

## Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI's)

CORD's rural development projects work on four principles & strategic approach,

1. Participation
2. Integration
3. Networking
4. Sustainability

CORD is very conscious, especially since the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA)-1992 that India's participatory local self- governance has a feasible & institutional status that can be harnessed to implement people's programmes at the grass root. Eventually, local self governance will be the final route of decentralization of fund, function & functionaries specially the 29 subject/departments under 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA,

However, this dream of local self governance needs informed and responsible decisions at village level by the electorate in Gram Sabhas. Hence, CORD is not only aware of the possibility & potential of PRI's but it is also very conscious that we have a long way to go to strengthen the PRI's in Rural India. It is possible if all of us who are involved in rural development take the building of PRI's as a very important tool for developing rural India which constitutes 71% of India's populations. It requires **active** and responsible participation by the Gram Sabha. This is a big challenge in a country with 34.97 illiterate people & where the literate are either indifferent or driven by vested interests.



*People approving the resolution in Gram Sabha*

CORD is committed to strengthening of PRI's in villages through capacity building of Community Based Organizations (CBO's) on issues of local self governance to enable them to make a difference in Up Gram Sabhas & Gram Sabhas. To understand this very important aspect of the basic unit of India's democracy we need to be aware of the history of PRI's.

During the time of the Rig Veda (1200 BC), evidence suggests that self-governing village bodies called **Panchayat** existed. Panchayats were functional institutions of grassroots governance in almost every village. The village Panchayat had powers, both executive and judicial.

It was during British rule that the autonomy of Panchayats disappeared gradually with the establishment of local civil and criminal courts, revenue and police organisations, the increase in communications, the growth of individualism and the operation of the **Ryotwari** (landholder wise) system as against the **Mahalwari** (village tenure system). During the freedom movement, leaders of the freedom movement could not agree on the status and role to be assigned to the institution of rural local self government. *Mahatma Gandhi was in favour of village 'Swaraj' or self rule and strengthening of the village Panchayat to the fullest extent.* The drafting of the Constitution for independent India saw Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) placed in the non-justiciable part of the Constitution, the Directive Principles of State Policy, as Article 40. The Article read 'the State shall take steps to

organise village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self government.

After enactment of the Constitution and its enforcement, the first step for rural upliftment was the emphasis on Community Development Projects in 1952. However, the Community Development Projects soon found themselves floundering in a vacuum with the absence of effective instruments for peoples' participation

The first attempt by the Government to confer constitutional status on Panchayati Raj Institutions was the Constitutional Bill (64<sup>th</sup> Amendment) which was introduced in Parliament in July of 1989 as a result of efforts of the then Prime Minister, Shri Rajiv Gandhi.

In 1991, the Government introduced another bill, 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Bill, for Panchayats. They were referred to a joint selected committee of Parliament who ultimately passed the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Bill in December of 1992. The President gave his assent on April 20, 1993, and the Government enforced them by notifications issued on April 24, 1993 as the Constitution (73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment) Act of 1992 for Panchayats. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution was made in order to revitalize the rural local bodies respectively by giving them Constitutional status, allocating powers and functions, making provisions for finances, ensuring regular elections, and providing reservations of seats for SC's, ST's, women, and weaker sections so as to ensure their participation in the political process at all levels. This amendment has also provided for reservations for chairpersons at all levels of local bodies to ensure their effective role in decision making.

**The main features of the Constitution (73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment) Act:**

- Establishment of a three tier structure (Village Panchayat, Block Samiti and Zilla Parishad) in states which have a population of 20 lakhs and above.
- Regular elections to Panchayats every 5 years.
- Reservations of seats for members and offices for chairpersons to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in proportion to their population.
- Reservations of greater than 1/3rd seats for members and offices for chairpersons to women.
- Constitution of state finance commissions every five years to recommend measures to improve the finances of Panchayats.
- A State Election Commission has to be constituted in every State and Union Territory (UT), to supervise, direct and control the regular and smooth elections to Panchayats.
- Gram Sabha or village assembly as a deliberative body to decentralise governance has been envisaged as the foundation of the Panchayati Raj System.
- To promote bottom-up planning, the District Planning Committee (DPC) in every district has been accorded constitutional status.
- An indicative list of 29 items has been given in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. Panchayats are expected to play an effective role in the planning and implementation of works related to these 29 items.



**Pali Sabha meeting in Deuldhia, Orissa**

CORD Lead & Resource Centre at Sidhbari is working through its Comprehensive Integrated and Participatory Rural Development Programme in over 223 Gram Panchayats of District Kangra in Himachal Pradesh for the last 23 years. Other sites in Orissa & Tamilnadu, CORD has recently started facilitating & mobilizing people through Community Based Organisation to participate in Gramsabhas. In Orissa at CORD Lathikatta & Deuldhia 'Pali Sabhas' (Upgram Sabhas) have been conducted too. In these areas CORD is focusing we have been working here to ensure that Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI's) function as instruments of local self-government; It is important that their

functional and financial autonomy is guaranteed and transparency in their functioning is ensured. To show tangible results, we have been focusing on 26 Gram Panchayats since September of 2007 by ensuring that all the Wards in a Panchayat have at least one CBO so that each Ward in the Panchayat begins to conduct effective Up-Gram Sabhas, a sub –unit of Gram Sabha at Ward level. Each Panchayat has 5-13 Wards often spread over a large area & in case of Himachal Pradesh a hilly State the terrain too is difficult.

**CORD organized a series of activities to empower people specially women & youth and spread awareness of Panchayati Raj. Activities were categorized under the heads:**

- To strengthen the Panchayati Raj system
- To increase the participation of village community in Up–Gram Sabha and Gram Sabha
- To help the Panchayats for implementation of rural development schemes
- To enhance capacity building and decision making of elected Panchayat representatives
- To motivate rural youth and women for active participation in the Up-Gram Sabha & Gram Sabha
- Optimum utilization of the human and economic resources of the villages

CORD has campaigned for the proper conduct of Up-Gram Sabha/Gram Sabha meetings in these Panchayats. The procedure has involved youth & women to participate in the deliberations and decision making in Up-Gram Sabha/Gram Sabha in ways meaningful to everyone in the community. We have also assisted in the preparation of ward plans (resource mapping) at the Panchayat level in many villages (wards) around the District in an attempt to address the priorities and real issues of local community. As a result of these efforts, most of these Gram Panchayats have now adopted this "bottom-up" approach and the Gram Sabha is accepted as the forum for participation, deliberation, planning, and monitoring of rural development.



*According to our experiences, since a large percentage of Elected Panchayat Representatives are entering public offices for the first time, they have pioneered many innovative approaches to their capacity building. Over this period, nearly 1,150 Elected*

*Panchayat Representatives have been trained by CORD on certain aspects of governance. Out of these, nearly 400 are female Panchayat representative and 200 SC/ST Panchayat representatives have been trained to perform their responsibilities effectively.*

### **CORD's following efforts play a crucial role towards strengthening Panchayati Raj System in the State**

#### **Up-Gram Sabha**

Up-Gram Sabha is a ward level meeting in which the community assembles together with ward member of concerned wards and discusses economic and social issues. At the district-level, we started to facilitate Up-Gram Sabha through our assistance to organize it. Our



*Up-Gram Sabha (Ward level meeting)*

workers assist to organize Up-Gram Sabha; For identification and sensitization of local resources, resource mapping practice are used to prioritize the problem. We then facilitate the community in a ward in preparing their resolutions. Respective ward members of the Panchayat then submit the resolution in the upcoming Gram Sabha meeting. According to our experiences, the male participation in the Up-Gram Sabha is usually very low compared to female involvement. This provides a big challenge for us to encourage the male community to partake in the Up-Gram Sabha. Topics in the Up-Gram Sabha include hard issues such as road construction and building construction (community hall, school, etc.) as well as soft issues like female foeticide, dowry, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence etc. We have facilitated 433 **Up Gram Sabhas** with the help of CBO's, mainly Mahila Mandals.

#### **Resource Mapping**



*Village people preparing their resource mapping*

“Resource mapping is a process in which we identify the local resources of a Panchayat with the participation of the community and prioritize them on the basis of their necessity”. In this process, we first identify, with the help of CBO's, the present problems in the villages

and then prioritize on the basis of need. Often, village communities realize that they are unnecessary demanding for an asset already existing when they are many more other important priorities when we facilitate resource mapping with them. This method is an important means for effective micro-planning for the village community. We have facilitated approximately **250 resource plans** with the help of CBO's.

CORD mobilizes communities for participatory planning so that elected local bodies at Gram Panchayat level have an idea of the resources that will be available to them on an annual and five-year basis if they work with their elected members to procure & negotiate schemes available with Government. Participatory planning lies in mobilizing the local community to articulate their priorities in an informed and intelligent manner so that grassroots planning moves from being the preparation of a wish-list into a feasible, responsible plan.

### **Gram Sabha Facilitation (Strengthening People's Participation)**

In every Panchayat there is a people's body called Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha is a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral roll at the village level. It is the only forum which provides opportunities to all the adult villagers to directly participate and suggest what can and needs to be done for their own Panchayat, and how that could be achieved . Only an effective Gram Sabha can ensure public regulation of authority .In case the Gram Sabha does not demand transparency & accountability from the elected leaders specially the Pradhan (chairperson of Gram Panchayat) Panchayat though informed discussions & decisions, the vested interest of the elected representatives will prevail. The Gram Sabha serves to keep Gram Panchayat accountable.

Gram Panchayats across Himachal Pradesh have been constitutionally mandated to ensure that Gram Sabha meetings be held at least four times a year. But in reality, for most places in Himachal Pradesh, Gram Sabha meetings are held on paper only. Most of the Gram Sabha members are unaware of their rights and responsibilities as Gram Sabha members; and many of them can't distinguish between the Gram Sabha meeting and the Gram Panchayat meeting of elected representatives only. It has also been found that villagers in general are not informed of Gram Sabha meetings. Even if informed, women may not participate because of social customs. Lack of a common venue for meetings where the Gram Sabha is too scattered also becomes a barrier to peoples' participation in these meetings.

As per Article 243-G, Panchayats are constitutionally mandated to prepare plans for economic development and social justice. Thus every Panchayat has to prepare a plan taking into account local needs and local conditions. The whole process develops a framework of agreement within the Gram Sabha about development priorities.

Villagers sit together to priorities community problems, prepare a list of resources available, and ask the Gram Panchayat to implement the plan. Since the plan is annual, it provides a rigorous framework for the Panchayat to be accountable to the Gram Sabha. A plan



*Women raising their issues in the Gram Sabha*

facilitated by local organizations and local community groups like youth and women's groups, allows villagers to scrutinize and judge the performance of their Gram Panchayat. These organizations and the Gram Sabha play a constructive role in augmenting Panchayat resources by enabling Panchayats to mobilize internal resources as well as to negotiate effectively with the government to provide resources to implement the village plans.

Information dissemination to the people and the process of bottom-up-planning or micro-planning are some of the most effective ways of strengthening participation by the community for their own development. CORD plays a vital role in strengthening people's participation (in local governance) through these processes. It also helps civil societies to strengthen their voice in peoples' individual development.

### **Village Volunteer Resource Person (VVRP) Training**

The objective of the village volunteer resource person is to identify active persons so that people from local communities can come forward themselves in eradicating their social problems independently. We organize VVRP Training in our focused Panchayats. We provide training to all the participants on Panchayati Raj concept. We specifically call the president or the secretary of Mahila Mandal and Yuva Mandal for their capacity building, and through this training we prepare village level facilitators on PRI's. Their roles and responsibilities also include facilitating some aspects of the Gram Sabha and raising questions to the villagers. This is where we talk about the self-development and self-reliant community that can take decisions and has the authority to do so as per the Constitution of the country. The village facilitator whom CORD calls VVRP is an important introduction for generating community's interest in the Panchayats concerning various issues. By this method, we are trying our best to bring up-liftment in the villages and the Panchayat. A total of **150 Village Volunteer Resource Person** have been identified.. Training programme of VVRP for strengthens PRI's constitute the following issues:



*CORD Workers discussing their plan for VVRP Training at field*

- What is Panchayati Raj?
- Why is it necessary?
- Up-Gram Sabha/Gram Sabha and their importance
- Resource mapping and its importance
- What is NREGA, RTI, etc?
- Schemes for rural development and many other important social issues.

### **Panchayat Divas (Panchayat day) follow up Programme**

CORD conducts Panchayat Divas some times in which several Panchayat representatives come from different Panchayats to share their experiences and working patterns. This sets an example for other villagers to do the same as well as provides a role model. Panchayat Divas follow up programme is open to all local self-government elected representatives and Gram Sabha members. During this programme CORD upgrades and mobilizes elected Panchayat members. In this process schemes are discusses that have been started for rural/village development. The leaders are advised how they could utilise the funds effectively. This programme includes several productive games related to functions



*Panchayat representatives Training at CORD Centre*



of Panchayat elected representatives, their schedule, and their work, thus helping to increase their capacity and leadership qualities by bestowing them the latest information on central and state sponsored schemes and any other issues related to Panchayat.

### **The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) -2005**

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 guarantees at least 100 days of employment in a financial year to any rural household whose adult members are willing to do unskilled manual work. The Act has come into force in district Kangra of HP since 2007.

*Women doing labor under NREGA*



CORD sees NREGA as an opportunity where PRI's will have access to fairly adequate resources to meet the expectations of the rural population by not only generating wage employment for the needy but also creating useful community assets, which will further catalyse socio-economic development of rural areas. Community Based Organizations (CBO's) were sensitized about the importance of working with Panchayats to make NREGA a success. We have guided the following efforts.

- To orient the members of the Gram Panchayat for better understanding and implementation of NREGS
- To orient the CBO's in the NREGA job application process
- To motivate and orient villagers for social auditing
- To orient the CBO's, village volunteer resource persons, members of the Gram Panchayat, and Gram Sabha members on registration and issuance of job cards, wage payments, worksite facilities, muster roll, measurement of business etc.

### **Social Audit training for NREGA-**

The Block Development Officer of Nagrota Bhagwan of District Kangra has requested CORD to train elected leaders & the electorate in conducting Social Audit for effective implementation of NREGA. The training of Panchayat Samiti members of the block has been completed successfully in July 2008.



### **Right to Information Act- 2005**

We all pay taxes. Even a beggar on the street pays sales tax when he buys anything from the market. This money belongs to us. During interface with our associated CBO's & other village communities following points are emphasised



- Where does this money go? Proper utilization?
- Why are there no medicines in the hospitals?
- Why are people dying of starvation?
- Why are the roads in such pathetic conditions?
- Why are the taps dry?

Now we have a right to question governments. The Parliament of India has passed Right to Information Laws, which empower citizens to question the government, inspect their files, and take copies of government documents and also to inspect government works.

### Advocacy

Advocacy has a vital role in CORD's programme. It promotes that people voice for their rightful needs in local self –governance be made feasible. As per Himachal Panchayati Raj Act-1994, fifteen departments are given to Panchayats directly in which they can interfere or take actions for the betterment of concerned department's and mitigate the problems of the villagers by using their services positively. However, since some Panchayat Representatives are not very aware of their rights and powers for action. CORD encourages discussions with Panchayat representatives about appropriate advocacy.

### Networking

Our aim is to connect with departments/offices to form a strong relationship with officials and get the latest, necessary information. This information is always needed by our entire team and village level institutions i.e. CBO's for community development. In our programme, we network and form liaisons with different government departments on the Block and district levels such as: BDO, Panchayat Samiti Horticulture Office, DPO (District Panchayat office), DRDA (District rural development authority), Zilla Parishad, ADC, Director, and **Secretary PRI and R&D** correspondingly .This is a very important activity of CORD's programme which helps with policy and advocacy in PRI's. Through this activity we are also connected with various NGO's which are working at the state and national level.



### A brief review of CORD's associates in PRI's elections in District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh from 1994 to 2005-

During elections CORD's works hard with the communities in the process of selecting & nominating people with leadership qualities so that they do not base their nominations & selections only on the basis of caste & other vested interests.



CORD has been working to empower women through PRI's since 1994 when the first election with reserved seats for women was held in Himachal Pradesh. It was a daunting job to convince women of substance to stand for elections if they had leadership qualities even if they were not connected to powerful men in the village who were nominating only their wives or relatives in spite of them not having any background or interest in community work so that these powerful men could continue to rule through the women they had nominated. Many a women were thus elected. CORD worked with these women to during their five year tenure so that they were less of a "puppet" in the hands of the men who ordered them around. Later in 2000 elections women had gained confidence that could fight the elections on their merits. Many women thus stood for reserve seats & competed with other women who were been supported by powerful lobbying by certain men with vested interests. *A woman Pradhan discussing issues in Panchayat executive body meeting* During this tenure CORD saw fewer "puppets" operating as Pradhans. However, it was only in 2005 elections women stood not only for reserved seat but also fought elections in open seats opposing men & won quite number of seats! 67 women associated with CORD won open seats. It has been a gradual journey of women's empowerment. It is not unusual today to see a confident women Pradhan conducting Gram Sabhas & Gram Panchayat meetings effectively.

### **Following has been the statistics of elected CORD's associated communities & workers**

- 65 women from CORD's Mahila Mandals were elected as Panchayat office bearers in the 1995 elections, from the 65 Panchayats the programme worked with
- 249 women from CORD's Mahila Mandals were elected from the 185 Panchayats it worked in 2000 elections
- 495 women from CORD's Mahila Mandals and CORD workers, and 34 from the Youth Mandal structures were elected as Panchayat office bearers in the 2005 elections, from the 218 Panchayats the programme was then working in
- A total of 14 associates of the programme have been elected twice since 1995

### **Learning**

India is the largest democracy in the world. It signifies among other things the aspirations of our people and the vision of our leaders. True democracy emphasises decentralization of government. The institutions of local self-governance should be strengthened to be participatory, responsive, transparent and accountable. For this, citizens should be educated and peoples' bodies like Gram Sabha must be strengthened to act as custodians of grassroots democracy. The capacities of PRI members should be enhanced through training and workshops. The government officials who are used to the top-down model need to be sensitized to the new realities of local self-governance.

The Panchayati Raj Institutions should be given control, responsibility and authority over all the resources lying in their geographical jurisdictions. They should be held accountable for local matters by their voters in the Gram Sabha. It must also be ensured that women and marginalized people are active and effective in local self-governance.

CBO's have played a very effective role in making people more and more conscious of their roles and rights. Through processes like resource mapping, special emphasis on weaker

sections of the population, and participatory research studies and advocacy, people's participation has been greatly enhanced in 'intervened' areas. However, sustained and more aggressive interventions are needed to deepen democratic local self-governance. Research and policy advocacy have to be promoted on an extensive and sustained basis to improve different aspects of local self-governance. Creative individual and collaborative efforts by civil society and the government to strengthen local self-governance needs to be scaled up