



PEOPLES PARTICIPATION IN GRAM SABHA: A STUDY OF KINNAUR DISTRICT IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

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Abstract

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments provide recognition and protection to the local government and in addition each state has its own local government legislation, the Gram Sabha is the soul of the Panchayati Raj system where people can directly participate and exercise their rights regarding their development process, obligations and concerns. India's first independent Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru inaugurated the Panchayati Raj system in Rajasthan on October 02, 1959, to involve the rural people in the process of governance. After passing through many ups and downs, Panchayats and Municipalities got constitutional status in the year 1992-93 as the third tier of governance structures in democracy at the local level. Establishment of Panchayati Raj, in the Gram Sabha, the general assembly of the villagers plays an important role for the effective functioning of the panchayat. Gram Sabha meetings provide an opportunity to the rural poor, women and marginalized people to be a part of decision making on matters affecting their lives.

KEYWORDS: Effectiveness of Gram Sabha, Participation, Awareness, Local planning, Panchayat.

The present research paper deals with processes, results and perspective of Gram Sabha meetings in Kinnaur district with the main objectives of peoples participation, awareness and effectiveness of Gram Sabha in local planning in Himachal Pradesh. The present research paper shows that the area under study is mainly clear and the Panchayat is facing problems of conflict during the meeting of the Gram Sabha. This shows that peoples are aware of their rights and duties. To make the Gram Sabha meetings effective, there should be a Question Hour. All the concerned officers should be present in the Gram Sabha meetings so that all the doubts of the members of the Gram Sabha regarding the implementation of local development programs can be resolved. Effective Gram Sabha is possible only when the participation of the people in the Gram Sabha is maximum. For this, an awareness campaign should be conducted under which information about new techniques of agriculture and horticulture should be given.

Introduction

The gram sabha constitutes the most basic unit of decision making in the panchayati raj institution structure. The gram sabha area consists of a village or group of contiguous villages with a population of not less than one thousand and not more than five thousand. In case of scheduled areas, an area with a population of less than one thousand can constitute gram sabha. A gram sabha is established by a government order and consists of

persons who are residents within the sabha area and are entitled to be registered in the voters list of that gram panchayat. The basic philosophy that underlines the concept of gram sabha is that of participatory democracy. Gram sabhas provide a local platform for people to meet and discuss local development problems and to monitor and evaluate the development and administrative actions of their elected representatives does ensuring transparency and accountability in local governance. Most importantly, a gram sabha provides an opportunity for the participation of all sections of the village women, dalits, tribals and other marginalized group in planning and implementation of local development programmes.

Active functioning of the gram sabha would ensure a participatory democracy with transparency, accountability and achievements. Gram sabha has been given 'watchdog' powers and responsibilities by the panchayati raj acts in most of the states to supervise and monitor the functioning of panchayat elected representatives and government function in functionaries and examine in the annual statement of accounts and audit reports. These are implied powers indirectly empowering gram sabha to carry out social audit scene additional to other functions. Members of the gram sabha and the village panchayat, intermediate panchayat and district panchayat through their representatives, can raise issues of social concern and public interest and demands an explanation.

The gram sabha has been conceived as the basic body to ensure people's participation in local governance and development. The article 243 (b) of Indian constitution defines 'Gram Sabha' as a body consisting of persons registered in electoral rolls related to a village comprised within the area to panchayat at the village level. The article 243 (g) of the act defines a village as one specified by the governor by public notification to be a village for the purpose of the act and may include a group of villages so specified. And the article 243 (a) empowers gram sabha to exercise such powers and performed functions at the village level as the legislature of a state may, by law, provide. The amendments do not specify any function to be performed by the gram sabha but it is left to the states to statutorily and entrust the gram sabha with vast powers to function as legal entity.

Local governance as an institution of local administration establishes the crucial significance in participation of people in the management and administration of their local affairs. The local government is called the government at local level. The concept of people's participation in local government is of great importance for successful functioning of a local authority. People's participation not only enhances individual dignity and community failing at local levels but also makes the programs more responsive and better adaptive to the local needs. People participation in local governance has also making a developmental communication between authority and mass in grass root level.

Panchayati raj institution in rural India for rural governance has a long history during ancient days. Indian villages were organised in a way that enable them to maintain social order in vedic period. The village was a part of administration. The village government was run under the control of village headman called 'Gramini'. In the Morya period the village was basic unit of administration and there was the existence of village panchayat.

In Gupta period village council became the permanent feature of local administration. In Chola period there was also the existence of well organised village panchayat system as such as modern panchayat. In Sultanate period panchayat as a grassroots government looked after education, sanitation and acted as a judicial body to settle

dispute. In Mughal period the village administration by elder's council was made indispensable part of the civil administration. But there was no any evidence for participation of women in such type of grassroots governmental bodies.

During the freedom struggle, India fought with a highly centrally british regime and most of indian thinkers were not in favour of centralised structure of government. Participated democracy, on the other hand, lays emphasis on participation as a determining principle of the functioning of democracy. Participation means active involvement of citizens in the decision-making process. To ensure and to provide opportunities for people's participation, it is necessary to establish appropriate institution at the grassroots level. In India more than two third populations is rural, therefore such institutions are needed to be established at the village level. Village is a community based on face to face relationships and the objective of 'Communitarian Polity' can be achieved through active participation of rural people. Mahatma Gandhi eulogized self-governing village and expressed his view, "If my dream is fulfilled, and everyone of seven lacs of village becomes a well living republic in which there are no illiterates, in which no one is idle for want to work, in which everyone is used fully occupied and has nourishing food, well-ventilated dwellings and sufficient khadi for covering the body, and in which all villagers know and observe the laws of hygiene and sanitation, such a state must have varied and increasingly needs which it must supply unless it would stagnant."

Mahatma Gandhi strongly advocated for decentralization of economic and political power through the organisation of village panchayat. Gandhi wanted true democracy in India. According to Gandhi "True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by people of every village". Gandhi really wanted 'Swaraj' of self-rule by the people of India who represent the rural mass. He observed that India's soul lives in the village. He wanted that power structure should be begin from the below. He dreamt of an ideal village.

According to Mahatma Gandhi ideal village will have perfect sanitation, sufficient light and street will be free from dust. Village will also produce own grain, vegetable, fruit and its own khadi. Gandhi said, "My ideal village will contain intelligent human being they will not leave in dirt and darkness as animals. The concept of decentralization and local governance are recognised as an essential element for the development of grassroots democracy. It is the process through which the responsibility of decision making at local level comes to the people. The real intention of participation is to strengthen human capabilities as well as to encourage the people. Indian states have introduced the concept of democratic decentralization in the form of panchayati raj and municipalities, where all the people including the poor and marginalized section can actively get involved in the decision-making process. The concept of democratic decentralization is materialized at the rural level through the panchayati raj institutions. It is considered to be an effective institution for the socio economic development of the rural people. It provides an opportunity to people to participate in all the affairs of rural governance.

Panchayati raj was given new deal in the shape of a unified Himachal Pradesh panchayati raj act 1968, which came into force on 15th November, 1970. Under this scheme; gram panchayats at the village level, panchayat samitis at block level and zila parishad at the district level were established.

The study area is Pangi Panchayat in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh. Himachal Pradesh is situated in the middle of the Western Himalayas. The study will be helpful for policy planners and rural development planning, especially for the Panchayati Raj Department, for adopting strategies to ensure the effectiveness of Gram Sabha in local planning.

Methodology

The methodology included personal interview schedule using primary data, secondary data, secondary data has been collected through census reports, gazetteer official records and panchayat records. In the present study, random sampling techniques have been followed in the selection of samples. Tables are created with the help of Excel sheet and SPSS-22 software. Different tables are used to analyze the data.

Objectives

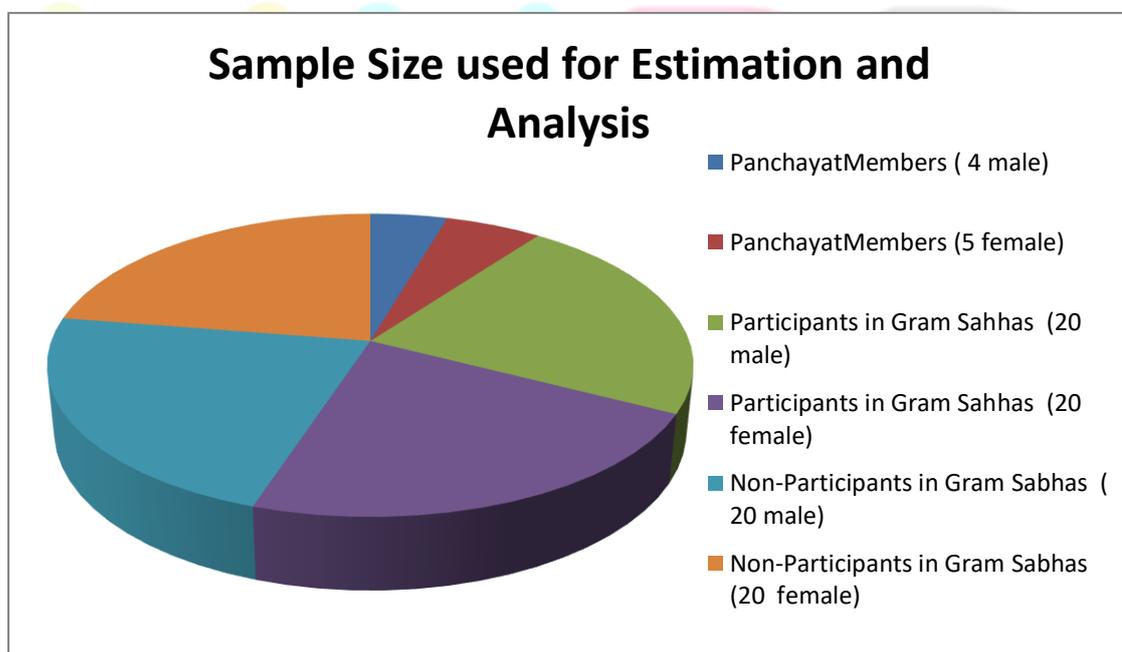
- ❖ To study the people's participation in gram sabha.
- ❖ To understand the extent of awareness and effectiveness of the Gram Sabha.
- ❖ To assess the opinion of the participants in gram sabhas and non-participants on the role and importance of the gram sabha.

Analysis

Table 1.1 Sample Size used for Estimation and Analysis

Types of Respondents	Sex		All	
	Male	Female	Number	Percentage
Panchayat Members	4	5	9	10.12
Participants in Gram Sahhas	20	20	40	44.94
Non-Participants in Gram Sabhas	20	20	40	44.94
Total	44	45	89	100

The total numbers of respondents are eighty nine. Out of the 9 Panchayat members 4 male participants and 5 female participants have been taken. Of the 40 participants in Gram Sabhas, men and women constitute 20 each and, of the 40 non- participants, men and women constitute 20 each.



Most of the members have attended training programs related to Panchayati Raj or decentralized planning. All the Panchayat members under study have received training. With regard to the agenda of the Gram Sabha

meetings, 88.9% of the respondents mentioned that there was a specific agenda for each Gram Sabha meeting and 11.1% of the respondents disagreed.

With regard to participation, 100% of the respondents said that the president, vice-president and other officers always participate in the meetings of the Gram Sabha and 77.8% of the respondents agreed that the district and block panchayat members also participate in the meetings. All the respondents stated that Gram Sabha was held on working days. Regarding making Panchayat members aware of wards and voters, 100% men and women said that the ward is reserved. All the members of the Panchayat know the head of the families personally. This shows that they are aware of their voters and wards.

It is well known that four Gram Sabha meetings should be held in a year. Heading to the question of whether the Gram Sabha should be a body of conflict resolution, it was found that 100% of the respondents said that there was a conflict resolution in the Gram Sabha.

The Panchayat members answered the question asked regarding Mahila Sabha. In this regard, cent percent panchayat members said that women's meetings are necessary to promote women's participation in Gram Sabhas.

Regarding the effectiveness of Gram Sabha in local planning about the existence of voluntary organizations in their own wards and panchayats, 100% of the respondents reported that there are voluntary organisations.

To understand deeply the working of Gram Sabha, investigator asked some questions related to Gram Sabha and Ward member representative. In response to the question whether they have called Adarsh Gram Sabhas in their wards, 55.6% of the respondents said that they have organized Model Gram Sabhas as decided by the Panchayat Samiti. Model Gram Sabhas set the tone for Gram Sabhas in other wards. It has been found that the people who conducted the Adarsh Gram Sabhas are relatively more popular, efficient and hardworking among the voters. A question was asked regarding the location of the venue capable of accommodating 500 persons, 11.1% said that it was capable of accommodating 500 persons and 88.9% of the members accepted that the meeting place could accommodate 500 persons.

Regarding the quality of discussion in Gram Sabha meetings, 56.6% of the respondents reported that the members of the Gram Sabha have a tendency to criticize the public representatives unnecessarily, 44.4% of the Panchayat members expressed that people did not take any criticism during the meetings.

None of the Panchayat members agreed that there was any such complaint as regards the complaint of the ward members neglecting the ward. Hundred percent of the respondents said that efforts have been made to increase the participation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Gram Sabhas. The most prominent categories participating in Gram Sabha are farmers i.e. 66.7% and 33.3% are women. 100% of the respondents said that quorum has been prescribed in the meetings. 77.8% of the respondents said that most of the time it is found that people do not create any disorder in the Gram Sabha, but 22.2% of the respondents agreed that people deliberately create disorder in the Gram Sabha.

With regard to the effectiveness of the Gram Sabha, a question was asked as to what the participants of the Gram Sabha expect. 11% of the respondents said that awareness campaign should be started, under which information should be given about new techniques of agriculture and horticulture, 33% of the respondents are in favor of village development, 11% of the respondents should help the villagers to know maximum benefits. Interested, 11% respondents are in favor of improving irrigation facilities in the village, 11% respondents said that all works should be done smoothly, 11% respondents said that all needy people should not be deprived of their rights and remaining 11% of the respondents said that proper arrangement of pucca lane, street light and sewage system.

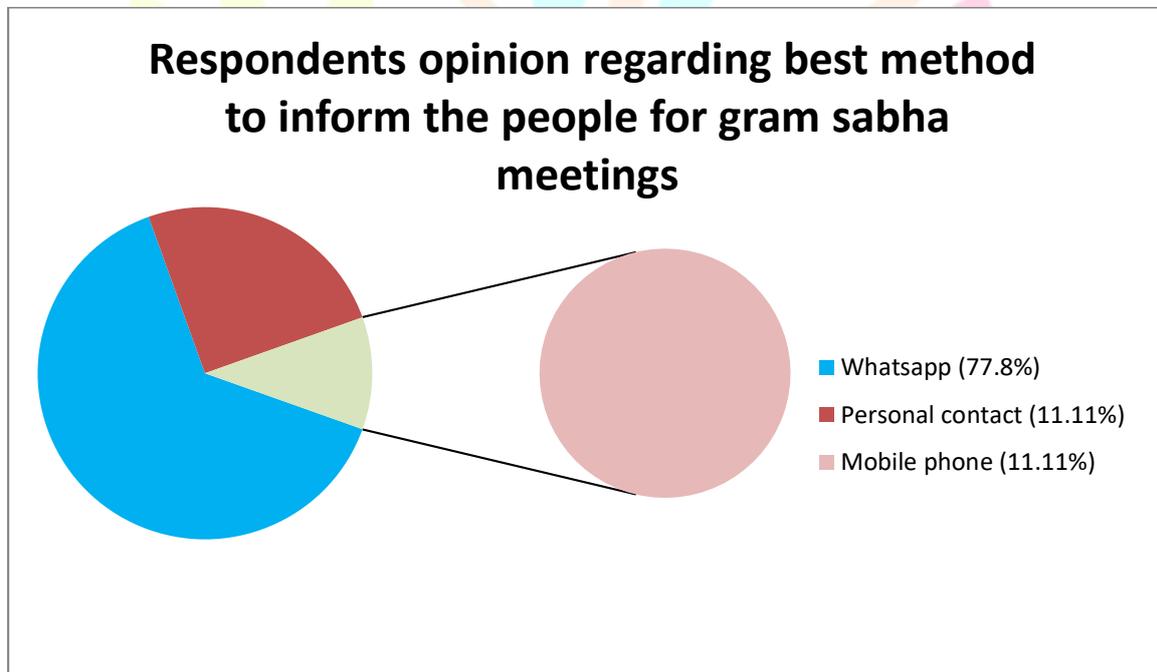
In response to the experience related to Gram Sabha as a Panchayat member, 44.4% of the Panchayat members said that they became a Panchayat member for the first time and it is a good experience, we will know more with the passage of time. Only one respondent said that this is my second term and its experience is very good

and will do best in future. The remaining 44.4% of the respondents said that it was a good experience. To make Gram Sabha more effective, 22.22 percent of the respondents said that Gram Sabha should be organized on holiday to make Gram Sabha more effective. 33.3% of the respondents said that cultural program can make Gram Sabha more effective. One respondent said that people's participation can be increased by providing seeds in free of cost, one respondent is in favor that it can be made effective by organizing sports events before or after Gram Sabha and the remaining 22.2% respondents said that the Gram Sabha can be made more effective by giving them the opportunity to express their views.

Table 1.2 Respondents opinion regarding best method to inform the people for gram sabha meetings

Method	Rospondents	Percentage
Whatsapps	7	77.78
Personal contact	1	11.11
Mobile phone	1	11.11
Total	100	100

Table 1.2 shows the respondents' opinion about the best way to inform people for Gram Sabha meetings. In this, about the best way to inform people for Gram Sabha meetings, 77.78% of the respondents said that they informed people through WhatsApp. 11.11% of the respondents were informed through mobile phone and personal contact.



With regard to non-participant's awareness of ward members, Gram Sabha and neighbourhood groups, 100% of male and female respondents said that they know the ward member personally. And all the respondents are aware of the neighbourhood clusters in their ward. Another question was asked whether he had heard of Gram Sabha. Out of 40 respondents, all said that they had heard about Gram Sabha meetings. Of the participants, 42.5% of the respondents said that they knew about the Gram Sabha from the ward members, 30% of the respondents said that they had been informed about it to the neighbourhood groups, 7.5% of the respondents said that they Information of villagers was received, 20% of the respondents said that the head of the family.

With regard to the reason for not attending the Gram Sabha, 65% of the respondents (non-participants) said that they could not participate due to paucity of time. 2.5% of the respondents are not willing to attend the Gram Sabha meeting. 2.5% of the respondents said that we do not come under BPL or IRDP and never get any facility from the Panchayat, hence the need is not felt to attend the meetings. 5% replied that Panchayat is far away from us. 25% replied that we do not live in the house permanently.

With regard to people's participation, 100% respondents said that they have participated in social activities. 27.5 percent of the respondents participated in the Dev Sabha function. 7.5% of the respondents have participated in each culture function in Piri, marriage ceremony and death ceremony and 10% of the respondents have participated in the birthday celebrations. 12.5% of the respondents have participated in a program of Buddhist scripture called Yumpothi, which is circumambulated once a year. 20% of the respondents have participated in the Havan program called as Homang in local dialect. One of the non-participants has participated in the circumambulation of a place called Rangkoryang to enter the temple of Mata Chandike.

In order to know the constitution regarding the participation of the people in the meetings of the Gram Sabha, the investigator put various questions. In response to a question, 100% of the respondents said that there was a prescribed quorum. It is also observed that in many Gram Sabhas the conveners are not interested in maintaining the attendance register carefully. 80 percent of the respondents said that the participants demanded minutes of the Gram Sabha meetings, while 20% said that no one asked for minutes. 95 percent of the respondents are of the opinion that the meeting place of Grain Sabha is convenient, while 5% said that the place is not convenient for them. When asked about attending the next Gram Sabha, 100% of the participants replied that they would attend the next Gram Sabha meetings.

To know the opinion of the respondent about the benefit of attending the Gram Sabha meetings, 62.5% of the respondents did not get any benefit from attending the Gram Sabha and 37.5% of the respondents got benefit from the Gram Sabha meetings. 20% of the 15 (37.5%) beneficiaries expressed that they got the benefit of land reform under MGNREGA, 10% of the beneficiaries built a water tank under MGNREGA and each 2.5% of the respondents have made toilet, land reform and water tank and all benefits under BPL. 85% of the respondents are counted as beneficiary of any type of project and 15% of the respondents did not get any benefit from any type of project

Table 1.3 Respondents Level of Involvement and Participation in Gram Sabha

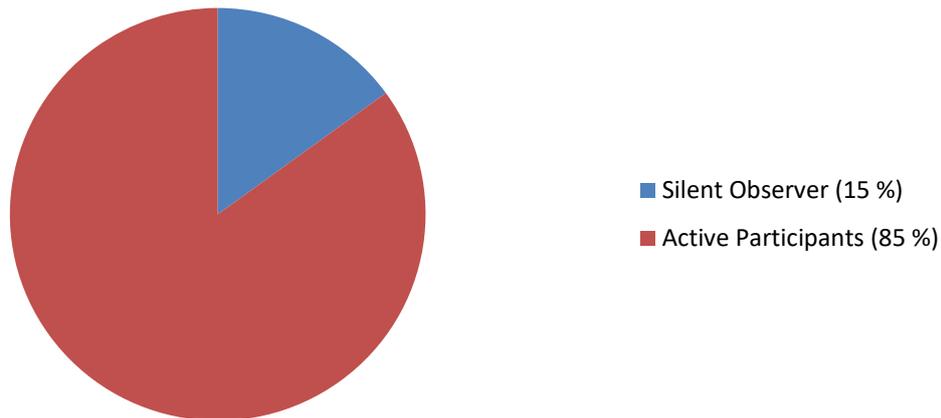
Meetings by Sex

Participation	Respondents	Total %
Silent Observer	6	15
Active Participants	34	85
Total	40	100

With regard to the level of involvement and participation of the respondents, 15% said that they were silent observers, 85% said they were active participants as shown in table 3.26 and by pie chart. It is clear that most of the respondents are active participants which show the effectiveness of gram sabha in local planning.

Research Through Innovation

Respondents Level of Involvement and Participation in Gram Sabha Meetings by Sex



Regarding Gram Sabha meeting, 57.5% of the respondents said that two Gram Sabha meetings have been held in their wards in the last two years. 40% of the respondents said that they have attended the meetings thrice and 2.5% of the respondents have attended the meetings four times. In response to the number of Gram Sabha meetings attended, 65% of the respondents said that they have attended Gram Sabha meetings twice and 35% respondents have attended Gram Sabha meetings thrice. It was also found that majority of the respondents i.e. 62.5% attended the meetings for the first time during the last two years in December, 2019 and the remaining 37.5% of the respondents attended the meetings for the first time in April, 2019.

It was observed that if the affluent and other respected persons of the ward will attend the meeting, the working class, especially, the women, remain silent on their comments and orders. During the field work, the investigator found that 85% of the respondents said that the affluent areas participated in the Gram Sabha meetings and 15% of the respondents said that the affluent areas did not participate in the Gram Sabha meetings

In response to the experience of attending Gram Sabha meetings, 52.5 percent of the respondents have good experience in Gram Sabha meetings. 15% of the respondents said that important discussions take place in gram sabhas, 20% of the respondents said that most of the problems are explored and run smoothly. 7.5% of the respondents said that there is conflict between political parties and interfere in each other's work. 5% of the respondents said that the meeting of the Gram Sabha provides a good platform to the people and said that it is a good medium for the development of the village which will lead to the public development of the village.

Suggestions

- It is found that most of the respondents are in favor of village development, in favor of benefits to the villagers, want to know about the improvement of irrigation facilities in the village, all the needy people should not be deprived of their rights and some of the respondents said that there should be proper arrangement of pucca lane, street light and sewage system. This is possible only when there is a meeting in the ward and feedback is taken from the people before the meeting of the Gram Sabha.
- An awareness campaign should be conducted under which information about new techniques of agriculture and horticulture should be given.

- Effective Gram Sabha is possible only when the participation of the people in the Gram Sabha is maximum.
- To make the Gram Sabha meetings effective, there should be a Question Hour.
- To make Gram Sabha more effective, Gram Sabha should be organized on holidays, cultural programs should be promoted, games should be organized and participation of more and more people is necessary.

Conclusion

Out of 9 respondents of Panchayat members, 5 are women. It shows women dominance and awareness about Panchayati Raj system. Non-profits, employers and the middle class of the society are still far away from attending the Gram Sabha meetings. Most of them feel that they are not getting any benefit and some of them are very busy with their work. Employees do not have a workplace in their hometown. Most of the Panchayat members have attended the training program related to Panchayati Raj. This shows that they are trying to improve their skills. All Panchayat members have made efforts to increase the participation of people belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It is found that among the Panchayat members there is an unmarried woman i.e. there is no restriction for the participation of unmarried women by the parents to hold such posts. Of the participants in Gram Sabha meetings, 33.5% are in the age group of 42-49. Majority of the non-participants (97.5%) in Gram Sabha meetings are married. Majority (77.8%) of the panchayat members, including both men and women, are married. Most of the non-participants like to go in groups together and participate in social activities. It has been found that Whatsapp, mobile phones and personal contacts are the best ways to bring in the Gram Sabha as most of them do not care about posters, notices or other written material. Non-participants also know about neighbourhood groups in their wards. It is now accepted that Gram Sabha is a valid mechanism for beneficiary selection. The attendance of the participants in the Gram Sabha has been carefully noted. All the Panchayat members know the number of people present in the meetings of each Gram Sabha.

It has been found that the Panchayat is facing problems of conflict during the meeting of Gram Sabha. This shows that people are aware of their rights and duties. There should be a Question Hour for the Gram Sabha meetings to be effective, it is found from most of the respondents that they have given time in the Gram Sabha to ask questions and obtain information. It shows the effectiveness of Gram Sabha in local planning. All concerned officers should be present in the meetings of the Gram Sabha so that all the doubts of the members of the Gram Sabha regarding the implementation of the local development programs can be resolved.

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