

GRAM SABHA: A MILESTONE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

RITANSHI JAIN

IPS Academy, Indore

ANKUR GUPTA

Modern Law College, Ghaziabad

SYNOPSIS

Peoples' participation and meaningful involvement in planning and implementation of socioeconomic development programs are necessary to yield betterment of results. Villagers are the best to identify their development needs including basic needs, infrastructure, programs and beneficiaries under Government sponsored programs¹. The central Government has initiated a number of programs to generate employment in rural areas, to remove poverty but the outcomes are not that efficient.

The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 acknowledge the ground reality of rural area, government came with three tier Panchayat Raj System at the village, intermediate and district levels. This amendment envisages the Gram Sabha as the foundation of Panchayat Raj System which considers the supremacy of the people. It provides direct platform for the people of village to discuss the problems and understand the requirement of the whole community in very participative manner therefore it is called the soul of the Local self government. Gram sabha can be considered as first political institution which gives provides direct political power in hand people without any mediation of elected representative.²

From last decades our developing nation have seen significant rise in local democracy delegation of political, economic, and administrative authority to local government this bring complete concept of rural development because large number of poor population lives in rural area.

Gram sabha is very essential for Rural development it can change the destiny of not only rural area but the whole nation by its meeting. Effective meeting depends upon the quality of people participating in the sabha. Gram sabha is fundamental for bringing transparency in panchayats and equitable distribution of benefit which foremost for rural development. Sarpanch, secretary, ward members and the committies of Gram Sabha plays a significant role in Gram Sabha.

Aim of Study:

The main focus of study is to evaluate the concept of Gram Sabha and its role in Rural Development.

Objective:

- To study the constitutional provision related to Gram Sabha.

¹ Amrit Patel, & Mahendra Patel. (2014). Gramsabha – The Pillar of Development.

² Seshgiri. (2009). Encyclopaedia of Cities and Towns in India. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, XVII, 17.

- To overview the powers and function of Gram Sabha .
- To do analysis of the role of members, sarpanch and secretary of Gram Sabha.
- To evaluate the how Gram Sabha plays act a milestone for the Rural development.

Hypothesis:

- There is need for capacity building of the people in Gram sabha.
- It is essential to evaluate the link between People's Participation in Gram Sabha and the Rural Development.
- The Indian law needs to explore the potential of the law relating to the rural women.
- While seeing the present status of women, it is essential to understand the crucial and sensitive aspects of the law for upliftment of women in local bodies.

Research methodology:

Doctrinal research method is used in this research paper.

CONCEPT OF GRAM SABHA

In India the importance of Panchayat Raj Institution got attention in the late 1950's almost 45 years were taken by policy makers to attempt the statutory reforms to address the major issues in the local self government institutions in the form of 73rd Constitutional Amendment which has made specific provision for the establishment of Gram Sabha.

Gram Sabha is considered as the fourth tier of the Constitution the other tiers are Central Government, State Governments, PRIs .It is a mini assembly of people of village who are registered in electoral rolls. Villagers who are included in the electoral rolls of a village shall be the members of the Gram Sabha of that village.

Article 243(g) defines a village as one specified by the Governor by public notifications to be a village for the purpose of the Act and may as well include a group of villages so specified.

Article 243(g) defines Gramsabha as "a body consisting of all persons registered as voters in the electoral roll relating to the village within the area of the Panchayat at the village level"

Article 243A of the Constitution states that, "A Gramsabha may exercise such powers and perform such functions at the village level as the legislature of a state, may, by law, provide" .

In the opinion of **Jayaprakash Narayan**, "*Gramsabha signifies village Democracy with direct government and direct democracy. The relationship between Panchayat and Gramsabha should be that of Cabinet and Assembly*"³

Objective

There are mainly two main objective of Gram sabha:

- i. To have decentralized planning.

³ Bhargava, B.S., & Raphael C. Jos. (1994). Working of Gramsabha in Karnataka: A Study at Micro Level

- ii. Encouraging People's participation at grass root level.
- iii. To have transparency in administration.
- iv. To do social justice.
- v. Identifying problems at local level, determining priority and finding solutions.
- vi. Implementation of rural development programme.

Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat

There are lot chaoses between these two term .Gram sabha and Gram panchayat are not same but somehow they are linked with each other. We can understand the link mere by three points:

- a) All the plans of the Gram Panchayat are placed before Gram sabha.
- b) Every work to be done by Gram Panchayat should be approved by the Gram Sabha.
- c) Gram Sabha meeting consist of all the adults of the Panchayats.

While the differences can be understood as:

Gram Panchayat	Gram Sabha
All the members of panchayats are elected by the Gram sabha.	The entire villagers above 18 years are member of Gram sabha.
It consists of Panch, Sarpanch and secretary.	It can be member of one village or more whose name is registered in voter list of their perspective village.
It is a temporary body, where members of the panchayat are elected for a term of five years.	It is a permanent body
In Gram Panchayat members are directly elected by the members of the Gram Sabha	The members of Gram Sabha are not elected
Gram Panchayat execute all the development plan and programs that come under them.	Grama sabha prevent the Gram panchayat from abusing their power like misusing of money,showing favoritism.

Power and Functions of Gram Sabha

Power and function of Gram sabha are different at different states, it is left to discretion of the State legislature. In some state it is recommending body or discussing body while in other state it acts as approving body of various development plans and scheme taken up in the Gram Panchayat. But some general power and functions are as below:

Powers:

- i. All the development plans and programs of village are approved by the respective Gram Sabha.

- ii. Hold the ownership of all the minor forest produces.
- iii. Manage the market of village.
- iv. There are many beneficiaries under various Government scheme and programs, the selection of the beneficiaries among village are done by Gram Sabha.
- v. Control the money lending to Schedule tribes.
- vi. Regulate the sale and consumption of intoxicant
- vii. Prior consultation on land acquisition matter.
- viii. Control on institutions and functionaries in all social sectors.
- ix. Give utilization certificate of funds used for the projects and programmes of social and economic development etc. to the village panchayats.
- x. Prior recommendation for granting license or mining lease for minor minerals⁴.

Functions:

- i. Review all the development programs for the year and the upcoming program undertaken by the Gram Panchayat.
- ii. Promote brotherhood and harmony among all the sections of society.
- iii. To promote the educational and family welfare programs.
- iv. To seek clarification from the Mukhiya, Up-Mukhiya and other members of the Gram Panchayat about any particular, scheme, activity, income and expenditure.
- v. Examine all the audit report and note, statement of accounts to seek clarification from the Panchayats.
- vi. Consider the budget prepared by the Gram Panchyat and other development programs
- vii. Consider the levy of taxes, rents, rates and fees
- viii. Approve the selection of scheme and identify the beneficiaries.
- ix. Recommend and discuss the appropriate action with regard to reports of the Vigilance Committee.
- x. Consider all such matters as may be referred by the Gram Panchayat for its decision.

Role of Sarpanch in Gram Sabha

- Organise minimum two Gram Sabha meetings per annum as per the date prescribed by Government.
- Presides over Gram Sabha meeting except in social audit Gram sabha.
- Take such initiative to ensure large People's participation in meetings.
- Being a chairperson in Grama sabha meeting, he can answer all the questions raised by the members.
- Take the initiative to bring all the section of people mainly ST,SC,women and encourage them to participate in meeting by putting the grivenances and suggestions.
- Register meant for recording the minutes of Grama sabha should be signed by the Sarpanch.
- Ensure that all the suggestion of Gram sabha should be discussed in Grama panchayat at priority basis.
- Sarpanch should play a pro-active role for initiating proper action on the Gram Sabha resolutions⁵

Role of Ward Member in Gram Sabha

⁴ http://www.arthapedia.in/index.php?title=Gram_Sabha

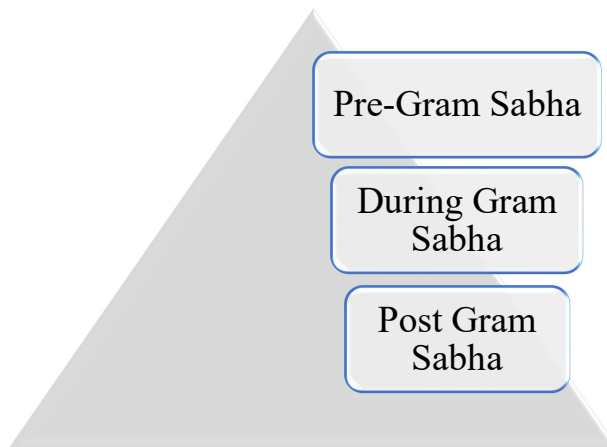
⁵ <https://vikaspedia.in/social-welfare/community-power/role-of-gram-sabha/duties-powers-and-responsibilities-of-gram-sabha>

The ward member plays very proactive role in Gram Sabha.

- They ensure all the discussions are made as per the agenda of Gram Sabha.
- They find the issues and solutions relating to their wards and villages.
- They make sure that proper beneficiaries are identified by the Gram Sabha.

Hence, they play a lead role in placing problems and needs of villagers in Gram Sabha.

Role of Secretary in Gram Sabha



Pre-Gram Sabha duties

- Issue notice of Gram Sabha meeting.
- Consult the Sarpanch for the agenda of meeting and finalize it.
- Publishing the date, time and venue of Gram Sabha meeting.
- Make arrangements for seating, water, sanitation and other facilities for the attendees of Gram Sabha meeting.
- Prepare the list of agenda to be discussed in meeting.
- Prepare Action Taken Report on the resolutions of the previous Gram Sabha meeting.

Duties during Gram Sabha

- Maintaining the record of all members attending the meeting.
- Presenting the Action Taken Report on resolutions of the previous Gram Sabha meeting.
- Ensure the smooth conduct of meeting.
- Record the votes of the Sabha casted in favor/against of any resolution placed before Gram Sabha.
- Assisting Sarpanch in other tasks like maintaining records and minutes of Gram Sabha.

Post Gram Sabha duties

- Keep coordination among Sarpanch and ward members for considering the resolutions of Gram Sabha in Gram Panchayat meetings.
- Send reports to higher officials concerned relating to Gram Sabha meeting.

Role of Staff of Various Department

The staff from various Government Department should attend the Gram Sabha with all the latest report. They are suppose to reply all the question put forwarded by the participating members regarding the development of village.

Role of self groups/Committees in Gram Sabha

Certain committees are created for the developments like Rural development, Agriculture, Health etc. within jurisdiction of Gram Panchyats. Some important committees working under the jurisdiction of Gram Panchyats are:

- Water Users Association
- Village Education Committees
- Mother's Committees
- Village Organization of Women Self Help Group
- Village Drinking Water and Sanitation Committee
- Village Health and Sanitation Committee
- Watershed Committee

Gram Sabha is a good forum to bring synergy among the various committees to have proper horizontal linking for successful implementation of their programmes with the help of other Committees.

Role of Members of Gram Sabha

Every registered voter in Gram Panchayat shall attend the Gram Sabha meeting. They shall come prepared to discuss the various issues related to community as a whole. The member assist in prioritizing the development work fo the village.They should encourage fellow members specially ST,SC and backward communities to attend the Gram Sabha meetings.

Empowering Gram Sabha through Social Audit

Gram sabha act as watchdog to supervise the function of panchayats and also authorized to examine annual statement of account and audit report. It has been observed that maximum numbers of villager are not aware of their rights and most of them don't the difference between Gram sabha and Panchayats. While Gram sabha is corporate body and Panchayat is executive body. So there is urgent need to empower Grama sabha.

Social Auditing is one of the eminent measures to empower Gram Sabha. Social Auditing is a process in which financial and non-financial details are used by public agencies for development and which is shared through public platform to the people. As per 73rd Constitutional amendment Social Audit is mandatory in Gram sabha in which villager are empowered to do social audit of the work done for development and the concerned authority is bound to facilitate them.

BENEFITS of the Social Auditing are:

- i. Improve people participation
- ii. Bring accountability and transparency
- iii. Create knowledge among villager member about the development work
- iv. Help in keeping account and record of all spending made against grants.
- v. Improve quality of work and service delivery.

But there are certain factors which adversely affect the social auditing, like:

- i. Lack of awareness about the rights
- ii. Lack of education
- iii. Dirty politics
- iv. Lack of motivation and interest
- v. Dependency of panchayat members.

Gram Sabha and Rural Development

The foundation of entire rural development depends on the three-tier Panchayat Raj system. One of the core purpose of panchayat Raj System is that villagers should think, decide and act for socio economic interest. On 2nd October, 1959, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, laid the foundations of Panchayat Raj at Nagpur in Rajasthan. And in 2009 Golden Jubilee Celebration was marked with the observance of year 2009-2010 as '*The Year of the Gram Sabha*'⁶.

Constitution of India explains Gram Sabha as body of adult member of a village who has the right to vote and which act as a watchdog on working of Gram Panchayat beside the Rural's people participation in decision making process.

There are certain roles of Gram Sabha which facilitate the Rural Development. It can categories as:

- Role of Gram Sabha as people's platform for participation accountability and transparency.
- Role of Gram Sabha including the excluding, empowering the powerless.
- Role of Gram Sabha in overcoming weak governance.
- Role of Gram Sabha in creating the responsible citizen
- Role of Gram Sabha in social and human development
- Role of Gram Sabha in Women empowerment
- Role of Gram Sabha in Implementation of Programmes

Role of Gram Sabha as people's platform for participation accountability and transparency

At the most basic level, participation means people being involved in decisions that affect their lives. Participation matters as a core value in open and democratic societies⁷.

In this aspect Gram sabha is entity where entire villagers above 18 years are member of Gram sabha. It prevents the Gram panchayat from abusing their power which bring the accountability and transparency in governance. It assure democracy and socialism both. Gram sabha is system of check and balance, common man can also raise questions under Right to information(RTI).

H. Friedman argued that the greater participation in development planning and management not only promotes national unity by giving people, indifferent regions of a country, a greater ability to participate in planning and decision making but also increase their share in maintaining political stability⁸

⁶ Panchayat Raj Update. (2009). XVI(1), 1

⁷ <https://www.eldis.org/keyissues/what-participation>

⁸ Panalithurai, G., & Sundaram, D. (2006). Decentralization and Rural Development in India:

Role of Gram Sabha in including the excluding, empowering the powerless.

The main agenda of Gram Sabha is to give power in hands of people of society but no society is there where powers are equally distributed. While some people enjoy or exercise power, especially political power, always went to those who enjoyed high status and wealth⁹. It simply mean upper class always rule.

Gram Sabha has extracted all the social evils from society like untouchability, restriction among women which helped in participation of every caste and creed of society. Before Panchyati Raj Institution, upward class ruled the village but in today's scenario every people have right to participate and raise voice against the social evil.

Role of Gram Sabha in overcoming weak governance

Governance and Good Governance are two different things. There are many obstacles in Good Governance like corruption, lack of transparency, poor organisation, poor motivation, lack of efficiency, lack of responsiveness, and lack of technical capacity. Weak governance there is abuse of poers which directly affects the poor section of people.

Gram Sabha provides people's participation at grass root level, there active participation promotes Good governace. Participation of villagers at every discussion, excueting the plans helps to maintain the transprancy and accountability which enable to overcome weak governace.

Role of Gram Sabha in creating the responsible citizen

One of the most important parts of good governance is civil society. Now a days civil society has become an active partner in Gram Sabha concept as it provides the desired space of civil society. Gram Sabha created a nexus between the rural citizen and the India Political system by giving rural citizen a right to involve in Indian politics. Gram sabha has made beautiful platform for discussion where every villager can do active participation, all the proposal of development work, plans to execute undone work are made.

The Gram sabha creates an atmosphere in which citizens can feel confident in taking initiative to solve problems .Gram sabha system informs and educates people about the happenings in administration.

Role of Gram Sabha in social and human development

Social development includes improving the well-being of every individual in society so they can reach their full potential. The success of society is linked to the well-being of each and every citizen. It basically means investing in people. It can only be done by the active participation in making fundamental decision in community.

Empowerment, Strategies and Emerging Challenges. The Grassroots Governance Journal, IV(1), 64.

⁹ Bishnu, C.B., Umesh C. Sahoo, & Baviskar, B.S. (2009). Panchayati Raj Institutions and Rural Development, Narrative on Inclusion of Exclude

Social capital plays important role in sustainable development, improve standard of living, education, stop the crime, improve economic performance, and facilitates good governance. Social capital is defined as attributes of social organization, such as the network, norms and social trust that facilitate cooperation, coordination, for mutual benefit. Gram sabha plays significant role in achieving social capital.

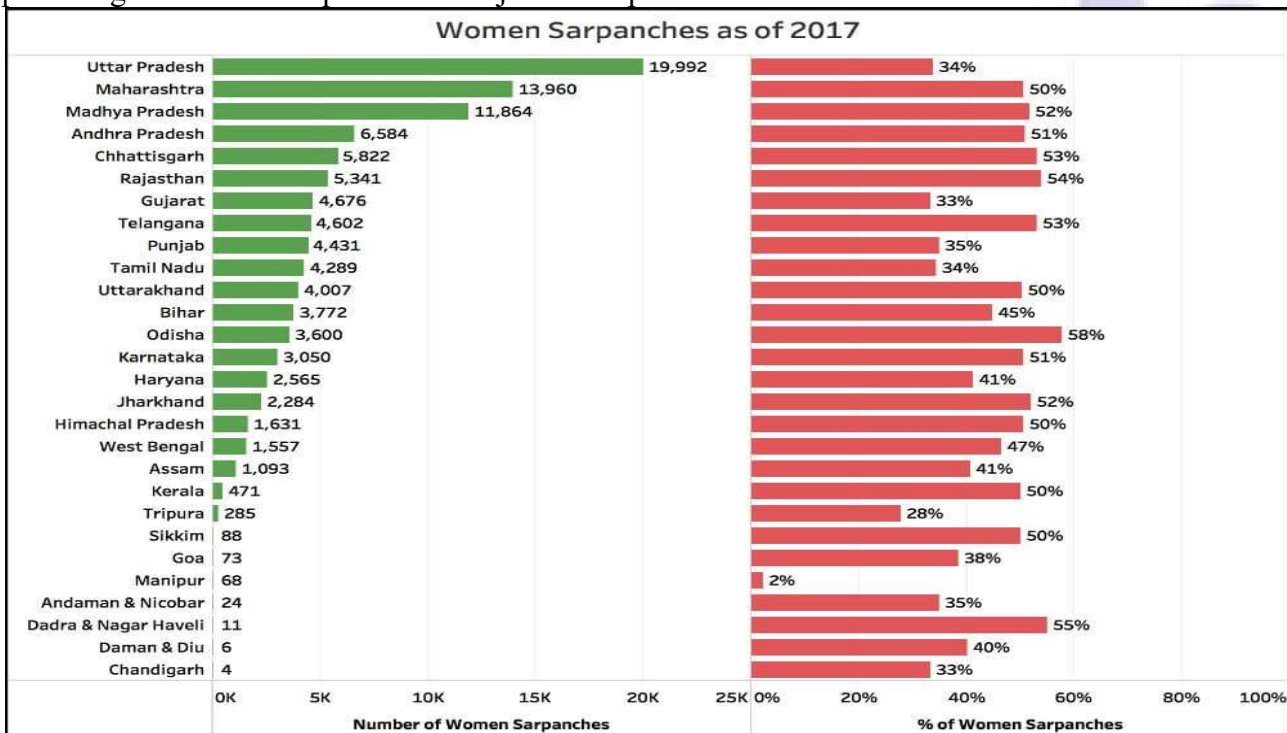
Role of Gram Sabha in Women empowerment

The former Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru says, *“You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women.”*

The status of women depicts the social, economic and mental condition in a nation. Democracy without women is incomplete. Women have completely transformed in the modern day, from equal status with men during ancient times to the low points in the medieval period and then to the up gradation of women rights by many reformers, their history in India has been eventful .

Our constitution has given the facility of reservation for every women of the country. As per provisions contained in **Article 243 D** of the Constitution, 1/3rd of the Seats of Panchayati Raj Institutions and 1/3rd offices of the Chairperson at all level of Panchayati Raj Institutions covered by Part IX of the Constitution are reserved for women. The following states have made legal provision for 50% reservation for women among members and Sarpanches: AP, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tripura and Uttarakhand.

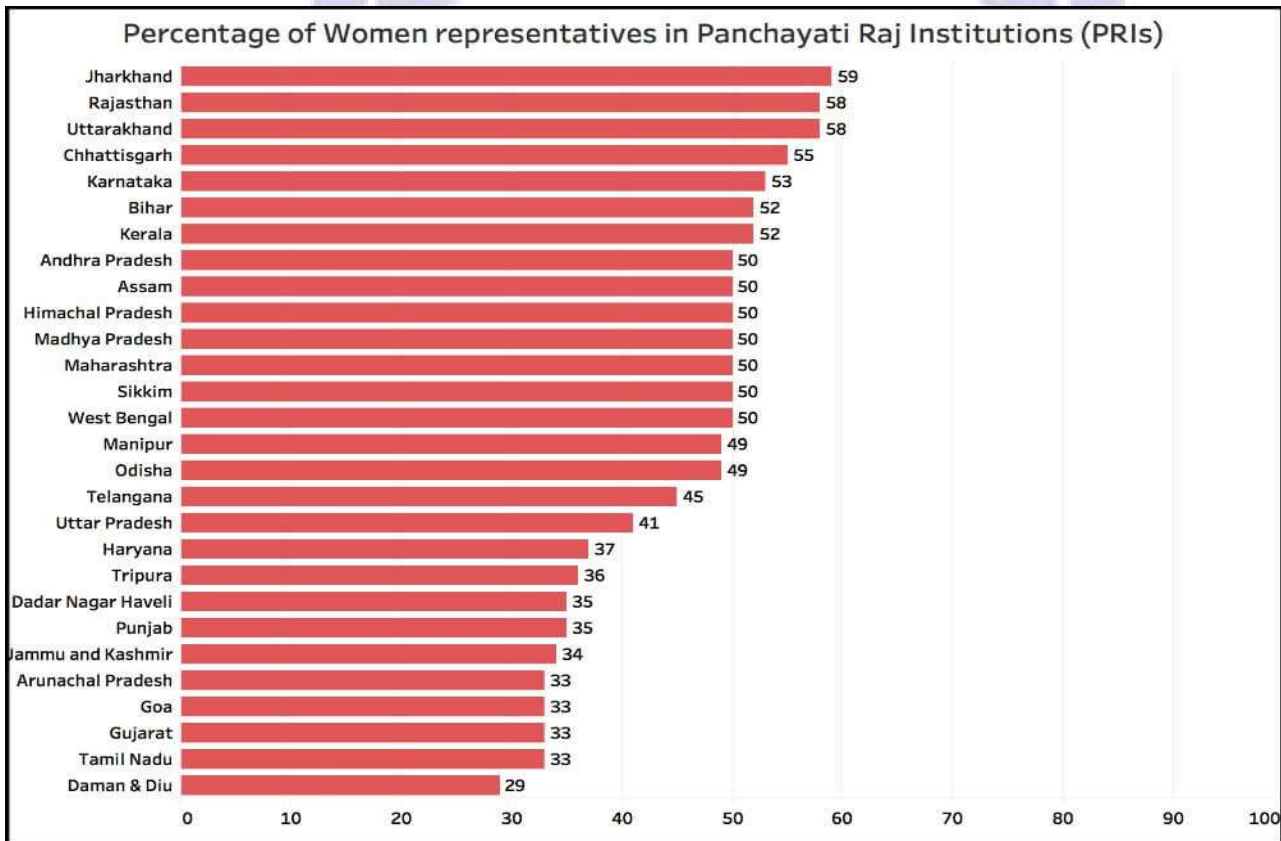
Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of women sarpanches at 19,992 but only 34% of total sarpanches. The state of Odisha has 3600 woman sarpanches, an above average 58% of the total number. Manipur has the least percentage of women sarpanches with just 2% representation.¹⁰



¹⁰ <https://factly.in/representation-to-participation-women-in-panchayat-raj-institutions-state-assemblies/>

In Panchayat Raj Institution one million women have actively entered political life in India. The Gramsabha is considered as heart of Panchayati Raj Institution is best platform where women can raise voice against political, social, and economic issues. Gram sabha plays significant role in transformation in the lives of women, who have empowered and have gained self-confident, political awareness, and affirmation of their own identity. Seeing the present scenario we can say that Gramsabha has become training ground to women, many of them have become leaders in the village Panchayat.

Today, 14 states have 50%-58% representation of women in Panchayat Raj Institutions. Jharkhand leads the way with 58%, closely followed by Rajasthan and Uttarakhand.¹¹



Role of Gram Sabha in Implementation of Programmes.

- **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme**

As per the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) it is only through the Grama sabha that one who is seeking for the wage can be informed and made aware of their rights and Gram Panchayat to be aware of their roles and functions. Identifying, execution, monitoring the work and social auditing has to be done by the Grama sabha. Gram Sabha should be conveyed all the funding from the Vigilance Committee. We can say that no programme has given so much centrality to Grama Sabha as in NREGA.

¹¹ <https://factly.in/representation-to-participation-women-in-panchayat-raj-institutions-state-assemblies/>

▪ **Water Shed Programmes**

Ministry of Rural Development in 2008 has issued common watershed guidelines in which central role is of Gram Sabha. The watershed committee to be constituted through Gram Sabha. All the election of president of any watershed program is done through Gram Sabha and it have power to approve all the detailed report prepared by Watershed Development Team. It also approves all the norms made for the utilization of the fund.

▪ **Validation of Electoral Rolls**

Gram Sabha has to verify the entries in the electoral list and validate the list by announcing it in village assembly. Reading out the list enables in weeding out the names of the person who has been absent from long time and those who have died. And it also helps in adding the names in the list whose are not entered in voter list.

▪ **Identification of BPL families**

BPL is the list of the people below poverty line in order get benefit under the development and welfare scheme and the survey is done by union minister on rural development through DRDA. List of the BPL is placed before the Gram Sabha to confirm whether they belong to the below poverty line. Grama sabha is a forum which can debate on the genuineness of the information and can also drop the name from the list.

▪ **Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana**

It is on the important yojana which aims at reducing poverty. Gram Sabha identify the beneficiaries who are from below poverty line and involve them in individual group employment scheme.

▪ **Indira Awas Yojana**

It is a scheme to provide houses o all the BPL families. Gram Sabha identify the beneficiaries and nobody has right to alter or change the list of the beneficiaries except Grama Sabha. Gram Sabha only validate the list under this scheme.

▪ **Pension Scheme**

Beneficiaries for social security scheme like old age pension, Disabled pension, Pension for widow, Pension for handloom workers are selected through Gram Sabha. After careful inspection of list Gram panchayat and secretary prepare the list of eligible beneficiaries. Mandal Parishad Development Officer will sanction the pension to all the beneficiaries approved by Gram sabha.

▪ **Mid-Day Meals Scheme**

The main aim of the scheme is to enhance the enrollment ratio in school or reduce the drop out or increase the attendance by supplying the nutritious food to children. Gram Sabha has power to set up the group to examine on the its behalf the qualities of the food, cleanness of the cooking areas and place where children sit and eat.

CONCLUSION

It has been clear that Gram Sabha is symbol of direct democracy through the People's participation. Local community participation in decision making, discussing and approving the scheme and development plans, formulating annual report and conducting social audit all these work are carried at village level. But is

observed that there is involvement of Sarpanch or Pradhans of village, this is mainly because of the lack of awareness, low education, low level of participation of people, lack of coordination among members of Gram Sabha. Non-participation of the rural people has obstructed the development of the gram sabha. A gram sabha needs to generate a feeling of belonging. There is need of hour that people should be educated and aware about the rights and responsibility toward the community and raise voice against odds.

Grama Sabha has empowered the women by their active participation at grass root level. As we know by seeing the status of women we can tell about the development of Nation, therefore we can state empowerment of women is directly proportional to Social Development which play crucial part in Rural development.

Social Auditing is one of the eminent measures to empower Gram Sabha. It is a measure where people should be informed and educated. It should duty of Gram Sabha members to maintain the accountability of all the reports and time to time meeting where all the reports are to be present before the Panchayat.

The need is of Training camps, awareness campaigns and audio-visual mediums can be of critical importance for the purpose of sensitisation and capacity building of the people. Media can also play an important role in spreading the awareness and education among the Gram Sabha members thorough their specially designed programmes for this purpose.

REFERENCE

- Panalithurai, G., & Sundaram, D. (2006). *Decentralization and Rural Development in India: Empowerment, Strategies and Emerging Challenges*. The Grassroots Governance Journal, IV(1)
- Bishnu, C.B., Umesh C. Sahoo, & Baviskar, B.S. (2009). *Panchayati Raj Institutions and Rural Development, Narrative on Inclusion of Exclude*
- C Hemalata Prasad, *Development of womens and children in rural areas “ successful case studies”*- Indian journal of rural development, vol-40(1PP6587HYD)
- *People’s participation in rural development- A critical analysis* E.Desingu Setty, Indian journal of social work 1985 vol 4-1-4-73-83.
- Amrit Patel, & Mahendra Patel. (2014). *Gram Sabha – The Pillar of Development*. Kurukshetra, 62(3).