



TOWARDS HOLISTIC PANCHAYAT RAJ

**Twentieth Anniversary Report
of the
Expert Committee on
Leveraging Panchayats
For Efficient Delivery of Public Goods and Services**

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Box 6Y: The Mahila Rajsatta Andolan, Maharashtra^{163 164}

The Mahila Rajsatta Andolan (MRA) is a campaign that aims to empower women and strengthen their **participation in governance** processes through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). It started in 2000 with support from the Resource and Support Centre for Development (RSCD), which is a network campaign that aims to liberate people from exploitative situations and deprivations.

Inspired by the towering figure of Savitri Bai Phule, who dedicated her life to the education and empowerment of deprived women and girls, the MRA began in 500 villages, through 5 regional networks in 25 districts of Maharashtra. MRA work towards building the political consciousness of women through awareness, campaigns, advocacy and trainings. MRA has been able to make an impact at the State level decision-making through its field and policy advocacy initiatives and different intervention strategies such as - advocacy, organising training programmes, providing support in times of crisis and documentation, and dissemination of Information for Elected Women Representatives (EWRs). The aim is to promote a value and issue based people-centric development model, through engaging with those who believe in constitutional values, promote issue based politics, and give priority to marginalized people.

Second, MRA undertakes policy advocacy on issues emerging from research and other field level activities, working with rural women, elected women representatives, policy makers, like minded CBOs and NGOs, researchers, academicians and the media.

Third, MRA works on strengthening key village-level Institutions with a focus on the PDS, health care, education and strengthening of credit societies. The strategy is to energise and activate the Gram Panchayat to take the lead in ensuring effective implementation, utilising government schemes and ensuring that they are implemented transparently. This is being done by distributing posters and booklets about schemes, compendia of latest government resolutions, good practices documentation, Gram Panchayat Darshans, ration audit, social audits¹⁴⁹ and awareness building and training etc.

¹⁶³ Abridged from information submitted by Mr. BhimRaskar, RSCD, Maharashtra.

¹⁶⁴ Innovations in this regard include 'HishobDakhaAbhiyaan' (show your accounts' campaign), Lokshahi Din (democracy day) and Yuvati Sunnvai (public hearing of problems of adolescent girls).

Fourth, MRA conducts a distance education programme named BOSS (Budget, Order, Services and Schemes) for EWRs in 25 districts of Maharashtra.

Fifth, MRA has been working on consolidating an association of elected women leaders and potential women leaders to strengthen governance and practice values, issue and people-based governance.

MRA experience has been that when one focuses on activating already existing structures and ensuring proper service delivery rather than on initiating parallel governance systems, people's ownership is strengthened. Supporting EWRs addresses several issues through the Panchayats as women's leadership is more inclusive, collaborative, consultative; more tolerant of different points of view; more people-oriented and uses more democratic and facilitative forms of decision-making. The experience has challenged many stereotypes of women elected representatives and also facilitates changes in the larger fabric of social structures.

Box 6Z: Capacity Development and Training Efforts in Punjab¹⁶⁵

Because of the very large number of Gram Panchayats in the State, Punjab has a very high ratio of elected Panchayat representatives to the total population. The SIRD, Mohali, Punjab is an apex institute of Training and Research in the State. Training of about 90,000 Elected Representatives every year is taken up through a cascade model, which employs about 200 qualified and experienced empanelled resource persons. These RPs undergo regular orientation and refresher training.

Training to PRIs Representatives is imparted at the block and district level under the supervision and control of SIRD. Reading material prepared by SIRD faculty in vernacular language ensures standardized and uniform model of training.

One of the interesting initiatives undertaken is to focus on social mobilization of the Gram Sabha in the capacity building programmes. Mock Gram Sabha meetings are held during a five-day long training on the Gram Sabha, in which Gram Sabha members are trained in the areas of Village Plan preparation and Social Audit.

¹⁶⁵ Abridged from material contributed by Dr. RozyVeid, SIRD, Mohali, Punjab.