

A Report
on
Community Development through Panchayati Raj
Institutions (PRIs) in Himachal Pradesh: A Study of
Balagad Panchayat

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Executive Summary

Gram panchayat Balagad is located in Banjar block, Tehsil Banjar of district Kullu. The gram panchayat has been spread in the area of 5 to 6 square kilometres. As per Census 2011, the panchayat has 512 households having the population of 2,489 which consists of 1,261 males and 1,228 females. The sex ratio of panchayat is 970 females per thousand males. Scheduled castes comprise 26 percent of the population. Panchayat's literacy rate is 92 percent of which male and female literacy rate is 94 and 91 percent respectively. Most of the villagers are dependent upon agriculture, horticulture and dairy farming to earn their living. Gram panchayat Balagad is headed by Pradhan and comprises seven ward members.

Over the years gram panchayat Balagad has completed various developmental works that have brought economic and social transformation in the panchayat. Balagad panchayat is predominantly a hilly panchayat. Majority of the residents earn their living through agriculture and horticulture. As the area under agriculture is totally dependent upon rainfall, the situation becomes difficult during the months when there is no rain. Lack of adequate rainfall not only affects the agriculture production but also reduces the productivity of the land. Year after year, the prolonged spell of dry weather had a detrimental effect on the productivity of land and the income of farmers also reduced manifold in this panchayat. The seriousness of situation compelled the panchayat members and farmers to take initiatives to come out of this predicament. Panchayat proposed an idea to construct water storage tanks on individual lands through MGNREGA works. Construction of water storage tanks on the agriculture lands has helped in restoring the soil moisture. Construction of water storage tanks has not only diversified the sources of income in the entire panchayat but also brought prosperity in the lives of people.

Apart from agriculture/horticulture income, the villagers of Balagad panchayat also earn their living from cattle. Cleanliness in cow sheds is important for the overall hygiene of the cattle and people look after them. The panchayat has helped them by constructing concrete floor in the cow sheds which has reduced the wastage of fodder and there is better accumulation of dung. This has improved the overall hygiene of the cow sheds. Also, the panchayat has constructed permanent goat sheds which have helped the shepherds to keep their herd safe. They have increased the size of their herd which has resulted in the increase in income.

Village Bala in Balagad panchayat is a home to Markandey Rishi. Devotees from far off places visit the place and pay homage to the Rishi. However, there were no adequate boarding arrangements for the devotees especially coming from far off places. Also, every year during the month of February, a fair is organized in the temple premises but due to the lack of community hall, the functions had to be organized under an open sky in all weather conditions. The panchayat took the initiative to construct a community hall in the temple premises which could be used for multiple purpose in the near future. Now, due to ample space available, marriages and other gatherings are also taking place in the hall.

Further, the gram panchayat has made proper drainage for the wastewater. Now the wastewater doesn't get accumulated and overall hygiene has improved. This has helped in reducing the impending danger of ailments associated with poor hygiene. This is an important step in fulfilling the Hon' Prime Minister's dream of making India clean i.e., Swachh Bharat.

Although the initiatives taken by the gram panchayat Balagad are not new and most of these works are common in the rural areas in India. However, the panchayat implemented them in a better way and transformed the life of local residents. For their efforts, they thoroughly deserved the accolades they got. In recognition for the activities following awards were given to the panchayat: (i) Deendayal Upadhyay Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar for the year 2015-16 and the panchayat has also been selected for the year 2016-17, and (ii) Panchayat Pashu Dhan Puraskar by the Govt. of Himachal Pradesh for the year 2015-16 and the panchayat has also been selected for the year 2016-17.

Introduction

An overview of Panchayati Raj in Himachal Pradesh

In Himachal Pradesh, Panchayat Raj system was established in a statutory form under the provisions of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1952 in the year 1954. Before the enactment of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, 1952 only 280 Gram Panchayats existed. However, in the year 1954, 466 Gram Panchayats were established, and the number of Gram Panchayats increased to 638 during the year 1962. On 1st November 1966, the hilly areas of Punjab were merged in the State, and consequently, the number of Gram Panchayats rose to 1695. In the merged area, a three-tier Panchayati Raj system was in existence under the provisions of Punjab Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad Act, whereas two-tier system was prevalent in this State. To bring uniformity in the Panchayati Raj system of the old and the newly merged areas, the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1968 was enacted on 15th November 1970 in this State, and the two-tier Panchayati Raj system was established throughout the State. After the enactment of the said Act in the year 1970, the existing Gram Sabhas were reorganized or bifurcated from time to time and new Gram Sabhas/Gram Panchayats were established. At present, some Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) working in the state of Himachal Pradesh in several domains are quite noticeable which include fields like regularity of panchayat meetings including those of gram sabha and standing committees, attendance in these meetings particularly the representation of SC and STs in the Gram Sabhas, discussions held and issues discussed, resolutions undertaken on various development works, identification of multiple beneficiaries, implementation of the State and Central Government schemes, efforts for achieving total sanitation, development of effective plans for raising own resources, systems for efficient tax collection, strengthening of local institutions, capacity building of the elected representatives and staff, having mechanism for

transparency and accountability, development in the infrastructure in the panchayat, cleanliness, women empowerment, save girl child, education, health, employment, awareness and so on. These gram panchayats in the state have set many examples in rural development, infrastructure development and implementation of all programmes launched by the Centre and state government. These panchayats have been selected among many gram panchayats from all over the country and state for the national and state level awards in different time periods and got an appraisal for their best performance in the country. Some of these panchayats took the lead in getting declared open defecation free (ODF) in the state and became eligible for different cash awards. Some of them have successfully launched Swachh Bharat Mission by keeping its panchayat neat and clean besides constructing separate toilets of boys and girls in all government schools in the panchayat and fulfilled all yardsticks laid down by the Centre under the Swachh Bharat programme. Some of them have installed solar streetlights in different wards of the panchayats. The panchayats have also built crematoriums under government's Vikas Mein Jan Sahyog scheme. Most of these panchayats have built their panchayat bhawans (buildings) with a well-furnished conference hall, veterinary dispensary, community hall, and a fair price shop are sometimes running under the same roof. Some of them have brought about a remarkable change in the magnitude of participation of women in PRIs. In fact, Himachal excels in working for women empowerment and has been awarded the 'Diamond State' award. Himachal Pradesh has become the first state in the nation in which 50 % reservation is given to women in Panchayati Raj institutions and other urban jobs. In this project, we have documented the successful practices of such 5 panchayats from three districts named Kangra, Kullu, and Hamirpur of Himachal Pradesh. These panchayats are national award-winning panchayats in excelling in the overall development of the panchayat. This work is

beneficial to motivate other panchayats especially those who have the similar type of problems, topography and climatic condition.

Methodology

Need for the study

Himachal Pradesh is different from rest of the country in many aspects. These include the topography of the region, climate, culture, dialects, agricultural cycles, and practices. In addition, there is a relative absence of industrial factories in the state that are the mainstay of urban employment in many other states of India. Himachal Pradesh is the most rural state in the country where 90% the population live in rural areas. Although 3316 panchayats (Zila Parishad 12, Panchayat Samitis 78 and Gram Panchayats 3226) are working in the state but some of them are doing very well and are ahead of many other panchayats in their work efficiency and management. These panchayats are considered good in meeting some of the core objectives of the Panchayati Raj including rural asset creation, micro-watershed development, reducing urban migration, empowering women, uplifting scheduled caste, scheduled tribes, economically and socially backward sections. For their outstanding contribution, they were awarded national awards many times. In this project, we have documented that in spite of hard topography and other barriers, how these panchayats have performed better than others. There was a great need of the documentation of successful practices of these panchayats and the mitigation strategies

Objectives

While many panchayats in Himachal Pradesh have been successful in achieving the desired objectives of the Panchayati raj but there is a lack of studies done on the factors behind the successful working of these panchayats. Our study has delineated the practices and processes responsible for the successful working of these panchayats. Given Himachal's mountainous

terrain the study has also uncovered the practices which can become inspirations to other panchayats of the country especially to other hilly and difficult terrains.

Nature of data used

In order to analyze the objectives of this study, both primary, as well as secondary data, has been used. The secondary information has been collected from the District Rural Development Agencies, Block Development Offices, books, journals, and reports. The primary information has been collected from different stakeholders at the panchayat level.

Research approach

Our study aims to delineate the practices and processes responsible for the successful working of five panchayats namely; 1) Tandi Gram Panchayat, block Banjar, district Kullu; 2) Balagad Gram panchayat, block Banjar, district Kullu; 3) Kuther Gram panchayat, Nagrota Surian block, district Kangra; 4) Kasba Paprola Gram panchayat, district Kangra; 5) Pahlu Gram panchayat, district Hamirpur, in the diverse areas of Himachal Pradesh, India. These panchayats got different national and state awards for their exemplary works in the respective panchayats. This study has been conducted in three phases. The first two phases involved preparation of preliminary and preparatory tools to undertake the main survey in Himachal Pradesh. In the first phase, a review of the literature, internal group discussion and interviews with key stakeholders has been conducted, which provided the background information necessary to ensure a complete understanding of the successful Panchayati Raj institutions' working. With this background information, the study has proceeded to the next level wherein appropriate research tools have been identified, as also the indicators to measure the different dimensions of the study. This exercise has enabled the research team to secure greater control over and a better understanding of the issues under review. The research methodology and tools have been then taken to the field

for pre-testing. The pre-testing has helped in establishing confidence in the methodology and to facilitate the firming up of indicators. From this phase, the study moved into the final level, which has included field survey and monitoring, preparation of data entry programme, data entry, preparation of analysis plan, analysis of data, and final report writing.

Case Study of Balagad Panchayat

The milieu of the district in which Balagad panchayat is situated

Nestled in the lap of the majestic Himalayas, Kullu is a veritable jewel in the crown of Himachal Pradesh. The breath-taking beauty of its marvelous landscapes, the hospitality of its people, their distinctive lifestyle and rich culture have enthralled travelers for ages. The Dev Sanskriti of the valley blends faith, mythology, and history to create and sustain a unique bond between the mundane and the divine. Blessed with salubrious weather throughout the year, the district is known for the internationally renowned towns of Kullu and Manali, the pristine beauty of the Parbati valley, the teeming biodiversity of the Great Himalayan National Park, the quaint temple architecture of the hills and several enjoyable trekking routes across its breadth and width.

Kullu district is bound between 3058°00° north latitude and 7706°04° east longitude. The district of Kullu came into being on November 1, 1966. An official Census 2011 detail of Kullu, a district of Himachal Pradesh has been released by Directorate of Census Operations in Himachal Pradesh (Table 1). Enumeration of key persons was also done by census officials in Kullu District of Himachal Pradesh. In 2011, Kullu had a population of 4,37,903 of which male and female were 2,25,452 and 2,12,451 respectively. In 2001 census, Kullu had a population of 3,81,571 of which males were 1,98,016 and remaining 1,83,555 were females. Kullu District population constituted 6.38 percent of total population of Himachal Pradesh. In 2001 census, this figure for Kullu District was at 6.28 percent of Maharashtra population. There was a change of 14.76 percent in the population compared to population as per 2001. In the previous census of India 2001, Kullu District recorded increase of 26.17 percent to its population compared to 1991.

Demographic characteristics of district Kullu of Himachal Pradesh

Description	2011
Actual Population	437,903
Male	225,452

Female	212,451
Population Growth	14.76%
Area Sq. Km	5,503
Density/km2	80
Proportion to Himachal Pradesh Population	6.38%
Sex Ratio (Per 1000)	942
Child Sex Ratio (0-6 Age)	962
Average Literacy	79.40
Male Literacy	87.39
Female Literacy	70.91
Rural Population	93.04%
Urban Population	6.96%

Source: Kullu district: Census 2011 data retrieved from <http://www.census2011.co.in/census/district/232-kullu.html>

District Kullu has been divided into 4 subdivisions namely Kullu, Manali, Banjar, and Anni. These subdivisions consist of 5 tehsils and 3 sub-tehsils. A total number of villages and towns comprise 172 and 4 respectively. There are 204 village panchayats comprising 1,228-gram panchayat members, 103 panchayat Samiti members, and 63 panchayat secretaries. There are 14 Zila Parishad members in the district.

Administrative and Panchayati Raj setup in District Kullu

Description	2017
Sub Divisions	4
Tehsils	5
Sub-Tehsils	3
Blocks	5
Towns	4
Total Villages	172
Total Panchayats	204
Zila Parishad Members	14
Panchayat Samiti Members	103
Gram Panchayat Members	1,228
Total Panchayat Secretaries	63

Source: District administration: Kullu retrieved from

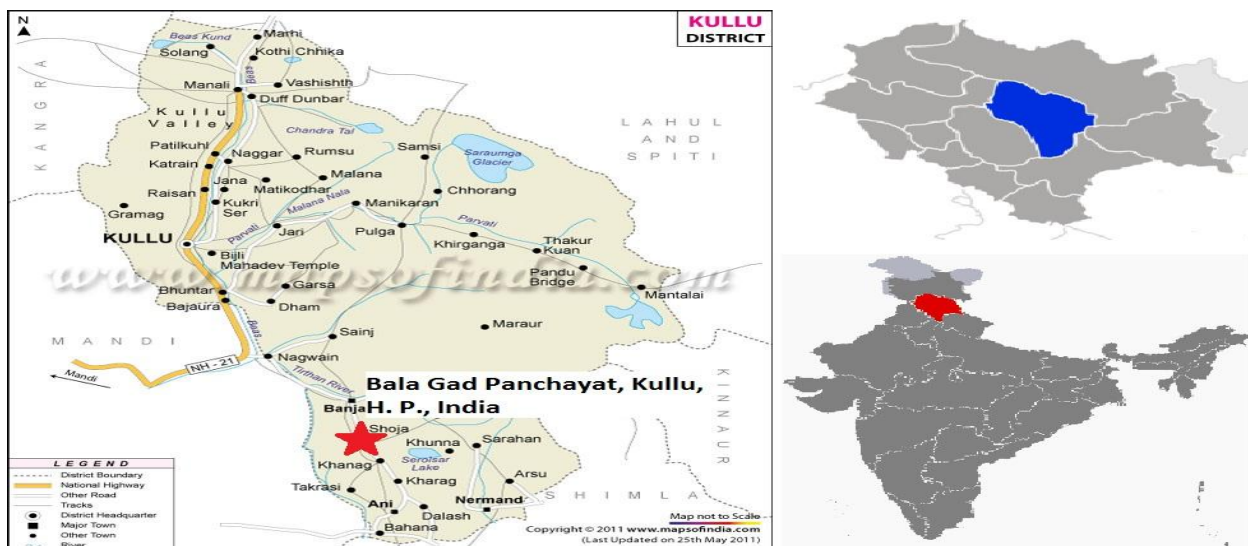
http://himachal.nic.in/index1.php?lang=1&dpt_id=200&level=1&sublinkid=8236&lid=8472

Location and demographic characteristics of Balagad panchayat

The gram panchayat Balagad is located in Banjar block of district Kullu. Gram panchayat has been spread in the area of 5 to 6 square kilometers. It is surrounded by gram panchayat Shikari Ghat on

the north, Khabal on the west, Bahu on the south and Kothi Chehni on the east. As per Census 2011, the panchayat has 512 households having the population of 2,489 which consists of 1,261 males and 1,228 females. The sex ratio of panchayat is 970 females per thousand males. Scheduled castes comprise 26 percent of the population. Panchayat's literacy rate is 92 percent of which male and female literacy rate is 94 and 91 percent respectively. The native language of panchayat is Hindi and Pahari, where Hindi is the predominant language used by most of the villagers. Hinduism is the only religion in the panchayat which includes the Brahmins, Rajputs, and Kolis. Most of the villagers are dependent upon agriculture, horticulture and dairy farming to earn their living. Gram panchayat Balagad is headed by Pradhan and comprises seven ward members. Panchayat has its own building which is located in Bala hamlet. Other important institutions situated in the panchayat include Govt. Degree College, Anganwadi, primary school, public distribution system and veterinary office. Panchayat has formed six samitis and meetings are held for each samiti in the presence of all members.

Location of Balagad Panchayat in district Kullu of Himachal Pradesh



Source: <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/himachalpradesh/districts/kullu.htm>

Case presentation of Balagad panchayat

In case of gram panchayat Balagad, the information at ground level was collected from panchayat members (Man Singh – Pradhan, Bhuvneshwar Dev – Uppradhan, Lalit Kumar – panchayat secretary and Heera Devi, Yashpal, Surat Ram, Javitri Devi, Bhima Devi, Chandra Devi and Prem Singh – ward members) and panchayat residents. Panchayat Pradhan Mr. Man Singh assumed the office in January 2016. He is 51 years of age and has a total experience of 22 years in the politics. During the course of data collection, local residents praised the Pradhan for his efficiency and generosity. According to them he is easily approachable and takes prompt decisions while undertaking a development work. His experience in politics comes handy while dealing with the difficult situation. As per local residents apart from him, panchayat secretary Mr. Lalit Kumar is also very efficient in his work. He has the experience of 18 years in managing the affairs of the panchayat. People also praise Mrs. Meenakshi Devi, the former Pradhan of the panchayat who also did a lot for the panchayat. According to them, it was her farsightedness that has yielded the desired results to the panchayat.

Over the years gram panchayat Balagad has completed various developmental works that have brought economic and social transformation in the panchayat. These works include: (i) Construction of water storage tanks on individuals land, (ii) Construction of multipurpose community hall in the panchayat, (iii) Street lighting through installation of solar lights, (iv) Building concrete floors in cow sheds, (v) Construction of goat sheds, (vi) Construction of all-weather village paths, (vii) Construction of wastewater drainage and (viii) Land development works. Apart from these works panchayat has also done various other developmental works such as building houses under Pradhanmantri Awas Yojana, plantation of trees on public land and constructing rainwater harvesting tanks. Due to the paucity of space and time, we cannot present

a detailed explanation of all the developmental works. Among all the developmental works done by the panchayat, we have given a detailed account of some of the most important works done by the panchayat, problems faced during these works and how these initiatives brought a change in the lives of local residents. These works are as following:

Construction of water storage tanks on individual land

Balagad panchayat is predominantly a hilly panchayat. Majority of the residents earn their living through agriculture and horticulture. As the area under agriculture is totally dependent upon rainfall, the situation becomes difficult during the months when there is no rain. Lack of adequate



Water storage tank on the individual field

rainfall not only affects the agriculture production but also reduces the productivity of the land. Year after year, the prolonged spell of dry weather had a detrimental effect on the productivity of land and the income of farmers also reduced manifold in this panchayat. The seriousness of situation compelled the panchayat members and farmers to take

initiatives to come out of this predicament. Panchayat proposed an idea to construct water storage tanks on individual lands through MGNREGA works. However, with limited funds, it was not possible to construct water storage tanks for every household. As the shortage of water was acute, so everyone wanted the tank to be built on their land. Selection of beneficiaries became an extremely difficult task for the panchayat officials. Again, the panchayat officials met with local people and devised a strategy. According to this strategy, those households who got a tank constructed on their land would share water with those who didn't get the opportunity to build a

tank. In this way, through proper understanding water storage tanks were built. Construction of



A full-grown orchard

water storage tanks on the agriculture lands has helped in restoring the soil moisture. One such example is, Mr. Sunil Bhardwaj, a resident of Bala village of Balagad panchayat. A tank was constructed on his land and water was brought from the nearby spring through proper channelization. With the accumulation of water in the storage tank, Mr. Bharadwaj started to irrigate his orchard and

fields with the help of sprinkler and drip irrigation. In the beginning, he had about 250 fruit trees with an annual income of about INR 1,00,000. With the construction of tank, the number of fruit trees has increased to 1500. Adequate water supply to fruit trees has increased the fertility of soil which has resulted in the increased productivity of the land. Along with fruit trees, he is also cultivating cash crops such as garlic, green peas, potato etc. All these initiatives have resulted in a manifold increase in his annual income. With the construction of water tank, nearly 10-12 nearby families are also getting benefitted because of irrigation facility. Through proper channelization, they are also able to irrigate their land. Construction of water storage tanks has not only diversified the sources of income in the entire panchayat but also brought prosperity in the lives of people.

Construction of multipurpose community hall in the panchayat

Village Bala in Balagad panchayat is believed to be the village of Markandeya Rishi. Devotees from far off places visit the place and pay homage to the Rishi. However, there were no adequate



Inside view of the multipurpose hall built by the panchayat

boarding arrangements for the devotees especially coming from far off places. Also, every year during the month of February, a fair is organized in the temple premises but due to the lack of community hall, the functions had to be organized under an open sky in all weather conditions. The situation used to become worse

during inclement weather. Due to these difficulties, the panchayat took the initiative to construct a community hall in the temple premises which could be used for multiple purposes in the near future. The multipurpose community hall in the Markandey Rishi temple premises has been an important asset built by the village panchayat. Due to ample space available, marriages and other gatherings are also taking place in the hall. In addition to the hall, there is a separate kitchen to organize feast during functions. To maintain proper cleanliness, panchayat had also constructed toilets in the vicinity of the premises. Earlier lack of toilets caused major sanitation problems, especially during functions. Now, with the construction of toilets, this problem has been resolved to a large extent.

Anganwadi Kendras

Next, Anganwadi Kendras are important nurturing grounds for children who are in their pre-schooling age. Anganwadi Kendras need adequate facilities such as hall, separate kitchen, and playground for children. However, Anganwadi Kendra was lacking these facilities and had to be

run in a small room. As the room was congested, children were often getting affected by cold and cough from each other. This was reducing the participation of children as parents were reluctant to send them to Kendra. As a result, Anganwadi people went to panchayat and requested for better facilities for the children. The panchayat had a vacant room in their premises and they accommodated the Anganwadi Kendra. Now there is adequate space for Anganwadi Kendra to accommodate children and cook food for them. Outside, there is also a playground which is very useful for children. With increased space, the number of children coming to the Anganwadi has also increased over time.

Street lighting through installation of solar lights

Adequate street lighting is important in villages where the houses are scattered in different parts



Street light installed by the panchayat

of the village. Most of the villages in the panchayat did not have the facilities of street lighting. As a result, local residents found it difficult to reach their home especially during evening and in the night. There were also some incidents of local residents being attacked by wild animals in the night. Due to this women

and children couldn't walk alone in the evening and night. Looking into the situation the panchayat discussed this matter with block officials and were told about the street lighting schemes of the government. The gram panchayat had surplus funds which were used to install street lights in the panchayat. Panchayat has so far installed 33 solar lights in the area and it intends to install 75 more in the current financial year. These street lights provide safe passage to the commuters coming back to their homes during the night. Women and children who were earlier afraid to move out at

night are able to venture alone. Being renewable in nature, solar lights save electricity and the cost of maintenance is also nominal. According to local residents, street lighting has extremely beneficial and they are not afraid to venture in the night, which was earlier not possible.

Building concrete floors in cow sheds

Animals such as cows and buffalos are an important source of earning in villages. In addition, their dung is used as fuel for heating purposes at home in hilly rural areas. Manure made of dung is also used to increase the fertility of the land. However, most of the cow sheds in the panchayat had kutchra floor due to which the fodder was getting mixed with mud on the muddy surface and was getting wasted. It was already difficult to bring fodder for cattle and its wastage was accentuating the problem. Moreover, the overall hygiene was also getting deteriorated due to the muddy and stinky surface. Some villagers spoke about this problem and the matter was discussed in the open house of the panchayat. Panchayat officials took notice of this problem and allocated funds to individual cow sheds for the construction of concrete floor. With panchayat's initiative, people constructed concrete floor in their cow sheds which have brought a positive change. Earlier due to kuccha floor, fodder was getting mixed with mud and cow dung which was causing the wastage of fodder. But now with concrete floor, there is less wastage of fodder, it is easy to accumulate dung. With a better accumulation of dung, the manure for fields has also increased. This has also helped in increasing the fertility of the soil.

Construction of goat sheds

Apart from milch animals, goat and sheep are also an important source of livelihood in hilly areas. Shepherds extract wool from sheep which is sold to hosiery for the purpose of making shawls,



Goat shed and concrete village path constructed by gram panchayat Balagad

sweaters and other woolen garments.

Moreover, goat and sheep are also sold for the purpose of meat. But the shepherds suffered from the problem of an adequate shed for their herd. It was risky to keep the herd in open as often they fell prey to wild animals. These incidents used to happen commonly in the panchayat area. The worried shepherds went to

the panchayat bhawan and discussed the matter with the officials. The panchayat officials took note of the problem and granted funds to the shepherds to construct permanent sheds for their herd. So far, the panchayat has constructed 88 permanent sheds for sheep and goat. This initiative has provided a permanent place for shepherds to keep their herd safe. With the assured safety of their herd, shepherds have increased the number of goat and sheep which has increased their annual income. Take an example of Mr. Sundar Singh. Prior to the construction of permanent shed he used to keep his herd in the cowshed. Due to the paucity of space, the cattle were kept inside the house. Every year his herd were falling prey to wild animals. The number of sheep was around 5-6 in number. But now with the construction of goat shed the size of the herd has increased to 25. He is earning INR 15,000 to 20,000 by selling wool to the hosiery. This was earlier not possible. In an interview, Mr. Sunder Singh told that in the future, he wants to increase the size of his herd that will further increase his income.

Construction of all-weather village paths

Construction of village paths is very useful for the purpose of connectivity from one place to another. Often lack of connectivity hinders the overall development of the area. Due to hilly tracts, it becomes difficult to take agriculture produce to the market. The panchayat had very few all-weather concrete paths and during the rainy season, the situation became worse. It was extremely difficult to take ailed persons and pregnant women to the healthcare facility and often people had



A concrete village path built by the panchayat

carried them in the palanquins. The panchayat gave prominence to village paths and constructed concrete paths with the help of various government-funded schemes. According to panchayat Pradhan, it was not easy to construct the village paths. In the beginning, some persons were reluctant to part with their land and the ongoing work had to be stopped. Then with

the help of village people, panchayat officials told them the positive impact of village paths. In this way, they sorted these problems. With the help of these paths, many households which were hitherto unconnected with the road are now connected. This has resulted in the easier transportation of vegetables, fruits and other farm produce to the markets which has increased the income of farmers. With better connectivity, it is easier to take patients pregnant women to the nearby health care facility which was earlier not possible.

Construction of wastewater drainage

Proper drainage of wastewater is extremely important to maintain hygiene in the area. However, most of the times' village panchayats give less priority to these works. Same was the case with Balagad panchayat. There were no adequate drainage facilities and wastewater run-off from

kitchen and bathroom and was getting accumulated in the streets. This caused major sanitation and hygiene problems in the villages. It was also difficult to pass through because of the stink caused by the free-flowing wastewater. Therefore, with the help of health officials the panchayat allocated funds towards the construction of proper drainage in the panchayat. Now the wastewater gets drained out and doesn't accumulate outside the houses. The households are very happy and now they do not a complaint about the stink and mosquitoes all around in the village, which earlier was the case. Overall, the impending danger of ailments associated with poor hygiene has also subsided.

Land development works

Land development works are important to protect land from soil erosion. Most of the time topsoil is washed away due to heavy rain which causes soil erosion. Panchayat of Balagad was no different



View of the land development work

as every year soil erosion occurred during the rainy season. Residents were often worried about soil erosion that not only reduced the size of their holding but also affected the fertility of the land. With the help of MGNREGA works, land development works were initiated by the panchayat. This has not only reduced the soil erosion but also restored the fertility

of the land. With proper foundation, the rainwater does not run away quickly from the fields. It helps in keeping intact the water content of the soil. With improved fertility, the productivity of land has also increased. This has resulted in increased agriculture and horticulture production from the same piece of land.

Supportive agencies/ institutions/ individuals – Gram panchayat Balagad is grateful to the concerned officials at block and district level especially District Rural Development Agency for their unconditional help always. Panchayat members also acknowledged the role and help of panchayat secretary, without which it wouldn't have been possible. Local residents of the panchayat have also helped by giving their inputs when needed.

Discussion

Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) play a vital role in the development of rural areas of the country. They are the backbone on which the entire progress of villages depends. Therefore, the growth of entire village revolves around the efficiency of PRIs. In the current study, we have discussed the important initiatives taken by the gram panchayat of Balagad that significantly transformed the entire region. Take the case of water storage tanks built by panchayat on the land of farmers. These storage tanks have been extremely beneficial to the farmers as they are no longer dependent upon the mercy of rain gods. Regular supply of water to the fields has increased the net area under orchards and cash crops. Overall the annual income of farmers has increased manifold. In addition to building water storage tanks, some important land development works have also been undertaken by the panchayat. One such work is the laying of retaining walls along the fields prone to soil erosion. Retaining walls have reduced the soil erosion significantly and restored the fertility of the land. These measures have enhanced the per field productivity which has increased the overall production of agriculture and horticulture crops.

Increase in agriculture and horticulture production needs to be complemented with the proper connectivity to the market. Connectivity to the market can be increased by the construction of all-weather paths and roads. Gram panchayat Balagad took an important step to improve the connectivity to the market by constructing all-weather village paths. With the help of village paths,

it has become easier to transport agricultural produce and fruits on time to the nearby markets. Also, with better connectivity, it is easier to take patients and pregnant women to the nearby health care facility which was earlier not possible.

Apart from agriculture/horticulture income, the villagers of Balagad panchayat also earn their living from cattle. Cleanliness in cow sheds is important for the overall hygiene of the cattle and people looking after them. The panchayat has helped them by constructing concrete floor in the cow sheds which has reduced the wastage of fodder and there is a better accumulation of dung. This has improved the overall hygiene of the cow sheds. Also, the panchayat has constructed permanent goat sheds which have helped the shepherds to keep their herd safe. They have increased the size of their herd which has resulted in the increase in income.

Installation of solar lights on the streets is another important initiative taken by the panchayat. Solar lights have improved the overall visibility in the night. These street lights provide safe passage to the commuters coming back to their homes during late hours of the night. Women and children find it safe to venture outside their homes after sunset. Due to better lighting in the area, the residents are rarely being attacked by wild animals. Being renewable in nature, solar lights save electricity and the cost of maintenance is also minimal.

Further, the gram panchayat has made proper drainage for the wastewater. Now the wastewater doesn't get accumulated and overall hygiene has improved. This has helped in reducing the impending danger of ailments associated with poor hygiene. This is an important step in fulfilling the Hon' Prime Minister's dream of making India clean i.e., Swachh Bharat. Although the initiatives were taken by the gram panchayat Balagad are not new and most of these works are common in the rural areas of India. However, the panchayat implemented them in a better way

and transformed the lives of local residents. For their efforts, they thoroughly deserved the accolades they got.

Recognition for Her/ His activities – In recognition of the activities following awards were given to the panchayat:

(i) Deendayal Upadhyay Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar for the year 2015-16 and the panchayat has also been selected for the year 2016-17.

(ii) Panchayat Pashu Dhan Puraskar by the Govt. of Himachal Pradesh for the year 2015-16 and the panchayat has also been selected for the year 2016-17.

Future plan and vision – Gram panchayat Balagad intend to continue the good work done in the past few years. Future plan includes the construction of remaining village paths, building water storage tank for every household, installing street lights in the uncovered areas and fulfilling the Swachh Bharat Mission by making panchayat clean and hygienic.

Acknowledgement – We acknowledge the panchayat Pradhan Mr. Man Singh, panchayat Secretary Mr. Lalit Kumar and other ward members for their support and information are given about initiatives taken by the panchayat. We also want to thank local residents for sharing their inputs about the developmental works undertaken by the panchayat and the changes brought about by these works.

Tables, figures and photographs



Some important captions written on the walls of panchayat bhawan



Separate toilet constructed outside the community hall



A full-grown orchard



Outside view of the panchayat premises, ground floor is used by anganwadi kendra



Solar light installed in the village street



Cow eating grass on the concrete floor



Community hall in Balagad panchayat



Drainage constructed by panchayat



Concrete drain alongside village path

Video version of the case study

Given separately.

Permission

Not needed.