sup>35</sup>, the creation and distribution of relevant IEC material.

Village level meetings were held to discuss different government sponsored schemes. Preceding the *aam sabha* (general assembly) to identify beneficiaries under schemes like Dindayal Awas Yojana, Indira Awas Yojana, Annapurna Yojana, efforts were made to organize village meetings so that names of the deserving persons could be decided by consensus. The villagers themselves decided who should be benefited under specific schemes; middlemen were discouraged. Such meetings were important to bring people together on the issues that concern the development of their village and to thwart the practice of middlemen that has emerged in the state. The meetings helped to improve the access to government schemes and the efficiency of service delivery system.

**Strengthening SHGs and formation of clusters and forums:** In many villages in the project area, SHGs were in existence. Efforts were made to strengthen these SHGs so that they can act as pressure group at the *gram sabha* level. The SHGs were in turn consolidated under a larger institution called a cluster, which could emerge as a pressure group at the *panchayat* level. As a result of rigorous input towards strengthening of women's clusters, women gained recognition at the *panchayat* level. Since women had no recognition or voice at the block level, efforts were made to consolidate the clusters at the block level as well. Women's forums were established and the representatives of women's forum were selected unanimously. Monthly meetings of women's forums at the block level were initiated.

**Information Centres:** In order to disseminate information regarding *panchayati raj*, recent development schemes and news of local importance, Information Centres were established at the *panchayat* level.

35 Altogether 10 episodes each of 15 minutes duration were broadcast, each dealing with a specific issue.

Awareness regarding the importance of *gram sabhas* has increased and there is an increase in the presence of women in *gram sabhas* and *aam sabhas*. Several initiatives at the village level have been taken by women and the women have built up the confidence to contest the *panchayat* elections when they are held. The environment building exercises have created an environment that is supportive of women's participation at the *gram sabha* meetings.

## The power of collective strength

**Narrated by Neelam Devi, Muhulia Panchayat, Block – Patan**

“We have no metalled roads in our village. We have mud tracks that run through our village. In the rainy season, the mud roads are full of slush and dirt, which makes it very difficult for the villagers to travel. With cattle, using the roads is an ordeal since it slows us down and keeping the straying cattle together in a herd, becomes an impossible task. Moreover, cycles and carts get stuck in the mud, wasting a lot of time when we are going to the fields. We are daily wage labourers and work for owners who are tough on us. Coming late to the work site means the loss of half-day reduction in our daily wage. This is very difficult for me especially because I have a family of five to feed. My husband hurt his rib while working on one of the construction sites and I have to provide meals for the family and pay for his medicines. Some women who suffered a similar plight brought the matter up at the various meetings. Subsequently, a contractor was hired to help make a metalled road, with money collected from the villagers. Sadly the contractor constructed a poorly made road, using cheap tar and mud. He used only half the money we had given him and had kept the other half as his profit. The road could not withstand even a light shower and was completely washed away with the first rain.

All the women came together and decided to take up this matter. They located the contractor and brought him to the road which he had constructed. At first he denied that he had built the road, but when he saw the number of women surrounding him, he admitted that he had indeed used poor quality material to construct the road. The women then showed the contractor a sample of the material that should be used to construct the road and told him to construct a new road, using the right material. The contractor began working immediately. Now we have a good metalled road and we women are very proud of it. We hope it will withstand the monsoon rain.”



## Madhya Pradesh

### Dewas district

#### Background

Despite the carving out of Chhattisgarh in 2000, Madhya Pradesh continues to be the second largest state in the country in area (308,000 square kilometres). With a population of 60.34 million people, the population density is 196 people per square kilometre, substantially less than that for the country (324 people per square kilometre). Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy and 74.73 percent of the people live in the rural areas. Foodgrains (rice and wheat) and oilseeds (soyabean) are the main crops, but sugarcane and cotton are also grown. The state is rich in minerals like iron ore, manganese ore, bauxite, copper, dolomite, diamonds and limestone<sup>36</sup>.

Dewas district, located in the western part of Madhya Pradesh, was chosen for the capacity building of (EWRs) programme. Samavesh was identified as the partner agency.

The name of the programme, *Sakhi Pehal*, emerged from discussions amongst the participating women. *Sakhi Pehal* was initiated in June 2004, in three blocks of Dewas district - Khategaon, Sonkach and Tonk Khurd. Samavesh was the partner agency in Khategaon block and two other NGOs Jansahas and Dewas Gauri Mahila Samiti were responsible for Sonkach block and Tonk Khurd

36 See <http://www.mpinfo.org/mpinfo/new/english/factfile/ag.asp>

block respectively. There is a high proportion of people belonging to the SC community in Sonkach and Tonk Khurd blocks and a high proportion of STs in Khategaon block.

## Challenges

Deeply entrenched social prejudices and caste-based discrimination were major factors that inhibited the implementation of the project in Dewas, particularly in the early stages. The project area was located in a remote area, inhabited largely by people

belonging to the SC and ST communities, with very low levels of literacy. Initially it was decided that girls who had completed Class X11 should be recruited as *saathins* (village level professional women workers) to enable smooth functioning of the programme, but since girls with this level of education were not available, it was decided to recruit girls with education up to Class VIII if necessary, who were then trained during the course of the project<sup>37</sup> (see Box on page 39).

There was stiff resistance and occasionally hostility from the elected male representatives. The *saathins* faced a number of difficulties in their work. Concerns of security made women reluctant to travel out of their village. Some women dropped out of the programme because of opposition from their families; others dropped out because of the domestic constraints and workloads. These factors made the task of empowering the *gram sabhas* more difficult.



Among the early challenges was how to identify an approach that would motivate and involve the women in the programme, encouraging them to take ownership and participate at each step.

Another challenge that the programme encountered was that information was often withheld from the EWRs or not made available to them on time. Women did not get prior information about *panchayat* meetings and sometimes issues raised by women were not recorded in the minutes of the *panchayats*.

## Strategies Adopted and Lessons Learnt

This programme was called *Sakhi Pehal* by the women themselves; this gave the women a sense of ownership of the programme.

A number of strategies were adopted under this programme, some of which are detailed here.

**Common Platforms:** Under the *Sakhi Pehal* programme, collectives were formed at different levels (see Box on page 40), as women tried to create pressure groups that focused attention on issues

### Selected Indicators – Madhya Pradesh, Dewas and India

	Madhya Pradesh	Dewas	India
Population (2001)	60,348,023	1,308,223	1,028,737,436
Sex Ratio (women per 1000 men)	919	930	933
Population of Scheduled Castes (%)	15.20	18.26	16.20
Population of Scheduled Tribes (%)	20.30	16.45	8.20
Literacy Rate (%)	63.70	60.94	65.38
Men	76.10	75.74	75.85
Women	50.30	45.03	54.16

Source: Census of India 2001

<sup>37</sup> While there were a few girls who were more educated, they belonged to dominant-caste families and were not allowed to work outside the house. Most families were reluctant to send their daughters to work because they were worried about 'what others would say'.

## Saathins - the focal point of the programme

At the very inception of the *Sakhi Pehal* programme, it was realised that if capacity-building of women panchs and *sarpanchs* (both EWRs) was to be successful, then it would be essential to have women workers who could stay and work among the EWRs. While in the initial stages, they may not do this; the selection process should be such that the *saathins* should be able to take up this challenge, at a later stage. Therefore all the *saathins* were appointed from the same villages as the EWRs. The identification of *saathins* was done with the help of the women of the villages. Women, who were active in SHGs and EWRs in the villages were connected through cluster-level meetings, where the programme was discussed with them. Pamphlets were distributed in the villages, to spread awareness about the selection of *saathins*.

The *saathins* were responsible for the identification of EWRs, active women and women leaders for inclusion in the village *sangathan* and in the cluster *manch*, and mobilizing women *sarpanchs* and *panchs*, as well as the leaders of the SHGS in the area for involvement in women's issues and community issues<sup>38</sup>. Additional tasks included organizing *manch* meetings at the village and at the cluster levels and working with women in the *manch*, as well as the federation, to increase information, knowledge, confidence and empowerment (especially about their rights and responsibilities, along with the processes to attain rights). Mobilization of EWRs and other women leaders towards participation in *gram sabhas* and contact-based capacity building of EWRs at the *panchayat* level were additional tasks.

relevant to women's development. Learning from the experiences of other groups and the partner agencies, it was decided to facilitate the formation of village platforms, where women could participate actively to learn, debate and take their struggle forward at their own pace. Women who were active in SHGs, women's representatives and women leaders in the villages were encouraged to come together on a common platform, to form *sakhi manchs*. These *sakhi manchs* were critical to the strategy that was adopted. To support this strategy and provide the *manchs* with maximum local support, the women leaders created a team of *saathins*, drawn from the young women in the villages. The training and capacity-building of the *saathins* was the responsibility of the partner agency team.

Existing SHGs were strengthened and new SHGs were formed in Dewas, to act as a base for developing bigger forums. The block-level *sakhi manch*, the cluster *manch* and village *manch* trained their members for community mobilization, monitoring and support and prepared them for active participation in the process of governance (see Box on page 40). As a result, these networks (*manchs*) generated interest, confidence, initiative and a sense of self-esteem in the women. In the initial stages, male members were not allowed to attend the *sakhi manch* meetings, but gradually, male members were allowed in the *Sakhi Pehal* meetings, in an attempt towards gender mainstreaming.

Provision of larger common platforms in the form of annual seminars at the block level brought more women together and gave them a feeling of collective strength. *Mahila sammelans* (women's forums) were organized in all the blocks (Sonkach, Khategaon and Tonk Khurd) in March 2006 and were attended by over 1,500 people. Another *mahila sammelan* was organized in March 2007, which was attended by over 2,300 women. A *sammelan* is also organized every year in March on the occasion of International Women's Day. Such activities have helped to bring about a positive change in the attitude of men, who extended logistic and moral support to the women. A youth *sammelan* was organized at Khategaon block headquarters, in September, 2007 to encourage the younger generation to engage in the development of the village; this *sammelan* was attended by 325 boys and girls from 66 villages, who enthusiastically shared their experiences and views.

<sup>38</sup> The SHGs provided a platform for women leaders and SHG members supported the EWRs on social issues, but the financial activities of the SHGs were not linked with the EWRs.

## The three-tier manch system

Village *sakhi manch* - The first tier of the three-level system, this group consisted of active women from various SHGs, EWRs as well as other women in the village, who raised women's issues as well as general issues relating to the village.

Cluster *manch* - The most active women from 15 women's groups at the village level, formed a cluster *manch*. They analyzed the various issues raised in the women's groups and planned strategies for the future.

Block level *sakhi manch* - Active women from the cluster groups were selected to form a block level *sakhi manch*. They analyzed the various issues that emerged from the village and cluster manch and took them up with the respective administrative departments. They then presented the outcome of their discussions with government officials, to the cluster and village-level groups.

These groups acted as a forum where women could express their opinions and decide together what the *manch* should do. They provided an opportunity for women to step out of their homes and play a larger role in society.

**Contact based training:** The contact-based training for capacity building faced several constraints. The lack of cooperation from male associates and domestic priorities<sup>39</sup> precluded the participation of many women, leading to low attendance by EWRs. To counter this problem of poor participation, a mid-course strategy correction was made, and the *saathins* were encouraged to visit the EWRs at home, at least once a fortnight. They discussed issues of concern, provided information about ongoing programmes and developments and motivated the EWRs towards better participation. They also interacted with their families, in an effort to influence them and elicit their cooperation.

**Planning and review meetings:** Regular meetings were held with stakeholders of the capacity building programme to plan and review developments constructively, and prepare for further capacity building. Preparatory meetings were organized by the respective *sakhi manchs* to identify and discuss issues, as well as to explain procedures for making applications and raising matters in the *gram sabhas*. A review of the earlier *gram sabha* meetings to analyse and discuss the pending issues helped to plan for their satisfactory resolution.

Recognizing that the panchayat can be effective only when *gram sabhas* function smoothly, special attention was given to gram *sabha* mobilization. Efforts were made to convey information regarding the meeting to all villagers, by talking to the *panchayat* secretary and the *sarpanch*, before the date of the *gram sabha*.

Committee meetings were held periodically to review the programme and its functioning. Attempts were also made to hold meetings with several important district and state-level *panchayat* functionaries such as the *Zilla Panchayat* President, the District Collector and the Commissioner of Panchayats and Social Justice (Madhya Pradesh), which proved very useful in assessing the progress and sorting out small administrative matters. The empowering effect of these meetings encouraged the women to take greater interest in village issues and build up pressure on the concerned functionaries to hold *gram sabha* meetings regularly. The *sarpanch* began to provide opportunities to women to raise and discuss issues. The women utilized the procedural knowledge that they had acquired to good effect and were able to discuss their problems with the local MLA with confidence and full conviction.

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<sup>39</sup> Although these trainings were residential, most of the women would go back in the evening and return only the next morning.



**Learning visits:** Exposure visits facilitated experiential learning for the women. In addition to visits to *anganwadis* and midday meal centres, *manch* leaders participated in a Science and Culture Mela, visited the Women and Child Development Department in Dewas and obtained information on the various schemes of the district *panchayat*. These visits gave them confidence, experience and information, which they shared with their co-workers in *manch* meetings. An exciting and morale-boosting experience was the visit to the All India Radio (AIR) station in Bhopal by the EWRs and *manch* leaders, where they recorded their experiences. The women visited Jaipur (Rajasthan) and attended a *panch mahotsav* (a convention of elected women representatives) along with several *panchayat* leaders from Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, as well as other women leaders.



Women *panch*, *sarpanch*, *sakhi manch* leaders, *saathins* and cluster coordinators from Khategaon, Tonk Khurd and Sonkach blocks visited Gadchiroli village in Maharashtra and interacted with organizations like Aalochana and Aamhi Amachya Arogya Sathi, that implement similar programmes in these areas. They were inspired by the level of cleanliness in the villages of Maharashtra and learnt of the total sanitation project as well about the special *gram sabhas*<sup>40</sup> that are mandatory and unique to Maharashtra.

The confidence and learning gained from visiting other panchayats resulted in the demand for exclusive women's *gram sabha* meetings in their own villages. This allowed women to openly discuss their issues without the restricting presence of the older men of the village and the consequent need for *pardah*.

**Communication tools:** Video documentation of the main activities of the programme (*gram sabhas*, *manch* meetings, *mahila sammelans*, workshops and interviews) was very valuable in preparing short films for capacity-building trainings. The preparation of booklets on *panchayati raj* issues also proved helpful.

The publication of '*Apni Paati*' – the programme newsletter (from March 2006 onwards) has helped to bring the activities of the *Sakhi Manch* and their views into the public domain.

One of the main learnings from the programme was that capacity building of women can be done effectively only by bringing them together on a common platform. These platforms increase women's confidence and courage and bring about changes in the way they think. Some *saathins* argued that unless women had some pressing issues they would not come forward to join the *manch*. Yet, when women from some SHGs started meeting regularly to discuss social and economic issues, they themselves began defining their demands. Thus they began moving towards the formation of a *manch* on their own. Once the *Sakhi Manch* was formed in one village, it had a snow-balling effect. Women raised their issues on their own initiative in the *gram sabha* (although they were not familiar with the rules and procedures of the *sabha*). Soon women's groups were formed in all villages and the SHGs were the main stay of these groups.

<sup>40</sup> In Maharashtra, there is a provision to hold a special *gram sabha* for women prior to the general *gram sabha*. In the special *gram sabha*, women put forward their issues separately, which are then included in the agenda of the general *gram sabha* on the next day. As a result, women get both space and adequate time to voice their concerns.

## Fighting for the rights of her community

### **Bhagwatibai, Panch member, Puroni village**

Puroni is a small and remote village with a population of only 900 people. It is dominated by families belonging to the Other Backward Castes (OBCs), particularly the Ruhela caste. The tribal population in the area is dominated by the Gond people. Among the SCs, the Balai people are predominant. Even though the number of Patel families in the village is not very high, they are powerful and hold most of the land. Members of SC and ST communities work as labourers in their fields.

Bhagwatibai is 50 years old and was elected unopposed to the post of *panch* in her village (Puroni), where the *sarpanch* is also a woman. There were no proper roads to her village, no proper access to water or electricity and the ration shop opened only once in three or four months. In the beginning dominant caste Patels created obstacles and no one would listen to Bhagwatibai, but she was persistent in her efforts and soon began to see some success. Now the ration shop opens at least once every month.

However, a number of problems remain and need to be addressed. Some people belonging to the SC/ST communities had not paid their electricity bills (possibly because they could not afford to), and therefore the electricity connection was cut off, throwing the entire locality into darkness. Access to water is limited, because the hand-pump provided by the government is located at least 200 metres away from the settlement. The absence of a good *kharanja* (link or access road) is another problem that needs to be resolved. Bhagwatibai has raised these issues and continues to struggle undeterred, so that her people can claim their basic rights.



## Maharashtra

### Gadchiroli district

#### Background

Maharashtra, located on the west coast of India is the second most populous state and the third largest in area. It extends over an area of 307,713 square kilometres and the population is 96.87 million people (2001 Census). One of the richer states of the country, its per capita income is 40 percent higher than the all-India average. Maharashtra's income is derived largely from the secondary and tertiary sectors. Agriculture has not made the state self-sufficient in food grains but commercial crops have given rise to a vibrant agro-processing industry.<sup>41</sup>

Maharashtra has a 720 km long coastline stretching from Daman in the north to Goa in the south and the state is encircled by the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Maharashtra has the country's second largest urban population, about 43 persons out of every 100 live in towns and cities. It also has a large migrant population.

Gadchiroli (the block chosen for the project) is about 960 kms from Pune. Aalochana was the partner agency for the project and it in turn collaborated with a local NGO, Aamhi Aamchya Arogya Sathi (AAAS), for the execution of the project.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Extracted from Maharashtra Human Development Report, 2002, published by Government of Maharashtra.

<sup>42</sup> AAAS has been working on issues of health awareness and employment guarantee schemes for the last 20 years. It has built a large micro-credit network for empowerment of women. AAAS was instrumental in the successful implementation of the JHEP (which means 'leap' in Marathi) project, (which was the name given to this project) between 2004 and 2007.

**Selected Indicators –  
Maharashtra, Gadchiroli and India**

	<b>Maharashtra</b>	<b>Gadchiroli</b>	<b>India</b>
Population	96,878,627	970,294	1,028,737,436
Sex Ratio (women per 1,000 men)	922	976	933
Population of Scheduled Castes (%)	10.20	11.22	16.20
Population of Scheduled Tribes (%)	8.90	38.31	8.20
Literacy Rate (%)	76.90	60.10	65.38
Men	86.00	71.86	75.85
Women	67.00	48.07	54.16

Source: Census of India 2001

Gadchiroli is a primarily tribal region. Eight of the 12 blocks and some villages from the four other blocks fall within the purview of the Tribal Self-Governance Act. The Gond, Madia, Kanwar and Pardhan are the major tribes that inhabit this region. Of the 12 blocks, five blocks were selected for implementation of the project. Out of these, three blocks – Gadchiroli, Kurkheda and Armori were selected for intensive work and formed the main project area, while Korchi and Dhanora were selected as extended project areas.

Five *gram panchayats*<sup>43</sup> were selected from each of the three blocks- Gadchiroli, Kurkheda and Armori.

In all, 15 *gram panchayats*, that also include group *gram panchayats*, were the focus of the intensive activity. The number of villages covered under a *gram panchayat* was sometimes three to four villages. The villages comprised of small *tolas* and *padas* (clusters of houses). The primary occupation in the area is agriculture and paddy is the main crop. Besides this, forests are a major source of livelihood and the people are dependent on minor forest produce.

## Challenges

The challenging political situation in Gadchiroli prevented many people from participating in the programmes<sup>44</sup>. A number of *bandhs* (strikes) were called by the Naxalites, when public transport came to a standstill. Poor communication systems, especially in the interior, discouraged women from attending training programmes, as they had to walk miles to get to the training venue. Most EWRs belonged to the younger age group and they were doubly burdened with child-care and household chores, which made it difficult for them to attend training camps that were often of three to four days duration. In some cases, family members opposed their participation in activities, which were located outside the village. Widespread and acute poverty inhibited the participation of people, in particular of women, in the programme<sup>45</sup>. This also affected the planning of the events, as participation rates varied by season.

The gender gap in literacy remains high in Gadchiroli. Over 50 percent of the women are illiterate. This affects their status, efficiency and independence, both at home and in local government and business.

<sup>43</sup> The *gram panchayats* were: Kurkheda Block- Belgaon, Chikli, Ranwahi, Kurkheda and Maushi. Armori Block -Kojbi, Wairagad, Bhakrondi, Thanegaon, Boldha Gadchiroli Block- Marakbodi, Gurvala, Ambetola, Ambeshivni, Rakhi and Marada Aswalhudki and Nandali from Korchi and Lekha Mendha and Yerandi from Dhanora were selected as the extended project areas

<sup>44</sup> Some cases where women candidates withdrew their nominations after threats from the Naxalites were reported in Gadchiroli block.

<sup>45</sup> Participation may entail a loss of daily wages. Collection of tendu leaves, gathering and processing of mahua flowers in season and agricultural activities keep many women away.

Absence of trained social activists and trainers created pressure on the few trainers that were available in the region. Trained staff was not easily available at the local level. Among field workers, the drop out rate of ST volunteers was high; a majority of the field workers were from OBCs.

Male colleagues opposed the demand of the EWRs that 10 percent of the budget be spent on the women's component plan. Even *gram sevaks* and *sachivs* opposed the EWRs, as the money which should have been earmarked for women and child welfare had so far been diverted by them for other purposes.

Few elected women completed the full round of training. The partner agencies felt that it is only when women realized that their participation can change their situation that they were willing to attend the trainings. This was a challenge which the partner agency tried to address.

Government officials were often ill-informed about *panchayat* matters and on many occasions unhelpful. Moreover, government officials keep changing and this required constant liaison with new officials. The absence of caste certificates prevented many women belonging to the SC and ST communities from standing for elections, even for reserved seats. This was a major problem encountered by the project partners in promoting women candidates for reserved posts especially during the PEVAC phase. Most women had never contested an election before and the need for such certificates had therefore not arisen earlier. The procedure for acquiring these certificates was cumbersome and involved going back to the parental village in most cases. In many instances, the certificates could not be procured in time to allow filing of nominations.

## Strategies Adopted and Lessons Learnt

A number of initiatives were taken as part of the capacity building programme in Maharashtra among which the specific focus was to bring EWRs and women from the community together for trainings, in an attempt to bridge the barriers between them. An attempt was made to include men in the trainings wherever possible, to sensitize them to gender issues and issues of participation and minimize intra-family conflict.

**Training for EWRs and SHGs:** Past experience showed that EWRs often faced opposition from their families and seldom got any cooperation from them or from the men in the village or even from the *gram panchayats*. Support usually comes from women's groups or mahila mandals, women's SHGs or *bachat ghats* extend both moral and physical support. Training programmes therefore included EWRs as well as women from the SHGs in the villages. This strategy was successful in almost all the villages where it was adopted. The partner agency, AAAS provided a base for the execution of the project through its network of SHGs<sup>46</sup>. Since the major objective was to prepare women to enter the political arena and participate effectively in politics, work was focused largely on capacity building programmes, creating the right resource materials (which should be easily accessible), setting up of resource centres, holding networking programmes to bring the women together, building up their confidence and enabling them to speak out.

A participatory methodology was adopted for training. Resource persons who were well-versed with village administration processes, rules and regulations, who had worked at the village level and had an understanding of women's issues, were selected as trainers. Every issue was analysed through the gender-lens. This helped women to make connections between their real life situations and their powerlessness in the *panchayats*. Training programmes have led to information transmission and a campaign was started across the project area to encourage women to assert their right over the resources assigned for them. The process of this assertion of women's rights over the funds earmarked for them has been empowering in itself.

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<sup>46</sup> A group of SHGs is formed in villages located in a radius of five kilometres. This group is called *parisar sangha* or neighbourhood group

**Gender sensitization for men:** Male representatives and youth groups were included in the project, to facilitate interaction between men and women representatives, to impart gender sensitization to the men and to create a supportive environment for the programme. The project envisioned capacity building of government functionaries to make them gender sensitive and to enable them to work in cooperation with the women. One of the obstacles in the effective functioning of the EWRs is the non-cooperative attitude of *gram sevaks* and BDOs. The project provided for *gram sevak* training and helped them to look at the problems women face more sensitively and to extend their cooperation. Creating such a gender sensitive environment at the *gram panchayat* level was an outcome of the project.

**Mobilizing the gram sabhas:** Since 63 percent of the SC and 58.5 percent of ST households in the district were in the BPL category, they were eligible for inclusion in poverty alleviation schemes like IAY, NREGS and the Maharashtra Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MREGS). The official lists required revision urgently, as they were incomplete. These communities could be mobilized through the *gram sabhas* with the support of the *gram panchayat* and women's groups to ensure inclusion of all genuine BPL families in the lists. This required the cooperation of block/*tehsil* level functionaries to overcome stone-walling by vested interests. The opposition came from the dominant castes and non tribals, who often benefited by giving false certificates and accessing the resources under these schemes. A strategic alliance between EWRs and SHG members led to a fruitful co-operation between the two groups.

The project has established the need to support NGOs in training and awareness-raising activities for EWRs as well as for the wider community, particularly in remote areas with poor communication links. The state's 11 *Panchayati Raj* training institutes and the Yashwant Rao Chavan Academy of Development Administration (YASHADA) provide training to about 26,660 elected *panchayat* representatives annually, covering about 130,000 representatives in a five year term (MoPR,2007)<sup>47</sup>. There are approximately 230,000 elected representatives and therefore there are roughly 100,000 representatives (including 34,000 women), who are not able to access the training offered by government institutes. Thus it is important that the non-governmental sector be involved in *Panchayati Raj* training, particularly for women, at the village and block levels.

## Confident and committed

### Usha Pillare, Panch, Chikhali gram panchayat

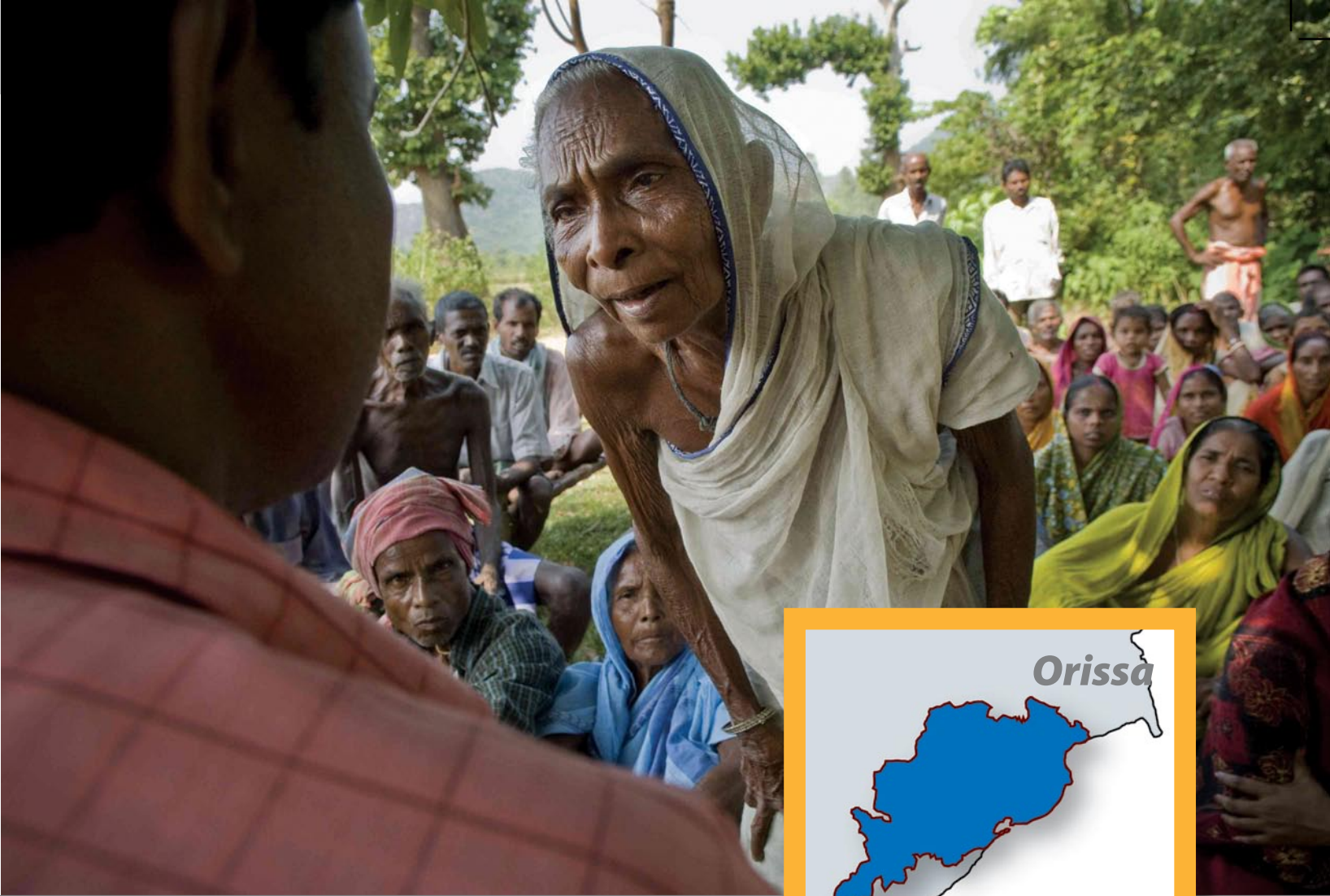
Usha Pillare, a ward member of the Chikhali *panchayat* belongs to the OBC community. She is a committed *panch*, who was elected because of the encouragement of the *parisar sangh* (women's federation), with which AAAS works. She was elected unopposed. She has the full the support of her husband in her work but is not a proxy *panch* member.

She has used the knowledge provided by Aalochana about the women's component of the *panchayat's nidhi* (funds), to disseminate information and to ensure appropriate utilization of the money. She raised the issue in the *panchayat* and also informed the federation, which in turn brought up the matter in the *mabila gram sabhas*.

Usha is aware of the financial matters of the *panchayat* and of her rights is able to take confrontations and opposition. Along with the cluster federation, she successfully approached the local MLA to sanction the construction of a meeting hall. Since the formation of a *mabila sabha* is compulsory in the state, she has always tried to inform all SHG members in the federation about the *sabha* and attendance has been high at *sabha* meetings.

Usha knows that there are huge challenges ahead and hopes that she will be able to meet them and motivate others to participate effectively in decentralized governance.

<sup>47</sup> *The State of the Panchayats, A Mid-term Review and Appraisal, Volume 2, State / UT Reports/ New Delhi, Ministry of Panchayati Raj*



## Orissa

### Anugul district

#### Background

Orissa with a population of 36.71 million people (2001) is located on the eastern coast, bounded by the Bay of Bengal in the east, West Bengal in the north-east, Bihar in the north, Madhya Pradesh in the west and Andhra Pradesh in the south. The state has the third lowest population density (236 persons per square kilometre in 2001) among the major states of India, ahead of only Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. There is significant inter-district variation; Khurda has a population density of 666 persons per square kilometre while Kandhamal has a population density of only 81 persons per square kilometre. There is therefore spatial concentration of the population; for example, coastal Orissa has 52 percent of the population and 25 percent of the area. The rate of urbanization in Orissa (at 14.91 percent) is one of the lowest among the major states of India.

The sex ratio in Orissa was 972 in 2001, the third highest among major Indian states, lower than only Tamil Nadu (986) and Kerala (1058). About 22 percent of the population belongs to tribal communities. They are largely concentrated in the north-western and south-western part of the state. They depend heavily on forests for their livelihood. People belonging to the Scheduled Castes account for about 17 percent of the population. They are mostly concentrated in the four (undivided) coastal districts of Balasore, Cuttack, Ganjam and Puri<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> Extracted and adapted from Orissa Human Development Report, 2004, published by Planning and Coordination Department, Government of Orissa.

Anugul district, carved out of the erstwhile Dhenkanal district in 1992, was selected for the capacity building programme in Orissa. The Institute for Socio-Economic Development (ISED) was selected as the partner agency to execute the programme. The blocks where the project was implemented were Anugul, Banarpal, Talcher, Kaniha, Pallahara, Chhendipada, Athamallik and Kishorenagar.

## Challenges

Since the passing of the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution, three *Panchayat* elections have been held in Orissa; in each election more

than 35,000 women have been elected to positions in the *Panchayat*. The visibility and impact of most EWRs has tended to be extremely limited. Many of them do not see the need to attend *palli sabha*<sup>49</sup> and *gram sabha* meetings and often remain silent participants at *panchayat* meetings.

Given the constraints that women operate under and their own perceptions, long term plans and strategies are required to enable women to use the available opportunities for their own advancement as well as to assist them in influencing the processes of development in their favour. Specific support was required (beyond technical training), so that women could come together and linkages between women's organizations and elected bodies could be established. Facilitation was required for the creation of forums of EWRs at various levels. These forums enabled them to share their experiences and build up a supportive peer network. These networks also enabled the EWRs to achieve unity and consensus on common concerns and helped them to function as pressure groups.

Many EWRs were dependent on the support of their husbands and other family members. The challenge was to involve *anganwadi* workers, leaders of SHGs, teachers and other women who were active and played a prominent role in the affairs of local government, in this initiative. In addition, key government functionaries at the district and block level associated with *panchayati raj* were engaged in the effort.

## Strategies Adopted and Lessons Learnt

In Anugul district, linkages between SHG members, *anganwadi* workers, EWRs and women have been instrumental in effecting changes at the *panchayat* level. There has been a continuous process of empowerment and awareness building, which is evident in the high representation that women enjoy in the *panchayats* in the district (40 percent of the seats in PRIs are represented by women).

**Mahila Manch Panchayat Nirvachan Abhiyan:** Enthusiasm for decentralized governance among the people and members of the forum (a informal association of EWR, SHG members and *anganwadi* workers) was created by continuous interaction among the members, initiatives for leadership

### Selected Indicators – Orissa, Anugul and India

	Orissa	Anugul	India
Population	36,804,660	1,140,003	1,028,737,436
Sex Ratio (women per 1000 men)	972	941	933
Population of Scheduled Castes (%)	16.50	17.20	16.20
Population of Scheduled Tribe (%)	22.10	11.67	8.20
Literacy Rate (%)	63.61	68.79	65.38
Men	75.95	81.43	75.85
Women	50.97	55.37	54.16

Source: Census of India 2001

<sup>49</sup> For every village within the gram, there is a *palli sabha*, constituted by the State Government. A *palli sabha* relates to a revenue village while a *gram sabha* may comprise of more than one village.



building and providing access to information through learning materials. A decision was taken to contest all key positions in the PRI elections held in February/March 2007. This initiative was called the 'Mahila Manch Panchayat Nirvachan Abhiyan', a campaign for *panchayat* elections by the women's forum (see Box below). While 33 percent of the seats in PRI are reserved for women, in Anugul district, women contested elections in 42 percent of the seats and were elected to 40 percent

### Mahila Manch Panchayat Nirvachan Abhiyan – a campaign for panchayat building

*Mabila sabbas* were organized in all of the 209 *gram panchayats* of the district, to identify candidates and motivate them to contest the elections. This was the beginning of the formation of women's forums at the *gram panchayat* level. Core committees of 11 forum members were constituted to overview the *Abhiyan*. A 60-member District *Mabila Manch* (DMM) was set up at Anugul, which provided leadership to the process. Members of the *Zilla Parishad*, the *panchayat samiti*, the *gram panchayat*, the ward and a few SHG leaders from different blocks constituted the DMM. The DMM meetings were held at Anugul, on the last day of every month to review the activities of the Block *Mabila Manchs* (BMMs), which were in place in all eight blocks of the district.

A majority of the BMM convenors were *sarpanchs*. There was a fixed date for the monthly BMM meeting, which took place on the block premises. Meetings reviewed the performance of cluster forums (CFs), resolved cluster issues, disputes related to domestic violence and problems within SHGs. Eleven cluster forums were functioning in Anugul, Banarpal and Talcher blocks, when the project closed. Other blocks had formed CFs and were in the process of consolidation. There was a fixed date for the monthly meetings, which were held in the *panchayat* office or in the primary school.

Issues concerning service delivery systems such as the functioning of primary schools, *anganwadi* centres, ANMs, village level workers and village agriculture workers were discussed. The CFs planned strategies to strengthen SHGs and the functioning of the delivery systems, they also functioned as learning centres and discussed the latest developments in PRIs. The monthly *mabila sabbas* helped to take the cluster processes to a larger audience and elicited better involvement.

The Convenor of the *Zilla mabila manch* (district women's forum) was elected to be the *Zilla Parishad* President, which was a significant achievement and has given a gender focus to all the development activities in the village.

of the seats. The *Abhiyan* concentrated on mobilizing participation at cluster meetings as well as participation at all tiers of the *panchayat* system. As cluster meetings began to focus on social issues such as domestic violence, harassment for dowry, opening of liquor shops, the participation rate of women increased. Women put pressure to ensure enumeration of beneficiaries under social security schemes such as the old age and the widows' pension schemes, IAY (housing scheme for the rural poor), Annapurna<sup>50</sup> and Antyodaya Anna Yojana<sup>51</sup>. At several meetings, men vehemently opposed the participation of women. In some *palli sabha* meetings (at Basala, Budhapanka and Badakera), women were not allowed to participate; forum members complained to the concerned authorities and the *palli sabbas* were re-convened, to ensure the participation of women.

The clusters grew in confidence, as they were entrusted with a variety of tasks. For example, the clusters in Sankhapur, Kanjara, Jokub were entrusted the task of running the mid-day meal

50 The Annapurna programme is an attempt to provide food security to the destitute. Special identity cards enable the beneficiaries to receive 10 kgs of rice per month, free of cost.

51 The Antodaya Anna Yojana is an attempt to ensure food security for all and serves the poorest of the poor in rural and urban areas, it gives foodgrain to those who are unable to buy food even at BPL (Below Poverty Line) rates.



programme in their schools. Similarly CF members in Badakera *panchayat* were asked to supply packed food to *anganwadi* centres. In many villages, cluster members ran the PDS system successfully.

**Training under various programmes:** Forty SHG members belonging to the forum were given training under the district sanitation programme. They have since played an active role in implementing the programme. Forum members became members of Parent-Teachers Associations and Mother-Teachers Associations in a number of villages, which has led to a perceptible improvement in the quality

of education in these villages. About 200 women were given computer training and seven computers were installed, two each in Anugul and Banarpal blocks and three in Talcher block.

**Building communication and mobilizing resources:** Forum members brought out a bi-monthly bulletin called *Mahila Samarthyā* which documents the various issues and success stories that dot the road to women's empowerment. Three forum members participated in a *Gramsat*<sup>52</sup> programme on Women's Empowerment and *Panchayat* Finance. The *Gramsat* team interviewed Pratima Behera (see Box on page 51) and Tulsi Nayak, identifying them as empowered *panchayat* representatives, for their programme. These examples illustrate the confidence that many of the EWRs display, when they are given appropriate opportunities.

Women members have been active in mobilizing resources from the National Aluminium Company Pvt. Ltd. (NALCO), and through income generation activities like dairy, poultry and pisciculture, all reflective of their enhanced confidence and zeal. Today, women PRI members have become more articulate and assertive in the *gram panchayat* meetings and some of the *sarpanchs* are particularly eloquent. The *sarpanchs* of Gobra, Basantapur, Batisuan, Pedipathar and Jamudoli have set examples for other women representatives to emulate.

Thus the experience in Anugul district has been extremely positive, even though there was some initial resistance, but much remains to be done before women can claim their rightful place in governance.

<sup>52</sup> The *Gramsat* programme is a two-way audio and a one way video networking and training development communication channel (TDCC). It is commissioned by ISRO and is used for training/conferencing by the different priority programmes of the PR; by officials, non-officials, NGOs and programme beneficiaries engaged in the field of *Panchayati Raj* administration.

## From self help group member to sarpanch

### **Pratima Behera, Sarpanch – Gobra Gram Panchayat, Block –Talcher**

Pratima is an example of a woman who owes her initiation into politics to the policy of reservation for women, but has transcended this to win another election, without the benefit of reservation.

In 2000, the post of *sarpanch* of the Gobra *gram panchayat* was declared reserved for women. Pratima Behera, an active member of one of the SHGs in the village, was elected to the post. Over the next five years, she successfully carried out her responsibilities as a *sarpanch* and resolved that the next *sarpanch* should also be a woman. In the next elections (February 2007), the post was open to candidates of both sexes. However, Pratima contested once again, and was elected despite a number of strong male opponents. She has since created a definite political space for herself and made a mark at the village, block and district levels.

Pratima's journey into politics began with her joining a SHG which was formed in her village with support from ISED. The training from ISED has helped her to be transparent in her functioning. At *gram sabha* meetings, she made it a point to inform the people about government schemes and discussed with them on how best these schemes could be implemented. The active participation of the community ensured that the quality of work in water supply, road construction and housing schemes was good and that there was no misuse of funds.

Pratima and a few other women in the village were also given basic training in computers. The computer in the Gobra *gram panchayat* (GP) office contains up to date information about the village.

Pratima's work has been recognized. Gobra GP was selected by the State Government as the best GP from 209 villages in Anugul district. Pratima has recently been nominated to the *Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan* (a committee formed by the Government of India), as a representative of Anugul district.

Pratima has been instrumental in convincing the people of her village about the need for joint names on properties (houses) awarded under the Indira Awas Yojana. She has ensured that the children in the village have access to recreation facilities, by making the club house available to the *anganwadi*. Today five out of six public distribution outlets in the village are run by SHGs, and this has led to considerable improvement in their functioning<sup>53</sup>. Thus, Pratima has ensured that Gobra village has a model *panchayat* by working hard at forum activities as well as at her job as a *sarpanch*.

In 2006, she organized a unique programme in the village – a Women's Sports Meet at the mini-stadium in the village. More than 1,000 women took part in this first of its kind meet. This meet broke the stereotypical image of women and gave them an opportunity to explore a different dimension of their personalities.

Pratima has several other initiatives in mind, which she wants to implement. She has the people's support and is confident that she can bring more improvement to her village.

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<sup>53</sup> There are public announcements when stocks of food grains and kerosene arrive unlike in the past, where the shopkeeper was always turning people away on the pretext of no stocks.



## Rajasthan

### Jodhpur district

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#### Background

Rajasthan has a geographical area of 342,239 square kilometres, and is India's largest state. Fifty six million people live in the state (2001 Census) and the population density is 165 persons per square kilometre. There is diverse physiography, ranging from the desert and semi-arid regions of western Rajasthan to the greener belt east of the Aravallis and the hilly tracts of the southeast<sup>54</sup>.

More than 60 percent of the state's area is desert, with sparsely distributed population. Rajasthan is deficient in water (surface and ground). Ground water at many places is unfit for human and livestock consumption. Literacy levels, especially for girls, are among the lowest in the country<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> This section has been adapted from the Rajasthan Human Development Report, 2002 published by the Government of Rajasthan and available at <http://data.undp.org.in/shdr/raj/rajhdr.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*

Jodhpur district was selected for the project intervention and the partner institution was Unnati – Organization for Development Education<sup>56</sup>. The project was implemented in nine blocks<sup>57</sup> of which five blocks (Mandore, Balesar, Bhopalgarh, Shergarh and Osian) were covered by Unnati, while the other four blocks (Phalodi, Baap, Luni and Bilada) were covered by local NGOs, that had a long association with Unnati.

## Challenges

In Rajasthan, women were actively prevented from participating in *panchayat* activities by male family members and other members of the *panchayats* itself. The male members

often insisted on attending meetings in place of EWRs. Male *panchayat* members took advantage of the low levels of literacy and lack of knowledge and experience to take decisions in the absence of EWRs and tried to keep them out of important meetings.

The practical realities of poor rural women's daily existence also kept them out of the *gram panchayats*. Burdened with housework and child care responsibilities and sometimes also employment prevented many EWRs from active participation in the activities of their *gram panchayats*. The low self-confidence and poor self-image also kept many women away.

To enable women to participate and function effectively at every stage, capacity building support was needed from the beginning of the election process and through the tenure of the elected representatives. An enabling environment was required for the recognition of women as leaders and the elimination of proxy candidates. Continued hand-holding support to EWRs was required throughout their tenures.

## Strategies Adopted and Lessons Learnt

The capacity building was not limited to structured training programmes. The EWRs were assisted on a range of practical and day-to-day issues and aspects, including gram sabha mobilization, interaction between officials and EWRs on finalization of the BPL list, campaigns on health issues, girl child school enrolment, voter awareness, monitoring of drought relief work, mid-day-meal programme and the functioning of *anganwadis*.

The objective was to make grass-roots democracy effective and to strengthen the community and their representatives. While the capacity building of the PRI representatives was a major focus, the wider community also needed to be enabled and empowered. All of this required continuous sharing,

Selected Indicators – Rajasthan, Jodhpur and India

	Rajasthan	Jodhpur	India
Population	56,507,188	2,886,505	1,028,737,436
Sex Ratio (women per 1,000 men)	921	907	933
Population of Scheduled Castes (%)	17.20	15.81	16.20
Population of Scheduled Tribes (%)	12.60	2.76	8.20
Literacy Rate (%)	60.40	56.67	65.38
Men	75.70	72.96	75.85
Women	43.90	38.64	54.16

Source: Census of India 2001

<sup>56</sup> Unnati is committed to promoting social justice and has been working in Rajasthan and Gujarat for the last 18 years. In its initial years, it focused largely on capacity building; it has since diversified its activities into dalit empowerment, mainstreaming gender, promoting community based disaster preparedness and strengthening accountable local governance in rural and urban areas.

<sup>57</sup> In the nine project blocks, a total 1648 EWRs were covered in 339 gram panchayats.



learning, reviewing and planning during the course of the project.

Among the most successful initiatives in Rajasthan were the setting of Panchayat Resource Centres and the use of radio for awareness creation among the common people on developmental issues and PRI functioning.

### Setting up Panchayat Resource Centres and Local Resource Groups:

Panchayat Resource Centres (PRCs) were located on the premises of the Intermediate *panchayats*. They were staffed on a rotational basis by men and women functionaries and provided cost effective support to the EWRs, and to *panchayats* headed by

women. The PRCs provided training and helped mobilize and catalyze participation in the *gram sabhas*. Local Resource Groups (LRGs) were also set up and served as a link between the PRC and the EWRs. They facilitated the exchange of information, interacted with EWRs on issues of concern and relevance to them, and assisted PRIs in the monitoring of basic services<sup>58</sup>. In the *Panchayat* election of 2005, the LRGs<sup>59</sup> helped women to file their nominations. The objective was to improve the delivery of services and ensure that marginalized sections - particularly women and those belonging to the *dalit* communities were covered by the schemes.

**Training, capacity building and training of trainers:** From the commencement of the project, Unnati emphasized a bottom-up approach. On the job and residential trainings/workshops/seminars were held to orient the newly elected representatives on the functioning of PRIs and on how to manage everyday affairs. Orientation training was provided to the resource group; these trainings<sup>60</sup> covered the Panchayati Raj Act, basic services, leadership and PEVAC. These groups provided support to the EWRs. Unnati utilized its network of associated NGOs to cover additional areas and used the training of trainers (TOT) component to build a grassroots level team of trainers.

Developing the reading skills of the EWRs was an important component of the training imparted to PRC staff and to the LRGs.

**Radio as a tool for awareness creation and feedback:** The radio was used effectively to communicate to reach out to the people. Special radio programmes, each of 15 minutes duration were broadcast every week, to create awareness about the decentralized mechanisms of governance and the role of EWRs. To attract listeners, drama and quiz formats were utilized. At the end of each programme, a dedicated telephone line allowed listeners to call in with their queries. Unnati received 3,349 postcards and 1,242 phone calls as a result of this popular programme.

<sup>58</sup> Monitoring reports (on the ICDS and MDMS) were compiled and provided to the concerned departments for corrective action.

<sup>59</sup> In Unnati, a local resource group comprises of village level workers, such as the *anganwadi karyakarta*, *Sarva Shiksha utprerak* (catalyst), ANM, *saathin*, *pracheta*, school teachers etc. and local community leaders, ex-service men and retired government officials.

<sup>60</sup> Seventy two participants attended the training programme, of which 18 were women.

The PRC has played an important role in bridging the gap between the EWRs, local government officials and the community. An effort was made to form networks (nine such networks were formed) of EWRs and bring them on common platforms to promote collective action.

The project has led to a greater understanding amongst the people, especially women, of the importance of participating in *gram sabha* meetings, as well as of the role and responsibilities of EWRs. People belonging to Scheduled Castes, marginalized families and vulnerable groups were the most important beneficiaries of this process.

## From political participation to fighting for rights

### **Mumal Devi Barupal, Sarpanch, Mogra Kalan Gram Panchayat, Block – Luni**

Mumal Devi Barupal is a *dalit* from the Meghwal community. In 2004, she was elected the *sarpanch* of Mogra Kalan *gram panchayat*<sup>61</sup> in Luni. Contesting from a seat reserved for Scheduled Castes, she defeated her three male opponents.

She has stepped out of the traditional confines of *purdab*. She has encouraged the women *panchs* to attend *panchayat* meetings and barred their husbands from representing them at these meetings. She has also persuaded women to participate actively in the *gram sabhas*. As a result of her efforts, there has been a noticeable increase in the participation of women.

Mumal Devi did not know how to read and write, but she participated in a literacy campaign which was organized in all the blocks of the district. Trained animators were expected to work with ten elected women representatives. Mumal Devi was one of them and she was a quick learner. Within the stipulated period, she learnt to read and sign her name and also learnt some basic mathematics. In a subsequent evaluation, she secured the first position amongst all neo-literate women. As a result, she started reading all the proposals before signing them and before finalizing beneficiary lists. Being a *dalit*, she ensured that the beneficiary list included the correct names and insisted on adding names of people who had been left out earlier. During the development planning process, she participated actively in the finalization of the micro-plan and in its consolidation.

Since then, despite her relatively short political career, she has taken up the issue of encroachment of public land and fought against the denial of political space to women. Some private builders have been trying to set up a mini township near the village. Trouble erupted when it was discovered the builders had encroached on public land. She has been fighting for the restoration of the land to the *gram panchayat*. Mumal Devi has also managed to remove other encroachments from *panchayat* land and from the village commons.

For Mumal Devi the journey has just begun.

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61 The *gram panchayat* comprises of two revenue villages. It is located along the Pali-Jodhpur highway. The village is dominated by the Patels and Chaudharis, who tend to have large landholdings and assets. The *dalits* have small landholdings and are engaged in subsistence cultivation, or work on the fields of the larger landowners. Some *dalit* men work as labourers on construction sites in nearby Jodhpur. In the non-farming season, *dalit* men migrate to Maharashtra and Karnataka in search of work. Most of the dominant caste households have access to electricity and water through tankers. Some houses along the highway have access to piped water. The *dalits*, however live in *kutch* houses with poor access to electricity and sanitation facilities. Access to education for women, even amongst the dominant castes is limited. Women work at lower wages, have fewer employment opportunities, are affected by the lack of health care facilities and face discrimination.



## Uttarakhand

### Tehri Garhwal district

#### Background

Uttarakhand (formerly Uttaranchal) became the 27th state of the Republic of India on 9 November, 2000. Uttarakhand borders China in the north and Nepal to the east. To the west, Himachal Pradesh is its neighbour and to the south lies Uttar Pradesh (the state of which it was a part, before 2000). The state is spread over an area of 55,845 square kilometres and has a population of 8.5 million, with an average density of 159 persons per square kilometre.

The provisional capital of Uttarakhand is Dehradun, a rail-head and the largest city. The state comprises of two regions, the western half is Garhwal and the eastern half covers the Kumaon region.

The district of Tehri Garhwal was selected for the project. The district stretches from the snow clad Himalayan peaks of Thalaiya Sagar and Jonli to the foothills near Rishikesh. The Bhagirathi river divides the district into two. The neighbouring districts are Uttarkashi, Chamoli, Pauri, Rudraprayag and Dehradun<sup>62</sup>. A large part of the area of the district is under forests, which occupy a place of importance not only in the ecology but also in the economy of the district. The partner agency engaged in this project was Shri Bhuvneshwari Mahila Ashram (SBMA<sup>63</sup>); and a three year pilot project

<sup>62</sup> See <http://www.tehri.nic.in/>

<sup>63</sup> SBMA is a voluntary organization established in 1977, by the late Swami Manmathan. It serves a refuge for destitute women and children. SBMA, has evolved into a prime mover of social change in the Garhwal region. With its primary focus on women and children, SBMA seeks to catalyze child-centered community development and empower women in decision-making and participation in the political process and help them realize their potential as the fulcrum of rural mountain communities.



called Women in Governance (WIG) was launched in 2004. The blocks covered under the programme were Bhilangana, Chamba, Devprayag, Jaunpur, Janknidhar, Kirtinagar, Narendranagar, Pratapgarh and Thauldar in Tehri Garhwal. Five additional blocks from three other districts were also covered under the project, these were - Almora in Almora district, Ghat and Gairsain in Uttarkashi district and Bhatwari and Dunda in Chamoli district.

The first *panchayat* elections after the formation of the state of Uttarakhand were held in 2003. Like other states, Uttarakhand has a three-tier *panchayat* structure with 13 *zilla parishads*, 95 *kshetra panchayats*, and 7,055 *gram panchayats*.

Selected Indicators – Uttarakhand, Tehri Garhwal and India

	Uttarakhand	Tehri Garhwal	India
Population	8,489,349	604,747	1,028,737,436
Sex Ratio (women per 1,000 men)	962	1049	933
Population of Scheduled Castes (%)	17.90	14.44	16.20
Population of Scheduled Tribes (%)	3.00	0.11	8.20
Literacy Rate (%)	71.60	66.73	65.38
Men	83.30	85.33	75.85
Women	59.60	49.42	54.16

Source: Census of India 2001

## Challenges

Uttarakhand is regarded as a progressive state in many ways but it still has a male dominated society, where women play a subservient role. Nevertheless there are a few dynamic women who are assertive and are striding towards effective participation and decision-making. In general, there is a dual pressure on the EWRs active in the political arena, since they have to attend to household chores and responsibilities as well as participate in meetings and discharge their functions in the *panchayats*.

In the elections held in March 2003, 42 percent of the seats in local government bodies in the Garhwal area of Uttarakhand were won by women, a figure substantially higher than the 33 percent seats reserved for them<sup>64</sup>. There are however social, cultural and economic factors that impede the functioning of women as effective *panchayat* functionaries. The heavy workload on women, family constraints, difficult geographical conditions, economic compulsions and discrimination are some of them.

## Panchayati Raj in Uttarakhand

The Panchayati Raj Act operational in the Uttarakhand is the same as in Uttar Pradesh. The Act does not take into account the local situation in Uttarakhand or the suitability of its provisions for the hill state. Aspects like access to resources and decision-making by the EWRs at different tiers in Uttarakhand are likely to be very different from Uttar Pradesh, which is located almost entirely in the plains. The Act provides that the *gram sabha* meeting should be held every month, however in the difficult terrain of Uttarakhand, this may not always be possible, given the workload and time constraints faced by women. There are a number of issues that need to be addressed at the policy level and many aspects of the Panchayati Raj Act need modifications, so that they can take into account the local realities of Uttarakhand. (Extracted from report prepared by SBMA)

64 Source: RLEK Human Rights Centre

Many of the women leaders elected in March 2003 were young, with no prior experience of working in the public sphere. They had no knowledge of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act. They had a limited understanding of their roles and responsibilities under the PRIs and even less of the procedures, processes and structures.

Most EWRs were at best functionally literate and many had not received any training for the important roles that they would play within the framework of the system of *panchayati raj*. Consequently, training and capacity building emerged as a major requirement. The remoteness of villages, inhospitable terrain, poor infrastructure and connectivity were all challenges that made the task more difficult.

Creating a vision among the community members as well as the forums is a challenge. Organizing women into forums is a slow process and requires a lot of patience both on behalf of the community and the organization. The State Steering Committee had not been formed (till 2007) and there was only peripheral involvement of the State Government.

## Strategies Adopted and Lessons Learnt

The WIG programme aimed at promoting good governance in rural areas by building the capacity of female *panchayat* members and facilitating effective participation of EWRs, the program sought to build an enabling environment for women's empowerment and ensure gender equity in democratic governance.

**Capacity building and training:** The WIG programme worked to build capacities amongst *Mahila* Forums and to identify and articulate the strengths, problems and needs of women in public life. The nine forums that operated in Tehri addressed issues of health and education and provided information on government schemes (for instance pensions for widows). WIG has worked to empower women *panchayat* leaders to be effective in the work that they do as representatives of the people. The women have acquired leadership skills that enable them to manage and lead the forum and to take on responsibilities. There are visible successes – women who rarely left their villages now visit the block office frequently and those who found it difficult to speak to the leadership of their village now boldly present issues before senior Government functionaries.

**Creation of forums and leadership trainings:** EWRs are encouraged to organize themselves into forums at the block level, so that they are able to address issues of social justice and participate meaningfully in local governance and emerge as effective leaders. Forum members have become more confident. They no longer require to be escorted by a male relative to meetings; some women have even spent a night away from their homes to attend block-level (*kshetra panchayat*) meetings.

Women attended structured trainings on leadership, gender, financial management and data collection and have become familiar with the *Panchayati Raj* system. Inter-forum meetings have enabled the women to share ideas and experiences with the other groups. *Mahila* forums have organized events such as International Women's Day and Annual Day celebrations, indicative of their organizational capabilities and confidence.

**Exposure visits and expansion of training:** Exposure visits have opened new worlds and provided fresh perspectives. In March 2005, 15 EWRs went on a 10-day exposure visit to Himachal Pradesh to study the *Panchayat Raj* system. In an expansion of scope, women trained by the WIG program in Tehri are helping to train EWRs in the districts of Almora, Chamoli, and Uttarkashi.

**Mobilization of support from male members:** Mobilizing support from male members to create a positive environment for the empowerment process was seen as an essential requirement of the programme. For this SBMA had organized a '*Pratinidhi Pati Sammelan*' (a gathering for spouses of the EWRs), which was very useful to mobilize male support to take up issues at the village and district

level. The forum members are taking a lead in addressing gender stereotype roles, for example many forum members delegate their responsibilities to their male counterparts and come out for meetings and sometimes the members stay out of their homes at night to plan for the block level events and activities.

**Documentation and record keeping:** The empowerment process is being documented (for example the events records maintained by forums and block volunteers, calendars, Annual Reports and video documentation of programmes) - the successes and failures, problems and strategies and will provide valuable inputs to the empowerment process elsewhere in the state.

The programme has had considerable impact in Tehri Garhwal. Women are emerging as vocal and powerful leaders, comfortable in talking with male government officials and are working towards empowering themselves and their communities. A major indicator of success of the programme is that although, SBMA had initially restricted its interventions to Tehri Garhwal district, women from Uttarkashi and Chamoli enthused by the success of the forums in Tehri Garhwal have come forth to form their own forums. SBMA received requests from Bhatwari in Uttarkashi and Gairisain and Ghat in Chamoli to help them establish women's forums there and the forums are functioning in these districts as well. The women's forum at the district level needs to be further strengthened and there is a need to establish a women's forum at the state level.

## Overcoming resistance

### **Beena Sajwan, Pramukh, Block – Bhilangana**

Beena Sajwan is from Bhilangana block, the largest, most populous and most remote development block of Tehri Garhwal. In 1996, at the age of 23, she contested the *kshetra panchayat* elections. Inevitably she faced opposition – from within her family, and from men in her village. Some men even suggested that the seat was reserved for men to dissuade her from filing her nomination. With the support of the women of her village, however, she won the election. Not long after she was elected the Block *Pramukh* (President of the Block Development Committee). Today, she is a member of the district forum.

Beena is an active and vocal functionary of the *panchayat*. She has prevailed over opposition from officials and from male members of the *panchayat*, and succeeded in overcoming these obstacles to emerge as a respected and inspirational figure, a model for other women to emulate.



## Uttar Pradesh



### Ghazipur district

#### Background

Uttar Pradesh is a large state, bordered by as many as seven states (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Uttarakhand) and by one country, Nepal, to its north. With an area of 236,286 square kilometres, it is the fourth largest state of the country<sup>65</sup>. It is the most populated state, accounting for 16.7 percent of India's billion plus population and has a population density of 689 people per square kilometre.

Uttar Pradesh has one of the most fertile land masses for agriculture with the Ganges, Yamuna, Ramganga, Gomati and Ghaghra rivers flowing through the state. It is largest producer of foodgrains (particularly wheat), sugarcane, pulses and potatoes in the country<sup>66</sup>.

The state has the largest SC population in the country (there are 66 SC communities) accounting for about 21.1 percent of the population. The five ST communities of the state constitute only 0.1 percent of the population.

<sup>65</sup> <http://upgov.nic.in/>

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

Women and people belonging to the SC communities are among the most marginalized in the state. The literacy rate for women is only 42.20 percent and the sex ratio is 898 women for every 1,000 men: reflective of their status in society<sup>67</sup>.

Ghazipur district, which falls in the Varanasi division and borders Bihar was selected for the project<sup>68</sup>. The district has 16 blocks of which seven blocks – Sadat, Jakhnia, Saidpur, Karanda, Mardah, Muhammdabad and Sadar – were covered under the project. The partner agency identified was Sahbhagi Shiksha Kendra (SSK).

#### Selected Indicators – Uttar Pradesh, Ghazipur and India

	Uttar Pradesh	Ghazipur	India
Population	166,197,921	3,037,582	1,028,737,436
Sex Ratio (women per 1,000 men)	898	976	933
Population of Scheduled Castes (%)	21.10	21.38	16.20
Population of Scheduled Tribes (%)	0.10	0.01	8.20
Literacy Rate (%)	56.30	59.55	65.38
Men	68.80	74.87	75.85
Women	42.2	44.03	54.16

Source: Census of India 2001

## Challenges

Initially, the project had to contend with a lack of interest in its activities and objectives amongst the women. The women were burdened by household responsibilities and social pressures and restrictions added to their inhibitions and reluctance to come out of their homes. The established dominance of their male associates on the PRIs and the opposition of vested interests led to poor participation by EWRs. The idea of women as leaders is not easily accepted at the community level or indeed even by government officials.

Many of the female *pradhans* had male secretaries. This led to a problem; the conservative mores of society made it difficult for the women *pradhans* to talk to their male secretaries, let alone guide and instruct them. In many cases, the problem was resolved in a most unsatisfactory manner, with male relatives acting on behalf of the women *pradhans*.

There were other challenges at the organizational level, and the lack of a strong and committed cadre at the inception of the project hampered the capacity building programme. Lack of support from government officials and the inability to form the State level and District Steering Committees placed the programme at a further disadvantage.

Implementation was especially difficult in the case of marginal groups like *dalits* and SCs, as the external environment was very unsupportive<sup>69</sup>. The local NGOs involved in implementation of programme, also had limitations with regard to project implementation (particularly in management and documentation), and there was a high turnover and dropout of coordinators, which impacted on the project.

## Strategies Adopted and Lessons Learnt

A combination of the following strategies was used to bring EWRs to the mainstream and facilitate their empowerment.

67 The sex ratio varies widely between districts, it is as high as 1026 in Azamgarrh and as low as 841 in Mathura. See <http://upgov.nic.in/>

68 <http://ghazipur.nic.in/ghazipurgeographic.htm>

69 The external environment was unsupportive, as women's leadership was not easily acceptable both at the community level as well as at the government level. Women were reluctant to visit government offices as they were not comfortable with male officials. Women leaders and activists often faced sarcastic comments from their families and the community and many women preferred to stay within the safe confines of their homes.

**Sensitization and awareness:** A pivotal and facilitating component of the project was sensitization and perspective building for the stakeholders, at various stages of the program. *Panchayat Rath Yatras* (rallies to create awareness on *panchayats*) during the PEVAC and *Panchayat Soochana Rathis* (information vans) in the Panchayati Raj Jan Abhiyan (PRaJA) were modes used for mass mobilization. Decorated rickshaws or bicycles with posters, pictures and slogans attracted attention. Announcements made through songs in the local dialect, using the voices of film stars were used to draw the attention of the rural populace. In the second stage, interactive activities, puppet shows, street plays and cultural programmes generated awareness on *panchayati raj* issues. One-day sensitization trainings, organized at the cluster level, helped in environment building and raising awareness. Informal meetings (with both men and women) were organized to mobilize and strengthen perspectives of EWRs.

Sensitization of government officials at block and district levels, through orientations and workshops explaining the objectives and concept of the capacity building program of EWRs facilitated their understanding of work-related needs and the problems faced by EWRs.

Sensitizing male associates and male family members of EWRs was another useful initiative<sup>70</sup>. Widespread illiteracy made the EWRs dependent on the more literate male members of the family. Orienting male associates enlisted their support and encouragement.

**Trainings and experiential learning:** Newly EWRs often lacked knowledge and skills. Residential trainings provided an opportunity to these women to express their views and concerns, to share experiences and gain confidence and skills.

Exposure visits to other projects sites/areas helped EWRs to learn from each others experiences. The visits also facilitated the process of networking amongst the EWRs and led to the formation of district level networks.

**Enabling environment:** Various campaigns were adopted to create an enabling environment for the EWRs. Mobilization of the gram sabha and its empowerment was a part of mainstreaming of EWRs. Open meetings of gram sabhas were organized and the identification of issues, setting of agendas and displaying the same, were taken up.

For many first timers, who belonged to disadvantaged social backgrounds, sudden exposure to government programmes was quite intimidating. Confidence building *Samman Samarohs* (felicitation ceremonies) held after the elections provided recognition and inculcated a feeling of togetherness between the stakeholders and the EWRs. An extremely important initiative was the setting up of information dissemination mechanisms. Updated information and learning materials were provided. Special attention was paid to those EWRs who were not able to read, by preparing suitable information and communication materials like posters, pictures, audio cassettes and films. Radio programmes were effectively used for information and knowledge dissemination and provided a platform to EWRs to reach out to the community. These were aired by AIR Varanasi, in five districts of eastern UP.

**Support and backup:** Sensitization exercises, trainings and interface meetings, were followed by providing continuous support. EWRs were assisted in the writing and filing of applications (for example under the RTI), giving them the confidence to manage issues and problems. Household visits by field level workers and informal meetings were undertaken to facilitate the movement of women outside their homes.

Women Citizen Leaders<sup>71</sup> provided support to EWRs in organizing *gram sabha* meetings, accompanied them to block and district offices and created a favourable atmosphere for them to carry out their functions. In this process, they gained visibility and a platform to build their own leadership skills.

<sup>70</sup> SSK organized 75 one-day cluster sensitization trainings for 2,425 participants and eight orientation trainings for pradhan patis with 244 participants, to develop understanding and provide support to EWRs.

<sup>71</sup> SSK began identification of citizen leaders during the PEVAC, with the objective of providing back up support to EWRs.

The 56 Panchayat Information Centres (PICs) evolved as hubs for activities and for the dissemination of information. Through visits to the PIC, EWRs acquired information and confidence. The PIC also provided a platform for EWRs to come together, share views and discuss issues related to the *panchayats*.

**Strong networks:** The strengthening of existing womens' collectives and the facilitation of new platforms was intended to counter the traditional male dominated structures. These networks created an enabling environment, to promote gender sensitive policies in the PRIs and advocated increased accountability of the structures of local government.

EWR collectives were formed at the block and district levels. The district level network (*pradhan sangh*) consisted of the all the *pradhans* whereas the *Mahila Panchayat Pratinidi Sangh* (MPPS) included the women *panchs* only. Eight MPPSs were formed in the eight intensely covered blocks and one *pradhan sangh* was formed at the district level. These helped to raise women's issues at various forums, provided a voice and platform to EWRs and allowed them to play a more active role. The realization of their collective strength, in turn, gave the EWRs the confidence to take up initiatives and their successes led to the acceptance of the forums.

## Confident to take on responsibility

### **Kamala Yadav, Pradhan, Kaula Zakhaniya Gram Panchayat**

"I have been a *pradhan* for three terms. During the first two terms, my husband used to carry out my responsibilities on my behalf. This time I myself am discharging all the responsibilities of the *pradhan* of the *gram panchayat*."

- Kamala Yadav, *Pradhan* of Kaula Zakhaniya

Kamala Yadav has been elected as the *gram pradhan* for the third time. She belongs to a well-off family and wanted to go in for higher education but was unable to simply because there was no high school in the village. She studied only till Class X. She was married young and had to take on new responsibilities. She has three sons and a daughter. She says she treats all her children equally and wants to give her daughter every opportunity to study.

About her *pradhani*, she says, "there is a big difference in my earlier and current *pradhani*. All the three times my family members made me stand for the election. This time I have taken responsibilities as a *pradhan*. Earlier I did not know anything about the *gram panchayat* and role of the *pradhan*. I was just a proxy *pradhan* and my husband carried out my duties. After I won the election, I was honoured by a social organization called Jan Gramin Vikas Sanstha (JGVS) and I learnt about their activities. While I was keen to attend their meetings, my family members were reluctant to let me to go out and participate in the meetings. A woman representative of the JGVS visited my home, met my family members and explained the activities of the organization, the objectives of the meetings and programmes to my family. She built up a certain level of confidence with my family members and after that my family permitted me to go to the meetings. However after my first time, my family has never stopped me from attending any meetings. I have attended all the trainings, programmes and meetings of the organization."

Kamala assertively said that the three-day residential training was constructive and effective. She got a considerable amount of information and knowledge about *panchayati raj* from JGVS, which helps her discharge her role as a *pradhan* in the village. Kamala arranges meetings every month with the help of *panchayat members* and discusses the current problems of village. She is concentrating on monitoring the mid day meal programme and on education for the girl child, and at other development issues also. She is vocal about her experiences with government officials and says that being a woman it is easy to approach women government officials. She is currently putting her energy into building a local market and a *gram panchayat bhavan* in the village.

Kamala says that she will not take a single step back. She is full of confidence and wants to take up the *pradhani* again, even if the seat is declared an open seat.

