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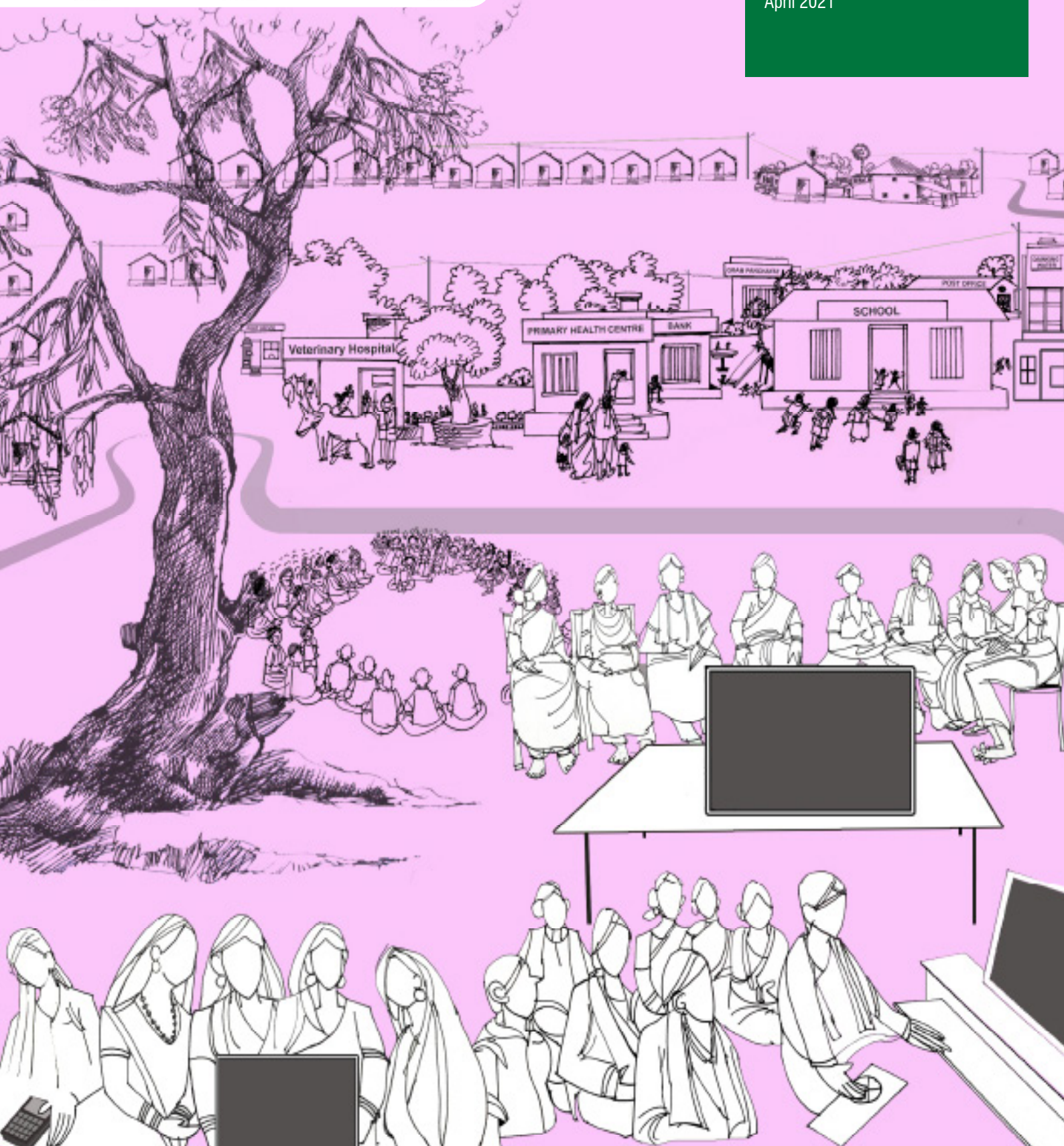


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Empowering Rural India through Digitisation of Panchayats



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Empowering Rural India through Digitisation of Panchayats

The majority of the Indian Population lives in rural areas. As of 2019, around 66 per cent of the total Indian population resides in villages. Rural India is governed by using a three-tier Panchayati Raj system consisting of Gram Panchayat (at the lowest level), Block/Mandal Panchayat (at intermediate level) and Zilla Panchayat (at district level). There are 630 Zilla Panchayats, 6,614 Block Panchayats and 2,53,163 Gram Panchayats in India. Rural India is facing a lot of development challenges and needs a focused, sustained and integrated approach to address them. The existence of sharp inequalities and information asymmetry further aggravates the situation at the grassroots level. India cannot be called a developed nation until its rural areas are developed and become part of its growth story.

The development of rural India should be done in an inclusive and integrated manner. The principles of social justice provide the basic tenants of development which include access to resources, equity, rights and

responsibility, diversity, priority for the poor and vulnerable, principle of subsidiarity, participation and promotion of peace. The contour of policies made by the government (both State and Union), for a long time, have been reflecting the principles of social justice either conspicuously or indistinctly. To operationalise the same, the government is focused on

Technology is the greatest equaliser that can improve the quality of a person's life through the click of a mouse button.

equitable distribution of resources, inclusive planning and last-mile service delivery. To realise the above aspects of governance, technology plays a crucial role. Technology is the greatest equaliser that can improve the quality of a person's life through the click of a mouse button. Technology plays a level playing field in improving the accessibility and delivery of services for rich and poor citizens alike. For example, with the advent of the internet, students have access to

a lot of educational, infotainment and other learning materials almost for free. Technology is constantly evolving to remove barriers that emerge due to a person's social characteristics, geographic location, physical or sensory abilities. Hence, it is an irrefutable fact that increasing the penetration of technology and digital footprint helps in achieving the empowerment and social justice.

Need for Digitisation of rural India

The Indian economy is predominantly rural with over two-thirds of its population and workforce residing in rural areas. Rural India contributes a substantial part of the total net value added in many sectors, with an overall 46 per cent contribution to our national income. With a population of 833 million people residing in Indian villages, it is projected that, by 2050, more than half of India's population will still be rural, despite rising urbanisation. Thus, the growth and development of the rural economy are imperative for the inclusive development and overall growth of the country. Technology and digitisation

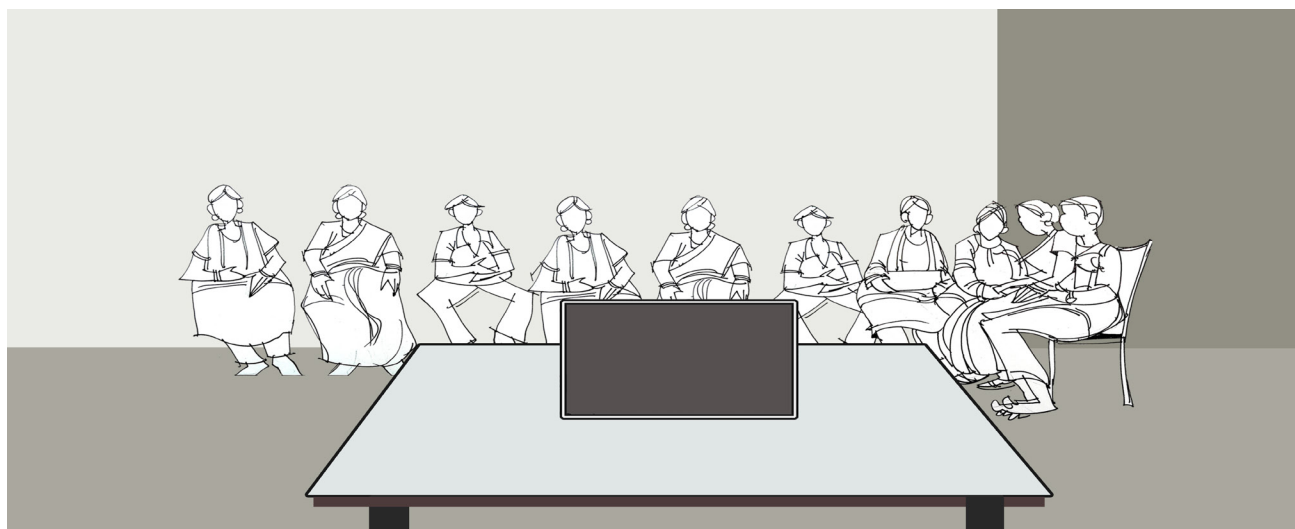


Illustration: Shri V G Bhat

facilitate the access and availability of more and more services and products to rural people. Digitisation also addresses the issues of gaps in service delivery and overall governance.

Benefits of Digitisation of Rural India

1. Increased Transparency and Accountability

Information asymmetry, especially in the functioning of government at the grassroots level and entitlements, has highly prevailed across rural India. Through digitisation, the information will be accessible and available for all the citizens, thereby removing information asymmetry. This will improve transparency in the local government as citizens are empowered to make the functionaries accountable.

2. Improved Service Delivery

Availing government services is an arduous task involving time, effort and

money. With the increased digitisation various government services like G2C (Government to Citizen), G2G (Government to Government), G2B (Government to Business) and B2C (Business to Customers/Citizens) can be availed with the click of a button.

3. Data digitisation

Data is crucial in planning and policy formulation. It also plays a crucial role in monitoring and evaluation of any scheme, programme and system. It is quite common that most of the times, data required at the GP level is not available. This has become one of the biggest impediments to quality planning at the grassroots level. Digitisation of data involves capturing important information digitally and preserving it for future access. This helps in evidence-based planning, assessing the performance and monitoring of initiatives.

4. Increased access

Accessibility to services and products of rural people will be increased with improved digitisation. Various aspects of rural life will be reshaped by the improved access to e-governance, banking and financial services, educational and healthcare services, mobile/DTH recharge, e-ticketing services and even online shopping.

5. Increased awareness

With the improved digitisation awareness of various policies, schemes and benefits will be increased among the rural population. Improved digitisation will also increase the awareness of various rights and entitlements.

6. Strengthening grassroots planning

Evidence-based planning is the key aspect of holistic and sustainable development of rural areas. To facilitate evidence-based planning at the grassroots level, accessibility to data and capturing the views of various stakeholders are highly crucial. Strong digitisation will provide tools and techniques in capturing the data, analysis of data and arriving at insights from data. This will, in turn, help in formulating data-driven plans



A training programme in progress (file photo)

reflecting the real development needs at the grassroots level. Centre for Panchayati Raj, Decentralised Planning & Social Service Delivery, NIRDPR under Action Research Project (ARP) is attempting to create ARPITA, a tool which will help in the digitisation of primary data at the GP level which will help in the preparation of data-driven Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP).

What does a digital Panchayat have?

A digital Gram Panchayat contains a facility for data digitisation and ensuring speedy delivery of all Panchayat-level services. Common Service Centres (CSC) maintain records of all Gram Panchayats in digital format, besides supporting Gram Panchayats in conducting various surveys. CSCs will also work as digital literacy centres for all elected representatives of Gram Panchayats. GP using platforms like Service Plus in the delivery of government services to its constituents. People of the GP are using online banking, online shopping and digital payments to buy products and services.

Efforts by Government of India

1. Digital India Programme

Digital India is a flagship programme of the Government of India with a vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy and also to push for the digitisation of Rural India. Digital India has the following major programmes:

- i) To provide broadband highway, broadband connectivity across India, especially in rural India.
- ii) To develop universal access to mobile connectivity across rural India.
- iii) To provide public internet access through Common Service Centres
- iv) To provide e-governance by transforming government through technology.

Akodara: India's first digital village

Akodara is a village in Sabarkantha district of Gujarat, India. This village is located 64 kilometres away from the State capital Gandhi Nagar. According to Indian Census 2011, the village has 236 houses with the population of 1,191 individuals, of which 538 are males and 653 are females. The literacy rate is 91.69 per cent. A total of 98.50 per cent workers were involved in major livelihood activities. Akodara village has received the tag of 'first digital village of India'. The financial transactions in the village are done through digital modes, namely SMS, net-banking and debit cards, etc. In 2015, ICICI Bank adopted this village under the Digital Village Project and has made it cashless by using digital technology. The bank provided training to the village households to make them familiar with the digital technology in order to reduce dependency on the cash-based transactions.

The village has almost 100 per cent financial literacy. Villagers used to have mobiles and now they comfortably use mobile banking for all financial transactions. Akodara village also has its own official website. All the financial transactions related to their livelihoods, sale of proceeds and other money-related matters are done using digital mediums. All the schools from primary to higher secondary level in this village are fully equipped with smart boards, computer systems and tablets. The villagers use online mechanism for availing services from government including entitlements like pensions. Not only the payment system has been digitalised but, services such as education, agriculture and other basic facilities have also been made digital. The concept of digital village was developed by ICICI Bank based on three concepts: Cashless, Connectivity and Comprehensiveness.

- v) To provide electronic delivery of services through e-Kranti.
- vi) To provide information to all through digital mechanisms.
- vii) To promote electronic manufacturing.
- viii) To create employment through information technology through village level entrepreneurs.

2. National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM)

Digital literacy is the ability of individuals and communities to understand and use digital technologies for meaningful actions in real-life situations. Digitally literate persons would be able to operate computers/digital access devices (like tablets, smartphones, etc.), send and receive emails, browse the

internet, access government services, search for information, undertake cashless transactions, etc., and hence, use IT to actively participate in the process of nation-building. National Digital Literacy Mission or the Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (DISHA) or National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM) aims to impart IT training to 52.5 lakh persons, including anganwadi and ASHA workers and authorised ration dealers in all the States/UTs across the country so that the non-IT literate citizens are trained to become IT literate to enable them to actively and effectively participate in the democratic and developmental process and also to enhance their livelihood.

ARPITA (Action Research Project IT Application) under Project for Creating Model GP Clusters

The proposed application will be integrated with a baseline data collection interface with the reports and dashboards based on the indicators suggested by the Project. The application would provide a dashboard and reports on the progress of each of the Gram Panchayats, their activity status, Young Fellow's engagement and their task/weekly and monthly plan management. The application will have a Young Fellow's tracking module. This module will enable ARP to track the progress of each of the Young Fellows on the activities which they need to execute towards providing the handholding support. The details of the periodic activities of FYs have been listed under the Activity module. The GP tracking module will be integrated into the application to track each GP's progress based on the progress of ERs participation and their involvement in the governance of GPs. The application will also provide master data management (Location, Gram Panchayats and Development Framework. The master data will include GPs' and ERs' profile, etc). The application captures baseline data of GP which is collected through PLE exercise. The application will also capture all the details of the capacity building and training information on the development of institutional capacities of GPs.

3. Common Service Centres

CSCs serve as one-stop front-end e-services delivery points of government and other services in rural India. This CSCs provide high quality and cost-effective video, voice and data content and services in the areas of e-governance, education, health, telemedicine and entertainment services. A highlight of the CSCs is that it will offer web-enabled e-governance services in rural areas, including application forms, certificates and utility payments such as electricity, telephone and water bills. To leverage the connectivity of high-speed internet at the Panchayat level, the Government of India is now contemplating colocation of CSCs in GP buildings to facilitate the quality of services.

4. Digital Village Scheme

The primary objective of the Digital Village programme is to support the techno-economic viability of digital technology, introduce the projects for

efficient applications in village areas and capacity building activities on information technology systems. Digital Village scheme aims to integrate the services across sectors like agriculture, health, education, etc., and provide a seamless experience to the citizens.

Challenges in Digitisation of GPs

Following are the major challenges in achieving the digitisation of Panchayats:

1. Lack of Infrastructure

According to the data by Government of India, till July 2016, there were 55,619 villages in India, where there is no mobile network. The situation might have been improved since then but there is a long road ahead. The problem is more pronounced in North-Eastern States where the accessibility is very low. Under RGSA, MoPR is providing computers to all the GPs where there is no such facility. Bridging the infrastructure gap across rural India is the biggest challenge in achieving the digitisation of GPs.

2. Lack of Financial Support

Providing infrastructure alone is not sufficient unless it is put to use for achieving the objectives of digitisation of GPs. Under the 14th Finance Commission, there was a provision for administrative expenses under which GPs use to employ a computer operator who will be working on the computer facility. But 15th Finance Commission has removed such provision for administrative expenses forcing some GPs to dispose of the existing computer operators. The co-location of CSCs should address this issue.

3. Lack of Digital Literacy

A lot of rural households along with elected representatives are not digitally literate to explore and exploit the digitalisation efforts. It is highly imperative that digital literacy should be provided to all the rural households as envisioned under NDLM.

Conclusion

It is quite evident that the digitisation of GPs will help in addressing the majority of issues related to development in rural India. A digitally empowered GP will help in providing good governance through improved service delivery and better transparency and accountability mechanisms. This will further empower citizens through reduced information asymmetry and barriers to accessibility. Despite the possibility of transformation, the empowerment of digitisation of GPs is a long road ahead given various challenges and hurdles in realising the same.

Dr. Anjan Kumar Bhanja

Associate Professor, CPRDP&SSD &

Shri Vamsi Krishna Nukala

Senior Programme Management

Consultant, Model GP Clusters,

CPRDP&SSD, NIRDPR

Cover page design: **Shri V.G. Bhat**

3-day online ToT on Promoting Women Entrepreneurship through Community Resource Persons (CRPs)

The creation of a cadre of mentors for entrepreneurship promotion is a well-accepted methodology and has been included under various livelihood programmes, including the Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP) under DAY-NRLM, which focusses on the Community Resource Persons (CRPs)-led entrepreneurship promotion. These CRPs are trained and prepared to act as local level mentors for supporting rural women to start their small businesses and/or to scale up their existing businesses. These CRPs are women from the community, who are trained in business skills and on the backward and forward linkages and psychosocial aspects of women entrepreneurship.

The success of the CRP-led mentorship model lies on the methodology and curriculum adopted for imparting training to these CRPs. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent prolonged lockdown have thrown challenges for micro and small enterprises sector, including SHGs. These enterprises witnessed varying degree of business closure, loss of customer clientele, inadequate working capital, declining financial support from formal institutions, huge unsold stock and delayed payment of dues. The women entrepreneurs faced disproportionately high degrees of these difficulties as compared to their male counterparts. Both aspiring and existing women entrepreneurs also witnessed personal, social and psycho-social problems. Thus, there is a need to improve the training and capacity development of these CRPs with a regular interval to appraise them about the changes in the policies and programmes and also to impart them new skills to facilitate them to implement both on-farm and non-farm livelihood programmes more effectively. In this background, an online ToT

programme was conducted by Centre for Entrepreneurship Development & Financial Inclusion and Centre for Gender Studies and Development, National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Hyderabad to inform and capacitate master trainers as well as the CRPs and other rural development stakeholders who are associated with entrepreneurship development programmes and schemes on effective approaches towards promotion of women entrepreneurship.

About 70 participants from 21 States and UTs attended this ToT. They were meticulously shortlisted from 250 applications received through the online registration process. The participants were faculty members from SIRDs, ETCs, RSETIs, officials and young professionals from SRLM, bank officers, CRPs and representatives from NGOs and CSR affiliates. The following sessions were arranged to discuss various dimensions of women entrepreneurship through the lens of CRPs:- 1) Sensitising participants on various concepts relating to gender 2) reimagining women entrepreneurship development in rural areas through CRPs 3) challenges of women entrepreneurship drawing from field examples and ongoing models 4) towards creating an enabling

environment or ecosystem for women enterprise promotion 5) positioning women in value chain analysis 6) entrepreneurship development among rural women through FPOs 7) psychosocial dimensions of women entrepreneurship 8) Stree Nidhi: an innovative model of financial services to SHGs. In addition, all recent programmes and schemes were also discussed. Due care was taken to conduct each session on an interactive platform and participants were encouraged not only to ask questions but also to share their experiences. Detailed online feedback was collected from the participants on Training Management Portal (TMP). Based on the feedback from the participants and external resource persons, it may be concluded that the said programme was satisfactory in all respects. The objectives and goals envisaged in the programme were duly realised.

The three-day online ToT was jointly coordinated by Dr. Partha Pratim Sahu, Associate Professor, Centre for Entrepreneurship Development & Financial Inclusion (CEDFI) and Dr. Ruchira Bhattacharya, Assistant Professor, Centre for Gender Studies and Development (CGSD), NIRDPR.



What our participants said:

All the sessions were quite interesting and intriguing. It would be better, if we can get some case studies/successful women entrepreneurs, with whom we can interact live during the session!"

Ms. Deepsikha,

Project officer, Ambuja Cement Foundation (CSR)

We got a lot of ideas from this programme. Specific programme may be organised on rural tourism and homestay, focussing on managerial skill, marketing skill and crisis management skill, and how to survive in a pandemic time.

Dr. R. Babu,

Asst. Professor Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies (KITTS)

I have seen many eye-opening sessions and I found these sessions useful for us who are working on ground. Longer and interactive sessions may be organised on financial inclusion for CRPs and women entrepreneurs.

Shri Ramesh N,

Senior Associate, Deshpande Foundation.

*These are personal views

Role of Panchayat in Menstrual Health Management



A slide from the training programme

Menstrual hygiene is a subject matter of deep concern in India where women, especially in rural areas, face challenges in acquiring hygienic absorbents and develop health risks. Menstruation is associated with the onset of puberty in girls and many a time, it comes with rules, restrictions, isolation and changed expectations from the girls by the society. This attitude towards girls such as restrictions on their self-expression, schooling, mobility and freedom has far reaching consequences on the mindset of women. Lack of adequate information on sanitation and hygiene facilities, particularly in public places like schools, workplaces or health centres can pose a major obstacle to women and girls.

Sanitary pads are used by less than 18 per cent of Indian women. The latest National Family and Health Survey found that 58 per cent of young Indian women (15-24 years) use a hygienic method of protection (mostly sanitary pads), a significant increase from the 12 per cent using pads. This is, no doubt, a consequence of greater attention to menstrual hygiene management over the past few years in India. But still, the process needs to be accelerated at grassroots. Panchayati Raj Institutions, especially, Gram Panchayat which is closer to people and its access to other

local institutions at village level, can be enhanced for Menstrual Health Management (MHM). Hence, a two-day workshop was organised by the Centre for Panchayati Raj, Decentralised Planning and Social service Delivery (CPRDP&SSD), National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Hyderabad from 15th -16th April, 2021.

In this workshop discussions were held on the ways to enhance the capabilities of Gram Panchayat in MHM and the activities that can be undertaken by the Panchayats to promote MHM and sanitary napkins among girls and women – 'Pad Kranti'. Also, a deliberation on how Gram Panchayats can help and facilitate Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and NGOs to promote Sanitary Napkin Enterprise (SNE) which can make affordable napkins was also held.

Dr. C. Kathiresan, Associate Professor & Head, CPRDP&SSD, rendered the welcome address and Dr. Vanishree Joseph, Assistant Professor, CPRDP&SSD gave an introduction to the workshop, explaining the need for enhancing the Panchayat to work on MHM. Ms. Rekha Yadav, Joint Secretary, MoPR inaugurated the workshop. Padma Shri awardee Dr. Arunachalam Muruganantham known as 'India's Menstrual Man' and 'Pad Man of India' participated in this workshop and shared his experience in promoting

menstrual health and suggested how Panchayat can play a crucial role in MHM. In a country where menstruation is a taboo subject even amongst women, he came forward with an innovation that opened dialogues and conversations regarding the same.

Ms. Ina Patricia Jurga, International Coordinator Menstrual Hygiene Day from WASJ United also participated in this workshop and shared her experience and recommendations for MHM education. Dr. Ramesh Sakthivel, Associate Professor & Head of Centre for Innovations and Appropriate Technologies for Skills and Jobs, NIRDPR gave an insight about the low-cost incinerators which can be installed in rural areas from household level to community level at large. Ms. Sohini Rohilla, Director of Pratistha shared her experiences in working with rural people in remote areas and raised her concern about the prevalence of gender discrimination and negligence of MHM.

The second day of the workshop started with an elaborate presentation by Shri Sampath Raj, Advocacy Manager, Gramalaya on menstrual health issues faced by women. Ms. Anuradha Joshi, Sarpanch of Kodriya Gram Panchayat, Madhya Pradesh talked about the initiatives taken at the Panchayat level and setting up of SNE.

Dr. Ruchira Bhattacharya, Assistant Professor, Centre for Gender Studies and Development, NIRDPR shared her research findings on menstrual health behaviour, attitude, practices among women in Rangareddy district, Telangana. Finally, Dr. R. Ramesh, Associate Professor & Head of Centre, Centre for Rural Infrastructure, NIRDPR talked about menstrual health waste management and how that can be taken by Panchayat.

This workshop gave an insight about how Panchayat can work on the issue of MHM and the following points emerged:

1. Information, education and communication (IEC) strategy for Menstrual Health Management:

One of the main reasons why menstruation is a taboo and menstruation hygiene is neglected is gender inequality. Unequal rights given to men and women result in women's voices being ignored within households and communities and in development programmes. Due to cultural norms and stigmas, menstruating women are not allowed to use water and sanitation facilities and in some cases are even excluded from home as menstruation is considered impure. Therefore, comprehensive programmes that engage both men and women should be organised related to menstrual hygiene. This can be accomplished through integrated awareness, motivation and meditation programmes. Panchayats can organise such programmes with the help of Integrated Child Development Services supervisors, anganwadi workers, school teachers, health workers, ASHAs, NGOs and SHGs. It will provide girls and women with know-how on how to handle menstruation, improve knowledge of personal hygiene and boost confidence by addressing the unanswered questions through interactive and engaging training methods.

Similarly, men and boys should also be sensitised about what girls and women face during puberty, menstruation and menopause. Men can

support and influence women and girls in managing menstruation in households, schools, work and community through many roles as husbands, fathers, brothers, students, teachers, colleagues, leaders and policymakers.

2. Establishing menstrual hygiene facilities:

Menstrual facilities are associated with a safe and dignified menstruation, such as toilets and water infrastructure. Lack of toilets and water and if they are available, lack of bins for the disposal of sanitary pads and handwashing facilities for menstruating women to handle menstrual hygiene is a problem. In schools, due to lack of sanitary facilities, girls throw (dispose) their pads in toilets. In some cases, girls threw away their used menstrual clothes without washing them. Also, many were reported being absent from school due to lack of disposal system, broken lock/doors of toilets, lack of water tap, bucket and poor water supply. Gram Panchayats can make sure these are available at schools and other institutions.

Incinerators which are inexpensive and environment-friendly can also be procured or made available by Panchayats in schools and public institutions. This will help them to manage the menstrual waste.

3. Promoting SNE at grassroots and facilitating supply chain:

Increase in access to sanitary napkins can happen when napkins are available at an affordable price. Shri Arunachalam Muruganantham known as 'India's Menstrual Man' developed an inexpensive and environment-friendly machine which produces semi-biodegradable sanitary pads. Learning from his experience and from other low-cost mechanisms, Gram Panchayat can facilitate the production, sales and distribution of napkins by SHGs and other cottage industries. Gram Panchayats can conduct capacity building in collaboration with NGOs in terms of mechanisation, capacity to express the operational part, awareness generation, record keeping within the units, demand supply management, liaising with the customers, marketing issues and business plan.

4. Menstrual Waste Management:

Disposal of menstrual waste is a major concern as it affects the health and environment. There is a need for effective menstrual materials which need less and cost-effective management. The menstrual material was disposed according to the type of product used, cultural beliefs and location of disposal. Incinerators can be used according to eco-friendly guidelines as they create less pollution. They should be installed in schools, institutions and at community level. These are special kind of toilets in which a shoulder level chute was made in the usual deep pit. A chemical agent is added to the pit five times in a month to enhance the decomposition process of used napkins. Clay and cement incinerators used in villages of Gujarat by 'Vatsalya Foundation' is a welcome step in menstrual hygiene management. Ms. Swati designed this incinerator and named it 'Ashudhinashak' which burns many sanitary napkins at a time without creating any smoke. This eco-friendly and cheap innovation is appreciated by rural women who found it difficult to dispose them. Gram Panchayat can adapt any of these facilities and can promote institutions and households to use any one of the methods.

5. MHM for girls and women in vulnerable positions:

Inaccessible water, health and sanitation facilities in communities, schools, healthcare facilities and public places add to the long list of barriers that prevent girls and women with disabilities from participating fully in social and economic life. Menstruating girls and women with different disabilities may have different needs. Emergency-affected and displaced women and girls face additional challenges for maintaining menstrual health and hygiene. Transgenders face additional barriers to these facilities and services, particularly toilets. So, Panchayats should be sensitive to the needs of girls and women in the vulnerable position and address the need of transgenders and non-binary menstruators.

The i ad eZab was coordinated by Dr. Vanishree Joseph, Secretary, Professor, CPRDPSSD, NIRDPR.

Online Training of State Level Master Trainers (SLMT) and officials/ resource persons on preparation of District Panchayat Development Plan



Dr. Anjan Kumar Bhanja, Associate Professor, CPRDP&SSD (2nd from left) and team members interacting with the participants

The Centre for Panchayati Raj, Decentralised Planning and Social Service Delivery of NIRDPR, Hyderabad, organised an online training for State Level Master Trainers (SLMT) and officials/resource persons on preparation of District Panchayat Development Plan (DPDP) on 20th April, 2021. The fundamental objective of this programme was to orient the State Level Master Trainers and officials/resource persons on the context and importance of planning at the District Panchayat level and to understand the focus, steps and methodology of preparation of DPDP.

Dr. Anjan Kumar Bhanja, Associate Professor, CPRDP&SSD welcomed the participants. He briefly touched upon the need for DPDP, the planning cycle and the steps and processes involved in the preparation of DPDP. A total of 162 participants took part in this programme. They represented five States and one UT (Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Rajasthan, Telangana & Puducherry). The participants were higher officials of SIRDs (Assistant Director, Deputy Director, Faculties), Planning Officers, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), experts of decentralisation, and Block Development Officers.

Dr. Chandra Sekhar Kumar, Additional Secretary, MoPR, delivered the keynote address and highlighted the need for realising the autonomy of all three tiers of Panchayats. "We have matured the formulation of GPDP

and now it is time to focus on Block Panchayat Development Plan (BPDP) and DPDP," he emphasised and made several suggestions to ensure that the DPDP is implemented effectively. His suggestions include SDG complaint quality planning at all levels, integration of GPDP and BPDP issues in DPDP, the inclusion of service delivery at all the three tiers; own source revenue, e-governance at all three tiers and set up of control rooms at all levels.

The one-day training programme covered the following topics:

- i) Localising SDGs and their integration into DPDP
- ii) Collection and consolidation of data emanating from BDPDs, Census, SECC, MA, GIS, line departments, and primary data of District Panchayats
- iii) Utilisation of e-Gram Swaraj Portal of the MoPR for DPDP
- iv) Guiding Principles, Focus, Steps, and Methodology of Preparation of DPDP in an integrated, convergent and qualitative manner
- v) Challenges of BPDP-based DPDP and responsibilities of various institutions/ stakeholders.

The participants raised various questions during the interactions about integrating GPDP and BPDP issues in DPDP, usage of Mission Antyodaya Gap Report in eGramSwaraj portal, convergence of the schemes and inclusion of green goals in DPDP which were addressed in detail with examples by resource persons.

Participants expressed positive attitudes towards DPDP preparation in their respective States at the conclusion of the training programme. Shri Ramchandra Saini, Assistant Director, IGPRS Jaipur, observed that the online training was outstanding. "I learned more about DPDP. Its theory as well as implementing part was appreciable. The training helped a lot for uploading plans on the eGramSwaraj portal," he said. Another participant, Smt. Neelam Chhikara, Planning and Management Development expert from State Panchayat Resource Centre, Govt. of Haryana thanked the Additional Secretary, MoPR and the team of Model GP Cluster Project. "It will be more helpful for grassroots field officials to prepare an effective District Panchayat Development Plan in the future and as per the mandate of MoPR Govt. of India," she said. Dr. G. Anjaneyulu, Mandal Parishad Development Officer from Telangana, stated that the online training was outstanding. "The training programme was conducted in quite orderly fashion. The presentations made by Dr. A. K. Bhanja, Dr. S. Jyothis and Shri Dilip Kumar Pal inspired us a lot. We definitely should take the lead in the preparation of the best DPDPs in our districts" he added.

The programme was coordinated by Dr. Anjan Kumar Bhanja, Associate Professor, CPRDP&SSD, NIRDPR with support from Project Management Unit Team for Model GP Clusters.

Implementation of National Food Security Act (2013): Concurrent evaluation findings in Karnataka State



Photo for illustrative purpose

The main objective of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) is providing food and nutrition security to people by providing access to foodgrains at affordable prices. The Act provides for coverage of up to 75 per cent of the rural population and up to 50 per cent of the urban population for receiving subsidised foodgrains under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), thus covering about two-thirds of the population. The eligible persons are entitled to receive five kg of foodgrains per person per month at subsidised prices for rice/wheat/coarse grains.

The existing Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households, which constitute the poorest of the poor, will continue to receive 35 kg of foodgrains per household per month at highly subsidised prices. The main objective of the concurrent evaluation is to assess the overall progress of implementation of NFSA (2013) in Karnataka State to measure as well as monitor the change it has brought in, specifically at systematic level (assess and analyse the progress of implementation of various aspects of the NFSA 2013) and at the beneficiary level (evaluate the benefits of NFSA on the target groups to achieve the objectives of the NFSA). The concurrent evaluation was conducted in Karnataka State on a quarterly basis. Seventeen districts were covered (Ballari, Dakshina Kannada,

Mandya, Shivamogga, Bangalore Rural, Bangalore Urban, Chikkaballapur, Tumkur, Bijapur, Bhagalkot, Gadag, Haveri, Chamarajanagar, Chikkamangaluru, Hassan, Kodagu and Mysore) in four quarters. The allocation of total sample in Karnataka was based on the proportion of NSSO agro-climatic regions and population size of the State. A multi-stage sample design was adopted for the concurrent evaluation. Districts/cities/towns, villages/urban wards and households were from the first, second and third stages of sampling, respectively. Five villages/urban ward (where Fair Price Shop is located) from rural/urban areas in each district (based on urban rural distribution of NFSA population in the State) were randomly selected. In each village, 15 sample NFSA beneficiary households (i.e. 10 Priority Household-PHHs & 5 Antyodaya Anna Yojana -AAYs) were selected using a systematic random sampling method. The following are the key findings assessed and analysed through concurrent evaluation in four quarters during 2018-19 in Karnataka State.

I. Beneficiary selection and ration card management: Online mechanism for receiving application for new/duplicate ration cards and workflow-based system are functioning. Online services are available at block level centres run by dept./at last mile point

through CSCs/local private entrepreneurs and even at village GP level. It is observed that at present, SAKALA cell is opened at taluk level where the issue of new ration cards/deletion/modification of ration cards are taking place. The average time taken for new ration card/modification is two to three hours. There is a provision to acknowledge the application or provide status update to the applicant through SMS. It is cross-checked that the details of Ration Card Management System are correctly reported on NFSA. More than 90 per cent of the population is aware of the NFSA eligibility criteria (especially income criteria). It is reported that almost all the eligible households are covered under NFSA. Eldest women (18 years and above) of the household are recognised as heads of the household. Online system is made available live to ensure inclusion of genuine beneficiaries. The beneficiaries are fully aware about ration card eligibility and knowledge of addition and deletion of names in the ration card. For new ration card, addition/deletion the beneficiaries are incurred on an average of Rs. 120 (Rs. 50 per application and Rs. 70 per postage charges). It is observed that the steps for Aadhaar-based duplication and validation as well as e-KYC/bio updated ration cards took place and nearing completion. A majority of 99 per cent of RC level Aadhaar seeding is done. However, mobile number seeding in RC

is in progress, whereas bank account seeding of RC is hardly found.

II. Access to foodgrain entitlements and FPS automation:

The state has purchased Rs. 3 per kg from FCI (Central Government) and delivered to the PHH card holders five kg per person and 35 kg per card for AAY card holders at free of cost. Apart from the above, the State government adds another 2 kg (purchased from Open Market Sales Scheme-OMSS) and made available to the BPL card (PHH) holders. Altogether, seven kg per person is made available to the PHH card holder members at free of cost. The State government has incurred more than Rs. 2,694.83 per quintal and 1.5 per cent cess while purchase of foodgrains is through open market auction from FCI.

III. Fair Price Shop services:

The beneficiaries were fully aware of commodity/entitlement of foodgrains for their share. There were no complaints regarding under weighing of commodities and over charge. The beneficiaries expressed that the duration of opening PDS shop and satisfaction level of timings are quite satisfactory. It is ensured that the opinion of beneficiaries on quality of foodgrains and gain preference is quite satisfied and fully recognised. There are no foreign particles found. The accessibility of FPS to avail foodgrains is quite easy and information access regarding distribution of foodgrains is mostly by self-visit or known from SMS alert as well as from fellow residents. The timings and days of ration shop remaining open are also quite acceptable to the beneficiaries. Beneficiaries are well aware about toll free/helpline number; however, they are not much familiarised with those institutions and their purpose such as DGRO/SFC and also not aware of airing their grievances on grievance redressal platform. Digitisation of beneficiary details and seeding of Aadhaar number in ration card have

been almost completed in Karnataka. However, only 50 per cent mobile numbers are seeded yet. Availing foodgrains by using e-PoS at FPS is very ease and time saving. The same is expressed by the beneficiaries. It is overwhelmed by all the beneficiaries in sample districts of Karnataka. It is observed that except a few occasions due to poor connectivity, overall the e-PoS machine is well functioned at FPS level. But printed receipts are not made available to the beneficiaries.

The beneficiaries expressed that the awareness and functioning of vigilance committee is well recognised but approaching the vigilance committee for grievance redressal is hardly materialised. It is observed that the beneficiaries in our sample districts of Karnataka are given preference to foodgrains instead of cash. Digital payments option has hardly preferred as the foodgrains are provided at free of cost. The reasons for not preferring to cash subsidy are risk of misuse of cash for other than food items and higher market price of foodgrains.

It is observed that the allotment and distribution is totally transparent (online updation automatically) and no leakage point is observed. There is no delay in receiving of foodgrains and also no nomination/home delivery facility at FPS. Display of information regarding working hours of FPS, entitlement of foodgrains, details of card holders and stock details are well maintained in all sample FPSs visited. Almost 100 per cent e-PoS machines were found operational at FPSs. The beneficiaries

as well as the FPS dealers expressed that the installation of e-PoS has given them ease and saved time. The average time taken for biometric authentication was 3 to 5 minutes. After successful bio-authentication in sample FPS, 100 per cent sale of foodgrain was observed. It is hardly observed that RCs in sample FPS with reported biometric authentication failure.

The display of information, transparency aspects as per NFSA guidelines are well maintained at FPS. The margin/profit and viability of FPS maintenance is depending upon the number of ration cards allotted and performance of FPS dealer and also the FPS owner engages in other than the NFSA food items. But our sample FPS visited in sample districts of Karnataka the FPS dealers are confined to NFSA foodgrains only. It was clear that the FPS owner is raising the income from two sources only (commission/margin and sale of gunny bags). It is observed that the entire sample FPSs have made profit more than Rs. 5000 per month. The Banking Correspondence (BC) and Common Service Centre (CSC) services are hardly found. However, some of the FPS owners are interested in delivery of CSC services as demanded by the beneficiaries. There is no online facility to apply for new FPS licenses and new licenses are issued manually.

IV. Supply chain management and FPS viability: The average capacity of sample godowns is 2000 M.T. The



Photo for illustrative purpose

number of FPSs tagged to sample godown are varied in nature. The storage capacity of sample godowns is based on two month's requirement. The godowns are maintained by the Taluka Agricultural Producers Marketing Cooperative Societies (TAPMCS) and Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Corporation (KFCSC) and these godowns are well maintained and modernised. Adequacy of storage capacity is observed by the study team in four sample districts visited. It is also observed that uninterrupted supply of foodgrains to the FPS is ensured. Movement of foodgrains, payment and SMS alert are fully automated and recorded online in four sample district supply of foodgrains from godown to FPS. However, foodgrains weighed at godown with electronic weigh bridge linked to online system is hardly found.

Food distribution calendar in sample districts is followed in 1-25 of every month and 100 per cent of foodgrains received on time by godown and the same is dispatched to the tagged FPS concerned. There are no instances of not lifting entire allocated quantity within validity period reported by godown and diversion/black marketing. The doorstep delivery of foodgrains is ensured from godown to the FPS and no cost is borne by FPS dealer for grain transportation & handling. The FPS closing balance/ration card number is fetched automatically for generation of allocation order through online. More or less 70 per cent has been covered under SMS alert. Soon after the delivery of foodgrains to the FPS, the SMS alert reaches GP Chairman, Vigilance Committee Members, Taluk Panchayat Members and FPS owner.

The receipt of stock from wholesale transporters and dispatch of stock to retail transporters and fair price shop owners are based on online stock and online billing at wholesale godowns. Stock position of all godowns and FPSs are captured online real-time. Delivery Orders, Release Orders, Truck Challans, Gate Passes, etc., for NFSA commodities are generated from system and they are



Photo for illustrative purpose

available on Transparency Portals. At present, only delivery order and truck challan are generated in taluk godowns while payment acknowledgement is not generated online. Details of allocation, off take and distribution are reported correctly on NFSA dashboard. The allotment and lifting statistics is available on the FIST/FCS dashboard of the department. The e-KYC, Best Finger Detection and Fusion finger functionalities are available for use in the PoS. The electronic weighing machine (bluetooth/cable) is not integrated at godowns and FPSs online and no local language interface –voice over/printed in local language. Micro-ATM functionality to perform BC and CSC operations is in progress, waiting for CSC to provide login Ids.

The total transactions in the district are reflected in the State portal and Central Portal (Annavitaran). There is a system in place at the district level to assess the Silent Ration Cards (RCs against which foodgrains are not lifted for three consecutive months) and vigilance committee members (VCMs) are involved for field verification regularly. State level portability is already implemented to address the issues of foodgrain allocation and distribution between FPS dealers and consumers.

V. Grievance redressal system

& Vigilance committee: None of the vigilance committee members (sample VCs) are aware of the provision to lodge written complaint to District Grievances Redressal Officer (DGRO). It is observed that vigilance committee members know some of the functions of FPS and implementation of NFSA but are not fully aware. However, some of the sample FPS VCs function very efficiently, especially in Haveri district FPS VCs. They conduct regular meetings and also maintained the minutes of the meeting. There is also a review meeting at taluk level in every month headed by Tahsildar and reviews the implementation of PDS.

It is correlated with some of the beneficiaries that the functions of vigilance committee members at different point of time in various meetings is discussed and ensured. The decisions taken in the regarding PDS items and alternative arrangements for thumb impression of age-old people. It is observed that there is a review meeting in the district under Karnataka Development Programme (KDP) and PDS is one of the subjects reviewed every quarterly. MLAs concerned, Minister in-charge and Zilla Panchayat Members attend the meeting and provide suggestions time to time for better delivery of PDS.

VI. Portability, Digital payment

& Cash Transfers: Installation and use of portability, digital payment arrangements are hardly found at fair price shops. Though facility is available in both rural and urban areas, rural people are not in tune to the portability facility. However, the urban people are availing the portability facility (more than 1.50 lakh beneficiaries are availing the portability facility in Bengaluru city). Some of the beneficiaries as well as FPS dealer said that they are interested in avail/perform Common Services Centre (CSC) services. None of the HH prefers cash transfers instead of foodgrains.

VII. Recommendations/

Suggestions:

- More income has to be generated to meet the administrative expenditure: Since NFSA foodgrains, the State is incurring Rs. 300 per quintal and made available to the beneficiaries at free of cost (@ 5 kg each member of the cardholder as unit). Apart from these, the State has added another @2kg per each member of the cardholder at free

of cost. For this, the State is incurring Rs. 2,695 per quintal purchasing from Open Market Sales Scheme (OMSS). A total of @7 kg is made available to each member of the cardholder. The district is receiving Rs. 35 per quintal as margin to meet administration expenditure which is very meagre amount and not sufficient to meet administrative costs. Based on the field experience, it is suggested that instead of free of cost, if the State government collects Rs. 2 per kg from beneficiaries (the beneficiaries are willing to pay Rs. 2 per kg), these amounts may help to meet administrative costs so as to avoid depending on loans by the district administration.

- Linking of weighing machine with online (e-Pos) system: e-Pos system has been effectively initiated by the State government at the PDS level. Weighing machine should be linked to online e-Pos system
- Demand for other commodities: Apart from rice, other items such as wheat, jowar, ragi, sugar, oil, etc., should also be introduced as

widely demanded by the beneficiaries.

- Introduction of CSC facilities at FPS level: Many of the beneficiaries demanded access to CSC facilities at their doorstep so as to save their time and money.
- Revisit of Vigilance Committees at FPS level and need to be strengthened: Awareness and demonstration platforms on role and responsibilities of vigilance committee, process of addition and deletion of members in the ration card, apply of new ration card, entitlement of PDS commodities, price, voluntarism, etc., are need to be familiarised to the villagers.
- It is also recommended that the regular monitoring, periodic meetings and follow-up of the DGRO and vigilance committees at district and FPS levels should be ensured.

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Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav: RTP, CIAT&SJ organises two online workshops

The Rural Technology Park, Centre for Innovations and Appropriate Technologies for Skills and Jobs, NIRDPR, Hyderabad organised two online workshops as a part of the Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav, the government's initiative to mark 75 years of India's Independence.

The workshop 'Role of Innovators and Start-ups in Rural Transformation - Interaction with Awardees of Rural Innovators and Start-up Conclave (RISC)' was conducted on 26th March, 2021.

As part of the programme, 13 RISC awardees and one incubatee of RTP, CIAT&SJ, NIRDPR were invited for presenting their innovations/start-up activities. Apart from the awardees, 95 personalities/institutions associated with different walks of life joined the programme including Dr. S. Senthil Vinayagam, Principal

Scientist, NAARM, Hyderabad Dr. Madhu Bala, Director, Diber-DRDO, Haldwani, Dr. A. K. Chakrabarti, Ex-Director, DRDO, Hyderabad, Shri Brig. P Ganesham, Palle Srujana - Honey Bee Network, Dr. Ketaki Bapat, Scientist 'F', Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to GoI, New Delhi, Rural Development Trust, Anantapuram, RuTAG, IIT Chennai and Appropriate Rural Technology Institute (ARTI), Phaltan, Maharashtra.

Mr. MD Khan, Senior Consultant, CIAT&SJ delivered the welcome address and briefed about the objectives of the programme. Dr. Ramesh Sakthivel, Associate Professor & Head, CIAT&SJ explained the importance of both the programme and the RISC event, which serves as a platform for rural innovators and start-ups, asking the participants to take advantage of the webinar for

promoting their technologies/activities.

Dr. S. Senthil Vinayagam, Principal Scientist, NAARM, who was the Guest of Honour at the programme, shared his views on the role that can be played by the innovators for the rural transformation besides making a presentation on the subject.

The programme was well appreciated by the attendees and the presenters expressed their utmost happiness for the opportunity given to share their technologies and activities. During the programme, the following technologies/activities were identified for adding to the existing technologies for training by RTP:

- Sustainable Livelihoods through Aquaponics (Shri Vijay Kumar, Narayana)
- Value-added products from banana (Shri Siva Kumar)

- Eco-friendly herbal sanitary napkins (Smt. Rama Devi B.)

Online workshop on Rural Transformation through Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship under UBA

The RTP, CIAT&SJ organised an online workshop on Rural Transformation through Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship under Unnat Bharat Abhiyan on 16th April, 2021, which was attended by 124 participants.

Mr. Mohammad Khan, Senior Consultant, CIAT&SJ welcomed the participants and explained the objectives of the programme.

Dr. Ramesh Sakthivel, Associate Professor & Head, CIAT&SJ, RTP briefed the participants about the programme and its expected outcomes.

Professor Virendra Kr. Vijay, National Coordinator, UBA and the Guest of Honour at the programme, in his key note address detailed the objectives of Unnat Bharat Abhiyan. Besides making a presentation on the success stories of the programme, he spelled out the coordinated activities conducted by Unnat Bharat Abhiyan and NIRDPR in the field of capacity building for creating an impact on the participating institutions towards the rural transformation. After the key note address, the participants interacted with Professor Virendra Kr. Vijay.

Further, Dr. Ramesh Sakthivel made an elaborate presentation on the activities of the RTP, CIAT&SJ and the achievements in the field of rural transformation through technology, innovation and entrepreneurship. He explained the impact created by the activities on technical institutions by involving them in the RISC events, RTP Mela, etc. He also made a mention about the proposed collaborations

the NIRDPR looking for with the UBA and its partners.

Dr. Partha Pratim Sahu, Associate Professor, Centre for Entrepreneurship Development & Financial Inclusion briefly touched upon the relevance of technology and entrepreneurship and throw light on how the technology can be integrated for the rural transformation, besides suggesting the scope and areas of collaboration.

Dr. Lakhan Singh, Assistant Professor, Centre for Human Resource Development briefed about NIRDPR's present collaboration with UBA on capacity building and the work done so far.

Thereafter, the forum was opened for discussions and a number of thought provoking suggestions for collaboration were made. Several institutions expressed their desire of entering into an MoU with NIRDPR.

During the interactions, Professor Virendra Kr. Vijay, National Coordinator, UBA opined that the funding available for the students to be taken to the villages for the identification of technologies and the placement of the technologies, etc. may be explored from UBA.

Further, the Participating Institutions (PIs) under UBA were briefed about the support available from RTP, NIRDPR for the unemployed youth, SHGs, etc., who can be identified from the villages adopted by the PIs for taking advantage of the trainings and technology transfer. Besides, the technical institutions were asked to participate in the RISC event proposed to be conducted by NIRDPR, RTP in the month of September, 2021.

RTP, CIAT&SJ requested the UBA National Coordinator for sharing the particulars of MoUs signed by them with other similar Rural Development Institutions to work out the modalities for signing of the MoU by RTP, NIRDPR in the field of skill development and technology transfer.

The workshop ended with the

concluding remarks by Dr. Ramesh Sakthivel.

Mr. Mohammad Khan, Sr. Consultant, who coordinated and moderated the proceedings, proposed vote of thanks.

The outcomes of the workshop include:

- Proposal to conduct online classroom programmes on rural technologies, innovations and entrepreneurship for the participating institutions from RTP, NIRDPR by duly chalking out the programmes with UBA
- Hand-holding support to the institutions that are inclined to set up technology demonstrations/units in their institutions on the lines of RTP, NIRDPR.
- Contemplating training programmes for the rural community of the villages adopted by the UBA Participating Institutions
- Planning training programmes for the trainers identified by the Participating Institutions
- Facilitating the transfer of technology which are duly identified by the Participating Institutions for their adopted villages
- Considering the nominations from the students and the Participating Institutions for Rural Innovators Start-up Conclaves (RISC)
- Workshop for the faculty of the UBA Participating Institutions with regard to the village development and rural transformation
- Considering internship to the students (non-fund based) and project work at RTP, NIRDPR during summer vacation, etc., in association with other centres of NIRDPR
- Workshop for the Regional Coordinators of UBA for a brainstorming with regard to the activities that can be done in a collaborative way.

The webinars were coordinated by Dr. S. Ramesh Sakthivel, Associate Professor & Head, CIAT&SJ and Shri Mohammad Khan, Senior Consultant, CIAT&SJ



Dr. G. Narendra Kumar, IAS, Director General, NIRDPR garlanding the bust of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar at NIRDPR.

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Hyderabad organised the 130th birth anniversary celebrations of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the father of Indian Constitution, on 15th April, 2021.

Shri E. Ramesh, Senior Hindi Translator welcomed the guests and staff for the celebrations organised at Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Block on the campus.



The dignitaries at the Ambedkar Jayanti celebrations

Dr. G. Narendra Kumar, IAS, Director General garlanded the bust of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Following him, Shri Shashi Bhushan, Director (Financial Management) & Financial Advisor, Lt. Col. Ashutosh Kumar, Registrar & Director (Admin), Shri Manoj Kumar, Assistant Registrar (E), faculty members Prof. R. Murugesan, Prof. Ravindra Gavali, Dr. M. V. Ravibabu and Dr. Akanksha Shukla, and others offered floral tributes.

Further, Dr. G. Narendra Kumar released a 'Compendium of Selected Literature on Dr. B. R. Ambedkar' compiled by Assistant Librarians Shri P. Sudhakar and Smt. K. Radha Madhavi, and Dr. Akanksha Shukla Head (i/c), Centre for Development Documentation and Communication.

The Director General also garlanded the portrait of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar inside the library building.



Shri Shashi Bhushan, Director (Financial Management) and Financial Advisor, Lt. Col. Ashutosh Kumar, Registrar and Director (Admin), and Shri Manoj Kumar, AR(E) offering homage to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar



Dr. G. Narendra Kumar, IAS, Director General releasing the "Compendium of selected literature on Dr. B. R. Ambedkar". Also seen are Dr. Akanksha Shukla, Head(i/c), CDC (3rd from left), Smt. K. Radha Madhavi, Asst. Librarian (4th from left), Shri Shashi Bhushan, Director (Financial Management) and Financial Advisor, (6th from left), Prof. R. Murugesan, Director (i/c), NERC- NIRDPR (7th from left) and P. Sudhakar, Asst. Librarian (8th from left)



Illustration: Shri V G Bhat

During the election campaigns every time, the public intellectuals get a topic to write about. They write a series of newspaper articles describing the election campaign strategies as foxy; vote canvassing as crooked; and the election manifesto as deceptive and so on. Their point: 'democracy is flouted'. There is a huge democratic deficit/democratic dilution. There is another elite class of writers, who write similar views, drawing additional corroboration from reports such as Democracy Index's global ranking. India slipped two places to the 53rd position in the 2020 Democracy Index's global ranking, they cite.

Although democratic form of governance as an idea evolved in 508 – 507 BC, the modern form of democracy with features such as a written constitution, periodical elections where people of all races - both men and women got the power to vote took shape in only 19th and 20th centuries. Otherwise, it was rule by kings, dictators, monarchs and holy books. The point is it has taken several centuries for the majority of the world to understand, appreciate and adapt to democratic form of governance. Thus, from the standpoint of practice, the modern form of democratic governance is not very old. Yet, it has spread across majority of the countries in a short span of time.

All said and done, democracy evolved from several other crude forms of governance, like humans evolved from apes, bonobos, and chimpanzees. In other words, like the modern humans evolved from Homo erectus to Neanderthals to Homo sapiens, the governance systems evolved as well – from kings to dictators to monarchs and so on. For the first time in human history, the democratic form of governance made way for achieving civil liberty and the rule of law. Therefore, it's no exaggeration if we say that democracy is one of the significant inventions of humans.

That so soon we have started talking about 'democracy being flouted' implies that evolutionary theory is true and operational. The theory of evolution is not merely about evolution of living beings or only of humans. It's also about the evolution of the idea of economy, society, polity and governance. Therefore, the worry of our public intellectuals about 'democratic-deficit' is unwarranted or undeserved. It simply means that the child has outgrown the shirt, which in day today language we say: the shirt has become too small to wear. The society (the voters and the politicians) has grown taller than the system, rendering the efficacy of the democracy insufficient. The signal is that it's time we give rise to the governance system. It has to evolve and step up.

When we look back about 12,000 years of human history - when humans started

agricultural pursuits, permanent settlements and domestication of animals - the advancement that humans have made in the last 100 years is unprecedented. Today, the way we work and live; the way we do our business transactions; the way banking and fund transfers take place; and the way governance is conducted have been miraculously transformed by technology and especially by the high-speed Internet. What we notice is when technology and algorithms are in the run-away. It's yet to take flight. We shall see the flight it takes and leap in human progress, with the application of Artificial Intelligence, Robots, Big Data Analytics, Genetic Engineering, etc., within the next few years. It's evolving and coming up to get its space in every sphere of work and human activity.

Humans are evolving to become super-humans compared to what our greatgrandfathers were in terms of their mental abilities, skills, opportunities and challenges. In today's times, even the inter-generational knowledge gap and divide in mental abilities is eye-popping, when we interact with our children. Transformative changes are taking place. The pace of change is perplexing, while some are within our comprehension, others are bizarre/weird.

Given the pace of progress in every sphere of human life, it's quite logical if I ask: don't we need an evolved form of governance if democratic form of governance we invented a century or two ago is found to be flawed today or we find it has many loopholes that human mind is able to easily pinpoint? Perhaps, one way of addressing it is, identifying the flaws and rectifying the loopholes so as to make the flawed democracy fulfilling the principles of democracy in practice or operation. On the contrary if it was found to be on slippery-slop and those who promise to lend hand in order to pull it up are political and pretentious, we would better quit.

Our Constitution is being amended as often as we decide. After all, democracy is an element that the Constitution talks about. Indications are that democracy is moving towards invisibility, and it is being emptied

of its meaning. For an optimist, it only means we are stepping on the next stair in human evolution. Possibly, such an evolved governance system would be able to comprehend and serve the society with ease and deal with the citizen with dignity.

So, what is likely to be the future of governance? The entire governance system could be completely technology-driven by Artificial Intelligence, and Big Data-based. Decisions will be evidence-based driven by big data-sets. In the new evolved system of governance, maybe, the elections and election campaigns will be done away with. When there are no election investments to make, there are high chances for corruption-free governance. Policies get formulated as suggested by data sets. There is no need for our public intellectuals to worry about the need for reviving or revitalising democracy. If democracy has to take retirement, let's approve it,

like we gave retirement to the kings and dictators.

Humans evolve. Doesn't the governance system have to evolve as well? That is what progress is all about. Otherwise, as a species we stagnate, which is untrue from the standpoint of evolutionary theory. Why stand guard of democracy, if we found it to be insufficient to keep pace with the rate of change that a technology-driven world asks for. It looks like being fixated and against the natural order of life. It sounds like finding the Theory of Evolution unacceptable, which has stood the test of time for over 160 years now.

Postscript: The purpose of this paper is to provoke a debate and out-of-the-box thinking amongst the PG students of NIRDPR. It does not intend to undermine the supremacy of democratic form of governance.

Dr. R. Ramesh

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