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SDC CapDeck NEWSLETTER

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Editorial

This newsletter gives a brief account of the learning process and experiences of twenty Panchayats through visiting each other to strengthen Panchayati Raj and decentralized governance. We started this inter-State Panchayat to Panchayat Programme in June 2008. Since Kerala has been recognized as a pioneering State in decentralization and people's plan, one Panchayat in every cluster is chosen from there and two Panchayats each from Karnataka, Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. The programme has two main objectives - mutual sharing of panchayati raj experiences and developing a new model of knowledge management. As it is a new beginning and this process cannot work out on its own, facilitating support organizations also had to play a role in it.

We all recognize that Panchayat elected representatives require quality training for capacity building and realizing this, many States have initiated formal institutions and specific programmes to achieve it. Today there is more than 26 lakh elected representatives in the three levels of Panchayats in our country and of these over 10 lakh are women. So imparting training to such a large number of people is not an easy task. Probably Governments alone cannot meet this requirement. Training also cannot be viewed as a one-time intervention, but should be a continuous ongoing process in order to achieve an enhanced sense of self-esteem and confidence. As the 15th Anniversary Charter of Panchayati Raj rightly points out "Panchayat training must promote a culture of oneness amongst Panchayats through exposure visits and interactions. Peer to peer learning, both within and outside the state through regional or national tie-ups and visits to beacon Panchayats should be encouraged and supported, so as to spread innovations and best practices." It is with this particular vision in our mind that we have envisaged this Panchayat to Panchayat programme.

This process of learning through seeing has evoked great interest amongst most of the Panchayat leaders as well as the facilitating civil society organizations who participated in it. They all still cherish their unforgettable visits and want to continue the new acquaintance in far away places. They also acknowledge it as a great learning experience. Through this newsletter we have tried to capture some of those experiences and processes. Due to various reasons and barriers like language may be only a small percentage of it could be presented here. We hope to include the experiences of those Panchayats which are not covered in this issue in the upcoming issue.

PANCHAYAT TO PANCHAYAT PROGRAMME



From West Bengal to share our experience in Panchayati Raj

PANCHAYAT TO PANCHAYAT PROGRAMME LAUNCHED

An inter-state Panchayat to Panchayat knowledge management programme was launched on 15th June 2008 at Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) campus in Trichur, Kerala State. This one year long programme intends to have ten SDC-CapDecK partner Panchayats in Kerala tying up with ten Panchayats from five other States in the country. This is the first time such a programme for exchange of ideas and experiences through visits between the primary local self governments in various States initiated in the country.

The objectives of this P to P programme are

- Mutual sharing of Panchayati Raj experiences and developing comparative Panchayati Raj systems

Kuthambakkam and Mangalapuram GPs
in the presence of Kannadi gram panchayat president



Exchange of letters



Michael Pattinam and Pananchery GPs in the presence of Mr. Saradindu Banerjee



Kotekar and Arpookara GPs witnessed by Ms. Beena Sunny, Vice president, Kerala Grama Panchayat Association

Bonthi and Ajanoor GPs in the presence of Dr. George Mathew



- Up-scaling and adaptation of initiatives from partner Panchayats
- Developing a new model of knowledge management in Panchayati Raj
- Capacity building of Panchayat Members
- National integration at grass-root level

Methodology

- There are ten sets of P to P clusters with ten Kerala Panchayats having one partner Panchayat each from outside the State. A formal agreement is signed between the partner Panchayats on this mutual exchange programme.

Our experience from Madhya Pradesh



PANCHAYAT TO PANCHAYAT PROGRAMME

The Ten Cluster Panchayats in the P to P Programme

Cluster number	Kerala		Outside Kerala Partners	
	Gram Panchayat	Facilitating Organization	Gram Panchayat	Facilitating Organization
1	Mangalapuram, Thiruvananthapuram	Kizhakkumkara Mahila Samjam	Kuthambakkom, Thiruvalluvar Dt. Tamil Nadu	Trust for Village Self Governance (TVSG)
2	Arpookara, Kottayam	Centre for Rural Management	Kotekar, Mangalore Dt. Karnataka	Dakshina Kannada Parisarasaktha Okkoota (DKPO)
3	Eruthenpathy, Palakkad	Maithri	Rola, Sehore Dt. Madhya Pradesh	Samarthan
4	Karakulam, Thiruvananthapuram	Grameena Patana Kendram	Reghunathpur-II, Purba Medinipur Dt. West Bengal	Amra Susama Jalapapat
5	Mullankolly, Wayanad	Shreyas	Mellidara Paiyong, South Dt., Sikkim	Indo-Swiss Project Sikkim
6	Pananchery, Thrissur	Good Shepherd Convent	Michael Pattinam, Ramanathapuram Dt, Tamil Nadu	Trust for Village Self Governance (TVSG)
7	Ajanoor, Kasargode	Santhigram	Bonthi, Bidar Dt. Karnataka	Inter Cooperation
8	Sreekariyam, Thiruvananthapuram	Loyola Extension Services	Ratanpur, Sehore Dt. Madhya Pradesh	Debate
9	Kumily, Idukki	Centre for Rural Management	Lakhi, Purba Medinipur Dt. West Bengal	Aamra Susama Jalapapat
10	Kaniyambetta, Wayanad	Rasta	Kartok Namcheybong, East Dt., Sikkim	Indo-Swiss Project Sikkim

Mellidara Paiyong and Mullankolly GPs in the presence of Mr. T.R. Raghunandan IAS



PANCHAYAT TO PANCHAYAT PROGRAMME



Participants from various states

- During the one year, there will be at least three mutual visits by each Panchayat.
- A facilitating organization (a non-governmental organization), interested in capacity building of Panchayati Raj institutions, is also identified by CapDeck at each Panchayat level for assisting this exchange programme mainly to help with the practical aspects like translation, facilitating travel and accommodation, documenting etc
- During each visit, there will be at least three members of the Panchayat and one person from the facilitating organization. Care will be taken to ensure gender balance in each visiting team.
- This knowledge management programme will conclude with the dissemination of experiences at a national conference.



Lakhi and Kumili GPs witnessed by Mr.S. Nasarudeen



Rola and Eruthenpathy GPs in the presence of Mr.S. Abdul Ghani Khan

programme held at the KILA campus on 15th June 2008. They included 47 Grama Panchayat members from outside Kerala, 34 Grama Panchayat

members from Kerala and 26 persons representing the facilitating NGOs. All the Panchayat members had come for the inaugural programme as well as to meet their partner Panchayat leaders for the first time. For those who had come from outside the State, they have clubbed it with their first visit to the partner Panchayats. All except one Panchayat group from Sikkim were present. The Kartok Namcheybong Gram Panchayat team had to cancel the trip due to a sudden strike call in Sikkim on the starting day of their travel.

Prof. N. Ramakantan, director of KILA welcomed all the participants to the KILA campus and Smt. Mariamma Sanu George (Nirmala) of SDC-CapDeck explained the objectives of this Panchayat to Panchayat knowledge management programme and formally welcomed the guests and the participants.

Sri T.R. Raghunandan IAS, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India gave the introductory address. He suggested that Panchayats should strive for more power. There are three kinds of power – of number, money and knowledge. All the three must go together. Now the Panchayats have the power of number only. But even if you have money,

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The Inaugural Programme

127 persons attended the inaugural

PANCHAYAT TO PANCHAYAT PROGRAMME



Partners of Panchayat to Panchayat Programme

without the power of knowledge it is useless. He wished that this knowledge exchange programme initiated here would go a long way to fill that void. He also suggested like the women's empowerment we are witnessing through the self-help groups in different parts of the country, there is a need for self-help groupings of Panchayats.

Dr. George Mathew, Director, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi in his keynote address highlighted the importance of such a partnership programme in the empowerment of local self governments. He said that local bodies in different countries in Europe are connected and they call it 'twinning arrangement'. Through such an exchange, they learn from each other and adopt innovative measures and schemes for the development and welfare of the

people in respective areas. He said that even now, many in the upper hierarchy in our country do not want to devolve or share powers down the ladder. They do not want Panchayats



All the way from the mountains...

to become more powerful. But if the Panchayats come forward with innovative programmes no one can stop them and it could change the history of Panchayati Raj in our country.

Mr. Saradindu Banerjee (Programme Officer, PRIA, Kolkata),

Mr. Abdul Ghani Khan (President, Association of Local Governance India – ALGI), Prof. N. Ramkantan (Director, KILA) and Mr. S. Nasarudeen (General Secretary, Kerala Grama Panchayat Association) did felicitation speeches at the function.

Soon after, formal signing and exchange of letters between the collaborating Panchayats took place. The distinguished guests also signed as the witnesses.

Afterwards, the scene was taken over by the leaders and members of the Panchayats present. They were free to speak in the language of their choice and simultaneous translations were also made with the help of members from facilitating NGOs. They all introduced themselves and briefly shared their

viewpoints on the existing Panchayati Raj system in their States. Many brought notes and presentations explaining their experiences and these were translated into corresponding languages (Hindi, Nepali, Bengali, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam) and distributed among all.

Dr. Joy Elamon of SDC-CapDeck then formally proposed the Vote of Thanks. He specially thanked the KILA for the excellent facilities and the food prepared by the local Kudumbasree women's group.

In the evening, the visiting Panchayat teams left along with their counterparts in Kerala to visit and learn from the ground level experience of Panchayati Raj in Kerala.

Raghunathpur II and Karakulam GPs in the presence of Mr. N. Ramakantan



Wayal nadu to the Valley of Rice

T.K. Omana
Director, RASTA

Our six member group consisting of Mr. Moyin Kadavan, the President, Mrs. Hymavati (Standing Committee chairperson), Mr. K. Abdul Gafoor, Mrs. Soosan James and Mrs. Raihanath Basheer, members, of the Kaniyambetta Gram Panchayat and me were all looking forward to this journey to Sikkim with great enthusiasm. We had no idea of our counterparts as the Kartok Namcheybong Panchayat representatives could not make it to the first larger get together at KILA in the month of June. None of us had ever been to Sikkim before.

We started our journey on 22nd August 2008 from Kaniyambetta by bus to Bangalore and from there by the Guwahati express train to New

Unlike Kerala, Sikkim has only two-tier system and there is no Block Panchayat there. The Secretary is also an elected member and they have 40% reservation for women in the Panchayat committee. There are only 144 Grama Panchayats in Sikkim and the population in each Panchayat is comparatively very small.

Jalpaiguri. The five-member Mullankolly Panchayat delegation was also with us and visiting Sikkim, but a different Panchayat. During the three-day journey we discussed a lot, most often aided by the scenes we saw around in different rural areas of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal. Why is it that even after 60 years of independence many people are living in such shabby and poor houses without basic amenities?

Why are they struggling to eke a descent living? Who is responsible for all this? Will there be any positive change in their life with NREGA being implemented throughout the country? There were many such questions raised during these discussions. Though we were agreeing on a few points, many questions were unanswered and we realized that we have to know more of this diverse country and its people to find the answers.

We reached New Jalpaiguri station around 11 pm on 24th August. Mr. Suresh Rai, Rural Development Assistant of our partner Panchayat was at the railway station to receive us. We stayed that night at Siliguri, which is only 6 km away from the

Procession with the Kartong Panchayat delegation along the Kaniyambetta main road





Kartong Panchayat president Deena Roy and others singing along with the Kaniyambetta Kudumbasree women

station and the second largest city after Kolkata in West Bengal. Since there are no airports and railway lines in Sikkim we have to go by road the next day.

On 25th early morning we proceeded from Siliguri to Sikkim in a jeep and in two hours we reached the border – Rangpo check post. During the journey we talked with Suresh about Sikkim and its people. The road to Sikkim goes along the banks of the river Teesta, which is also known as the ‘lifeline of Sikkim’. It is a river originating from Himalayas and flows right through Sikkim from north to south. Though we are coming from Wayanad and used with the ghat road and hairpin bends, a sort of fear gripped us when we passed through this narrow terrain road and frequent scenes of landslides all along. Suresh said, it is just after rainy period and landslides often occur here during rains. Sikkim is the second smallest State in India after Goa, and also the least populous State with a density of mere 76 persons per sq km (it is 819 in Kerala). Sikkim has a Tibetan name, *Denjong*, which means ‘the valley of rice’. When Suresh told us this, we were suddenly reminded of the name of our district Wayanad, which

actually originated from ‘wyal nadu’ meaning the ‘land of paddy fields’. In fact Wayanad district once had nearly 40000 hectares of paddy cultivation. Sikkim has three international borders – with China in north, Nepal in west and Bhutan in east and has only four districts – known as South, West, North and East. Our partner panchayat, Kartok Namcheybong is in the East district, where the capital city Gangtok is also situated.

Sikkim was a separate kingdom till 1975 and it became the 22nd Indian State only that year. People in Sikkim largely depend on farming for livelihood, growing crops such as cardamom, ginger, oranges, apples and tea. Rice is grown traditionally on terraced hillsides especially in the South district and maize is another major crop in other parts of Sikkim. Breweries, distilleries and tanning are the major industries. In recent years, tourism is very much promoted and is becoming the mainstay of the State’s economy. Floriculture, especially orchid farming, is also gaining importance of late. Lack of good roads is a major impediment, and may be we felt it more since we have come from Kerala with so many roads everywhere.

Panchayati Raj in Sikkim

On 26th morning we visited the Kartok Nam Cheypong Panchayat office and the president Ms. Dina Rai, vice president, other members and officials were present to receive us. We had some formal and informal exchange of ideas and information on the Panchayati Raj system in both Sikkim and Kerala.

Unlike Kerala, Sikkim has only two-tier system and there is no Block Panchayat there. The Secretary is also an elected member and they have 40% reservation for women in the Panchayat committee. There are only 144 Grama Panchayats in Sikkim and the population in each Panchayat is comparatively very small.

Kartok panchayat has an area of 445 hectares and the total voting population is around 3000 only. It is a hilly area and apart from agriculture and orchid farming, tourism is a major source of income. Unlike in Kerala the Panchayats in Sikkim do not have its own source of income and totally depend on government grant. The Panchayat receives about Rupees Ten Lakhs annually as grant from the government. When we compare it with the per capita grant, it is actually higher than in Kerala. They do not charge any tax on houses or local buildings and professions like in Kerala. The grant money is also very much under the control of the Block Development Office and without its approval no bills are passed. Gram Sabhas are held four times a year and people generally participate in it. There are 6 schools in the panchayat and we visited one primary school in Nayabasti ward. There are 9 teachers and 92 students and English is compulsory apart from Nepali. According to the panchayat committee members, if one completes school education and any skill training then he or she is sure to get a government job. The salaries of school teachers are paid through the Panchayats.

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The Panchayat issues certificates such as birth, death, nativity, income and ownership to the people and much of the work in panchayat office is compute-rized and the service delivery impressed all of us. Housing schemes with the support from Central and State Governments are also implemented through the Panchayats. A subsidy of Rs. 80,000 is given for construction of each house for selected poor beneficiaries. Electricity is also given free of cost to all BPL families.

We also visited the Block office located at Regu and had discussions with the BDO and few other panchayat presidents. Apparently the NREGA programmes are going on well there and relief work and financial assistance for natural calamities is a major activity. As roads get damaged very often in rain, 'sinking roads' is a common feature in Sikkim.

On our way back we visited Gangtok, capital of Sikkim and met the Secretary and Commissioner in rural development ministry. It was a fruitful interaction as they were also keen to know about the development activities and panchayati raj system in Kerala. On the last day we got a chance to see the beautiful nature of Sikkim and visited the Banjhari lake



Kartong Panchayat delegation at Mulla Kurumar tribal colony in Kaniyambetta

What impressed and attracted most of us in Sikkim were the general cleanliness and the organic farming practices of the farmers. No one throw litter around even in the villages and the use of plastics is totally banned there. The use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers is totally absent in Sikkim and farmers themselves believe that it is harmful to humans and nature... Their towns and the capital city also looked very clean compared with our garbage filled towns in Kerala.

and a waterfall. Many people come here to see the mountain god and goddess as they believe these Gods protect them from the fury of nature.

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agrarian crisis. Apparently they do not look for quick profits at the cost of sustainability of nature and farming. Their towns and the capital city also looked very clean compared with our garbage filled towns in Kerala.

We also felt that the cultivation of orchids and flowers could be emulated here in Wayanad as our climate is also suitable for it. Probably we could import a few varieties from Sikkim also and we felt that our Panchayat should make a Plan for the development of floriculture.

Introduction of 'poly house' is another method we thought could be done in Wayanad also to improve vegetable cultivation and productivity.

As a whole, our trip to Sikkim was very satisfying and we learned a lot. We will never forget the hospitality and the warmth of the people. Mr. Suresh Rai, the always smiling Rural Development Assistant, spent all the time with us looking after all our needs and on our way back, we were wondering, though the meaning in the names of both Wayanad and Sikkim is very much the same, whether we will be able to reciprocate at least half of their attitude when they come to visit us.

DISCUSSION MEET ON PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEMS: KERALA AND WEST BENGAL A REPORT

A discussion meet was organized by Centre for Rural Management (CRM) to deliberate on the Panchayat Raj systems in Kerala and West Bengal on 21st February 2009 at Chaitanya Centre, Kottayam. A team of fifteen Panchayat activists, which included a group of high level officials from the Panchayat and Rural Development Directorate and members of Lakhi Grama Panchayat, from West Bengal attended this meet apart from around 40 participants from Kerala. It was an informal get together for dialogue and cross utilization of ideas on decentralisation practised in the two States.

Dr T.M. Joseph, Principal, Newman College, Thodupuzha welcomed the gathering and also gave a brief description on two decades of work by CRM on decentralization and capacity development of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

Prof. Remakantan, Director, Kerala Institute for Local Administration (KILA) in his detailed inaugural address termed the two States as the 'trendsetters in decentralization'. He explained the comparative features in the history of Panchayati Raj in both states. The West Bengal government passed the Panchayati Raj Act as early as in 1958 and provided the lead in the country for three decades on its effective implementation. But in the post-Central Panchayati Raj (amendment) Act (1993) period, Kerala had been setting the trend and giving new lessons. West Bengal had no experience in participatory planning and their process was highly focused towards agrarian transforma-

tion by enhancing agricultural production and strengthening rural economy. During that period there was no pro-poor focus in West Bengal and Panchayats were controlled by the rural elite. The Panchayats were not really 'self-governing' but highly dependent on the State (district authorities). It was District Panchayat giving funds to Grama Panchayats and hence it was highly planned from above. Then a delegation from West Bengal visited Kerala to learn participatory planning and after producing an excellent document experimented it in one of their Gram Panchayats. And now a massive participatory planning programme is going on in West Bengal with the help of DFID. In Kerala, great efforts were made to devolve funds and resources to local bodies and firmly believed that without that their empowerment is not possible. Both West Bengal and Kerala believe in furthering democratic process and mobilization of people. Kerala have to learn many positive aspects of West

Bengal, especially the working of Grama Unnayan Samitis and management of plans. The Standing Committees are more powerful and functions better in West Bengal and are also ahead in computerization and e-governance. At the same time, in the implementation of NREG, mainstreaming of gender and functioning of District Planning Committees, Kerala is ahead and are good lessons for West Bengal.

Dr Jose Chattukulam, director of CRM, introduced the theme for the discussion meet and questioned the idea of training on Panchayati Raj only

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Lakhi Panchayat delegation at the Government Tribal UP School in Kumily



PANCHAYAT TO PANCHAYAT PROGRAMME

for the local (lower) bodies and not for upper and central bodies. He said this meet is intended to raise questions and dialogue.

Many presentations followed by questions and discussion then took place and all participated in it with enthusiasm and

eagerness to learn more. Mr. Sabyasachi Sarkar from Strengthening Rural Decentralization (SRD) Cell of West Bengal gave a detailed account of the ongoing programme with the DFID support in about 900 Panchayats in the State. The three main expected outputs of this programme are, effective preparation and implementation of a road map to deepen decentralization, institutional frame work for capacity building for local bodies and more pro-poor participatory planning, implementation and monitoring systems. The learning experiences are also documented and this program is not a parallel but complementary to the government programmes and strengthen community based systems and processes.

Smt. Santha Kumari, President of Pathanamthitta District Panchayat in her presentation gave a brief account of last 13 years of decentralization process in Kerala and focussed more on women empowerment through programmes like Kudumbashree, Samagra project etc. She said that in Pathanamthitta district, 10,000 women are involved in honey projects – both production and marketing. Ms. Flori Mathew, member of Kottayam District Panchayat with an experience of 13 years in local bodies pointed out that it is not the paucity of funds, but certain common guidelines without taking into account the geographical and social differences that cause problems and delay in implementing development programmes. Mr. Kunjappan, also a member of Kottayam District Panchayat, highlighted the achievement in converting barren land into productive agricultural land through planned schemes but also cited clash of MP and MLA fund schemes with that of the local bodies. Ms. Mini Savio also of Kottayam district Panchayat while admitting that there is a revolutionary change with more plans and schemes implemented, pointed out certain difficulties like low quality of houses built for people due to less allotted amount and high costs involved and delay in approval from the state level technical group. Mr. Aymanam Babu, President of Kerala Block Panchayat Association gave a brief account of the functioning of apex associations of local bodies in Kerala and appreciated that the State Government also listen and discuss with them on even larger policy issues and five year plans. However he ridiculed the practice in many grama Panchayats of Kerala giving a status to 'opposition



Lakhi panchayat delegation at a vegetable farm in Kumily

leader' with office and name plate, which is illegal and not mentioned in the Panchayati Raj Act.

Mr. P.P. Majumdar, District Panchayat President of Bankuara, West Bengal, in his presentation tried to compare the systems in the two States. While in Kerala

there only five standing committees, in West Bengal there are ten committees and they play more vital roles in the implementation of schemes. Compared to Kerala, the Gram Panchayats are weak in West Bengal and there is less coordination between the local bodies and nothing could be done without approval. An interesting discussion followed on the political party interventions, mobilisation of resources and role of bureaucracy and NGOs in both States. It was pointed out that though Kerala wanted to avoid 'Contractor Raj' it did not succeed in it.

Smt. Suparana Ganguly of SRD and Smt. Shikha, a member of Badwan District Panchayat from West Bengal gave a presentation on Gram Sabha and women's empowerment. They gave a vivid picture of the women's struggle against dowry, alcoholism and fight with the bureaucracy in getting water supply to rural areas.

Mr. M.S. Vasu, President of Kumily Gram Panchayat, Dr. E.M. Thomas of Christ College, Irinjalakuda, Mr. Jomon Joseph of Kudumbashree Mission, Mr. Pijush Kanti Roy, Vice President, Lakhi Panchayat, Mr. Uttam Ghorai, Mr. E.N. Muraleedharan Nair, President of Arpookkara Gram Panchayat, Dr. T.M. Joseph, Dr.Soumit Mitra, Directorate of Panchayats and Rural Development, Govt of West Bengal, Mr. Thomas Kunnappally, former Kottayam District Panchayat President, Mr. K. Roopesh Kumar, Mr. K. Rajashekharan of KILA, Mr. Toms K Thomas, CEO, MARG and Mr. M.U. Thomas also gave brief presentations on various topics. The topics included financial devolution, human development index, Panchayat and responsible tourism, accountability and social auditing, comprehensive health insurance schemes etc.

Though the programme was loaded with so many presentations in a day, it was a good opportunity for the participants to understand and compare the functioning of PRIs in two different States. There are so many pros and cons as well as lessons to be learnt from the experiences. The functionaries of the local bodies present there admitted that more such discussions would help to rededicate themselves to the cause of grassroots development and to work tirelessly with compassion, social justice and equity for all, for inclusive growth through inclusive governance.

This programme was organized with the support of KILA and SDC-CapDecK.

SIGNPOSTS

Women's reservation in Panchayati Raj

We have approximately 12 lakh women in the panchayats alone. As against the reserved quota of 33 per cent, their actual presence ranges around 38 per cent. This means that not only are we easily able to find women candidates to contest some 12 lakh posts but also there is on an average three or four contestants for a post. This means that approximately 50 lakh or 5 million women have been liberated from the kitchen and the courtyard and brought into the public domain. This is an extraordinary act of social and political empowerment. What is even more amazing, in my view, is that this extraordinary social revolution has taken place in conservative India, in the most tradition-bound rural society, with no tension and no tangible opposition from men. There may be individual male politicians who have attempted to subvert the process, for example, by putting up women relatives as their proxies. But, apart from this effort at the margin, there has been no social tension of any kind.

-Mani Shankar Iyer,
Former Minister for Panchayati Raj,
Government of India

People and Panchayats

It has to be recognised that Panchayats and municipalities being elected bodies, the right to call them to account is that of the people in the area and not officials of the state government. In fact the provision in the constitutional amendments for

Gram Sabhas/Ward Committees should serve to ensure continuing public audit of the local bodies, if these institutions are appropriately empowered.

-Late Prof. I.S.Gulati,
Former Vice-Chairman,
Kerala State Planning Board

Globalization and Panchayats

Globalization and liberalization has thrown up both challenges and opportunities for all levels of the



P2P Launch at KILA

Government. The Panchayats cannot be hesitant any longer. We must look beyond higher level governments to design and implement programmes that meet local needs and promote the prosperity of our people. We will inculcate in ourselves the spirit of self-help and take up locally driven initiatives which need not necessarily be funded by the central and state governments.

-15th Anniversary Charter on Panchayati Raj,
Government of India, April 2008

Expenditure of Local Governments

The total expenditure of local governments (PRIs and ULBs), as a proportion of combined expenditure of union, state and local governments

works out to about 6.4 percent in 1998-99 and 5.1 percent in 2002-03. Now these allocations were made for covering nearly 73 percent of the people. So allocations have actually decreased for decentralization. This is of course variable. Kerala for example has the reverse experience. But again about 40% budget devolved to village level bodies has a different antecedent and is almost non-comparable with other states, except perhaps Karnataka.

-Anurag Srivastava,
Centre for Budget and Governance
Accountability, New Delhi

Civil Society Organizations at the local level

Every plan document should have a separate sector on civil society engagement and it should be properly integrated with other sectors. Moreover the existing 'Voluntary Action Cell' in the Planning Commission should be adequately strengthened with expertise and professionalism. I feel more space for action by the civil society organizations is needed at the local level and very few organizations and individuals are present at the local level to fill the space. There is no dearth of experts and expertise at the national level. Therefore it is better to have a detailed discussion on the role of civil society organizations in the planning process at the sub state level political institutions (rural and urban local governments).

-Jose Chathukulam,
Centre for Rural Management,
Kottayam, Kerala

FOND MEMOIRS

Ashok Sahoo and Uttam Ghorai will never forget in their life that incident in the morning of 24th February 2009 at Kumily. Along with the other visiting members of the Lakhi Panchayat from West Bengal, after the breakfast, they were walking back to the rooms through the main road. As usual they had lit cigarettes and enjoying the smoke while walking. Suddenly a man in blue uniform emerges in front of them with pointed fingers. "Don't you know smoking is banned in public places? It is an offence liable for fine and punishment". Vinod of CRM who was with the visiting team intervened soon and told the officer that they are guests of the Panchayat and asked for pardon. Ashok and Uttam were perplexed and soon threw away their cigarettes. Hearing that they are guests of the Panchayat, the officer smiled and retreated after giving a mild warning not to repeat it. That officer was actually employed jointly by the Panchayat and the Tourist office to oversee that people do not throw litter on the roads and violate laws like no-smoking in public places. Though a bit taken up initially, both the West Bengal guests said it was a good thing to happen and this must be the way the Panchayat should act. They were even personally thinking of quitting smoking and wondered whether they could emulate it in their own Panchayat!

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For Jolly Peter and Chinnamma Vincent, the women members of Mullankolly Panchayat in Wayanad, the most unforgettable memory on their visit to Sikkim was that 'dark' day in Sikkim. "That day the sun never came out! It was so dark throughout and felt like a never ending night. Even the roads, houses there had to be lit up with lights throughout the

day and night". They had never experienced such a climatic condition at Wayanad. They were told that this sort of dark days is a usual phenomenon in Sikkim during the rainy period of the year. Sikkim is surrounded by lofty Himalayan ranges with so many mountain peaks and glaciers. Together with that the high altitude lakes, hot springs and over hundred rivers and streams make the climate extremely special and it is this fascinating scenic nature which made a lasting impression on these women members from Wayanad. A social aspect which also caught their attention was the gender equality prevailing in Sikkim. They found women and girls walking around freely everywhere in Sikkim even in nights without any fear and they did not see any men ogle or behave oddly with them. Both Jolly and Chinnamma were wondering when our so-called advanced Kerala is going to achieve such a gender equity situation?

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Visit to the *Akasha Parava* (means Sky birds) centre at Murikkudy in Kumily Panchayat was a heart-rending experience for the visiting team from Lakhi Panchayat of West Bengal. This centre run by a group of catholic nuns, is home for more than a hundred abandoned people - beggars, mentally challenged, sick, aged and even children. Though coming from the land of Mother Teresa the scenes at *Akasha Parava*

literally moved all of them. They had no words to appreciate the dedication and sincerity with which the sisters were looking after the inmates. When the sisters said that often with zero-balance in their bank account, they could not even provide enough food for the inmates and only because of the goodwill of neighbours they pull on. Some inmates in the centre are bed-ridden and the three sisters in charge of the centre feed them, cleanse them and take care of all their



Mellidara Panchayat delegation welcomed by children at the Panchayat school in Mullankolli

needs. Photographs displaying the features when some of these inmates were first brought to the centre and their present condition really showed the depth of hard work put in by these nuns. The visitors had a sigh of relief and satisfaction when they came to know that the Kumily Panchayat gives an annual grant of Rupees One Lakh for this centre. They appreciated this and requested the Panchayat leaders to continue this humanitarian gesture by all means.

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Betel nut (Areca nut) is a weakness of Ms. Dina Rai, the president of Kartok Namcheybong gram Panchayat in Sikkim. She loves to chew the dried nut all the time. During her visit to

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Kaniyambetta in Wayanad, after two days the stocks she brought was over. She looked for it at shops on the road, but could not get it probably due to communication problem or could not locate the pan shops. Then during a trip to see the NREG worksites, while walking through a farm she saw an areca nut locally known as adakka or paku fallen on the ground and happily took it. A sense of relief and joy could be seen in her face. Abdul Gafoor, a member of the Kaniyambetta Panchayat and who had visited Sikkim earlier noticed it and started asking her about it. Then only he realized how much she was fond of this 'supari' chewing. But unlike the pan chewers in Kerala, Dina Rai chews only the dried nut without mixing it with the betel leaf and lime. When Gafoor told her that Kaniyambetta is a major producer of areca nuts and there are even wholesale dealers who market it to distant places she was thrilled. So, when it was time for the Sikkim team to depart from Kaniyambetta, Dina Rai received a surprise gift from Gafoor. When she opened the nicely packed big parcel, her eyes glowed with excitement as it was 5 kg of good quality dried areca nuts. She said she could not have any better gift than this to take from Kerala.



For Rumit Lapcha and Elias Lapcha it was a dream coming true. Elias is the vice president and Rumit the woman member of Kartok Panchayat in Sikkim, members of the visiting team to Kaniyambetta Panchayat. They live beneath the mighty mountains of the world, the Himalayas. But they had never seen an ocean in their life yet. So the trip to Kerala was meant to achieve this dream and if possible to visit Kanyakumari – the meeting point of Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean. But only during the journey to Wayanad they realized that their travel plan is to return via Bangalore by train without

visiting even a beach. They were upset. Finally, Suresh who coordinated the trip agreed that if tickets are available they will modify the return trip and definitely go via Kanyakumari. So immediately after reaching Kaniyambetta they enquired through RASTA and to their luck tickets were available. Finally they saw all the important beaches – Veli and Kovalam at Trivandrum, Kanyakumari and the Marina beach at Chennai. While sitting and watching the sunset at Veli beach, Elias and Rumit were not even conscious of the hours passed and they felt like remaining there forever. The visit to Kanyakumari and Marina beach were more memorable. They saw both the sunrise and sunset. And the journey through the waters to the Vivekananda Rock Memorial was enthralling. They were eager to go back and proudly illustrate the sea to their unfortunate friends who are yet to have a glimpse of it in their life.



For Moyin Kadvan, the president of Kaniyambetta Panchayat, it was the innocence and kindness of the Sikkim people which attracted him most. "They are so simple and always open to learn from others. We the Keralites, preach a lot but do not actually mean or practice much of it. We say one thing and do something else. We always have hidden agendas. But they are transparent and sincere all the time. Probably they also enjoy their life that way better than us". Moyin Kadavan did not mince words when talking about his Sikkim counterparts. Soosan James and Rahinath Basheer also agreed to it. "During our stay at Sikkim they looked after us like

special guests. They were all the time with us forgetting their families and were so happy to meet all our requirements."



The ruling party -opposition relationship among the party activists in Kumily Panchayat was an eye-opener for the visiting group from Lakhi Panchayat. On the second day of their visit they witnessed a local cooperative bank election. The election looked like a fierce battle on political lines, with three political panels and this was more similar to West Bengal they thought. There were hoardings with names of candidates and canvassing was going on. Mr. Vasu, the president of Kumily



Mellidara and Kartong Panchayat delegations with the District Collector of Wayanad

Panchayat took the visiting team to the spot for a glimpse of the heat of election and introduced the team to various people. Some of them were candidates and leaders of different opposing parties. But all of them were talking and handshaking with smiles. Raju Dutta of Aamra Susama Jalaprapat who accompanied the Lakhi Panchayat members could not believe it. He said, "I cannot imagine this happening in West Bengal. There opposing party activists would never talk to each other in a friendly manner, especially during the heat of elections. But we need to change and people should always show friendliness irrespective of their political affinities". But Vinod of CRM, was quick to caution him. "Don't take the outward gestures for granted. They must be definitely gunning for each other in their minds".

KUMILY AND LAKHI CONTRASTING PANCHAYATS BUT GOOD LESSONS FOR ALL

Kumily Panchayat, located in high ranges of Idukki district of Kerala is one of the largest in terms of area with 824 sq km, but half of it falls within the famous Periyar Tiger Reserve. With Thekkady, the famous tourist location within its limits, a large town area has also developed here. In fact eight out of the total nineteen wards are in the town area. The Kumily town looks modern with high-rise buildings, tourist resorts and reasonable public transport network. A good number of people make their living out of tourism, though majority still continue to depend on farming, especially spices. Bordering Tamil Nadu on the eastern side, the population of the Panchayat, especially in the town area, is growing at a rapid pace due to in-migration. According to 2001 Census the Panchayat had a total population of 34558.

Kumily's partner Panchayat is Lakhi in East Midnapore district of West Bengal. It is a small rural panchayat with an area of just 7.8 sq km and a population of 17010 according to 2001 census. With almost half of the households under the BPL category, vast majority of the people depend on rice and dhal cultivation.

These two contrasting panchayats



Lakhi and Kumily Panchayat members in front of Kumily Panchayat office

have become partners in the Panchayat to Panchayat exchange programme and already two teams from Lakhi and one team from Kumily have visited each other. It was in June 2008, the first team of seven persons from Lakhi visited Kumily. They felt

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- Kerala is far ahead in implementing Panchayati Raj in its true spirit.
- Strong legal backing with devolution of sufficient funds and powers to the local bodies were the key to the success in Kerala.
- They noted that Kerala made it possible due to low levels of poverty, universal elementary education and high level of general social awareness and mass mobilization.
- They felt the rural masses are not as vibrant as in West Bengal.
- They recognized the Kudumbashree movement in Kerala as a successful service delivery programme by women.
- However they thought the rural banking and credit system to meet the economic needs of the ordinary masses is lagging behind when compared with West Bengal.
- They were very excited in seeing the level of success in rural health service delivery, Jaagratha Samithi, Sanitation

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programmes, forest management, social welfare measures and overall poverty alleviation programmes.

The visiting team from Lakhi at the end of their exposure programme was unanimous in saying that Kumily Panchayat body is a true 'participatory local government' by all means and termed it as a model for the whole country.

holders in the activities of the Panchayat. By bringing together various socio-economic players like the traders, hoteliers and eminent citizens into the planning and implementation, they no more think that contributing money to the Panchayat is useless, but effective

After returning to West Bengal they introduced few progressive changes in the functioning of their Panchayat.

- The Panchayat office more systematized now, with list of business and nameplates put up on the tables of all the staff.
- The vice president and the secretary and standing committees also allocated separate spaces within the office.
- Movement register for the staff also was introduced soon.

The first team from Kumily visited Lakhi Panchayat in October

carried out with limited funds.

- They are also systematic in doing things with better coordination between different standing committees.
- There is also greater coordination between the village, block and district bodies.

The second team from Lakhi Panchayat visited Kumily in the last week of February 2009 under the leadership of Sri Pijush Kanti Roy (Vice President) along with four members and two from the facilitating organization, Aamra

Susama Jalprapat. This time, the team tried to understand more on the practical aspects of planning and implementation of different development and welfare programmes of the local body.

programmes actually benefit all and help improve their own income too. For example, through a community led people's programme which addressed all sections of the society to bring about relevant behavioral changes for improved sanitation and hygiene practices, Kumily town and surroundings are now almost garbage free. So more tourists are attracted and hence the business of merchants, hoteliers, auto-rickshaw drivers etc also went up. When the Panchayat showed results through action, people realized that they are serious about it. Through NREG, the Panchayat cleaned an age-old filthy canal which was till then a dumping place for waste and dirt. All this has created a new enthusiasm, hope and belief that through the Panchayat the lives of people could be improved. The total Panchayat Budget for the year 2008-09 is Rs. 5.25 crores and more schemes are on the pipeline, including Rs. 4 crore development assistance promised by NABARD.

The Panchayat has intervened and provided better service in almost all aspects of lives of the people. Housing schemes for the needy, better health services, provision of drinking water, waste management, sanitation, improving educational facilities, better distribution of electricity, handling of gender issues through Jaagratha Samithis, making Krishi Bhavans and Veterinary hospitals more effective are some of the major areas where Panchayat has already made vast progress. During the year 2006-07, more than 2000 toilets were built and the Panchayat achieved 100%



Lakhi Panchayat delegation in conversation with the woman vegetable farmer at Kumily

2008. Sri M.S. Vasu, the president of the Panchayat led the team consisting five others which included three women members. Sri Tilakan from Centre for Rural management (CRM) accompanied the team.

The visit helped them to understand

- A totally different rural situation with the Panchayat struggling to meet the needs with limited resources.
- The team felt that they could learn how good work be

ing team was attracted by the progress made by the Panchayat in mobilizing own funds. Until 2005-06 the annual own fund revenue was around Rupees 25 lakhs. But in 2007-08 it collected 110 lakhs and this year it is expected to cross 200 lakhs. This made possible mainly through two means. One was streamlining of collection system so that no one could evade the legitimate taxes and fees. The other was through enlarging the participation of important stake-

ALL-WOMEN PANCHAYATS

Now in India, we cannot have any Grama Panchayat without women members in it. So, theoretically it is possible now that we can have “All-Women Panchayat”, but no more “All-Men Panchayat” which used to be very common in the past. Is there any chance, this theoretical possibility of All-Women Panchayat could be realized anywhere in our generally male-dominated society in India?

The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act 1992 says, reservation for women in Panchayats must be not less than 33%. Hence, now in India, we cannot have any Grama Panchayat without women members in it. So, theoretically it is possible now that we can have “All-Women Panchayat”, but no more “All-Men Panchayat” which used to be very common in the past. Is there any chance, this theoretical possibility of All-Women Panchayat could be realized anywhere in our generally male-dominated society in India? No. One would easily say.



But when Ms. Suparna Ganguly from the State Institute of Panchayats and Rural Development of West Bengal informed the Discussion meet on Panchayat Raj Systems at Kottayam on 21st February 2009, which was also attended by many Panchayat presidents and members from Central Kerala, that there are five all-women Panchayats in West Bengal at present, many could not believe it. Are there no men in those Panchayats, some wondered. When asked how this was made possible, she said, it was the result of a consensus

reached between the major political parties. How strange, no? Though unable to agree on most of the other matters, on the question of this women empowerment, the Left parties, Trinamool Congress and Congress (I) in West Bengal came together and decided to put up only women candidates in five selected

Panchayats. When asked whether this could happen in Kerala, Flori Mathew and Mini Savio, two women members of Kottayam district Panchayat said, while they would welcome such a move here also and would like to prove that women can fare better, they don't think the male-dominated parties in Kerala would agree for experimenting it here. Mrs. Suparna Ganguly also said, these “All-Women Panchayats” are functioning very well and people are happy about it. She further informed that West Bengal is yet to have a general apex body of Panchayat members like in Kerala, but they took initiative to form a Women Panchayat Members Association to bring together all women members to discuss their particular issues.

coverage among the households and now any applicant for new toilet will immediately get it sanctioned.

The on-going major schemes under implementation are a one ton garbage recycling plant, a modern crematorium, an open market for farmers and a hygienic fish and meat market. The Panchayat is also involved in promoting the cultural life of people and organize cultural and entertainment programmes which also attract tourists. Cultural organizations are also financially supported to train youth in folk arts and dance and there is now a trained women's group

to perform chendamelam (native drums). Many festivals like Onam, Wild life week, Keralotsavam, Spice fest, Flower show, Agriculture Mela etc are organized by the Panchayat and thereby also create occasions for the local young talents to showcase their performance art forms. The visiting team from Lakhi also witnessed one such regular cultural programme in which local girls from the Panchayat performed Bharata Natyam, Kuchipudi, folk dances etc.

Though the Panchayat has managed to achieve much progress in many spheres, the President and

members feel that a lot more is to be done and that requires more administrative reforms and qualified personnel. Lack of skilled technical staff and qualified accounts managers were pointed out by them as examples on this. Most of the present staff are mere clerks and lack technical skills.

The visiting team from Lakhi at the end of their exposure programme was unanimous in saying that Kumily Panchayat body is a true '**participatory local government**' by all means and termed it as a model for the whole country.

MICHAEL PATTINAM AND PANANCHERY: TWO PIONEERS IN INNOVATIVE MODELS

Pananchery Panchayat in Thrissur district of Kerala and **Michael Pattinam Panchayat** in Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu have innovated and implemented grass root level programmes which are hailed as new models and later many Panchayats in other parts of the country have also been successfully implementing it. The formation of 'Jaagratha Samithi' to handle women's issues is the successful contribution of Pananchery Panchayat. On the other hand Michael Pattinam has shown how a Panchayat could find solution for water scarcity even in a dry area by providing rainwater conservation technologies at household level. These two Panchayats are partners in the Panchayat to Panchayat programme and representatives of both have completed one mutual visit to each other.

The Panchayat team from Michael Pattinam came to Pananchery under the leadership of Smt. Jesu Mary (President), for a three-day visit in June 2008 after the first joint meeting at KILA. They visited the Panchayat office and tried to understand the office functioning and various programs and developmental activities undertaken. Next day they attended a meeting of Kudumbashree women at the Panchayat level. The local MLA Sri Rajaji Mathew Thomas also had an interaction with them and he spoke on the features of the Panchayathi Raj system being followed in Kerala. The group visited a hollow-brick unit run by a Kudumbashree unit and a tribal colony and the tribal school. In the evening a cultural

programme was also organized. Then at the Panchayat office, they had a detailed discussion on the 'Jaagratha Samithi', a unique programme which originated there. Jaagratha Samithi means Vigilance Committee and it is intended to take up cases of atrocities against women and children at the grass root level and act as an arm of the Women's Commission formed at the State level. Even though Kerala Government as early as in 1997 ordered constitution of Jaagratha Samithis, as no guidelines were issued, it did not materialise anywhere for about a decade. In 2005,

Pananchery Panchayat took up the formation of the Jaagratha Samithi as a challenge and began taking up cases and issues on atrocities against women. It was a great success and within three years they settled around 600 cases through the Jaagratha Samithi. The Panchayat president is the chairperson of the Jaagratha Samithi and all women panchayat members are also its members. The local Sub-Inspector of police, a woman advocate, Doctor from the Primary Health Centre and some

settlement. Pananchery Panchayat has a separate office room for the Jaagratha Samithi with two members on its staff. When a complaint is received the Samithi makes an enquiry on its own to ascertain the facts and then summons both parties. The sittings are held two days every week. A key feature is that the cases which cannot find easy and faster solutions in a court room are settled at the Samithi sitting. The societal and political intervention often leads to amicable settlements easily.

The Pananchery Panchayat Secretary also gave a presentation on the planning process, including plan preparation, approval, and implementation and auditing of the schemes and programmes of the Panchayat.

The team from Pananchery Panchayat made its return visit to Michael Pattinam from 28th October to 1st November 2008. The team consisted of three male members from the panchayat and Sr Lissy Chacko of Good Shepherd Sisters. Michael Pattinam Panchayat is well known for its unique and innovative development activities as its chairperson Smt. Jesumary was given an award by World Bank for implementing 100% rain water harvesting scheme in the Panchayat as early as in 1993. She was also invited for a global rainwater

After coming back the team shared with other members of the Panchayats on the innovative methods adopted in Michael Pattinam Panchayat and now other members have shown much interest in visiting the partner Panchayat.

women social workers are also members of this committee. Seeing the success of Pananchery, many other Panchayats came there to study the functioning of Jaagratha Samithi and have emulated it in their Panchayats also. Now Kerala has more than 120 active Jaagratha Samithis working under the Panchayats. This has resulted in more women coming forward to seek gender justice. Though the committee entertains all complaints, those of criminal nature are referred back to the police. Sometimes police also refers cases to the Jaagratha Samithi for

conference in USA. Later the Panchayat also received the Nirmal Puraskar award from the Central Government. In the year 2006-07, this Panchayat was one among the 15 village Panchayats conferred with the “Uthamar Gandhi Panchayat Award” for adopting innovative approaches and under-taking special initiatives. This award instituted by the Tamil Nadu Government consists of a cash prize of Rs. 5 lakhs, a certificate and a shield. So the team went with lot of expectations.

The onward journey was a lesson for the team on the need to make proper planning as they realized that they unnecessarily took a round-about route and wasted time. They were given a warm and simple welcome and the team was surprised at seeing such a small Panchayat office building compared to the big ones in Kerala. A group of women were waiting and had an interaction with them. Being a dry area, the main issue of the Panchayat is water shortage. The Panchayat has evolved many innovative programmes to tackle this issue and the team realized that there is a greater unity among the people, especially women, and their commitment to the common cause contributed a lot for the success of the programme. Now all households in this Panchayat have a toilet and rainwater harvesting facility. Not content with that they have now installed a rainwater harvesting facility at the common village tank also. Earlier the women had to walk a distance of 3 km or buy water and now they are self-sufficient. With the money saved now the Panchayat has provided two sets of trash cans to collect separately recyclable and non-biodegradable wastes. Through this visit, the team acquired many ideas and plans on saving and conserving water. After coming back the team shared with other members of the Panchayats on the innovative methods adopted in Michael Pattinam Panchayat and now other members have shown much interest in visiting the partner Panchayat. ●

REGHUNATHPUR II TO



Salutation to Reghunathpur II team

A five member team from Raghunathpur-II Gram Panchayat under the Shahid Madangini Block of East Medinipur district in West Bengal visited Karakulam Panchayat under the leadership of Smt Niva Barman (Vice President) in Trivandrum district of Kerala in January 2009 as part of the Panchayat to Panchayat programme. Sri Prasun Das of Aamra Susama Jalaprapat facilitated the team.

The team spent much time to understand the functioning of Gram Panchayat office and the Grameena Padana Kendram (GPK), a unique initiative of the Panchayat. The GPK was established in 1998 as a resource centre under the Peoples Plan Campaign. It was intended to train students to tap the IT job market. It was a run away success as many students got into private and government sector agencies for various computer application jobs. Another major activity of the GPK is the Participatory Resource Research and Training Centre intended to support local bodies in resource management, developmental planning and environment protection. So this Centre has reached out to even Panchayats as far as in northern Kasargode and Kozhikode districts and helped them to map the land use, water resources and soil capability. Another important contribution of GPK is the development of a responsive administrative system to improve service

At Grameena Patana Kendram...



KARAKULAM PANCHAYAT



Meeting at Karakulam gram panchayat office

delivery. As per this system the Panchayat holds a joint monthly meeting of all the heads of the institutions that come under its ambit and the elected representatives. A report of the functions carried out in the previous month is presented by all institutions and a review is made. One main agenda is to prepare the course of action for the next month. Then staff and standing committee chairpersons review the work in between. This system has improved the efficiency of the staff and more accountable to public. All institutions also prepare a citizen's charter, so the public have a clear idea of the services offered by the Panchayat. This programme was successfully experimented in Karakulam and now so many Panchayats have come forward to emulate it.

Kalagramam, a cultural forum, is another activity of the Panchayat which caught the attention of their counterparts from West Bengal. It promotes folk arts and indigenous cultural forms and conducts trainings for children. Monthly performances, demonstration lectures and interactive sessions are held regularly and this has helped children to be active partners in evolving a healthy cultural life.

The team also interacted with the Kudumbashree units in the Panchayat, Balasabha, Jaagratha Samithi, Krishi Bhavan and Self Help groups. The team was highly impressed with the way in which Panchayat members from different and even opposing political parties work together for the success of all the development programmes. The own fund mobilization of the Panchayat is also highly commendable and appreciated the healthy relationship between the staff and the members. Still the visiting team pointed out certain aspects and areas where more attention is required to their partners in Karakulam. The low level of livestock development and production is an issue and they suggested the Panchayat should strive for helping people achieve self-sufficiency in it.

Another point of concern noted by the visitors was the people's growing dependence on expensive and private allopathic health care and suggested that the Panchayat should explore scope of helping people grow indigenous medicinal plants and awareness programmes to promote ways of leading a healthy life.

Visit to Kalagramam





Ms. Saraswathi teacher with the second team from Ratanpur gram panchayat

SREEKARIYAM AND RATANPUR

Leaders of Ratanpur Grama Panchayat in Sehore district of Madhya Pradesh have now visited twice the Sreekariyam Panchayat of Trivandrum district in Kerala as part of the Panchayat to Panchayat programme. Their last visit was in the last week of March 2009. Sreekariyam Panchayat leaders have also visited their counterpart once.

Along with Sri A.P. Murali, the President, three members and a member from the Loyola Extension Service visited Ratanpur. According to Sri Murali, the visit helped them to understand the backward conditions of rural people in Madhya Pradesh. They were perplexed at the backwardness in education as well as people's laxity towards it. At the schools they visited, there were no benches and tables in the class room and though 40 children are enrolled only 5 were present. The Panchayat also showed helplessness and do not consider it as a big problem. While in Kerala, we have achieved total literacy and Sreekariyam Panchayat is proud of getting an award for good implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The Panchayati Raj is also not implemented well in Madhya Pradesh, as the local bodies do not

have enough power and resources. They have no right to collect taxes, and totally depend on government grant for development work and Panchayat's functioning. There is just one staff member, the Secretary, in the Panchayat office. The only

programme they saw implemented through the Panchayat was the Watershed management and that too everything being done through the District and Block Panchayat offices. However, the team was impressed with their achievement in agricultural

Ratanpur team at Karakulam gram panchayat



PANCHAYAT TO PANCHAYAT PROGRAMME

sector and wanted to adopt some of their farming practices here. But while they have vast land still available, here in Sreekariyam, and Kerala in general, non-availability of land is a big issue and a hindrance for taking up more development work.

The second team of four members from Ratanpur panchayat and Sri R.K. Dixit of Debate accompanied the team. They reached on 19th afternoon and after refreshing themselves visited the Veli Tourist village and then Sanghumugham beach. They were very happy to see the sea and sunset as Madhya Pradesh do not have a coastline and the women members were seeing it for the first time. On 20th March, they started with a discussion with the Loyola Extension Services (LES) team who are facilitating with this exchange programme. LES had been working with the Sreekariyam Panchayat for many years in planning and implementing various capacity building programmes at different levels apart from conducting surveys and studies. After this interaction with the LES team, they visited the Panchayat office and were given a formal reception. Sri A.P. Murali and most of the members of the Panchayat and some prominent citizens were present and each visitor were given as memento, a picture of Sree Narayana Guru, the most famous social reformer and spiritual



Sreekariyam team at Ratanpur

philosopher of Kerala. Fondly known as Gurudev, Narayana Guru was born in 1856 in Chempazhanthi village which lies in Sreekariyam Panchayat. Then the team visited the Kariyavattam Government UP School and interacted with the teaching staff and the students. The Panchayat is now managing and responsible for mobilizing necessary support and infrastructure for the school. The visitors were taken up seeing about ten computers kept for the use of students at the school and wondered when the schools in their village will

reach this level? In the afternoon, the team attended a meeting of Kudumbashree women in the Panchayat. There are 286 Kudumbashree units working in the 22 wards of Sreekariyam Panchayat. Around 400 women were present and that day a marketing centre was inaugurated, which is meant for selling only the products made by Kudumbashree units. Then they visited a few NREG work sites, including a big pond and a canal, which are cleaned and now in usable condition.

Later they visited the Biogas unit in the Sreekariyam market which is run by the Panchayat. At a time when neighbouring Trivandrum City Corporation is grappling with the garbage problem, Sreekariyam Panchayat has set an example in decentralized solid waste management through this Biogas unit. The entire quantum of fish, vegetable and fruit waste generated by the market is fed into the treatment plant, capable of processing 250 kg of waste every day, and convert it into bio methane gas. The gas is passed through special bio filters and used

The first delegation from Ratanpur



PANCHAYAT TO PANCHAYAT PROGRAMME



Sreekariyam team at Ratanpur

to power a generator that supplies power to light the public lamps through a control panel.

It is capable of a daily power output of 3 kW and 20 streetlights are now powered by it and the President said the unit had a cost of Rs 7 lakhs. The President proudly said, more lights could be powered by this unit and it was the outcome of a long pending demand of public to tackle the stinking garbage issue. The visiting team said that they would not have believed such a thing could be done by a Panchayat, if they

The visiting team said that they would not have believed such a thing could be done by a Panchayat, if they had not seen it through their own eyes!

had not seen it through their own eyes!

Next day they visited Karakulam Gram-eeena Padana Kendram (GPK), a centre run by Karakulam Panchayat, AICUF Centre, Sakhi Womens Resource Centre and Kerala Panchayat Association. Later they visited some important temples, museum and Santigiri Ashram and lastly the famous Kovalam beach. They had an evaluation of the exposure before departing and all of them were very happy and satisfied.

Visit to NREG work at Sreekariyam gram panchayat



Signing on behalf of Kotekar and Arpookara gram panchayats



We sign on behalf Reghunathpuri II and Karakulam gram panchayats



On behalf of Ajanoor and Bonthi gram panchayats

With roses we welcome you to Ajanoor gram panchayat



For SDC CapDeck , Dr Joy expressing his sincere gratitude





MEMORABLE OCCASIONS



Signing in the presence of Ms Nirmala, Kaniyambetta GP and Mr. Ganesh Rai for Kartok Namcheybong

Abot KILA

Lakhi and Kumily gram panchayats



PANCHAYAT TO PANCHAYAT PROGRAMME

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In Solidarity we stand for Panchayati Raj