

# Mahila Sabhas and Bala Sabhas: Best Practices



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## Preface and Acknowledgements

For us, writing the Case Studies on Best Practices of Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas has been a tremendously rewarding experience. It has taken us across states to places where dynamic Panchayat leaders are bringing about social change. These case studies document the work of the actual change agents, the leaders on the ground. The various narratives capture various methods and ways of mainstreaming women and children issues into local governance and enlisting community participation, particularly women and children, in the process.

The work was done collaboratively by several people involved with the project. First and foremost, we would like to express our gratitude to the Shri. Naredra Kumar, IAS, Director General of NIRDPR, who has been a constant source of inspiration and guidance for us. We would also like to thank Mr. Soumen Bagchi, Social Policy Specialist, and Ms. Hyun Hee Ban, Chief, Social Policy, UNICEF, India, for their assistance in gathering and publishing best practises on Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas. We are grateful to the State Nodal Officers, K. Nagamani, Yangchen Dhoma Lepcha, Hima Baishya, and Dipasri, for their assistance.

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We hope that this publication will aid current and future work on Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sahas throughout the States.

## Case Studies on Interventions of Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas in Gram Panchayats

### Introduction

The case studies presented here are as a part of the collaborative project between NIRDPR and UNICEF project titled “Integrating Emergency Response into Village Perspective Plans: Mainstreaming the Roles of the Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas into GPDP Preparation”. The objectives of the project is to, Identify women and children’s priorities in selected GPs, especially during health and humanitarian disaster emergencies, and integrate them into the GPDPs on a sustainable basis. The objective of the intervention is to ensure statutory mainstreaming of the Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas. The NIRDPR in Collaboration with UNICEF partnered with the 5 states SIRDPRs namely Telangana, Assam, Sikkim, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu to implement this project.

The Constitution of India guarantees women the rights for equal participation in political and governance processes. Articles 14 and 15 of the Indian Constitution prohibit discrimination on any ground (race, caste, gender etc.) with regards to employment and political participation. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts make it mandatory for one-third of the seats in all local bodies to be reserved for women.

At the global level, Article 7 of the Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (to which India is a signatory) ensure a woman’s ‘right to participate in contributing to government policy and implementing gender justice. The Article asks states to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life and to ensure that women are as eligible as men to contest elections to all public bodies. People’s participation is one of the fundamental building blocks of democratic government. A democratic form of government can be successful only when all people, irrespective of gender, class, and caste participate in the governance process.

Bal Panchayat (children's parliament) is an idea to bring the children together to strengthen their voice and leadership, to provide a podium where they can reach the adult duty bearer and change-agents in order to prompt their attention towards issues which affect children directly or indirectly.

To promote participation and leadership of women and children, NIRDPR and UNIEF in collaboration with SIRDPRs of Telangana, Sikkim and Assam states facilitated 3 rounds of Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas in 30 Gram Panchayats.

The MoPR has directed all states and union territories to organize Special Gram Sabhas and Mahila Sabhas (Women’s Assemblies) in all Gram Panchayats on March 8, 2020 to mark

International Women's Day. In a letter to secretaries / principal secretaries of states and UTs, Ministry of Panchayati Raj has said the theme this year will be "Generation Equality: Realizing Women's Right". The events should be held in partnership with Community Resource Persons (CRPs), Aanganwadi, Asha, Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) workers, it says. The Gram Sabhas would hold discussions on "Poshan Panchayat", land rights, education, safety, reproductive health and equal opportunity. Earlier, the Panchayats were asked to organize Poshan Pakhwada from March 8 to 22, 2020 as per the programme drawn out by the Ministry of Women & Child Development.

The Special Gram Sabhas would focus on issues such as the ban on sex determination tests and celebrate birth of a girl child; pre-natal and neo-natal care, immunisation and nutrition for all women; ensuring every girl child receives due care, nutrition and immunisation; encourage girls to go to schools and complete their schooling with focus on safe environment at home and in school; ban on child marriage; report violence, abuse or injustice against women and girl children; active participation of elected women representatives in Gram Panchayats and contribute to decision making; and encourage women to participate in Gram Sabhas. The Panchayati Raj Ministry has also circulated the broad outlines of a message that will be read out by CRPs and self-help-groups (SHGs) during the course of the Special Gram Sabhas.

These case studies of best practices from the intervention GPs are brought forward with a motto to scale the project and use as a tool for the other states. The cases have been organized based on structure, Process and outcomes. Therefore, the case studies give us pointers as to how Bal Sabhas and Mahila Sabhas can be organized at GP level.





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## Case Study 1

### Towards Gender-friendly Panchayat More Women Participation, More Strength

Mulakalapalli Gram Panchayat, Mulakapalli Mandal Bhadradi Kothagudem District, Telangana



#### Overview

Mulakalapalli Gram Panchayat is situated in Bhadradi Kothagudem district of Telangana. It has a population of 1431, with 715 males and 716 females. The village, spread across 6.43 sq.km, has eight habitations and 14 wards. Majority of the population belongs to Backward Classes (BC), whereas other communities like SC/ST and OC also reside here. Hindus constitute the majority of the population. The Panchayat has been declared ODF, and all households have access to toilets and water.

**Education:** The GP has 11 Anganwadi centres, five primary schools, two high schools, one junior college, and two other schools.

**Other facilities:** The GP has a primary health centre, sub-health centre, ICDS office, veterinary hospital, and Raithu Vedika (Farmers Club) office. The GP also makes headway in SHG federations, with 112 SHGs.

### **About the Sarpanch:**

Beebineni Badram, 36, was born into a farming family and completed his M.A. & B.Ed. He is particularly interested in Gram Panchayat development activities and devotes most of his time to attending to such issues. He is accessible to the villagers and GP officials anytime. Beebineni Badram reviews the GP's progress with the line departments on a regular basis and proposes priority tasks based on the villagers' requests. The GP is doing exceptionally well in terms of water and sanitation amenities. Beebineni Badram provides the GP report to Gram Sabhas, and people have faith in the system.

## **Processes**

### **Campaigning and Awareness**

To build trust among women, the village sarpanch, secretary, and project field personnel spent considerable time in the GP by distributing IEC materials and conducting door-to-door campaigns. The line departments encourage women to stay aware of the coverage and benefits available for those who are eligible. The Anganwadi, ASHA, and GP officials demonstrate an interest in knowledge transmission through various IEC resources. **Placards and slogans are used to raise awareness about the Mahila and Bal Sabhas.** When Sabha is announced, the date is posted on the GP notice boards and banners in the catchment areas.

### **Women review the implementation of the schemes in the GP**

One of the goals of the Mahila Sabha is to educate women about government initiatives. This is accomplished through awareness programmes and workshop held at the Gram Panchayat level by line departments, project employees, and Mandal level officers. The awareness of women regarding programmes like Kalyana Lakshmi, Arogya Lakshmi, KCR Kit, and others allows them to check their eligibility and contact the appropriate department for enrollment and registration. Given that Mahila Sabha is an open forum, qualified women are allowed to challenge the GP if they fail to provide eligible provisions for women, particularly those from a neglected community, street, or ward. The women discuss MGNREGS and demand jobs from the GP. They also talk about provisions and amenities at workplaces such as drinking water, shade, tools, aya, etc.

Santhakori Lakshmi Kumar, 45, wife of Venkateswarulu from Ward No 3 of the GP, says, "I didn't know that we could have a person to take care of our children when we are engaged at work under MGNREGS. I learned about this facility only after attending the awareness session and Mahila Sabha. Now I can demand my provisions. The VRP provided these facilities for a group of working mothers with children."

The women were made aware of Sukanya Samridhhi Yojana, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006), Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005, Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, and the prohibition of drugs and alcohol.

## **Domestic Violence and Women Groups**

A few women had experienced domestic abuse in the past; some of them faced harassment on demand of additional dowry. Due to male dominance and a lack of knowledge about many laws that protect women, they do not openly express their discontent or complaints. The Mahila Sabha's interventions and the subsequent education provided through GP-level workshops have made the women aware of their rights and the laws meant to protect and defend them. They don't hesitate to bring up instances of domestic violence at the Mahila Sabhas, and can now alert the Gram Panchayat about these incidents. The relevant line departments step in, counsel the family, and keep an eye on the situation. Following the first Mahila Sabha, a team representing all communities was established within the Mahila Sabha to address concerns within the GP and eliminate domestic violence. They continue to educate the villagers about their rights and assist in bringing up these concerns until the Mahila Sabhas ask the line departments and the GP Sarpanch for assistance. The outcomes have made them enthusiastic.

These women's teams are quick to respond to concerns, including child marriages, eve-teasing, relationships, and others, in addition to instances of domestic violence.

## **VOs and SHG**

The key players in the GP who ensure the success of the Mahila Sabhas are the VOs and women SHG members. Since the Mahila Sabha's announcement, women have been discussing in small, informal groups about the Sabha, the themes it would cover, its objectives, etc. Additionally, the women informed their peer groups in the GP of dates, topics, and proposals. The VOs and women SHG members were successful in gaining the trust of the women, which in turn, has increased the participation in Mahila Sabhas to the highest level.

## **The Action**

A 16-year-old girl's parents tried to marry her off to a relative's son covertly as they wanted to save the cordial relationship with the family. The issue was brought up by her family friend, who belongs to an SHG. Through VO, the woman was able to contact the Mandal Parishad Development Officer (MPDO) and Sarpanch. The girl informed the school headmaster about the incident. The Child Protection and Development Officer handled the delicate situation with the help of Anganwadi teacher, headmaster, Sarpanch, Mandal Parishad Officer, and MPDO. The parents received advice that left them completely persuaded. Today, the girl attends Zilla Parishad High School in Mulakapalli as a regular student in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

As a follow-up, the Anganwadi teacher and the GP's ANM frequently stop by the home. When she misses school, the HM notifies the officials concerned.

### **Outcomes and achievements through Mahila Sabhas**

- The Mahila Sabha has informed the GP that youngsters are indeed habituated to spending time on mobile phones watching videos and playing games. They do not have any other options to resist this temptation for a very long time during the day. Their mothers came up with the idea of a playground and playthings for the youngsters to deal with the situation. In response, the Sarpanch suggested to bring up this matter in Gram Sabha. They would set aside a piece of public land for this use. The Sarpanch spoke to a few local people to manage the donation of sporting equipment, including volleyballs, nets, and cricket gear. This allowed the women to get the young back on track
- The GP was informed about insufficient restrooms for girl students in the school. The Mahila Sabha asked the GP to fix the broken toilets and install additional toilets exclusively for girls
- The women SHG members have recommended construction of a community hall for their meetings, other activities, festivals, and holiday celebrations
- Women request provision of proper sanitation facilities in the village, and construction of drainages and water points.

### **Challenges, Support and Perspectives**

Women in the GP are now fully aware of their legal rights and show interest in participating in Mahila Sabhas. They hope that the Mahila Sabhas will bring about reform and growth in the GP and serve as a vehicle for highlighting their goals. The women want Mahila Sabhas in each of the six habitations so that they do not have to travel to attend the GP-level Mahila Sabha.

“The Mahila Sabha procedure is a fantastic idea,” says Kesupaka Nahgamma, 50, Ward No. 1. “Previously, we were unsure of where to direct our concerns in the GP. Men used to dominate the Gram Sabha and solely discussed matters of broad interest in the GP. Now it has become an excellent opportunity to ask questions, seek answers, and request assistance in women’s issues.”

## Vision

The Sarpanch wishes to see the Panchayat become gender-friendly by satisfying all UNICEF criteria for the designation. He intends to work consistently for the benefit of the GP and wants to use his power to make beneficial judgments.









## Case Study 2

### Living Testimony of Development through Bal Sabhas

Morampalli Bazar Gram Panchayat, Bhadradi Kothagudem District, Telangana



#### Overview

Morampalli is a Gram Panchayat in the Burgampahadu Mandal of Telangana's Badradri Kothagudem district. The GP comprising Morampalli, Jinkalagudem, and Marrikunta villages, has also earned recognition from the media for its efforts in bringing in infrastructure and facilities aimed at the growth of the children.

**Population:** The GP has a total population of 4,116, of which 1657 belong to ST, 331 belong to SC and 2128 from other castes.

**Education, Sanitation and Water:** In 2018, the Gram Panchayat was declared open defecation free, and it designated two Government Schools in Morampalli and Jinkalagudem villages as Swachh Patashalas. The government has provided water taps to all 1296 households, and the GP is equipped with four OHSR water tanks. ITC provides free sanitary pads to schools as part of its CSR programme.

### **About the Panchayat Sarpanch Ms. Bhukya Divyasri**

Divyasri is a 25-year-old woman who has completed a polytechnic course. Serving her first term as the Panchayat President, Divyasri says it was her father, a politician, who inspired her. She appreciates being close to people and exercising power over the GP administration, which allows her to make progressive decisions to take the GP forward. She attends to the needs of women, particularly female students at school. Fighting the contentious political issues, a resilient Divyasri was instrumental in allotting land for cremation in the GP through the Gram Sabha resolution endorsed by the police.

“If I am granted another chance to serve the GP as President, I have long-term ideas for its development, such as construction of roads, linking houses to drainages, etc. For the youngsters, I want to create a large green park with various plants. I will design a framework within the GP to address or escalate public problems on time,” she says. **Towards building a child-friendly Panchayat**

## **Processes**

### **Awareness, campaigning and entry point activities**

The GP successfully sensitises the relevant line departments, especially the school principals. It educates the children through a variety of awareness programmes, including ‘She teams’ and cyber Congress awareness by Sub Inspector Smt. Ramadevi. NGOs financed by ITC provide sanitation education, and organise various competitions such as essay writing on child rights, discussion on child labour, and drawing on child abuse are to create awareness among children. The GP was successful in motivating the children to express their concerns and priorities through Bal Sabhas with the help of SIRDPR and NIRDPR. Through circulars to line departments and schools, loudspeaker fitted in auto rickshaws and tom-tom, the GP also advertises the dates of Mahila Sabha and Bal Sabha.

## Structure

On the first Saturday of every month, the schools in the GP hold Mock Parliaments. Children from the three habitations take part and act as Members of the Parliament. They discuss a variety of national and international topics and demonstrate how members of Parliament debate issues. Many pressing concerns of public importance concerning priorities of children are presented and discussed during the question hour, such as unsafe broken compound wall, drinking water, broken pipelines, water facility in bathrooms, education amid the Covid crisis, quality of food in midday meal, and proposal for new water tank and bus shelter to name a few. The same process is followed at Bal Sabhas. The Sabhas have a chairperson, and the children discuss the same issues, with the GP Sarpanch acting as an observer, to transmit them to the Gram Sabha for resolution, followed by the GPDP preparations.

Keerthana Bama, 15, daughter of Chandu and the Sabha Adhyaksha, says, “Initially, I was too nervous about speaking, but Mr. Sai, the secretary, encouraged me to act as Adhyaksha and informed me of the benefits we can receive from the Bal Sabhas. After witnessing the developments, I want to take advantage of additional opportunities to raise our concerns during Bal Sabhas.”

## Infrastructure for a better learning environment

The GP has built an auditorium in the school to accommodate e-learning facilities. In collaboration with the Pratham NGO and ITC, the GP has equipped the school with seven computers and a printer. The GP purchased a projector with funding provided by the State Government. During typical lectures, the projector is handy for the children.

“I knew projector as merely a device to display movies but not as a learning tool. My teachers can use visuals to help us understand biology lectures,” explains Lakshmi, 14.

## Mobilising CSR, NGOs and villagers’ contribution

After successfully hosting two Bal Sabhas, the Sarpanch and authorities realised what was best for the youngsters. The GP successfully matches 90 per cent of ITC-CSR funding to repair pipelines, build new toilets, and provide water supply. The GP has contributed 10 per cent to the success of the collaboration. In addition, an RO plant was installed by Smart India Pvt. limited using CSR funds to match the e-mission Bagiradha programme, which was established and identified after the 1<sup>st</sup> Mahila Sabha in the GP. The communities provide financial and in-kind assistance to the growth of the GP and schools as needed. Recently, the villagers sponsored chairs and tables for the school.

## Outcomes

- The GP has also spent Rs. 38,40,408 under women development activities, such as Mahila Sabhas, IEC material with wall paintings, awareness programmes, Kalyana Lakshmi, Arogya Lakshmi, KCR Kit and, etc., are covered under this budget
- A few of the issues raised in the first and second phases of the Bal Sabha have been resolved
- The bushes behind the school have been cleaned. Previously, snakes and insects used to enter the classrooms
- CSR assistance is used to address water and sanitation challenges. Prior to the Sabhas, the washrooms had no taps, whereas the school lacked water tank
- The ANM has increased her visits to schools to monitor the children's health conditions
- The GP has put additional electric poles in newly built communities and dwellings in the loop regions in response to demands raised at the 1<sup>st</sup> Mahila Sabha
- The GP constructed an auditorium and donated e-learning tools, a projector, and computers to the institution

## Challenges, Support and Perspectives

Apart from a number of developmental improvements in the school and GP, the students still face challenges such as the electrification of the classrooms, availability of fans, tube lights, and seating facilities. The construction of the compound wall is underway, although it is dangerous in terms of security. The GP would refer the outstanding issues to Gram Sabha and propose a resolution to prioritise the matters in the GDDP preparations. The Sarpanch says she is concerned about children and guarantees to complete all outstanding projects before the end of her tenure.

## Vision

Shail Arif, 17, says, "Equal opportunity is offered to all youngsters across all villages during the Bal Sabhas. I would like to participate in the upcoming Bal Panchayat elections as an Adhyaksha, to bring to light any topics that are of concern to children."

Savitri Buduputi, 36, wife of Srinivas, states that her 9-year-old child is able to talk and disclose the most sensitive issues about her schooling and health. "This behavioural modification can only be achieved by holding Bal Sabhas," she adds.







## Case Study 3

# Children Start Believing in Transformation

Lakshmi Devipalli Gram Panchayat, Palavancha Mandal, Kothagudem District, Telangana



## Overview

This Panchayat was established in 2019 and consists of three revenue villages and nine wards. This predominantly tribal Panchayat is located approximately 25 kilometres from Palavancha Mandal. It was previously a habitation under the Ulvanoor Gram Panchayat. The GP has 316 households and agriculture is the primary source of income. Apart from Lambadi, the dominant community in the GP is Koya, a Scheduled Tribe.

## Population:

The GP has a total population of 1122 people, of which 867 are STs and 255 are other castes.

## Infrastructure and Education:

The Panchayat office is housed in a rented space. Two Anganwadi centres, one Primary Health Centre, two OHSR water tanks, and two primary schools are part of the GP.

## About the Panchayat Sarpanch Banothu Biksham

Banothu Biksham, aged 45 years, belongs to Lambadi, a Schedule Tribe, and is well-known for his efforts and struggles for tribal rights in his village, focusing solely on the encroachment of forest lands. He fought for their lands, which earned him the respect of the peasants and eventually made him the Sarpanch. He volunteers for the GP and works of Mahila Sabha and Bal Sabha, ensuring majority participation. The Sarpanch had put all of his efforts aiming to fulfil the requirements for the GP and taking it forward. Banothu wanted to offer a younger person the opportunity to be the next President.

## Small Changes, Big Difference

### Processes

## Social Security and GP Development

Although the GP is new, it is capable of providing latrine facilities to all households. All houses are linked by pipelines and have access to water. All streets and houses are connected by CC roads and residences have soak pits. All eligible villages are getting pensions, and no beneficiaries are left uncovered.



## Towards building a child-friendly Panchayat

Banaothu Biksham says there was no basic infrastructure in the GP as it is so new. The tribal children were initially hesitant to voice their ideas. They were unaware of the child protection regulations and government-run development programmes. Various entry-point activities and awareness sessions were held at the GP to reduce the stigma associated with speaking out and questioning. The competitions have enlightened students on various schemes, protection laws, and their rights. They are now dynamic, asking questions concerning their school and GP facilities.

### Bal Sabhas

During the first Bal Sabha, the children only attended for the sake of snacks. The field coordinator and facilitators worked hard to get the youngsters to speak up. During the second Bal Sabha, however, half of the children spontaneously stood up and proceeded to the stage to voice their thoughts, questions and proposals. Issues like infrequent visits of garbage truck, dirty drainages, lack of streetlights, and non-watering of roadside plants are repeatedly discussed in the Bal Sabha. There are also discussions over the quality of food served at school, ANM attendance, medical requirements, etc.

After seeing the youngsters participate in the Bal Sabhas, the headmaster and staff decided to hold Mock Parliaments in school. During Mock Parliaments, they teach moral ideals and political information while debating the children's priorities and problems.

"Without Bal Sabha, we could never know our rights and what better facilities we may ask for," adds B. Anjali of 9<sup>th</sup> Standard.

### Outcomes:

- Bal Sabha's efforts have transformed the GPs' behaviour to emphasise children's needs. The GP ensures that garbage trucks visit the streets and clean the drainages on a daily basis
- Street lights have been fixed and replaced and the kids are able to continue playing in the evening hours
- The plants along the road are watered on a daily basis
- The adolescents are informed of their rights, schemes, and Acts for protection. The participation of children in the Bal Sabha has increased
- GP severely prohibits underage marriages, child labour and dropouts. They keep an eye for any such indicators

## Challenges, Support and Perspectives

Although it is a small GP located in a remote area of the Mandal, it has significantly succeeded in many areas. However, there are some difficulties they would like to immediately settle, such as construction of Panchayat office and cooking shed at the school, a few new families to enrol for ration cards.

## Vision

Phase three Bal Sabhas will see increased involvement from other revenue villages, which means discussion on more topics and issues. The GP determines to incorporate priorities of children and women into the GPD planning and ensure that the plans are carried out.







## Case Study 4

### Towards Child-friendly and Gender-friendly Panchayat

40. No. Dakhin, Natun Dehar Gram Panchayat, Madhupur Development Block, Kaithalkuchi, Nalbari District, Assam



## Overview

40 No. Dakhin Natun Dehar Gram Panchayat is located in Barnagar Banekuchi in Madhupur Development Block of 61 No. Dharmapur constituency in Nalbari District, Assam. This Gram Panchayat comprises the villages of Barnagar Banekuchi, Niz Banekuchi, Rajakhat Banekuchi, Danguapara, Barkhetri Banekuchi and Burinagar that have a total of 10 wards. The GP spreads over 2.6 square kilometres and has sufficient infrastructure. Hindus, Muslims, Boro, and Koch-Rajbongshi live here, and the majority practises Hinduism. In the GP, there are two PHCs and 186 self-help groups. Every family in the GP has access to a toilet facility.

## Population:

According to Population Census 2011, this GP has 2118 households with a total population of 10560 (5523 males and 5037 females). Of this, 252 belong to ST, 68 belong to SC, and 1798 are from other castes.

## Education and infrastructure:

There are 18 elementary schools, two middle schools, and a high school. The GP has a private school - Sankardev Shishu Niketan - and 17 Anganwadi centres. The GP office is equipped with IT facility that updates all public information and portals.

## About The Panchayat President Mrs. Pranita Barman

Mrs. Pranita Barman was elected as President for the first time on 9th December 2018. She is 38 years old and married to a farmer. Before being elected as president, she aspired to be a social worker and actively participated in numerous GP development initiatives and politics. She makes herself available in the GP and keeps touch with panchayat line department employees as well as block-level authorities.

## Processes:

### Towards Gender friendly Panchayat

### We participate in the prosperity of the GP

The Sarpanch makes every effort to include majority of the people in Gram Sabhas. The Sarpanch arranges regular Gram Sabhas in the GP for allocating works under various initiatives funded by the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commissions. Ward members are also involved in addressing villager issues and conveying the majority of priorities and concerns to Gram

Sabhas. They take on the task of speaking out for their ward voters' most pressing concerns. The GP spreads the information about Mahila Sabha through loudspeakers fitted on auto rickshaws, distribution of flyers and other IEC materials. The GP also sends out circulars to line departments encouraging them to participate and disseminate the data and information.

### **Mahila Sabhas and proposals**

In the GP, two Mahila Sabhas were successfully organised. Mrs. Minumani Kakati Sarma presided over the Mahila Sabha as a village elder with expertise in rural organisations. It was proposed to construct a community hall in the heart of Benekuchi Chowk and a community training centre in the GP. Line departments participate and share information with the Sabhas along with PRIs' active participation.

Mayuri Barman served as the Bal Sabhas' Adhyaksha. The Bal Sabhas have 450 members, and the student volunteers arranged the second Sabha with limited assistance and oversight from the GP and school. The youngsters in the GP have requested playground with football and cricket equipment. The youngsters also wanted clean drinking water at schools, a common space for females, separate restrooms for girls, among other amenities. A dance school is intended for the well-being of youngsters.

"Bal Sabhas offered us the opportunity to discuss our priorities and requirements. We have learned about our rights, protection laws, and development plans through awareness campaigns and entrance point events," adds Bhargabijoythi Barman.

### **Awareness Activities**

The GP organised several awareness programmes for women and children. Women's empowerment, disaster management, skill development, health, sanitation, education, and child development are a few examples. Several Acts and programmes that help women and children were included in the awareness campaigns.

### **Follow-up and minoring the GP activities**

The GP President is fully aware that by exerting her power, she has the ability to make things happen. She visits Anganwadi centres, schools, and other locations to ensure their smooth functioning. She prioritises the need for clean drinking water and separate bathrooms in schools.

## Outcomes:

- Women are aware of the schemes, Acts, and available information at the GP level. They check their eligibility for the schemes and approach the right personnel for enrolment
- Increased female and child involvement in Mahila and Bal Sabhas is achieved.
- The GP is aware of the women's and children's priorities that must be planned and incorporated into GPDP
- The schools are receiving fresh drinking water while the pipelines are being built
- With the assistance of the PHE department, the GP proposed construction of three clean drinking water facilities
- Information regarding the programmes, eligibility and covered homes is constantly available and corroborated

## Vision

The Sarpanch hopes to transform the GP into a model Panchayat in the next five years and wants the GP's tagline to be "Leave No One Behind." Women will be represented in all of the GP's decisions. There would be no dropouts, and all female children would be adequately nourished. The President pledges to fulfil women's and children's interests throughout her tenure and intends to do so again if given another chance.











## Case Study 5

### Towards Building a Gender-Friendly Panchayat

119 No. Muguria Gram Panchayat, Bajali Development Block, Bajali district, Assam.

Acknowledgements from GPU office



The GPU expresses their utmost gratitude to the citizens of Muguria Gram Panchayat for their participation in the Mahila Sabhas. In particular, they would like to recognise the efforts made by SHGs or Village Level Organisation for assisting in the selection of a number of community awareness activities and for demonstrating enthusiasm in the successful implementation and monitoring of these activities. The Gram Panchayat is committed to upholding the spirit of the Indian Constitution; it believes in healthy cooperation and competitive federalism, and endeavours tirelessly to realise its full potential.

### **About the Panchayat President Khanindra Kakati**

Shri Khanindra Kakati, 46, was elected as GP President in 2018. He has been actively involved in politics from a very young age and has an inclination towards serving the local people. He attends and organises various events in his GP and believes in working for the people and making Muguria a better place, especially for women and children. He supports the GP functionaries and any new out-of-the-box, innovative ideas under his supervision. Khanindra is enthusiastic about welcoming major changes in his GP for his people. Under his leadership, Muguria GP has been selected under the Project for creating Model GP clusters. It also received the National Panchayat Award for Child-Friendly GP in 2022. With this glory, this time, Muguria is trying to make itself an engendered women-friendly GP.

### **Processes:**

#### **Panchayat Bandhus and Participatory planning**

The Sarpanch makes every effort to involve his. His work primarily involves and empowers people to volunteer for Gram Panchayat development. A number of No-cost Voluntary Activities (NCVA) and low-cost voluntary activities (LCVA) have been conducted in the GP. Cleanliness drives on GP premises and around wards take place frequently. Especially, help is extended by the SHGs in taking out such activities. The GP has formed groups known as “Panchayat Bandhus” or so-called ‘Village Volunteers’ to disseminate information to the most remote areas of the village. Ward members work as hands and feet of the Panchayat to spread information to the people.

#### **Mahila Sabhas with SHG and line departments Support**

119 No. Muguria GP has organised two Mahila Sabhas. The first Mahila Sabha was held on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2022 in the GP conference hall and was presided over by the GP President. Since it was the first occasion of its kind, it was important for the President to orient the women

of the GP on the importance of such Mahila Sabhas. Around 60 women graced the event. In the first session, the women were inducted by the GP President, Khanindra Kakati, on the necessity of women Sabhas and how the women from the following times should conduct it. Gender Advocate Chitralkha Baruah shared her thoughts on pro-women laws, particularly the Domestic Violence Act 2005, and legal remedies. She interacted with the women and tried to motivate them to attend such programmes and discussions. On the same day, a President was elected from amongst the women to ensure the smooth functioning of women Sabhas in the times ahead.

### **Ensuring Freedom from Violence and Social Security**

The next Sabha was graced with more than 80 women along with dignitaries from various line departments like Block Development Officer, Aggregate Engineer, Junior Engineer, Gram Sevak, Child Development Project Officer (CDPO), Anganwadi Supervisor, AWWs, ASHA ANMs, SHGs members, VO members, District Project Relations Officer (DPRO) from Zilla Parishad Bajali, GRS, GPC, GP Secretary, and Tax Collector. Also, a team from SIRD was present in the Sabha. The Mahila Sabha was presided by President of Mahila Sabha, Soroju Kakati. During the discussions, Soroju Kakati, an active member of the village, became enthusiastic about working for the welfare of society and women at large. She seemed vocal and fearless in presenting her thoughts and this helped many of her colleagues to voice their problems and engage in meaningful discussions to bring up solutions. A session was taken by CDPO on the celebration and importance of POSHAN Maah for children and women. She interacted with the women regarding improving their diet and how it can benefit their well-being.

### **Participatory Planning and Grievance Redressal**

During the Sabhas, women raised concerns on various issues. An AWW spoke on the importance of including indigenous locally produced food items in their diet. She emphasised how with less money, one can achieve ways to consume nutritious items from products available in their locality. Another AWW raised the issue of lack of proper utensils in her AWC and measuring instruments. A few women of the GP expressed that the tap water connections are not given properly in locations where it is in need. They also raised the unemployment problems faced by their male counterparts, who are now in their mid-30s and are unable to find work. Therefore, they expressed this concern for the Panchayat to extend some help to empower the males of their family. There were issues of missing out of beneficiary names in a few schemes, which were given to take care of on an urgent basis by the GPC. The women also expressed issues of bad road connectivity in a few localities and the areas were noted down. They also expressed the need for a restroom near DouL Gokhain Mandir. They demanded a water source near Kenduguri as many cultural activities take place around it. In the Sabha, the BDO, along with DPM, shared the benefits and necessary steps that can be taken to avail various schemes like Atal Amrit Yojana.

### **Monitoring:**

The PRIs and GP functionaries are very active, and they keep monitoring the progress and come up with better ideas for developing the GP. Alongwith them, the AWW, ASHA, and SHGs are very helpful in their job and motivating people around the GP. Also, the GP has activated a number of Panchayat Bandhus around the GP who help monitor and encourage the people. A few ward members are also actively mobilising the people in and around their wards. GP functionaries actively make community visits to the GP to discuss problems and find solutions.

### **Awareness camps:**

The GP plans to organise a skill development and vocational camp with the convergence of various line departments to tackle the unemployment issue expressed by women in the Mahila Sabha.

Several awareness camps have been organised on women & child development sanitation, cleanliness drive, etc.

### **Outcomes:**

- Muguria GP is now focusing on including these activities in creating a new GPDP.
- The GP is planning on convergence with various line departments like JJM for a new drinking water source, PHE, SBM and MGNREGA for the construction of restrooms and roads in various localities of GP
- Putting up an awareness camp on skill development in convergence with DDU-GKY to tackle the problem of unemployment
- Installation of awareness camps on banking, government scheme facilities in Gram Sabhas and various such events in the GP to make the people aware of such facilities
- Completion of construction of a Children's Park in Kenduguri

### **Challenges, Support and Perspectives**

“The GP realises that the transition is not simple,” says Sowbam from the GP, and they aim to include more women from other villages in the next Mahila Sabhas. “Several concerns must be resolved and presented before Gram Sabhas resolutions for absorption into the GPDP. I am aware of the GPDP procedure as a GP member. I shall see that the GP prioritises the issues highlighted in the Mahila Sabhas” she adds.

### **Vision**

The Sarpanch wishes to build trust and motivate people to develop the GP and wants to be known as a gender-inclusive Panchayat leader. He desires to fulfil all indications for the GP to be accredited as gender-friendly.







## Case Study 6

### Women's Empowerment through Panchayat

103 No. Bandhasidhani Gram Panchayat, Bajali Development Block, Choukhuty Bajali District, Assam





## Overview

103 No. Bandhasidhani Gram Panchayat is located in Bajali Development Block of Bajali District in Assam. This GP is within the jurisdiction of the 42 No Patacharkuchi constituency. This GP has three villages - Akaya, Daisingri, and Bandhasidhani - and 10 wards cover these villages. This GP has 254 actively functioning self-help groups and decent infrastructure.

## Community

The GP has a multi-ethnic and multi-religious community. Bodo Kochari is the major community, while SC, ST, BC, and a few other castes are also present.

## Population:

The total population of the GP is 9634, with 4892 males and 4742 females. There are 474 ST families, 20 SC households, 1324 OBC households, 187 minority households, and 295 general caste households. There are 2305 total households, with 1694 BPL families and 611 APL households.

## Education and infrastructure.

The GP contains 10 Anganwadi Centres, 10 Primary Schools, and two High Schools; however, there are no private schools. A vast majority of the residents are literate. The GP has a primary health centre.

## About the GP President

Mr. Ganesh Chandra Das, 58, is the GP President. Even though this is his first stint as President, he has extensive experience of serving as a ward member for a few terms. He is aware of the GP's primary concerns and always seeks to tackle them in a collaborative manner. He keeps the PRIs and GP officials in line with the GP's objectives. The women feel that Ganesh addresses many of their problems. The Sarpanch is constantly accessible to GP authorities and residents, and takes the initiative in all development matters.

## Back Ground of Sabha Adhayksha

Mrs. Golapi Das Medhi presided over the Mahila Sabhas. Aged 53 years, Golapi Das Medhi holds a B.A degree and is working as an Anganwadi teacher. She is also active in a variety of social programmes.

## **We know what we want**

Bandhasidhani GP was grateful to UNICEF, NIRDPR, and SIRDPR for selecting it to improve the lives of women and children. The prioritised proposals include a library, a community hall for cultural meetings and community needs, a playground, and sports equipment. The highlighted topics include improving sanitary facilities, providing clean drinking water, and covering eligible leftovers in government schemes. Apart from repairing roads and fixing street lights, the women insist that the garbage vehicle should cover all remote and secluded areas of the GP. Women were given the opportunity to review the Orunadoi scheme, PMAY-G, Old Age Pension, and Widow Pension schemes. The eligible uncovered persons applied to the concerned authorities during the Mahila Sabha.

The PRIs, GP offices and line departments actively engage in the Mahila Sabhas and assist the GP in improving its infrastructure, education, and livelihood, as well as disseminating important information that benefits women and children.

Mrs. Sabitri Baro wants a Community hall in GP for their gatherings and cultural needs

## **Women's responses following interventions - The motivation is rewarded**

After two rounds of Mahila Sabhas, there is a noticeable transformation in the Sarpanch, women, and PRIs. They like the forum and process of the Mahila Sabha, which prioritises their issues in the GP. They have gained confidence and faith in the GP and appreciate the format of discussions. The women who attended the inaugural Mahila Sabha brought forward many issues.

## **Outcomes**

- Majority of women are motivated and have gained trust in the GP.
- The Sarpanch and PRIs recognise the GP needs and endeavour to fulfil them using the finest approaches
- Improved communication between line departments and beneficiaries
- Women benefit from the forum for open discussions
- The women demanded that the approach street roads in the GP be repaired after they became drained following a rainstorm
- Streetlights should be installed in the new colony, as well as repair of streetlights in almost 12 spots be undertaken

- Sabha makes a recommendation for pure drinking water amenities in the GP
- It is recommended that a community hall be built to meet their cultural and social requirements
- A library as well as a playground with play equipment for children and youth is proposed

### Challenges, Support and Perspectives

The GP had never seen any meetings conducted exclusively for the women. Even at ward level meetings, women were not encouraged to participate. The campaign struggled to persuade women to attend the Mahila Sabha since they did not feel the gathering was organised to discuss their priorities. The women’s awareness meeting drew around 50 women, and the attendance eventually rose to 150.

### Vision

Mrs. Dipti Das claims that “the idea of ownership is taught in the PRIs via the Mahila Sabhas.” The change is meant to be permanent for the GP to advance.







## Case Study 7

### Restoring Faith through People-Centred Governance

26 No Bangaon Gram Panchayat, Paschim Nalbari Development Block,  
Nalbari District, Assam



## Overview

The Paschim Nalbari Development Block of Nalbari District, Assam, is home to the 26 No Bongaon Gram Panchayat. It is part of the Dharmapur Legislative Assembly Constituency 62. The Gram Panchayat comprises four revenue villages with 10 Wards.

## Communities:

The GP has various religious communities, including Hindu, Muslim, Kalita, Mukhi, Brahmin, Keot, Rajbongshi, Dhoba, Sonari, and others.

## Population:

According to the 2011 Socio-Economic Caste Census, there are 11,772 people, with 5432 females and 6340 men. The Scheduled Castes comprise 205 men and 157 females out of the total population. The overall number of households is 2232, with 669 falling below the poverty line.

## Education:

There are 23 Anganwadi centres, nine pre-primary schools, 11 elementary schools, three middle schools, one high school, and two skill centres.

## Other Facilities:

In addition to two post offices and one Assam Gramin Vikas Bank branch, the GP area has six public health sub-centres, six village organisations, and 125 self-help groups.

## About the Panchayat Pratinidhi Smt. Gitima Devi

Smt. Gitima Devi is a 54-year-old woman with a Bachelor of Arts degree and her first term as GP President began in 2018. She previously served as a ward member of the Paschim Nalbari Anchalik Panchayat from 2002 to 2007. Thus, she has been working as a social activist in various capacities since 2002

## Processes

### **Towards Building a Gender-Friendly and Child-Friendly Panchayat**

Smt. Gitima Devi has been working tirelessly to build a Gender-Friendly Panchayat. The President recognises that local self-government cannot be realised without the involvement and participation of the female population. By realising this fact after being elected as the GP President, Smt. Gitima Devi launched several measures to incorporate the villagers from many fronts, diverse castes and communities in the GP's operations. She has been organising Gram Sabhas, the primary and accessible democratic forum through which villagers may share and discuss numerous concerns, difficulties, and the need for development on the social, economic, and cultural fronts, among other things. During her first term as GP President, she could not bring the women of the GP area to the Gram Sabha on an equal footing with the males. To ensure their attendance and active engagement, she visited every GP residence door to door, convincing the women of the value and necessity of participating in different GP events. She made a special effort to educate and persuade them to share their perspectives and to be vocal and confident in speaking about topics affecting their families, children and community more loudly.

### **Some glimpses from Mahila Sabha organised in 26 no Bangaon GP**

The wholesome effort of Smt. Gitima Devi received a major thrust when Bangaon GP was selected as one among the ten GPs for the National Institute of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development, Hyderabad led pilot basis project to institutionalise Mahila Gram Sabha and Bal Sabhas in Assam. In complying with the same, under the Presidentship of Smt. Gitima Devi, Bangaon GP organised the first Mahila Gram Sabha on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2022, where more than 500 women were present. Many distinguished personalities were invited to impart their valuable speech regarding women empowerment. Women presented in the meeting shared their views, problems and needs in a more detailed way which were discussed and deliberated upon.

They were also apprised of various Governmental schemes like Mission Shakti, Nari Adalat, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, along with various Government helpline numbers so that destitute women can take help when needed. The debate and deliberations were finally recorded and written down as resolutions of the Gram Sabha.

Such formalisation of Mahila and Bal Sabhas opens up the scope for inclusion of these issues in the form of Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) that can be executed through MGNREGA and Fifteenth Finance Commission schemes, etc.

## Creating Linkages and Monitoring:

Smt. Gitima Devi visits Anganwadi centres, schools, and sub-centres to underscore the importance of establishing separate bathrooms for females. She regularly meets with Anganwadi staff and SHG members to engage them in GP activities. Through the 125 SHGs operating in the GP, the majority of women are becoming self-sufficient.

## Awareness Campaign

Several awareness camps for women's empowerment, development of disaster management skills, health, sanitation, education, and so forth are being organised. Special camps led by distinguished doctors were arranged to raise awareness of COVID-19.

## Outcomes

- In 2017, Bongaon GP received the Pradhan Mantri Deen Dayal Upadhaya Panchayat Shashaktikaran Award
- The commercial complex in front of the GP headquarters is being developed in honour of previous GP President Munindra Malla Baruah and is being rented out as a source of revenue
- Streetlights are installed at various locations to improve business exchanges, economic growth, and security, among other things
- Public toilets and tube wells, separate restrooms for females are being built in several communities
- Sanitation projects such as drainage and sanitary incinerators are implemented in schools.
- Repair works of Anganwadi centres are undertaken
- Under the Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission, women from village organisations and self-help groups participate in different economic activities such as weaving and pickle making
- A skill development centre is established in the GP to encourage women to participate in achieving self-sufficiency.
- The GP received a district-level award for e-governance project



- Conduct of alcohol and drug addiction awareness camp
- Convergence of schemes with the Department of Social Welfare and Public Health Engineering Department for constructing Model Anganwadi Centre, public toilets, waste collection mechanism, etc
- Action plan for inclusion of women's priorities in the GPDP
- Proposals for volleyball court in schools for girls

### Challenges, Support and Perspectives

Insufficient fund is one of the biggest challenges for executing the schemes included in the GPDP. The fund allotted under the 15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission is also inadequate to meet the increasing demands. The own source of revenue is meagre to meet such demands. Further, there is a lack of support staff and personnel in Panchayat.

Gitima Devi's dream is to establish a Panchayat in the real sense. Upon realising that the villagers' cooperation is essential in achieving the same, she continually urges the villages to partake in the initiatives of the GP. She is constantly looking for the help and collaboration of various government departments. Only with adequate funds, functions and functionaries can a PRI be empowered to develop an effective plan for socioeconomic development and social justice.

According to her experience, women were first hesitant to create SHGs or participate in skill development. However, repeated appeals through awareness camps could change their mindset. Now she may brag about the fact that SHG has 1223 female members. Many women have received skill development training and are now self-sufficient.

### Vision

Smt. Gitima says, "My aim is to make Bangaon a GP in the real sense. I wish to make villagers self-educated and self-sustainable. Earlier, people had a disliking for the Panchayat. I believe this notion can be changed. I desire to fulfil people's aspirations."







## Case Study 8

### Improving lives through Women-Centric Governance Gender-Friendly Gram Panchayat

Sudunglakha Gram Panchayat, Rhenock Block, Pakyong District, Sikkim



## Overview

Sudunglakha is a Gram Panchayat unit comprising five under Rhenock Block, Rongli Sub-Division wards in the eastern part of Sikkim. It shares boundaries with Rhenock GPU, Tarpin GPU & Dalapchand GPU.

The name Sudunglakha is derived from two words, “Sudur”, meaning a person who came from far away land in Lepcha language and “Lakha”, meaning cowshed.

Gram Panchayat Unit consists of five wards, namely Suntaley Darpaney- ward No. 01, Mulukey- Ward No. 02, Sudunglakha- Ward No. 03, Kopchey-Ward No. 04, Gairi Gaon-Ward No. 05.

## Demography

Gram Panchayat is inhabited by a mixed population of approximately 2061 people belongs to three major ethnic communities of Sikkim, viz. Lepcha, Nepali and Bhutia. As per the recent survey of 2021, the Gram Panchayat has 1033 males and 1028 females, of which 21 are SC, 449 are ST, 465 are OBC (C), and 1126 belong to OBC (State) category. It has a total of 461 households.

## Education

The Gram Panchayat has three Government Schools, viz. Govt. Secondary School Sudunglakha, Govt. Secondary School Mulukey and Govt. Primary School, Lower Sudunglakha. The GP is also home to two private schools and boasts that 90 per cent of its population is literate. Nearly 60 per cent of the population is engaged in agriculture, and 40 per cent are in government service. GP also has five Anganwadi Centres in each ward.

## Social Inclusion of Women

Womenfolk of the Gram Panchayat are included in the DAY-NRLM project and are organised into 31 women self-help groups comprising more than 300 members.

## About the Panchayat President- Ms. Tila Rupa Sharma

An all-women team of Gram Panchayat led by Ms. Tila Rupa Sharma in the capacity of President (Sarpanch) and accompanied by Vice President Ms. Sashi Gurung and Panchayat Members Ms. Sova Devi Sharma, Ms. Pempa Dem Lepcha, Ms. Purna Maya Sharma had been instrumental in mobilising womenfolk and empowering them. Mrs. Sharma had completed her +2 in Science stream, and after marriage, she was elected as Panchayat and became Panchayat President in 2017 for a term of five years. When she became Panchayat President, she mobilised SHGs and Ward Development Society to work with the Gram Panchayat and motivated them to participate in the Gram Panchayat Development Plan.

## **Conceptualisation of Gender-Centric Governance towards building a Gender- Friendly Panchayat**

After being sworn in as Panchayat of the Gram Panchayat and elected as the head of all-women Panchayat GPU, Mrs. Sharma thought of working for the welfare and empowerment of women. She hardly had any idea about local governance, and being elected as a President of the all-women Panchayat GPU was challenging. No male member in Panchayat could afford the time to visit State government offices since the State Headquarters was far off, and they had to stay back at the capital to accomplish minor work. On top of that, she had to face many social issues for which she needed to visit police stations quite often, which she did not personally appreciate. Facing many challenges, she thought of working towards women empowerment and mobilisation.

### **Processes**

#### **Situation Analysis, Ward Sabhas and Gram Sabhas**

She organised PRAs and Ward Sabhas in each ward and, with the help of SIRDPR (State Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj). Also, she organised Mahila Sabhas, wherein a situation analysis was carried out. She listened to the issues raised by the women and took cognisance of matters related to family disputes. She introduced a grievance and complaint redressal mechanism. The local police station was entrusted not to entertain any complaints related to family disputes till Gram Panchayat forwards the case to them. Many women suppressed their agony since they were reluctant to lodge their complaint at the police station, which was quite far from GPU and were fearful of dire consequences like arrests by the police. They were relieved of such fear and started lodging their complaints with Gram Panchayat. The Gram Panchayat handled many cases, provided counselling and disposed them of amicably.

The Gram Panchayat brought various issues related to women in Gram Sabha, such as skill development and leadership development of members of SHGs, alternative livelihood and capacity building and passed resolutions.

#### **Liaison and Networking with Institutions**

The Gram Panchayat worked close to (SIRDPR) State Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, Govt. of Sikkim and the State Rural Livelihood Mission. The GP passed resolutions in Gram Sabhas to impart training on organic button flower and bouquet making, reuse of plastic waste, etc., and get it sanctioned through SIRDPR to upgrade the skill and capacity of women SHG members.

## Awareness Generation, Training and Capacity Building

Awareness plays a pivotal role in development. The GP organised awareness programmes on the following issues:

- Awareness of Menstrual Health and Hygiene: Gram Panchayat, in collaboration with SIRDPR organised an awareness programme regarding menstrual hygiene. The main motto of the programme was to eradicate discrimination and taboo on menstruation.
- Awareness of different health issues and health camp: Awareness has been provided to the public regarding mental health and women's health with the help of health workers of Health and Wellness Centre Sudunglakha and CHC Rhenock. During free medical camps, medicines were also provided.
- Awareness & IEC activities on Swachh Bharat Mission: They were trained to manage solid and liquid waste by constructing soak pits, compost pits, segregation sheds, etc.
- Awareness of human trafficking: Awareness has been provided to the public regarding human trafficking with the help of the Social Welfare Department, Govt. of Sikkim and Rhenock Police Station.
- Waste management training for women SHGs
- Button flower and bouquet making training for women SHGs
- Computer training to educated unemployed women
- Driving classes for women SHGs and youth
- Training on mushroom cultivation and noodle making

### Outcome

- Participation of women in Ward Sabhas and Gram Sabha enhanced.
- Complaint/grievances redressal mechanism has gained popularity among the women-folk, and numerous disputes were disposed of, enabling them to raise their voice against violence.
- In the capacity of resource persons, women from SHGs are imparting training on waste

management to the students of different schools, colleges, and women SHGs of other districts and States

- They are earning income by selling products made from plastic and agricultural waste. They sell button flowers made up of farm waste and flower bouquets at functions organised by Gram Panchayat, Block Administrative Centre, schools and neighbouring GPs. As per the information provided by the women SHG members, they earned Rs. 30,000 by selling button flowers and Rs. 50,000 by selling flower bouquets at the time of the study
- Likewise, training in basic computer courses also adds to women empowerment. They are taking advantage of it in several fields - from running SHGs smoothly to performing well in jobs.
- Zero waste practices are in place in GP. Women SHGs make earnings through the sale of baskets made from plastic wrappers, thereby reducing plastic waste in the GPU
- The oriented women of the GP had undertaken Liquid Waste Management; 105 soak pits were dug through SBM-G, 50 soak pits through MGNREGA, and digging of 62 soak pits under 15<sup>th</sup>FC was progressing for grey water management. Several insanitary toilets are retrofitted, four community compost pits are constructed, and individual compost pits/vermicompost are constructed through Agriculture/Horticulture departments
- Kanchenjunga, one of the SHGs, received a national award.
- Numbers of IHHL (Individual Household Latrine) are provided for households separated from joint families and those who come under the BPL category at the GPU so far. Three sanitary community complexes have been constructed so far for these women

#### **Other Initiatives: Child Empowerment**

Gram Panchayat has its own well-equipped Child Empowerment Centre facilitated by SIRDPR. Gram Panchayat also has its own Bal Panchayats/Bal Parliament, which is based on the concept of providing children with a suitable democratic platform to directly engage with development agencies and local self-government to elicit their attention and action on issues that concern them. Right after the inauguration of CEC at the GP, committees were constituted, providing several orientations and capacity-building training programmes. An election was conducted where 24 members were elected via the sociocracy method. Mrs. Sweta Subba, aged 14 years, was elected as Prime Minister, Mr. Aleep Gurung, 14 years, as Deputy Prime Minister, followed by 22 ministers, of which 18 are the ministers of each Sustainable Development Goal (17 SDGs and a proposed goal- All Right for All Children).



Under the chairmanship of the elected Prime Minister, two Bal Sabhas were conducted; their ideas and thoughts regarding Sustainable Development Goals are beyond imagination and in-depth.

## Vision

The GP focus on minimising the time frame for grievance redressal exclusively in family cases. The GP resolved to create awareness about the ill-effects of alcohol through the GPU and put a hold on the illegal sale of alcohol in the GPU, which emerged as an issue during the Mahila Sabhas.







## Case Study 9

### Empowering Women and Children through Good Governance



## **Overview**

29- Lungchok- Kamarey Gram Panchayat Unit is one of the six GPUs under Melli Block Administrative Centre in Sikkim.

According to popular belief, Aai Nanda Rai, a resident of Sumbuk Village and a veteran of World war II ( Burma front 1940), decided to come on vacation. En route to his native place, he hired a young porter from the nearby Teesta Bazar. After spending his holidays, Aai Nanda Rai left for his duty. The porter he had brought along did not return and stayed in Sumbuk. He worked as a domestic helper and a shepherd for Swarup Nanda Rai.

With the passage of time, the young porter grew up and came to be known by the name of Indra Jong Tamla Rai. It is said that Indra Jong Rai started to live in Gopeni Forest as its custodian based on the direction of the Forest Department.

In the next few years, Indra Jong was given the additional responsibility of Bhasmey forest in Sadam. A pond was sighted in the Bhasmey forest, where he is believed to have stayed. That very pond is now named as ‘Tamley Pokhori’ after the name of its caretaker Indra Jong Tamla Rai.

The stories ‘Tamley Pokhori’ have been narrated by septuagenarian Shri R B Rai, former Panchayat and a resident of Lungchok. An avid social worker, Shri Rai impresses on us that the above narrative is based on his interactions with following persons like Karma Dhan Lama (Melli), Ram Bhadur Rai (Lungchok), Mani Raj Rai (Lungchok), Bisupati Rai (Sumbuk).

The Gram Panchayat unit came into its existence with the name Lungchok- Kamarey. In Lepcha language, ‘‘Lung’’ means Stone, ‘‘Chok’’ means fixed and ‘‘Kamery’’ means a type of soil found in the locality.

The GP consists of six wards, viz. Lungchok, Lungchok Rolu, Mungram, Kamery, Belbotey and Tharpu.

## **Demographic and infrastructure**

Lungchok- Kamarey has a total of 454 households with a population of 1929, of which 1012 are males and 917 are females. The GP has a village administrative centre, two Junior High Schools, a Primary School, six Anganwadi centres, four milk collection centres, a clubhouse and a horticulture centre.

The GP office is housed in a concrete building with all facilities, like individual cabins for the elected representatives and functionaries with the single window system, common facility centre with all computer-related works, library facilities, a conference hall with AVA facilities, a meeting hall with the capacity of 300 people, and well-equipped kitchen facilities. The livelihood in the GPU is based on agriculture and animal husbandry. Rural tourism is also blooming in the areas for the last few years.

## **Visionary Panchayat of Lungchok-Kamery GP- Mr. Deoraj Rai**

Deoraj Rai, 43, has served this GP since 2017 as Gram Panchayat President and was elected as a Zilla Panchayat member in the 2022 Sikkim Panchayat Poll. He graduated from North Bengal University and is a highly motivated and dedicated president. Under his dynamic leadership, this GP received National Awards on Good Governance for two consecutive years. In addition to his professional life, he is a very hardworking farmer who owns a large number of milch cows and cultivates organic vegetables on his farm. Deoraj Rai is a very supportive and cooperative leader to his fellow PRI representatives and functionaries. He worked towards women's emancipation to such an extent that he established a Women Empowerment Centre, the first of its kind in the State, besides constituting a committee to look into the women harassment cases at workplace, which was not in place in Gram Panchayat offices anywhere in Sikkim.

### **Creating Linkages and Monitoring**

A social Audit cum vigilance committee and an internal monitoring committee to assess the performance of the GP were formed. The timely social auditing is done by internal and external bodies. The GP works closely with the health department to ensure that the residents stay healthy.

### **Cases of Violence against women and Education in GP**

Very negligible issues and cases related to violence against women are reported. Education is the top priority sector of the Gram Panchayat unit by allocating funds to support the sector. The literacy rate in the GPU is almost 90 per cent.

### **Social Security, water and sanitation facilities**

The GPU worked on the water security sector and connected all the domestic households with tap water connections. All the individual households are provided with sanitary toilets with water facilities. A women empowerment centre was established to assist women, and a women's help desk was also introduced at GPK.

### **Infrastructure for gender equality**

- Women Empowerment Centre
- Women Help Desk at GPK
- Common facility centre with all computer-related works

- Library Facilities
- Conference Hall with AV facilities
- Meeting hall with a capacity of 300 people
- Well-equipped kitchen facilities

## Processes

### Participatory GPDP - Integration of Mahila Sabha resolutions in GPDP

Processes towards women-friendly GPU began with 1<sup>st</sup> ever GPDP (Gram Panchayat Development Plan) convened after Gram Panchayat members were sworn in in 2017. The State Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (SIRDPR) suggested the newly elected Panchayats to convene Mahila Sabha and incorporate the plans being proposed by Sabha in Gram Panchayat Development Plan. The Gram Panchayat, headed by Deoraj Rai, always ensured the convening of Mahila Sabha prior to Gram Sabha, incorporated the plan proposed and felt the need to consider discussions during Mahila Sabha. The Panchayat President, other elected representatives, and the functionaries of GP also attended Mahila Sabha all the time. In the end, the Panchayat president gave the keynote address, wherein they ensured to include the proposals/demands placed by the Mahila Sabha members in the GPDP. All the resolutions were given top priority.

### Mobilisation and motivation of women in attending Mahila Sabha

The women were motivated to attend the Mahila Sabha by completely trusting them to conduct it themselves. The resolution passed by the Mahila Sabha was incorporated into the GPDP. A Women Help Desk and a Women Empowerment Centre were established. The MS was conducted at the convenience of women. Self-Help Group and its Federation were entrusted to mobilise womenfolk and given due impetus to draw plans and programmes necessary to attract womenfolk and ensure their welfare and development.

### Situation of GP before conducting the Mahila Sabha

The participation of Mahila members in the GP level meeting was insignificant. Man folks of the GP dominated the Gram Sabhas, and plans formulated were largely benefitted few contractors. Very less or almost zero impetus was given to women and other vulnerable sections of society other than those who fall under the ambit of certain benefits like Old Age Pension, Subsistence Allowance, Widow Pension, etc. Under GPDP also, very few plans were being adopted for the benefit of the women.

## **Practices of Gram Panchayat for women empowerment**

- Establishment of Women Empowerment Centre
- Women Help Desk
- GP was conducting Mahila Sabha prior to the intervention of UNICEF with the technical assistance of SIRDPR Sikkim.
- Awareness of Domestic Violence
- IEC on Women's Rights

## **Reaction of women after attending the Mahila Sabha**

The reaction of the women members was very positive and motivating. The Sabha concentrated on women's welfare and was a big platform to voice the issues related to women in a proper and well-structured manner.

## **Bal Sabha and Behavioural change**

The Gram Panchayat conducted a number of Bal Sabhas in the last two years, and a ward-wise Bal Sakhi was appointed to assist the Children. Using the GP fund, a Child Empowerment Centre was established. A Children's Help Desk was introduced in the Village administrative Centre to address and assist the children visiting their GP. 29- Lungchok Kamerey GP boasts of becoming the first GP in the country to appoint Bal Panchayat Prime Minister as one-day Panchayat President. The GPU conducted several talent hunt programmes for the children. The GP included the plans related to child development in GPDP, established the fitness centre for the children and adopted ICDS centres as the model ICDS with the fund of the GP.

## **Motivation to women to attend Mahila Sabha**

The women were motivated to attend the Mahila Sabha by completely trusting them to conduct Mahila Sabha by themselves. The resolution passed by the Mahila Sabha was included in the GPDP. A Women Help Desk and Women's Empowerment Centre were established. The MS was conducted at the convenience of women.

## **Notable achievements through Mahila Sabhas**

The women were empowered through the Mahila Sabha. The boost in confidence level after

the Mahila Sabha gave them the power to raise their voice for women's issues. They placed the demands and included them in GPDP, and as per their demands, the works were executed in the field.

### **Major proposals came up through Mahila Sabha on village development:**

- Training on various livelihood options like rural homestay and animal husbandry for women.
- Training on soap making and phenyl making is to be done through GPDP
- Training on Public Speaking and Leadership Development to be conducted.
- The testing of water at the source to mouth to be done
- Testing to source water to be done every three months by the women representatives of VWSC for quality monitoring.
- Cleanliness drive at sources and Dhara Vikas intervention area to be done.
- The desilting of the recharge structures at recharge zones of the different water sources to be done by the women every year.

### **Issues discussed during Mahila Sabhas**

The needs, concerns, problems and priorities of the women, such as training on livelihood options like rural tourism, soap making, tailoring, knitting, poultry farming, and cattle rearing, concerns like IEC on women's rights, women's legal aid services, training on leadership, and public speaking, and problems like water scarcity and priorities like water sufficient GP and clean and green GP, were discussed in the Mahila Sabha.

### **Plan Formulation and GPDP**

The women are well aware of GPDP preparation and participated in PRA exercises at the ward level. They placed the proposals at the ward level to prepare draft plans. The women representatives are given a place in Gram Planning Forum. They participate in the Gram Sabha to pass the GPDP annual plan. During the entire process, the women representatives and members are involved.



## Challenges, support and perspectives

One of the main challenges faced by the GP is the low-income level of the people and it is making efforts to stop young people from migrating to urban areas in search of employment and livelihood options. The line departments are working in isolation, not conversing with the GPs and ZPs. The main support for the GPs is SIRDPR and the BAC. There is a vast scope for partnerships with other institutions and organisations.

## Awareness Camps and Campaigns

The GP conducted awareness camps on the following issues:

- Women's Rights
- Child Rights
- Substance Abuse
- Early Marriage
- Climate Change
- Dhara Vikash
- SC/ST welfare
- Zero Waste
- Water Conservation
- Family Farming

## The outcome of Gender-Friendly initiatives

Special Gram Sabha, on the Occasion of “International Women’s Day” organised on the theme of “Women in Leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in Covid-19 World”, duly passed the following resolutions:

- i. VAC-Internal Committee (IC)-to receive and redress the Sexual Harassment complaints at workplace.
- ii. Institution of Gram Panchayat Level “Gender Empowerment & Women Welfare Committee” (GE&WWC)-to fight against Domestic Violence and Gender Discrimination.
- iii. Sabha also took the post-facto approval of the Bal Panchayat ordinance, i.e.
  - a. Awareness Programme on Child Rights and Safety
  - b. Awareness Programme on Drug Abuse
  - c. Organisation of Bal Mela, etc.

The GP passed the Bal Panchayat ordinance during the One-day Panchayat President Programme held on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

### Reactions and suggestions from women for effective implementations of Mahila Sabha

The women suggested conducting Mahila Sabha every three months to discuss their issues. A quarterly review was also proposed to assess the progress of the plans and resolutions passed by the Mahila Sabha.









## Case Study 10

### Gender-Friendly Village



The Amballoor Gram Panchayat falls under Ernakulam district of Kerala, has a total population of 25628, comprising 12,560 males and 13,068 females. The GP has 16 wards, of which eight are women-headed.

### **GP situation before 2017**

Prior to 2017, the GP witnessed an increase in the incidence of violence against women and children while the grievance redressal system (Jagratha Samithi/Vigilant committee) remained inactive. Amballoor lacked women-friendly public places, and their mobility in public places, especially during the night, was restricted. Public institutions were also not women-friendly. The projects incorporated in the Women Component Plan of the annual plan of the Panchayat were not so beneficial to the women's community. The sanitation facility for girl students in schools were poor. The participation of women in employment showed a decline whereas insecurity at workplace escalated. Altogether, the involvement of women in the public sphere was a low key affair.

A Grievance Redressal Committee (GRC) was formed in 2017 and a Community Women Facilitator was appointed in the GP. A training session on gender-friendly GP was organised at IRTC Palakkad. The GP started collecting secondary data from schools, Saksharatha Kendra, Krishi Bhavan, Anganwadi, police station, Arts and Sports Clubs, Kudumbasree, political parties, Village office, Assessment Register, Women Component Plan, 2011 Census report, milk societies, veterinary hospital, hospitals, etc. Focus group discussions were conducted with widows, divorcees, traditional workers, housemaids, employees, adolescent girls, entrepreneurs, etc. Workshops and seminars were conducted at the Panchayat level and the GP released a policy document.

The grievance redressal system, namely Jagratha Samithi, was formed at the ward and Panchayat levels by installing complaint boxes. Jagratha Samithi offices were opened in all Anganwadis and regular monthly meetings of the Samithis are ensured. It received 79 complaints and action was taken on all of them. Legal awareness classes in all wards are completed and the topics include narcotic usage, Jagratha Samithis, Gender equality, Thulyatha sangamam module, etc. Also, several self-defence training sessions for girls, such as Taekwondo, were conducted.

Toilet facilities for women, high mast and mini mast lights, and waiting sheds were arranged at the main junctions. Breastfeeding rooms were installed in public institutions. Night walk for women has been encouraged to instil confidence in them. The GP ensures sufficient number of toilets for girl students, distribution of sanitary pads and installation of incinerators in all schools. Besides launching gender help desks in high school and higher

secondary school, Gender Clubs have been started in all schools.

The GP ensured participation of women in all working groups and development seminars. Auditing of the Women Component Plan ensured optimum utilisation of resources and the quality of WCP has been improved. SHGs were provided with skill training and a permanent training centre has been started.

## **Kudumbasree**

Kudumbashree is the poverty eradication and women empowerment programme implemented by the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) of the Government of Kerala. Kudumbashree is essentially a community network that covers the entire State of Kerala. It consists of a three-tier structure with Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) as primary level units, Area Development Societies (ADS) at the ward level, and Community Development Societies (CDS) at the local government level. It is arguably one of the largest women's networks in the world.

The GP has a total of 3264 households covered under Kudumbasree with 220 NHGs. The total thrift is Rs. 3.54 crore, and the revolving loan is Rs. 11.9 crore. The GP has 82 Joint Liabilities grouped under Kudumbasree.

## **Current situation in the GP**

The GP has a permanent effective grievance redressal system and a permanent counselling centre. The occurrence of atrocities against women has come down, and public places and institutions have turned women-friendly. The quality of WCP projects has improved and schools have sufficient sanitation facilities. The society is more aware of gender issues and women's self-confidence has improved manifold. Participation of women increased in public activities and skill training has also increased. Gender issues are being discussed in schools, which has resulted in students recognising gender issues. Financial empowerment is at its peak with thrift, loan, skill training, entrepreneurship training, service of micro enterprise consultant & industries intern, JLGs, farming and WCP Projects.

## **Vision**

Mr. Mukundan, a resource person says, "The Panchayat wants to make Amballoor a women-friendly and child-friendly village, and desires to bring down gender inequality to the minimum. Women should be empowered so as to have a major role in the development activities of the Panchayat as well as active participation in public sphere. They should pioneer the poverty alleviation and elimination activities. No woman or child should be deprived of their rights and privileges. They should live with dignity and freedom."









## **ABOUT UNICEF**

Works in the world's toughest places to reach the most disadvantaged children and adolescents and to protect the rights of every child, everywhere. Across more than 190 countries and territories UNICEF does whatever it takes to help children survive, thrive and fulfil their potential, from early childhood through adolescence.

The world's largest provider of vaccines, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, safe water and sanitation, quality education and skill building, HIV prevention and treatment for mothers and babies, and the protection of children and adolescents from violence and exploitation in India, UNICEF is dedicated to advancing the rights of all girls and boys, especially the most disadvantaged. They work across India to save children's lives, help them fulfil their potential and defend their rights.

### **According to their Mission Statement:**

- UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential.
- UNICEF is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and strives to establish children's rights as enduring ethical principles and international standards of behaviour towards children.
- UNICEF insists that the survival, protection and development of children are universal development imperatives that are integral to human progress.
- UNICEF mobilises political will and material resources to help countries, particularly developing countries, ensure a "First call for children and to build their capacity to form appropriate policies and deliver services for children and their families.
- UNICEF is committed to ensuring special protection for the most disadvantaged children - victims of war, disasters, extreme poverty, all forms of violence and exploitation and those with disabilities.
- UNICEF responds in emergencies to protect the rights of children. In coordination with United Nations partners and humanitarian agencies, UNICEF makes its unique facilities for rapid response available to its partners to relieve the suffering of children and those who provide their care.
- UNICEF is non-partisan and its cooperation is free of discrimination. In everything it does, the most disadvantaged children and the countries in greatest need have priority.
- UNICEF aims, through its country programmes, to promote the equal rights of women and girls and to support their full participation in the political, social and economic development of their communities.
- UNICEF works with all its partners towards the attainment of the sustainable human development goals adopted by the world community and the realisation of the vision of peace and social progress enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

