

A HANDBOOK



# GRAM SABHA

K.B. MADAN MOHAN



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**Swiss Agency for Development  
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CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR  
DECENTRALISATION IN KERALA

**GRAM SABHA**  
A handbook

*Originally prepared in  
Malayalam by*

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## INTRODUCTION

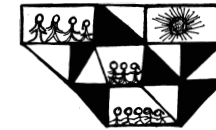
The importance of strengthening local government institutions was realised even during the days of the freedom struggle. People's participation in governance can ensure efficient administration that is free from corruption. Empowerment of people is possible only through the strengthening of local institutions. This is now widely accepted as the most effective remedy against exploitation of the masses and misuse of authority as it enables people to exercise their power and facilitates their active participation in development activities.

Gandhiji's perception of 'Gram Swaraj' was precisely this. He was convinced that an administrative set-up that ignores Gram Swaraj will not safeguard the interests of the people nor reflect their concerns and aspirations. Though there were some arguments for and against this at the time of securing freedom, in due course of time it was accepted as the right

concept to strengthen democracy as well as local level institutions through a 'bottom-up' approach. People from all sections of society will be able to present their views, suggestions, needs, problems etc. only through the local-level institutions. Appropriate changes in the administrative structure and style of functioning are essential to ensure full participation of the people in planning and development activities. Though this idea is generally accepted, there is need for more clarity on matters related to the manner and areas of participation.

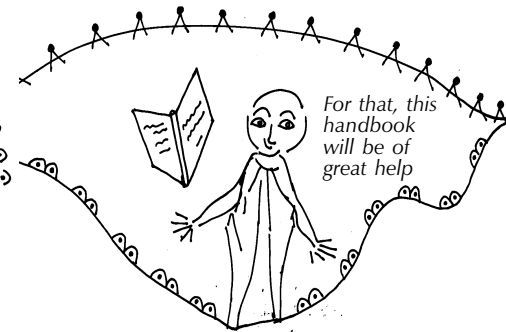
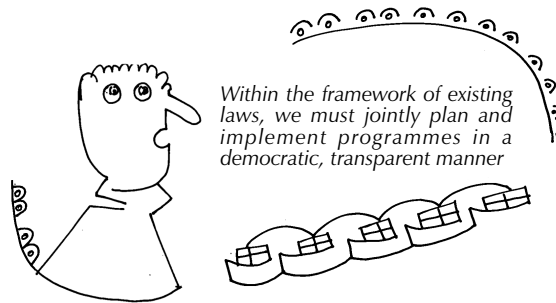
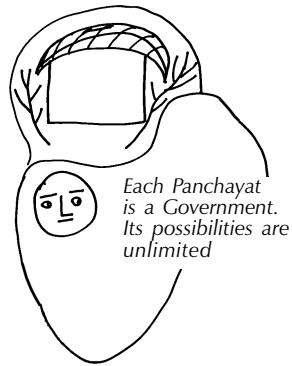
In the prevailing governance set-up, the Gram Sabha is the ideal forum for people to participate directly in governance and development. In Kerala this is a new system and the state is in the process of trying different ways of making it truly participatory. Discussions and exchange of views among those who are involved in these activities or are concerned about them are, therefore, important. This

*This is a handbook meant to facilitate discussions on 'Gram Sabha', based essentially on the deliberations at a seminar in Ernakulam on 10 December 2004. Apart from matters related to rules and regulations, ideas for further thought and discussions have been included.*



- publication has to be seen as a guide to facilitate
- deliberations on this topic. It includes ideas that
- were discussed during the workshop on Gram
- Sabha, organised by SDC CapDeck at Ernakulam
- on December 10, 2004. This handbook has
- incorporated a lot of ideas, concepts and
- examples from various state and local level
- interventions carried out by panchayats,
- organisations, social activists, KILA and other

training institutes. Indications and inferences in the light of past experiences are also incorporated to encourage more elaborate discussions and analysis to facilitate their practical application. While acknowledging and thanking all of the above, the author bears the responsibility of the views expressed in this handbook



# 1

## DECENTRALISATION

India was under British rule for nearly two centuries. The modes of governance in different parts of the country were, however, very different. While some territories were under the authority of British governors, some were under local kings or chieftains, some under Muslim kings, a few were Cantonments.

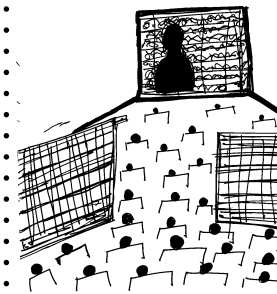
The history of the Panchayati Raj in India dates back to the Vedic period. The villages played a crucial role in decision – making on all matters affecting the life of common man including law and order. This system was, however, rendered ineffective under the British rule.

After Independence, a federal system of government was favoured instead of a unitary system, considering the prevailing diversity across the country. Since then, over the years, several attempts have been made to empower Panchayats.

### Administrative Reforms in the Post-Independence era

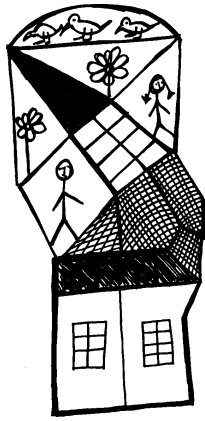
Gandhiji's idea of 'Gram Swaraj' where every village becomes a 'Panchayat Republic' did not exert a significant influence while drafting the Constitution. Gandhiji envisaged a five – tier system comprising the village, taluk, district, state and centre. But in a country where the caste system was still prevalent, it was feared that empowering villages would only result in power being concentrated in the hands of the upper castes. Dr. Ambedkar strongly felt that way and opposed the proposal. Gandhiji was disappointed on this score and was critical of the architects of the Constitution. Thus there was no mention of the concept of the village as the foundation of self-governance or 'Gram Swaraj' in the First Draft of the Constitution presented in the Constituent Assembly on November 4, 1948. This resulted in much criticism and objections.

*In olden times, villages used to play a crucial role in organising welfare activities touching all aspects of public life including maintenance of law and order.*



**GRAM SABHA**

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*The Balwantrai Mehta Committee was part of the Planning Commission's effort to harness people's power.*

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• Finally the proposal made by Shri. K.Santhanam as an amendment was accepted and the following provision included in the directive principles of state policy . [Article 40]

• Even before the approval of the Constitution, the state of Uttar Pradesh had passed the Panchayat Law and held elections in 1948. By March of 1954, a total number of 92, 255 panchayats had been formed all over India. A large number of villages were brought under the authority of Panchayati Raj. Under the initiative of the Central Government, a council was formed for local self- government bodies. In states like Bihar, Panchayat Courts came into existence to dispense justice in an inexpensive manner.

• The First Five Year Plan was implemented from 1951 to 56, followed by the Second Five Year Plan from 1956-61. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee constituted by the Planning Commission was a result of the realisation of the importance of the role of the people in the planning process. The Committee submitted its report in December 1958. It underlined the need for democratic decentralisation to ensure social development

and advocated the three –tier system of Panchayati Raj: Gram Panchayat, Block Panchayat and Zilla [district] Parishad. The Committee also recommended the formation of the Gram Panchayat through direct elections and the Block Panchayat and Council through indirect elections.

Following the approval of the National Development Council, the recommendations were implemented in several states and Union Territories, with regional differences. Panchayat laws and election patterns came into force. While one, two or three tier systems with many villages were established in the Gram Panchayats of most states, Kerala formed Panchayats on village basis. The period from 1954 to 64 witnessed significant growth of panchayats. The Third Five Year Plan [1961-66] set the right stage for this development. .

Since Local Administration came under the State List, the states were not bound to implement the recommendations of the committee in totality. The states, therefore, established Panchayati Raj in a manner that suited them. Further the Panchayats had only the status of statutory committees and regular

elections were not held in many states. There was a growing tendency to implement community development schemes sponsored by the Central Government through N.E.S Blocks and other development and welfare programmes through officials. This resulted in the sidelining of village level institutions and the relevance of Panchayati Raj system was minimised. Relief works were undertaken by Collectors and Tahsildars. The members of Panchayat Samitis were assigned the task of 'information agencies' during conferences and that of 'Assistants' to government officers during relief operations. The inordinate delays in securing official sanctions and the limitations in the exercise of financial powers adversely affected their image in the eyes of the common man. This state of affairs continued till the Constitutional Amendment in the year 1992.

The Dantwala Committee constituted to suggest measures to make the planning process meet the genuine needs of the rural population, recommended 'Block level Planning' in its report submitted in 1978. The Ashok Mehta Committee constituted by the Morarji Desai Government in 1978, recommended

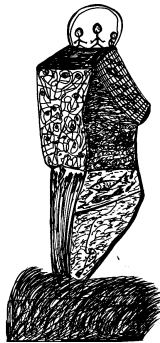
constitutional sanction for the functioning of Panchayats with due importance to district-level planning boards. Shri.E.M.S Nampoothiripad from Kerala was a member of this committee. The C.H Hanumantha Rao Committee appointed by the Planning Commission in 1984 recommended the 'district' as the principal unit in planning. It also suggested that the District Collector be made the co-ordinator for the planning and development activities. On the basis of these recommendations, guidelines for district-level planning were issued and steps were taken to provide untied funds to ensure adequate freedom in the planning process.

The V.K.R.V Rao Committee of 1985 recommended funding support for development activities with people's participation. The N.M Sanghvi Committee of 1986 also advocated the empowerment of local administration. In 1988, the Parliamentary Consultative Committee under the Chairmanship of Shri P.K.Thungon recommended Constitutional approval for the Panchayati Raj system. It was in this background that Shri. Rajiv Gandhi presented

*With the approval of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee's Report by the National Development Council, panchayat laws and election patterns with local variations came into force in various states and union territories.*



***The Dantwala Committee constituted for submitting proposals on a planning process that will benefit the rural population presented its report in 1978, proposing Block-level planning as the right approach.***



- the Panchayati Raj bill in Parliament in 1989 as
- the 64<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment. The Bill
- could not, however, be passed as the ruling
- party did not have the required majority in
- the Rajya Sabha.
- In 1992, the P.V Narasimha Rao
- government presented it as the 73<sup>rd</sup>
- Constitutional Amendment Bill. This was
- passed in the Lok Sabha on December 22<sup>nd</sup>
- 1992 and in the Rajya Sabha on December
- 23<sup>rd</sup> 1992. It was subsequently endorsed by
- 17 State Legislative Assemblies as well. On
- April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1993 the President of India gave
- his approval and the Panchayati Raj Act came
- into effect. However, it was significant that of
- the 97 powers vested with the Centre, 66
- powers of the State and 47 enlisted in the
- Concurrent List, only 29 out of the 66 enjoyed
- by the State were passed on to the Panchayats.
- This inadequacy could be seen in the allocation
- of subjects as well. In the field of agriculture
- for example, of a total of 62 powers, only 13
- were transferred to the local bodies.
- 
- **73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments**
- All the local self- government bodies like

District Panchayats, Block Panchayats, Gram Panchayats, Corporations and Municipalities present today came into existence as a result of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments of the Constitution. With these amendments coming into effect in 1993, the panchayats and corporations secured Constitutional protection hitherto denied to them. The Panchayati Raj got empowered through several provisions like the following:

- 1] In states with a population exceeding 20 lakhs, three-tier panchayats- at Village level, Block level and District level are to be formed.
- 2] Gram Sabhas are to be constituted with the voters whose names are included in the village electoral role as members.
- 3] One-third of the total elected members in the three-tier panchayats should be women.
- 4] For scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, their representation in the tiers should be in proportion to their population and one third of these members must be women.
- 5] In local self-government institutions, the

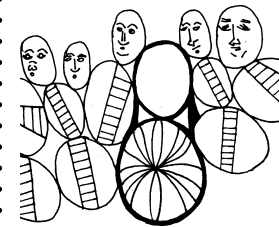
- post of President should be reserved for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, on the basis of their population, while one third should be reserved for women.
- 6] The reservation for members and presidential posts should be on a rotation basis.
  - 7] The term of elected local bodies shall be five years. In the event of vacancies of membership arising during this term or of an elected body not completing its term, fresh elections should be held within six months.
  - 8] A State Finance Commission is to be constituted every five years, for evaluating the financial status of the local bodies and for recommending guidelines for sharing of tax revenue and other income between the government and local bodies.
  - 9] A State Election Commission should be constituted to ensure fair and free elections to local bodies.
  - 10] Local self-government institutions should be empowered to plan and implement schemes for economic development and social justice.

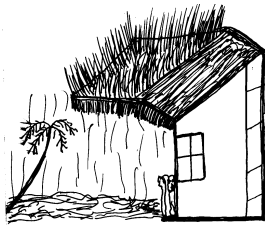
- 11] Planning Committees to be set up at the district level, with representation from both urban and rural areas, to coordinate the planning and implementation of development activities.

#### History of Local Self-Governments in Kerala

- Ancient village administration that began with 'Tharra or Karakootam' [group of people in the sub-division of a village] gave way to governance based on caste system.
- The caste system began to dominate the system of governance. The locality where the Brahmins lived was called the 'Gramam', the area where the Nairs lived was called the 'Tharra', that occupied by the Ezhavas was known as the 'Kara' and the area where other castes lived was the 'Cheri' or Murri'. The 'Kazhakam' was the smallest self-governing unit in a 'gramam' while the 'Kootam' was the smallest self-governing unit in a 'Tharra'.
- In 1762, ten taluks called 'Kovilakathum Vathukkal' existed, administered by a

*The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution amendment brought up by the P.V.Narasimha Rao government in 1992 gave constitutional backing to panchayats and thereby approval, to some extent, to the Panchayati Raj principle.*





*The Travancore –  
Cochin Panchayat Act  
came into existence  
in 1950, giving birth  
to panchayats. The  
Delimitation  
Committees were also  
constituted.*

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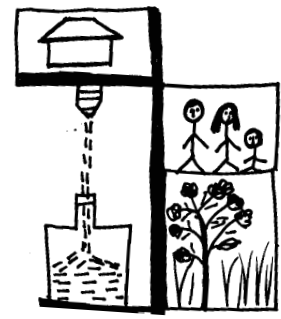
- ‘Karyakkar’ [prototype of present –day
- Tahsildar].Each taluk was divided into 30
- divisions called ‘Pravrithis’[villages],
- administered by the ‘Pravarthikar’ [Village
- Officer]
- In 1867, in accordance with the Madras
- Town Improvement Act, the Kozhikode,
- Thalassery, Kannur and Palakkad
- Municipalities came into existence.
- District Boards and Taluk Boards were
- established in accordance with the
- Madras Local Bodies Act of 1884.
- In 1914, the Kochi Village Panchayat Act
- was enacted and village governance
- began in the princely state of Kochi. The
- state was divided into five taluks under a
- five-member ruling committee, under the
- supervision and control of the Diwan
- Peshkaar.
- In 1922, the Kochi Panchayat Regulation
- gave more powers to the Panchayats. Tax-
- payees became eligible for membership.
- 1920- the Municipal Regulation Law.
- 1925-the Travancore Village Panchayat
- Act.
- 1935-Adult franchise.
- 1940-Travancore Village Union Act of 1940.
- Panchayats and Unions were brought
- under the Department of Panchayats
- created for the purpose.
- A Registrar was appointed as Head of the
- Department.
- The Trivandrum City Municipal Act of
- 1941 raised the status of the Trivandrum
- Municipality to that of a Corporation. The
- President was made a full-time salaried
- functionary.
- In 1945 a Government department was
- created for Panchayats.
- Commissioners were appointed in all
- municipalities.
- Village upliftment laws were passed
- in1947,48 and 49.
- The Travancore- Kochi state was formed
- in 1949. The Travancore Village Union
- Act of 1925 and the Kochi Panchayat
- Regulation of 1922 were unified.
- In 1950, the Travancore –Kochi Panchayat
- Act was enacted. Panchayats were formed
- and Delimitation Committees were set
- up.
- The Travancore-Kochi Panchayat Act was

implemented in August 1951 and Village Panchayats and Village Unions were named 'Panchayats'. The system of adult franchise and secret ballot was introduced.

- In July 1953, the first general elections were held in 548 of the 550 Panchayats. The committees took charge on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August.
- In Travancore, the village administration was carried out by the Registrar of Village Unions and Panchayats. When the Travancore-Kochi state was formed the Panchayat Directorate was established in Trivandrum on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1950.
- As part of the reforms introduced by Lord Rippon, a District Board was functioning in Malabar, which was part of the Madras Presidency. Even though the members were elected, they were all British loyalists. The last election to the Board was held in 1954. Political parties contested the elections and the Communist Party emerged the winner.
- In 1958, the first Committee for Administrative Reforms was formed under

the chairmanship of Shri.E.M.S Nampoothiripad.

- The Travancore-Kochi Panchayat Act of 1950 and the Madras Village Panchayat Act of 1950 were unified to form the Kerala Panchayat Act which came into force on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1960.
  - The Local Bodies Department was divided into the Panchayat Department and the Municipality Department.
  - The reorganization of Panchayats was completed on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1962. Based on their annual income the 922 Panchayats were divided into 4 groups.
  - General Elections.
- A State of Emergency was declared in the country on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1962 following the Chinese aggression and the election was postponed. In November-December 1963, the first election was held. Its salient features were the following:
- Secret ballot and adult franchise
  - 988 constituencies
  - One seat reserved for SC /ST candidate in every Panchayat.
  - A total of 67,80,525 voters



*The Travancore – Cochin Panchayat Act of 1950 and the Madras Village Panchayat Act of 1950 were combined to create the Kerala Panchayat Act of 1960 which came into force on 8 December 1960.*

***On 10 May 1983,  
1002 panchayats  
were regrouped***



- - Polling percentage of 75-95 %
- - 15 women candidates emerged winners in 81 Panchayats
- - Women were nominated in the remaining 907 Panchayats. The members took charge on Jan.1<sup>st</sup>,1964.
- • As per the recommendations of the Balwant-Rai Mehta Committee, the R.Shankar Ministry presented the Kerala Panchayat Council and District Parishat Bill in the Assembly in Feb.1964. The Bill could not, however, be passed as the Ministry had to quit.
- • During the President's rule in 1965, a Commission for administrative reforms and reduction of expenditure was set up under the Chairmanship of Shri.M.K Vellodi.
- • In August 1967, the E.M.S Nampoothiripad Ministry brought up the Panchayat Bill proposing a two-tier system of panchayats and districts. But due to the dissolution of the Assembly the bill could not be enacted.
- • 1969 – The Kerala Local Government Bill.
- • In 1971, the Achutha Menon Ministry

presented the District Administration Bill in the Assembly. However the term of the Assembly expired before the bill could be passed.

- The Kerala District Administration Bill was presented by the A.K Antony Ministry in 1979. Though it received the approval of the President of India on 18<sup>th</sup> May, 1980,it could not be implemented. The voting age was reduced from 21 to 18.
- Regrouping of 1002 Panchayats took place on 10<sup>th</sup> May,1983.

Income [Rs]	Grade	Number
1,75,000 and above	Special	351
1,00,000 to 1,75,000	Grade 1	444
50,000 to 1,00,000	Grade 2	193
Upto 50,000	Grade 3	14

- The Naha Commission was the first body set up to make an exclusive study of the financial matters of the panchayats in

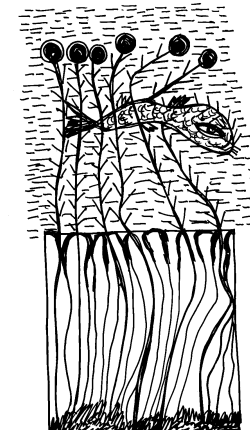
- Kerala.
- The first District Council –The E.K Nayanar ministry which came into power in 1987 conducted elections to the District Councils for the first time.
- The Panchayat Common Service ceased to exist with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January,1990.
- The District Council was dissolved in 1991.
- In March 1993, the Kerala Panchayat Bill based on the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment was presented in the Assembly.
- The Act came into effect on 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1994.

#### **The Kerala Panchayati Raj Act -1994**

The states were given upto an year's time to make suitable changes in their existing Panchayati Raj laws or to enact new legislation incorporating the provisions contained in the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments. The Kerala Assembly passed the new Panchayati Raj Act in 1994. The Kerala Municipal Act , applicable to urban areas also came into force in 1994.

In the light of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments, the Panchayati Raj concept became a much debated topic in Kerala. Many view points and suggestions emerged on matters related to the structure of the newly formed Panchayats and Municipalities,their membership, election, powers ,responsibilities etc emerged from the deliberations among experts, in institutions, voluntary organisations etc. Based on the provisions of the Kerala Panchayati Raj and Municipal Acts of 1994, Block Panchayats at the middle level and District Panchayats at the district level were formed in addition to the existing gram panchayats, municipalities and corporations.

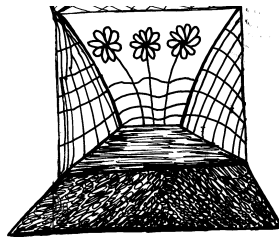
- Elections were held in September1995.
- Assumed power on 2<sup>nd</sup> October,1995
- On 18<sup>th</sup> September, 1995, the government order No:[P] 189 /95 /LAD was issued, transferring institutions and posts from 17 departments.
- The State Budget of 1996 included Appendix 4 [Financial Assistance to Panchayats]
- In July 1996, the Sen Committee was



*In 1999 on the basis of the report of the Sen Committee, a comprehensive amendment of the Panchayat Act came into force. Accordingly three types of responsibilities were assigned to panchayats.*

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***The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments to the Indian Constitution facilitated the creation of the local self governments of the present day viz: the District Panchayats, Block Panchayats, Grama Panchayats, Corporations and Municipalities***



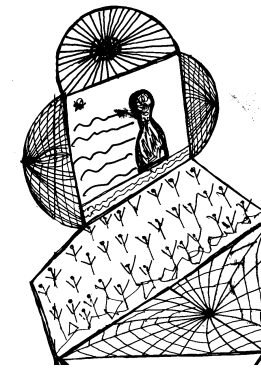
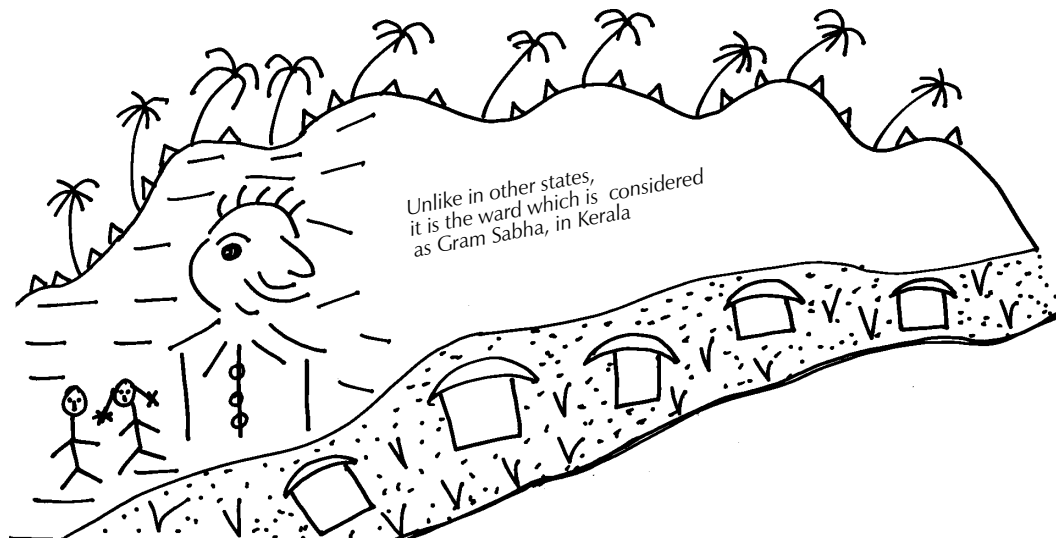
- constituted under the Chairmanship of Shri. S.B.Sen.
- On 17<sup>th</sup> August, 1996, the People's Planning Campaign was launched for the successful implementation of a five year plan for decentralisation. This was a revolutionary event in the history of development planning in Kerala.
- In accordance with the recommendations of the Sen Committee, a comprehensive Panchayat Act Amendment came into effect. The responsibilities of the Grama Panchayats were grouped under three heads :
  - Unavoidable responsibilities - 27
  - General responsibilities -14
  - Territorial responsibilities - 76
- [on 19 subjects]
- Highlights of the recommendations of the Sen Committee:
  1. Ombudsman
  2. The right to information
  3. Ensuring people's participation
- - The quorum of the Gram Sabha /Ward Sabha was raised from 5 to 10 %.

- The number of Gram Sabhas /Ward Sabhas raised from 2 to 4.
- Greater people's participation in planning, implementation and monitoring .
- Anti-defection law
- Appellate tribunal.
- Right to decide, freedom to work and responsibilities for each level.
- Local mobilisation of resources and decentralisation of financial management
- Transparency

These were included in the Panchayati Raj Act and the process of decentralisation was further strengthened through the 'People's Plan campaign.

- Amendments were proposed for 37 appended rules related to panchayat administration.
- The new Panchayat Samitis took charge on 30<sup>th</sup> Sept., 2001.
- The 'Akshaya' programme was launched in Grama Panchayats in 2002.
- The 'Clean Kerala' scheme was introduced in the panchayats in 2002.

- Panchayats were provided with ministerial and engineering staff through deployment.
- Creation of Relief Funds for Panchayats in 2003.
- Formation of Committees for Public Health Institutions in 2003.
- Rules for the 'Citizens Charter' in 2003.
- Ashraya Project in panchayats in 2003.
- New accounting and bill systems in 2004.



*In all states with a population of not less than 20 lakhs, three tier panchayats have to be formed at village level, district level and intermediate level.*

**PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE**

*Basic democracy attains perfection only when the Gram Sabha's functioning becomes lively.*



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With the objective of democratising the governance of villages, 'Gram Sabhas' have been made statutory through the Panchayati Raj Act. Gram Sabhas have been widely accepted as the pivot around which the concept of Grama Swaraj revolves. True democracy is realised only when the Gram Sabhas are lively. The success of decentralised planning depends on the resolutions and effective functioning of the Gram Sabhas.

The local self-government have the crucial responsibility of making the rural population aware of their powers as well as rights on matters related to planning, implementation and administration. Another important responsibility is linked to development activities. The process of decentralisation envisages the planning of various development activities for a locality at the level of the local self governing unit. Programmes and developmental schemes should be prepared

on the basis of the views and suggestions of participants in the Gram Sabhas and the recommendations of the working group. The governing body has the responsibility to give priority to the interests of society than those of an individual. Local self-government becomes meaningful only when this responsibility is fulfilled in an honest manner.

There are certain moral responsibilities and obligations for people's representatives who are in power. These are also as important as the rules and regulations of local governance. Democratising panchayat governance and empowering and promoting all institutions that can help or facilitate the process of greater democratisation is one such responsibility. These institutions can make the Gram Sabhas more lively and vibrant. Taking the lead in ensuring people's participation in development is also related to this responsibility. The social relevance of the panchayat programmes, resolutions and

administration is the most important factor in ensuring people's participation. Social and other gains achieved through people's involvement underline the importance of right selection of schemes, their prioritisation and the feelings of the people.

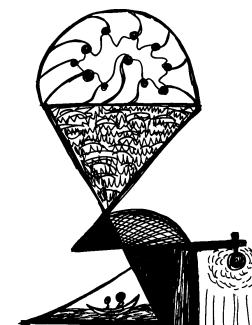
In addition to the official responsibilities, a people's representative in the Panchayat has to take up several tasks that are diverse and call for day to day interventions

- Sorting out personal disputes and problems as well as routine complaints.
- Intervening in political issues and involvement in political activity.
- Intervening in police cases.
- Intervening in marriage alliances, marital disputes and in efforts to reunite estranged couples.
- Taking part in ceremonies ranging from birth to death.
- Taking part in local meetings, committees etc.
- Playing the lead role in many events, rendering advice or opinions etc.
- Making recommendations either through the telephone or in person.

- Helping in hospital related matters.
- As an arbiter in disputes and as a 'surety'

Thus the list of tasks of Panchayat Members is endless. Perhaps some of them may not even come under their sphere of authority. But the people expect such help and cooperation from them and they may have to get involved in these tasks day and night. This underlines the need for strengthening the process of decentralisation, conferring to the Panchayat the status of a local self-governing body, for greater empowerment of the Panchayat and its members, and for more of people's participation and transparency in the functioning. A Panchayat Member's role assumes greater significance only when he/she successfully fulfills the aforesaid tasks, along with the duties in administration and development. This, however, requires an effective management system and proper division of responsibilities. Further, the members have to rise to the occasion and acquire leadership qualities. Gram Sabha and micro level institutions under it, and cultural organizations like arts clubs, libraries, farmers' associations, unions, and political parties can facilitate this.

***The LSGIs have a great responsibility in spreading awareness among people about their rights and powers in the sphere of planning, implementation and administration.***





***As a member of a panchayat, one does not have to do everything by himself/herself. Instead, one must ensure proper coordination of the institutional mechanism, apportion responsibilities, provide leadership for various activities and make the authorities realise the genuine concerns of the people.***

**18 GRAM SABHA**

- The success of a member / governing body
- in terms of democratisation or efficiency can
- be gauged from the extent of active
- involvement and utilisation of institutions.
- Otherwise people remain far removed from
- them without any sense of involvement, as
- shown by past experience.
- The most significant aspect of public
- administration in which the local self
- government institutions differ from the state
- and central governments in matters of strength
- achievements etc. is the direct involvement of
- the people in governance. The voters have the
- right and authority to assist the local bodies in
- administration, control and development
- activities and to appraise their decisions, gains
- and failures. A frequently asked question in
- Gram Sabhas, meetings of elected
- representatives and training programmes is
- whether this kind of appraisal by the people
- and their "Right to Information" should be
- restricted to Grama Panchayats alone. All
- views, suggestions and problems raised by
- voters in Gram Sabhas are applicable to the
- Block and District Panchayats and the State
- and Central Governments as well. The Gram
- Sabhas which are the voters' assemblies have

the authority to appraise at all levels functions of administration and execution of tasks related to development, regulatory measures etc. and offer suggestions. This opportunity to interact at all levels ensures greater people's participation, which in turn facilitates a combined effort to raise the standard of living.

Political parties, voluntary organisations [including Kudumbashree], N.G.Os and the citizens cannot stay away as if it is solely the responsibility of the elected representatives. They are all part of the Panchayati Raj system and the failure of even one of these constituents will be reflected in the development and administration of the panchayat. The panchayat members are not expected to do everything by themselves. Instead, they have to coordinate the working of the various agencies, divide the responsibilities among them, provide the leadership for their implementation, convey the concerns of the people to the decision-making authorities and ensure that the right decisions are taken and implemented. They should also take steps to ensure that the proposals of the Gram Sabha reach the appropriate levels of administration. Thus the panchayat members have an important role and great responsibilities in the

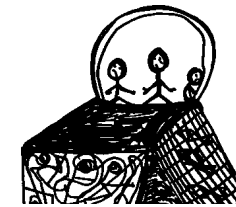
Panchayati Raj system.

The Gram Sabha is the constitutionally derived lowest rung where the people can directly involve themselves in the process of governance. Since their inception, the Gram Sabhas have achieved much. However, a few deficiencies and complaints do exist.

- Minutes of meetings are not recorded in time and in a proper manner.
- Women outnumber men in participation, but they are not adequately represented in the decision-making process.
- Participation of men in the Gram Sabhas is declining.
- The majority of people come to the Gram Sabhas seeking some individual benefit.
- The educated and economically better-off sections of society do not participate in the Gram Sabhas.
- Many of the decisions taken by the Gram Sabhas are not implemented successfully.
- The real or genuine needs of the people are not addressed.
- Gram Sabhas and the decision –making process get politicised.
- Favouritism and partiality exist.
- Participation in Gram Sabhas does not

serve any useful purpose.

- Benefits and concessions are given to the same persons over and over again.
- Changes are made in the List of Beneficiaries approved by the Gram Sabhas.
- The Gram Sabhas merely serve as platforms for rhetoric.
- All people are informed about meetings but participation is poor.
- The public is not aware of the rights and powers of the Gram Sabha.
- Lack of information about follow-up action on the decisions taken by Gram Sabhas.
- Failure to ensure participation of all sections of society.
- Working group members and officials do not participate regularly and do their share of the task.
- Deficiencies in deciding the venue, time, date and agenda of Gram Sabhas.
- A feeling that the Gram Sabha is to serve solely the interests of the Member.
- Lack of transparency in functioning.
- Lack of publicity.
- Poor coordination among the three tiers.
- Lack of interest on the part of the people's



*The Gram Sabha is the lowest level constitutional tier that facilitates people's intervention in governance.. Though there have been several achievements since the days of its introduction, many complaints about the Gram Sabha still persist.*

*There is no doubt about the sincere wish of the people's representatives and committees at the local self-government level to see that programmes are implemented in an efficient manner for the benefit of the people and with their involvement.*



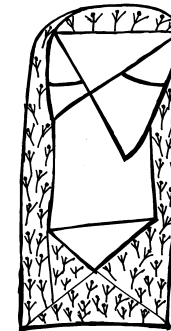
- representatives in the proper functioning of Gram Sabhas.
- Gram Sabhas degenerate into a mere ritual.
- These are some of the common complaints about Gram Sabhas in general. On the whole, without doubt, people's participation [not mere physical presence] is on the decline. The reasons for this have to be found and remedial measures taken. Every citizen, instead of shying away and criticising Gram Sabhas as impractical, should fulfill his / her responsibility as well as that of the organisation he / she might be part of, by working for the betterment of the system.
- There is no doubt that the representatives of the people and the regional governing bodies in Kerala, are interested in the proper implementation of programmes for the common good of people and with their participation. But they often face challenges which must be addressed if Gram Sabhas are to function effectively to ensure better administration and proper development
- 1. How can proper planning be done for organising the Gram Sabhas?
- 2. When there is an increase in the number

- of participants, what arrangements can be made to make all of them understand the matters brought up in the Gram Sabhas and to know their views?
- 3. How can people's participation be ensured in decision – making and implementation?
- 4. How can a favourable change be brought about in the mindset of officials, administrators, institutions and voters?
- 5. What are the steps to be taken at different levels to solve the problems or attend to the needs or act on the suggestions presented in the Gram Sabhas? What is the role of the different actors in these tasks?
- 6. How can volunteers be inducted and retained in these tasks?
- 7. What system should be adopted to identify the problems of a locality?
- 8. How can people's participation be secured in this task? What system can be introduced to make people aware of the problems and their causes and to ensure their participation in the remedial measures?
- 9. How can maximum transparency be ensured to avoid any misunderstanding in the minds of the voters?

10. How can people with skill and expertise in different fields be brought into this arrangement? What is the role of organisations and academic institutions and how can they be made part of the system?
11. How can the smooth functioning of the system be ensured in the midst of rules and regulations, control and interventions from higher levels, time limits etc.?
12. If and when smaller units like 'Ayalkootams' [Neighbourhood Groups] are organised under the Gram Sabhas, what responsibilities can be assigned to them and how can they be linked to this system?
13. When permanent solutions for all problems are not known or even if they are known, they may require a long period of time, how can people be made to appreciate the facts?
14. Since the Gram Sabhas are formed on the basis of Wards, how can the funds be allocated in a proper manner?
15. How can the problems, needs, suggestions etc. of each Gram Sabha be compiled and brought before the Panchayat? How will they be prioritised? How will the Report on Development Perspectives be prepared? How can a proper budget based on this be prepared?
16. How can the proper functioning of transferred institutions, working groups, and meetings of stake holders be ensured? How can they be linked and used in the Gram Sabha for the better performance of the system?
17. How effectively can each Member keep his political party informed about various matters, get instructions, incorporate them into the system and move forward?

***What is required is active support to the Panchayat Committee, with timely interventions, duly accepting its central position and appreciating its authority as well as responsibility. Anything else is contrary to this concept.***

***How to link local people with expertise in different fields with this arrangement? What is the role of organisations, institutions, academic institutions etc.?***



***Strengthening of the Gram Sabha is the responsibility and need of everyone of us.***

18. How can the Budget and the Plan be linked effectively?

From this long list of issues it is obvious that the development of Gram Sabhas as an institution requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses all the related institutions. The rules and regulations pertaining to the services rendered by the panchayats, procedural formalities, efficiency, unity,

perception, approach, mindset of the people, as well as officials... all these have to change. The local self government institutions and authorities should, therefore, strive to create a working environment in which everyone's responsibilities are clearly defined and opportunities are provided to fulfill them efficiently. This will make people's participation meaningful.



### 3

## GRAM SABHA

Unlike in other states of the country, under the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, a constituency [Ward] in a Panchayat is reckoned as a village or Gramam and the unit comprising all the voters in the Ward is called a Gram Sabha.

### What is a Gram Sabha?

The administrative unit at the lowest level of public administration is called the Gram Sabha. The unique feature of the local self-government is the participation of 'beneficiaries' of governance in the process of decision making, its implementation, resource mobilization etc. How to ensure proper functioning of the administrative system? What specific local rules or regulations are required for this and how to formulate and implement them? Gram Sabha is the forum to deliberate and take appropriate decisions on such

matters. Thus the Gram Sabha can influence the lives of individuals, families and the village community itself, as everyone is a member of the society. We should, therefore, realise that participation in the meetings of the Gram Sabha is our responsibility as well as an obligation similar to that of the members of the Gram Panchayat or Legislature or Parliament.

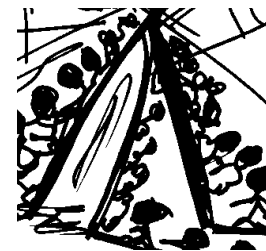
### Why Gram Sabhas?

A Gram Sabha should not be seen merely as a forum to dole out subsidies and grants or for monitoring and evaluating local administration. As the participants in a Gram Sabha are the voters, its possibilities are considerable.

### A . Help the Panchayat in Administration

1. In the decision making process
2. In resource mobilisation

*Gram Sabha is the lowest official tier in the public administration set-up.*



*The Gram Sabha should not be viewed merely as the forum for securing various benefits or for appraising the performance of governing bodies. The participants in a Gram Sabha are voters- the ultimate authorities- and therefore, its possibilities are great.*



- 3. In solving problems
- 4. In the implementation of rules and regulations
- 5. In the implementation of schemes
- 6. In the formulation of local regulations
- 7. In the selection of 'beneficiaries'
- 8. In the selection of benefiting areas

**B . Help in the Planning Process**

- 1. In the preparation of list of problems, schemes etc. and in prioritising them
- 2. In gathering information
- 3. In the sharing of experiences for solving problems
- 4. In assigning roles and responsibilities in interventions for solving problems

**C . Settling Disputes**

- 1. In presenting complaints – individual's or community's and solving them through collective discussions
- 2. In finding solutions through discussions for common issues / problems brought before the Vigilance Committees [Jagratha Samitis]
- 3. In finding solutions to common problems through collective discussions

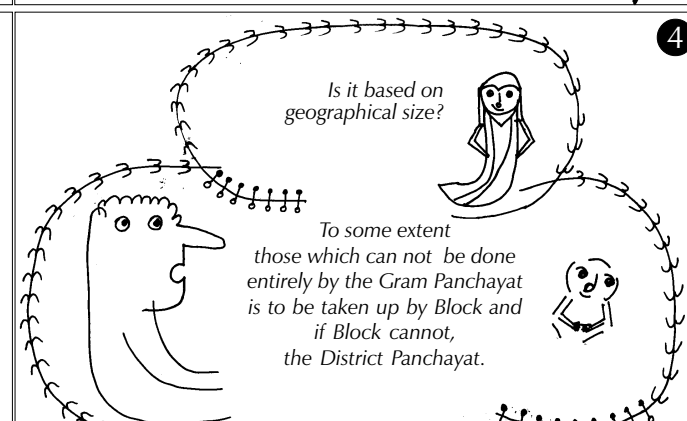
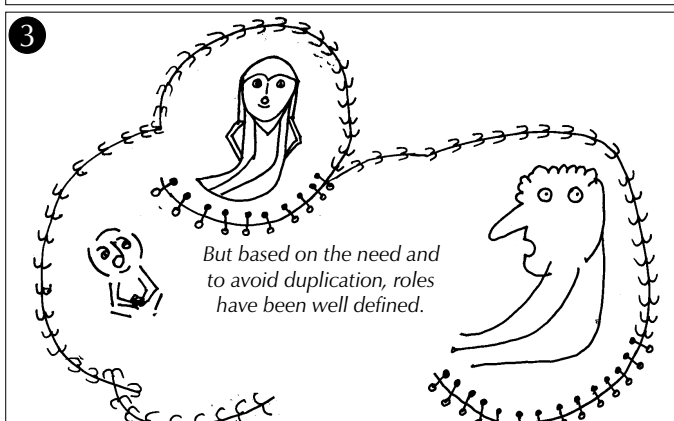
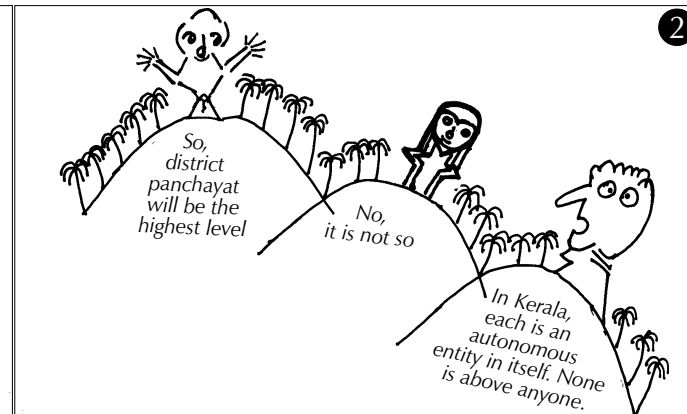
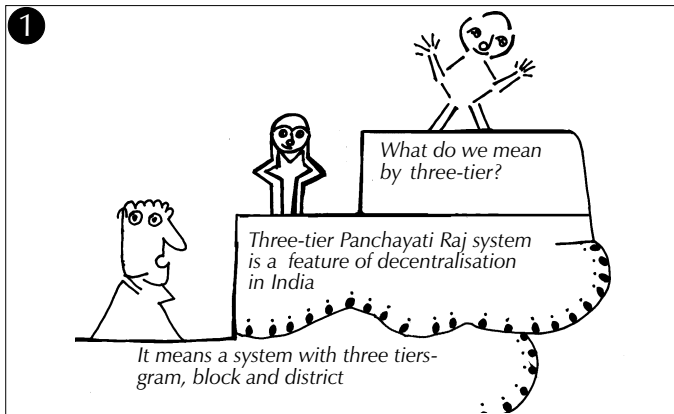
- 4. In formulating local regulations or in facilitating smooth implementation of existing ones and in ensuring their proper observance for common good.

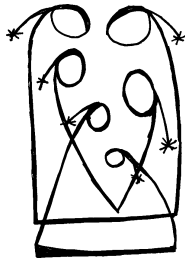
**D . Appraisal**

- 1. In appraising the performance of officials, institutions, authorities etc.
- 2. In appraising the utilisation of public funds
- 3. In appraising the performance of various committees
- 4. In appraising the implementation of the Citizens' Charter
- 5. In continuous appraisal of the performance of various institutions.

**E .General Matters**

- 1. The Gram Sabha has to treat as a major item in its agenda its role in supporting and strengthening all activities meant to help women and children realise and assert their rights and in creating opportunities that would enable them to live as individuals and equal members of society.





*Recognising the rights of women and children, supporting and strengthening their efforts and creating opportunities that enable them to live as individuals... this should become the main agenda of the Gram Sabha.*

- 2. Create conditions to help and protect the backward communities to come to the forefront of society.
  - 3. Organise art and cultural events.
  - 4. Honour those who have commendable skills / talents in different fields.
  - 5. Provide opportunities to persons who have acquired expertise to demonstrate their skills / talents.
  - 6. Plan and organise programmes to promote awareness on various matters.
  - 7. Constitute sub-committees and institutional set-ups for the aforesaid tasks.
  - 8. Discover people with competence in different fields and facilitate contacts among them.
  - 9. Support the activities of Kudumbashree units and arrange the marketing of their products.
  - 10. Support the educational institutions
  - 11. Organise voluntary activities.
- The concept of a Gram Sabha in the Panchayati Raj Act is such as to facilitate the aforesaid functions .Let us now examine the legal frame work.

### **The Structure and Functions of a Gram Sabha**

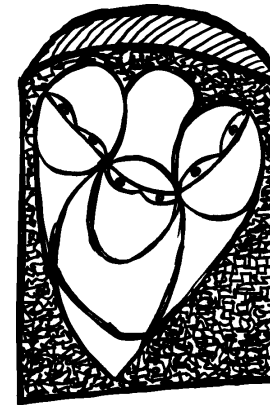
- The quorum for a Gram Sabha is 10 per cent of the number of voters. If the meeting is postponed to another day for want of quorum, the number of voters present in that meeting should not be less than 50.
- A Gram Sabha has to meet atleast four times in an year, once every three months.
- If the Member of the Panchayat who, as Convenor of the Gram Sabha, fails to convene two consecutive meetings he/she becomes disqualified as a Member.
- If the President of the Panchayat is convinced that a Member was unable to perform his/her functions as Convenor of the Gram Sabha, he/she can entrust the task to the Member from an adjoining Ward.
- The chairperson of a Gram Sabha is the Panchayat President. In his/her absence it can be the Vice-President, while in the absence of both, the Ward Member [Convenor] himself /herself can preside.

- The Convenor must ensure that the local MLA and Members of the concerned Block and District Panchayats are invited to all meetings of the Gram Sabha.
- All the tiers of the 3-tier Panchayat must properly consider proposals and suggestions of the Gram Sabhas.
- Officials working at the Panchayat –level must attend Gram Sabhas as and when instructed by the President of the Panchayat. Considering their role in the planning and implementation of developmental schemes, their participation provides an opportunity to know about the requirements of the voters and decide how best they can help.
- An official under the control of the Panchayat is made the Coordinator of Gram Sabha to perform duties like helping the Convenor to convene the Gram Sabha, recording the minutes of the Gram Sabha, helping in the proper conduct of the Gram Sabha etc.
- If not less than 10 percent of the voters make a written request, the Convenor has to convene a meeting of the Gram Sabha,

with the agenda containing only those matters mentioned in their request. This has to be between two normal meetings of the Gram Sabha. Notification relating to the convening of the Gram Sabha should be issued 7 days in advance.

#### **Powers and Responsibilities of a Gram Sabha**

- Assist in the task of collecting information required for preparing development plans for the Panchayat.
- Suggest the various development schemes to be taken up as well as their prioritisation.
- For beneficiary oriented schemes, prepare and submit to the Panchayat the list of eligible persons in the order of priority, based on the approved criteria.
- Render locally required assistance for the successful implementation of schemes.
- Mobilise and provide the required voluntary service as well as assistance, as money or materials, for development activities.
- Provide suggestions on the suitable



*Arrangements to help and protect the marginalised communities should be a concern of the Gram Sabha.*

**1** You were not seen in the previous Gram Sabhas what happened?

You look disappointed. Don't you find Gram Sabhas useful?

Oh, why should we waste time?

Of course, it is useful. But what about the higher tiers like block, district, state or central governments. Do we have any say there?

Our member always says, nobody wants transparency at higher levels

What is your opinion, sir?

**3** But they cannot attend all Gram Sabhas

We should invite the elected representatives of higher tiers. We should also ask them about what is happening there and also give our suggestions

They can give their reports to Gram Panchayat and they will inform the Gram Sabhas

**4** It means there are lot of things to do in a Gram Sabha

OK, even if we formulate suggestions for the higher tiers, will it reach those tiers and some action taken on those?

We can send our comments and suggestions to each tier through the Gram Panchayat

I never knew that Gram Sabha has this much powers and responsibilities

Now onwards I will definitely attend all the Gram Sabhas

locations for street lights, street / common water taps, community wells, common sanitary units, irrigation facilities and other items meant for common benefit.

- Prepare schemes to promote awareness on matters of common interest like cleanliness, environmental protection, pollution control etc. and provide protection against social evils like corruption, fraudulent and fictitious transactions etc.
- Promote friendship and unity among people of different sections in the area and organise cultural and artistic events to foster goodwill.
- Observe and assist the beneficiary committees working in the Panchayat area.
- Examine the eligibility of persons receiving various forms of assistance from the government like pension, subsidy etc.
- Gather details of the estimates for the different 'works' proposed in the area of the Gram Sabha.
- Provide information on the various tasks to be carried out and services to be rendered by the officers concerned during

the next three months.

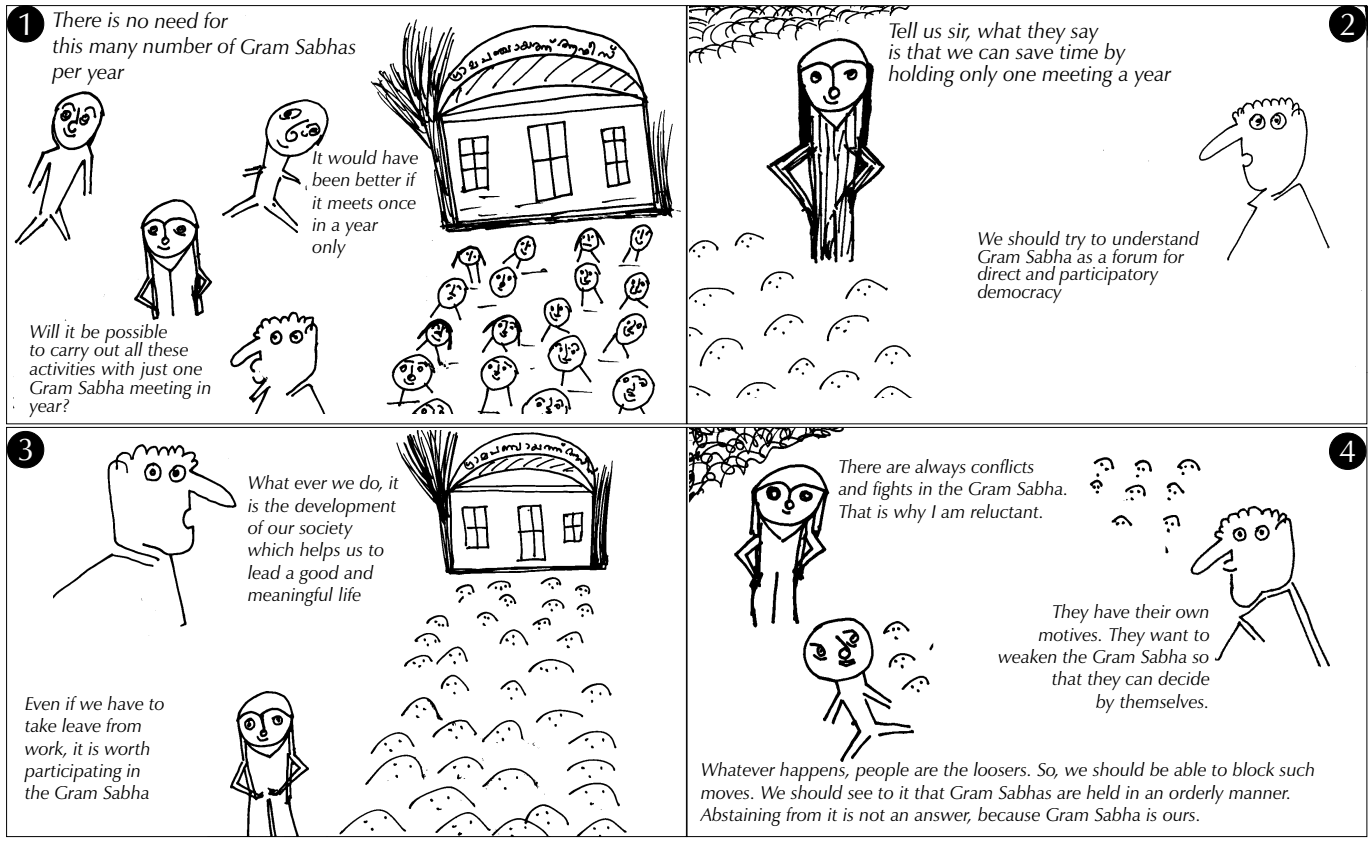
- Understand the rationale of the decisions taken by the Panchayat pertaining to the Gram Sabha's area.
- Get to know the action taken on the decisions of the Gram Sabha and if no action was taken, the reasons thereof.
- Cooperate with the employees of the Panchayat in cleaning operations and render voluntary service for removal of garbage.
- Identify the inadequacies in the services related to water supply, street lights etc. and suggest remedies.
- Cooperate in the activities of the Parent – Teacher Associations in the schools in the area of the Gram Sabha.
- Cooperate in the activities on public health, especially in those related to disease prevention, family welfare etc.
- Discharge other responsibilities that may be assigned in course of time.

#### Responsibilities of the Gram Sabha

- Disseminate information on activities related to development and welfare.
- Participate in and publicise activities

***The Gram Sabha must meet 4 times a year, at the rate of one every 3 months.***





1 There is no need for this many number of Gram Sabhas per year

Will it be possible to carry out all these activities with just one Gram Sabha meeting in year?

It would have been better if it meets once in a year only



2

Tell us sir, what they say is that we can save time by holding only one meeting a year

We should try to understand Gram Sabha as a forum for direct and participatory democracy

3

What ever we do, it is the development of our society which helps us to lead a good and meaningful life

Even if we have to take leave from work, it is worth participating in the Gram Sabha



4

There are always conflicts and fights in the Gram Sabha. That is why I am reluctant.

They have their own motives. They want to weaken the Gram Sabha so that they can decide by themselves.

Whatever happens, people are the losers. So, we should be able to block such moves. We should see to it that Gram Sabhas are held in an orderly manner. Abstaining from it is not an answer, because Gram Sabha is ours.

related to health, literary and other time-bound development programmes.

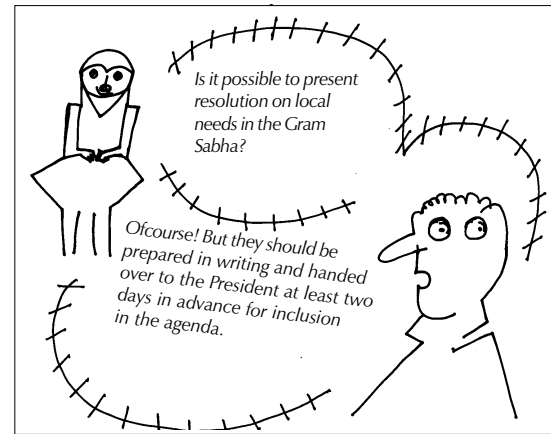
- Collect basic records on essential social and economic matters.
- Collect and provide information on the progress of development activities.
- Resort to righteous ways to pay taxes, repay loans, improve environmental cleanliness and to sustain the unity among people.
- Mobilise resources at the local level to improve the revenue earnings of the Panchayat
- Supervise the development activities.
- Make arrangements to alert the authorities immediately about epidemics, natural calamities etc.

### Periodical Gram Sabhas

As part of the implementation of the Sen Committee Report, the Panchayat Act stipulates the holding of a Gram Sabha atleast 4 times in a financial year, at the rate of one every three months. On the basis of the guidelines issued on different occasions, the following matters have to be included in the agenda. [Other matters considered important

by the Panchayat can also be included.]

1. Gram Sabha for planning.
  2. Gram Sabha to select beneficiaries and benefiting areas and to discuss implementation of schemes.
  3. Gram Sabha to discuss and review matters related to organisation, implementation, progress etc of schemes at different levels and decide future course of action.
  4. Gram Sabha to evaluate the schemes, their completion, steps to complete those that are incomplete, etc .
- In addition, Gram Sabha can be convened to discuss and find solutions to problems arising locally like drinking water, drought, epidemics, issues on education, agriculture, atrocities, law and order problems etc. But when such a special Gram Sabha is convened, it has to be between two regular Gram Sabhas.



***The Gram Sabha should provide locally required facilities for the successful implementation of development schemes.***

## CONDUCTING A GRAM SABHA

*The steps involved in convening a Gram Sabha are explained in this chapter.*



32 **GRAM SABHA**

Organisation of Gram Sabhas is the responsibility of the Gram Panchayat. The main responsibility for each Gram Sabha is assigned to a Standing Committee, in consideration of the special nature of Gram Sabhas. For convening the Gram Sabha a proper procedure has to be followed. Matters that facilitate this are discussed in this chapter. In the meeting of the Panchayat Committee that resolves to convene Gram Sabhas, the task of organising Gram Sabhas is assigned to 3 Members. The concerned standing committees have to oversee this function.

### 1. Decision to convene the Gram Sabha

- When requested by the voters
- When the President / Panchayat Committee wants the Gram Sabhas of a particular area or the entire Panchayat to be convened for any specific purpose.

- When the Standing Committees want to convene Gram Sabhas for any purpose related to their tasks.
- When the Panchayat Member feels the need or is asked to convene the Gram Sabha for any specific purpose.
- When asked by the State government.

Thus the Panchayat Committee can convene Gram Sabhas anytime. If the Ward Member feels that the Gram Sabha has to be convened urgently, she/he can do so after consulting the Panchayat President. [The Member can do so even on his own, whenever the need is urgent.]

### 2. Date and Time for a Gram Sabha.

The date and time for the Gram Sabha should be such that the President of the Panchayat, Ward Member and voters find it convenient to participate. Depending on the importance and size of the agenda and after

ascertaining the views of the people, Gram Sabha for the whole day is also possible. But such decisions should not be unilateral. Before deciding the date, time and venue for the Gram Sabha, the Member may, ideally, consult the Ward Development Committee and the Gram Sabha Organising Committee.

### 3. Venue for Gram Sabha Meetings

It should facilitate the participation of all concerned. Politics, caste or religious factors should never affect this. Gram Sabha belongs to all of them. If the people feel the necessity for it, day-long Gram Sabhas can be held as already mentioned. There have been instances in Kerala where such Gram Sabhas were held, with the local people meeting all the expenses and the meeting concluding with variety entertainment by children as well as grown-ups.

### 4. Finalising the Agenda

What should be the considerations while finalising the agenda for a Gram Sabha?

- Directions from the state government
- Decisions of the Panchayat Committee

- Directions of the Standing Committee
- Requirements / suggestions of officials
- Public demand / suggestions

Accordingly the Secretary and President should together prepare the draft agenda and get it approved by the Committee. It is possible that except for common items, each Ward may have a different agenda.

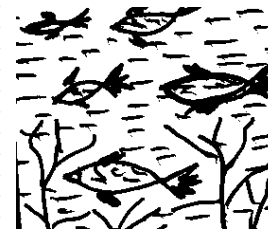
### 5. Preparing the Notice

In addition to information on place, date and time, it should also contain, in two or three lines, brief description of the agenda and the importance of that Gram Sabha.

### 6. Organising Committee

There must be an Organising Committee for each Ward. It is a good idea to constitute a committee with not more than 20 members comprising members of the Ward Development Committee [wherever existing], representatives of political parties and voluntary organisations including 'Kudumbashree', Gram Sabha members who are interested in serving in the committee, etc. The selection and a formal announcement

*The Gram Sabha should meet at a place that is convenient for everyone. Factors like party, caste, religion etc. should not be a hindrance to that.*



**1**

Can we request to convene the Gram Sabha?

Definitely. In fact there was a class on that in the last SHG meeting

Yes, I was also there. If we give a letter with specific request, Gram Sabha has to be convened

**2**

That means we can request for Gram Sabhas to solve women's issues. SHG issues, drinking water problems, crop failures and communicable diseases.

Yes, yes. We can mention these issues as reasons for a Gram Sabha meeting.

Letter should be addressed to whom?

**3**

It can be given directly to the President or through the ward member

At least 10% of the voters should demand for such a Gram Sabha

**4**

If we demand, within how many days should the Gram Sabha be convened?

Within 15 days

should be made in the Gram Sabha. This responsibility can be assigned to the Ward Development Committee wherever it exists. Various tasks like publicity, registration reception, food, group discussion, common platform, compilation of the discussions etc. can be assigned to groups within this committee. It should also have the freedom to incorporate more persons to help these groups. Once the Gram Sabha concludes, the responsibility of that group ceases and a new group can be given the responsibility. Persons who were members of the earlier group can be included in the new group. The new group will be responsible till the conclusion of the next Gram Sabha.

The Organising Committee has other responsibilities as well:

- It has to function as a committee to assist the Ward Members.
- It can help to initiate discussions among voters on agenda items even before they come to attend the Gram Sabha.
- Promote networking among voluntary agencies and other organisations in the area which will benefit in the various

activities in the Ward.

- Help in the organisation of different training programmes.
- Help in the selection of beneficiaries.
- Arrangements for organising the Gram Sabha.
- A member of the committee can be made responsible for the proper upkeep of the notice boards.
- Two members can manage the Gram Sabha office.
- Two members can attend to the task of organising Ward-level platforms.
- When meeting at the Panchayat-level, two members can take up the responsibility of the common platform.
- Help in the collection of Ward-level data on social and economic resources etc.
- Assist in local planning.

#### 7. Notice

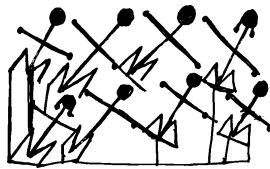
Notice about a Gram Sabha must reach the people atleast 7 days in advance. This would help in preparing for participation in the Gram Sabha in a serious manner.

The following are the different ways in which



*The notification on convening of the Gram Sabha must reach the people seven days in advance. This would facilitate preparations for participation in a serious manner.*

*After a Gram Sabha, it should be possible for it to ascertain the reason for the absence of people's representatives and officials. Further, a culture where those who participated ask in turn those who did not, the reason thereof, must be nurtured.*



- this notice can be issued :
- • The Organising Committee takes the lead in distributing the notice to every household and gets its receipt duly acknowledged in a book. This confers greater importance to the Gram Sabha. The importance of the Gram Sabha has to be explained in a convincing manner and members exhorted to attend well in time.
- • Once the date of Gram Sabha is known, the micro level organisational outfits can give due publicity within their groups. It is their responsibility as a social organisation to do it on their own.
- • Everyone who comes to know about it should inform another, duly emphasising the importance of his / her participation.
- • Other means of publicity like posters, permanent banners, press releases etc. can also be considered. The overall responsibility for publicity will be that of the Gram Sabha Convenor, Coordinator and Facilitator.
- If any of the people's representatives or officials does not participate in a Gram Sabha

despite invitations, the reason thereof should be ascertained by the Gram Sabha, after the meeting is over. There may be many members who do not care to participate. It would be a good practice for those who do participate to accuse the absentees of their indifferent attitude towards Gram Sabhas. In due course, this would cause a change in their mindset and they will start participating.

### **8. Registration**

In the venue of Gram Sabha meeting, posters containing information to be conveyed to the people, photographs, details of activities carried out etc. can be exhibited. Registration should be done group-wise on the basis of the number of groups planned. There should be persons specifically attending to tasks like guiding the people to the appropriate registration counter, explaining the role assigned to a particular group, etc. To facilitate easy identification of groups, slips of paper or cards with a number or name of the group can be pinned as a badge. Registration forms have to be used for registration at the counters. Attendance must be noted in the minutes



*Matters to be conveyed to the public [eg: details of activities carried out] must be exhibited at the Gram Sabha meeting venue, through posters, photographs, etc.*



- group composition decided earlier. The officials
- concerned with the subject, members of the
- working group and the group Facilitator are to
- join the group. If the Gram Sabha is convened
- for planning, each group has to discuss matters
- like review of the previous year's performance,
- success as well as failures, new directions,
- deviations if any from the five year plan
- document and the reasons for that, resource
- mobilisation, allocation, beneficiaries of each
- scheme, benefiting area, criteria, activities,
- organisation, funds etc. In the course of the
- discussion, an authorised person should write
- on a chart paper suggestions of Gram Sabha
- members, changes, alternate proposals for
- schemes etc. This will facilitate a better
- understanding of matters by the participants
- and thus an orderly discussion and proper
- compilation for the presentation in the plenary
- session where this paper has to be exhibited.
- Further, the key elements like active
- participation, voluntary efforts required etc.
- should be discussed in the plenary session, to
- provide the basis for project formulation.
- In the Gram Sabha that meets once in
- five years to prepare the development plan

ideally the meeting lasting the whole day, there must be an appraisal of the activities of the last five years and discussion on new problems, causes, solutions etc. When solutions are discussed in this manner, the related activities must be planned for next 5 years, for each subject, assigning priorities as to what has to be done first, then next etc. If certain matters require more clarity, the Gram Sabha can meet again. Instead, the Gram Sabha can also constitute a sub-committee for further appraisal. This may be necessary to ensure effective participation of all citizens.

The Gram Sabha that discusses the Annual Plan must consider the draft proposals of the Panchayat for each sector – the objectives, beneficiaries, activities, organisation, financial analysis, benefits etc. Aspects like the role of the Gram Sabha members, political parties, Neighbourhood Groups etc. in each of these components should be discussed. To ensure a meaningful discussion on these lines, it is essential that the Working Group keeps ready the chart papers on different subjects, with all relevant points, for presentation in the groups. The Gram Sabha can suggest changes on these.

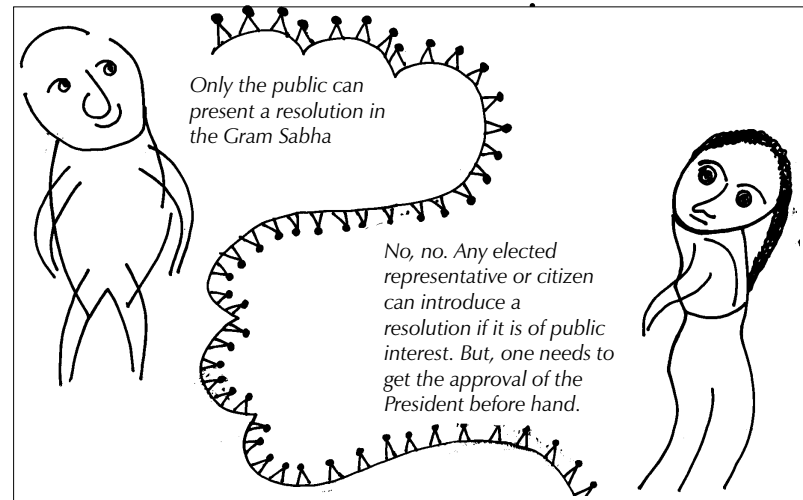
At the end of the meeting, the minutes should be read out and the chairperson, convener of the Gram Sabha, coordinator and two members selected from the Gram Sabha have to sign the minutes before the Gram Sabha is finally declared as concluded.

**Development Seminar**

The draft plan proposals can be finalised on the basis of the discussions in the Gram Sabha, with the changes suggested by it and a development seminar can be organised at the panchayat level for further discussions on the proposals. The participants of this seminar must be selected from each Gram Sabha. Ideally one man and one woman should be selected from each subject-group. They should be in the same subject-group in the seminar as well to ensure proper correlation in the discussions. Their experience in the seminar must be reported in the next Gram Sabha.

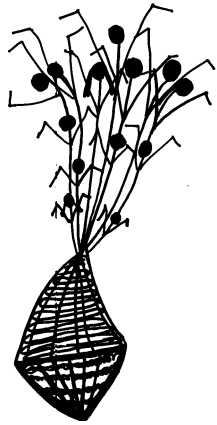
**11. Points to be noted while convening Gram Sabhas / Ward Sabhas**

- The day chosen should, as far as possible, suit the convenience of everyone.



- Proper preparation is very essential. This must be done on the basis of consultations in the working group and organising committee.
- The arrangement may be such that every participant is useful one way or the other [in the Resource Team, Subject Groups etc.]
- Atleast four hours will be required to complete the entire procedure. This may

***Discussions in the Gram Sabha are not for concluding that everything is in a mess, but to identify problems and solve them collectively.***



***Ways must be found to make productive use of all participants in a Gram Sabha. [Formation of resource team, use of working groups, forming subject-wise groups etc.]***

- be borne in mind while convening the Gram Sabha.
- Punctuality is important.
- The proceedings may start after a brief introduction.
- To ensure that the discussion on plan proposals is conducted and concluded in a systematic manner, the groups should be formed as decided earlier and persons who had already been selected and trained should be assigned the task of presentation and leading the discussion..
- The aim should be to see that all voters are involved in the activities of the Gram Sabha.
- Attempts should be made to ensure the participation of all persons from different socio-economic groups.
- The Panchayat Committee has to fix the dates for the Gram Sabha /Ward Sabha well in advance and work out the relevant details for its successful conduct. For organising the Panchayat-level meeting of the Gram Sabha, the Panchayat Committee must constitute a Sub-committee with 3 or 4 members.
- Neighbourhood Groups and Women’s Self-Help Groups may also be informed about the Gram Sabha for giving due publicity.
- The notice board for announcing meetings of the Gram Sabha should be exhibited at public places. Existing boards can be used for this purpose.
- Publicity can also be given through the schools in the area, Anganwadis, cooperative institutions etc.
- Publicity campaigns can also be organised by convening meetings of office bearers of non- governmental organisations, libraries, reading rooms, art and cultural organisations etc.
- Special squads for publicity through house visits can be formed with the involvement of functionaries like SC /ST Promoters, literacy workers, anganwadi workers, Health Inspectors etc. Services of college students who are members of N.C.C, National Service Scheme, Social Service Scheme etc. can also be mobilised.
- Everyone who knows about the Gram Sabha can be asked to inform others.
- Once the date of Gram Sabha is known,

members of various groups can organise meetings of the respective groups to discuss matters like problems /issues to be brought up, agenda for the Gram Sabha, solutions to problems and role of people at different levels etc. and prepare themselves for the Gram Sabha.

- As a prelude to a Gram Sabha, a meeting of officials can be convened at the Panchayat level to discuss matters like publicity, details of items to be presented for discussion in the Gram Sabha, involvement of the working group in the Gram Sabha etc. and to assign responsibilities.

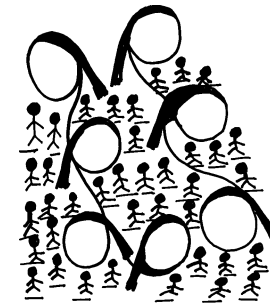
**12. Systematic preparation is unavoidable for the success of the Gram Sabha / Ward Sabha**

Systematic preparation is essential to retain and strengthen the confidence of the people in Gram Sabha /Ward Sabha. The following points are important in this context:

1. A written announcement about the Gram Sabha meeting must be distributed in

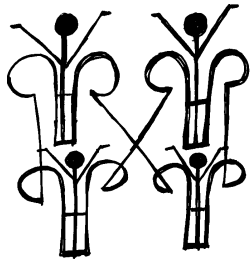
advance. A brief description of the subject to be discussed should be prepared and supplied to the groups of the Gram Sabha prior to the meeting.

2. In order to ensure commencement of the meeting at the right time and to conduct the proceedings as per the programme, arrangements have to be made in advance.
3. The people must be given the opportunity to express their views and put forward suggestions on development schemes. For recording these, stationery articles like chart paper and pen must be kept ready.
4. The Working Group members must participate in the Gram Sabha to make presentations and to clear the doubts of the people. For this, the working group has to meet before the meeting of the Gram Sabha. Matters to be presented in the Gram Sabha should be prepared carefully and written on chart paper. Who will make the presentation and when are also matters to be decided in advance.
5. To enable the people to study the matter



*The task of publicity about a forthcoming Gram Sabha can be assigned to Neighbourhood Groups and women's self-help groups.*

***Draft plan proposals, statement of income / expenditure etc. must be provided to the people well in advance, so that they can study the documents and come to the meeting prepared, to express their views.***



- for expressing their views, draft plan proposals and income -expenditure statements must be printed and supplied in advance. [They need be given only to organisations and groups instead of individuals]
- 6. If it has not been possible to execute any of the decisions of the Gram Sabha, records stating the reasons thereof, must be prepared and kept ready. It would be good if it could be presented with the help of an OHP.
- 7. If a programme approved by the Gram Sabha had to be dropped for want of funds or due to some technical reason, the explanation for that must also be prepared in advance.
- 8. To make sure that the members of the Panchayat, Block and District concerned participate in the Gram Sabha, they should be contacted well in advance.
- 9. In order to clear any doubt related to any item in the agenda, the officers concerned should be asked to come to the Gram Sabha with all the relevant records.
- 10. A meeting of the officials must be

- convened prior to the Gram Sabha to discuss matters related to its conduct..
- 11. Arrangements regarding place of meeting, group formation, boards for groups, registration counter, registration forms etc. must be made in advance.
- 12. Members of the organising committee, facilitators etc. must meet several times, decide matters and gain practice.
- 13. Each one's responsibility must be decided in advance.
- 14. Matters like working of the groups, role of different participants etc should be decided by the Facilitators, members of the working group concerned, Member, officials, members of the Organizing Committee etc. also in advance. Ideally they must meet at the Panchayat level for this purpose.
- 15. Different sub-committees must be formed and assigned responsibilities.
- 16. After the Gram Sabhas are over, the performance of the sub-committees must be evaluated and that report presented in the Gram Sabha. The members of the sub-committee should also be introduced in the Gram Sabha.

17. At the panchayat-level a general organising committee has to be constituted with atleast three members, to attend to tasks like convening the Gram Sabha, training of facilitators, training of organising committee etc.
18. Matters to be presented in the Gram Sabha should be obtained from the District and Block levels.

**13. After the Gram Sabha -  
Follow-up Action**

The organising committee under the leadership of the Coordinator and Ward Member must prepare the report [group-wise] at the Ward level, compiling the discussions in the Gram Sabha together with the material presented for discussion. This is to be handed over to the working group. It should also be recorded in the minutes book. While preparing the projects this should be the basis on which aspects like beneficiaries, criteria, activities and related calendar, organisation, financial analysis etc. have to be worked out.

The major decisions of the Gram Sabha have to be exhibited on the notice boards.

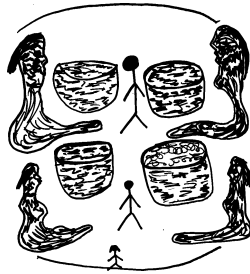
After each Gram Sabha a member of the organising committee must be made responsible for the proper maintenance of the notice boards.

Among the suggestions of the Gram Sabha, those that have to be submitted to higher authorities have to be presented in the Panchayat Committee and forwarded together with the Committee's recommendation without delay. If there are matters to be executed jointly by the 3-tier and 2-tier panchayats, the relevant details must be given. Arrangements must be made to forward those proposals that have to be submitted to the state or central government. Apart from this, for tasks that can be executed urgently under the aegis of the panchayat [without including them in the plan proposals], prompt action must be taken. Matters to be entrusted to different departments should be taken up with them without waiting for any special occasion. As regards criticisms, references, suggestions etc. concerning the panchayat and other institutions coming up in the Gram Sabha, the Panchayat Committee should convene a meeting of officials of the department



*The important decisions of Gram Sabha must be exhibited on the news board. A member of the organising committee can be made responsible for the proper upkeep of the news board.*

***The performance audit report and the reply given by the panchayat must be presented in the Gram Sabha for discussion because performance audit is conducted by the government for the people.***



- concerned, discuss matters and entrust the
- responsibility for follow-up action to the
- standing committee and the related officials.
- 
- ***For Gram Sabha's Consideration***
- The following documents have to be
- presented in the first Gram Sabha of every year
- - A review report on the previous year's
- development activities.
- - A report on planning indicating the
- activities to be taken up in the current
- year, estimated expenditure and
- development strategy for the next year.
- - If there is any scheme which requires
- selection of beneficiaries, relevant
- particulars like eligibility, norms for
- preferential treatment etc.
- - Statement of previous year's accounts.
- - Administration report.
- These reports have to be discussed in
- detail either in the Gram Sabha that meets in
- the normal course or in the Gram Sabha
- convened specifically for this purpose. The
- Gram Sabha has the right to know, examine,
- discuss and offer suggestions on matters like
- provisions made in the budget, allocations for

different schemes with their item-wise break-up, details of estimates of works including cost of materials pertaining to works already carried out or proposed etc. All the relevant particulars have, therefore, to be placed before the Gram Sabha. Further, the performance audit report should also be presented in the Gram Sabha, as this audit is conducted by the state government in public interest. In addition, any record or proof sought by the Gram Sabha must also be presented.

***Gram Sabha and the Resolutions***

Individuals or groups can present resolutions in the Gram Sabha on matters related to development of the area, common problems etc. for discussion and solutions. Those who are members of Neighbourhood Groups and other organisations can discuss matters beforehand and draft the resolutions. Presentation of resolutions should take place before breaking into groups for discussion. The discussion should be on ways of solving the problems mentioned in the resolutions, what are the interventions required and by whom. If any change in the resolution is felt necessary

during the discussion, that must also be made. Once the resolution is passed by the Gram Sabha, it has to be considered by the Panchayat Samiti and follow-up action taken on the basis of the discussion in the Gram Sabha. A resolution to be presented in the Gram Sabha should be submitted to the President through the Member two days in advance. It can also be submitted to the President directly with the knowledge of the Member. This is an essential requirement for inclusion in the Gram Sabha agenda and presentation thereafter.

**Gram Sabha and the Sub-Committees**

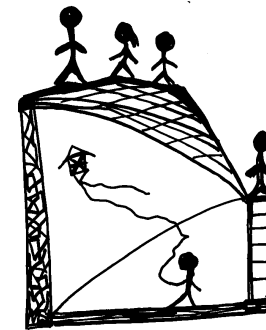
The Gram Sabha can constitute a common or separate sub- committee/s if required, to know more about matters presented in the Gram Sabha, accounts, implementation of schemes, purchase of materials, quality of materials etc.

As an institution with authority and direct participation of citizens, Gram Sabha is the forum where any issue that affects them or any matter related to the overall development of the area can be brought up for discussion. To facilitate such tasks, the Gram Sabha can

constitute committees like study committee, resource mobilisation committee, appraisal committee, etc as per requirements. As per the rules there must be not less than 10 members in each of these sub-committees and half of them must be women. When there are many subject groups, for matters concerning a particular subject, a sub-committee can be formed and Gram Sabha’s approval obtained in its plenary. The reports submitted by these committees have to be presented in the Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha and its sub-committees should endeavour to forge links with people who have the capacity and willingness to work in these committees. The organising committee must take the lead on such matters. In this manner everyone from all strata of society should get an opportunity to contribute in different ways. This facilitates the participation and involvement of everyone in the functioning of Gram Sabha thereby making it an important institution.

**Selection of Beneficiaries**

While selecting the beneficiaries under any programme / scheme / project, the working group must record the relevant particulars like



*Individuals, either alone or jointly, can present problems related to development, common issues etc.*



*After each Gram Sabha, an organising committee for the next one is constituted. A selected few from this can be made responsible to coordinate the functioning of public forums.*

- eligibility, norms for the preference, marks etc.
- at the proposal stage itself. This must then be
- discussed, duly considering the discussions in
- the 'Planning Gram Sabha' as well, and
- finalised in accordance with the norms set by
- the Panchayat Committee. This has to be
- notified and reported to the Gram Sabha.

#### ***Eligibility and Prioritisation Criteria***

- The eligibility criteria have to be prepared
- with great care to avoid persons who are in
- no way eligible seeking the benefit and thus
- creating misunderstanding and even affecting
- the project adversely. As the aims and
- objectives of a project are known even at the
- time of planning, the eligibility norms must
- be worked out and recorded at that stage
- itself. While discussing the project in the
- 'Planning Gram Sabha', the eligibility norms
- must also be discussed and made clear. This
- would facilitate smooth implementation of the
- project.

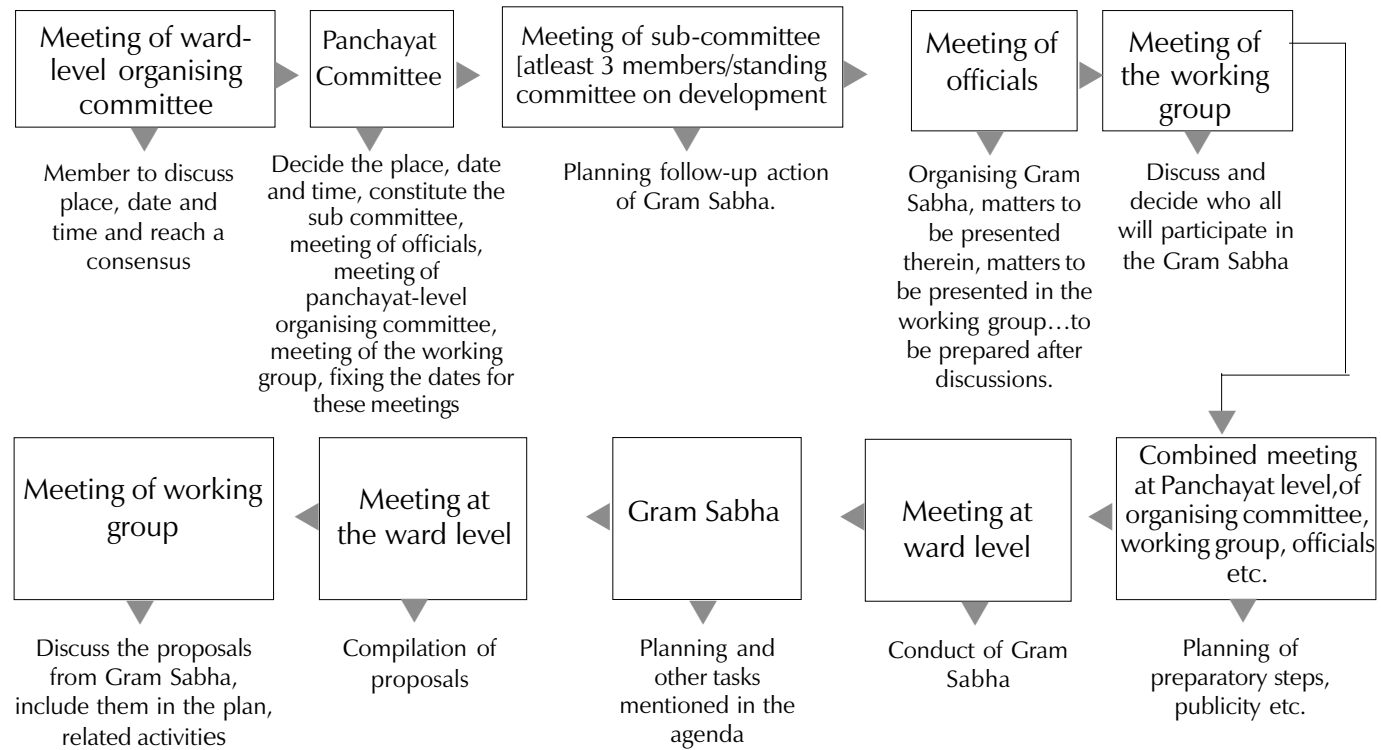
- When persons who are thus eligible apply,
- in order to select and list the more deserving
- ones among them in the order of preference,
- norms for such preferential consideration are
- necessary. Each norm must have a value / mark.

These marks are added and the list is prepared with the highest marks at the top followed by the rest in the descending order. In the event of many persons getting the same marks, further selection should not be done through draw of lots. Instead, sub-norms have to be prepared to select the most eligible ones. The norms thus prepared by the working group for different projects must be discussed in the Panchayat Committee, finalised and published.

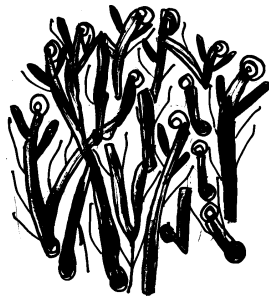
#### ***Approval of Beneficiaries List***

For selecting the beneficiaries, the application forms must be distributed along with relevant particulars of eligibility criteria and the number of beneficiaries required. On the basis of the completed applications received enquiries are made, marks awarded as per the eligibility criteria and the draft list is prepared. This task is done by the organising committee of the Gram Sabha or a sub-committee of 10-15 members comprising working group members from that Ward, the Facilitators, persons selected from the Gram Sabha and representatives of political parties or the Ward Development Committee, under

### Different stages in the organisation of Gram Sabha



***The Gram Panchayat does not have the authority to change the order of priority in the beneficiary list prepared and approved by the Gram Sabha.***



• the leadership of the Gram Sabha Coordinator and Member. The draft list thus prepared along with the marks must be exhibited on notice boards, news boards, in Neighbourhood Groups etc. If there is any amendment, the Coordinator / Ward Member must be informed in writing. The list has to be brought to the Gram Sabha, discussed in the different subject groups concerned, presented in the plenary and finalized. The Panchayat Committee does not have the power to make any change in the order of priority prepared and approved by the Gram Sabha. [The Hon. High Court of Kerala in its judgement on April 4, 1997 in O.P No. 18175 /1999 ordered that it is the responsibility of Panchayat Committees to accept the selection of beneficiaries by the Gram Sabhas ].

• Ideally all the application forms must be brought to the Gram Sabha. Particulars like eligibility, preference, sub-norms, number of beneficiaries in each subject, the Panchayat tier for which the list is applicable, work already done etc. may be written clearly on chart paper and exhibited. Applications can be submitted till the list is approved by the Gram Sabha.

But such applications must be complete, supported by proper records. If the name of an ineligible person gets included in the list after approval of the list by the Gram Sabha, it should be explained in the next Gram Sabha and the name removed.

### **Gram Sabha Report**

Report on topics discussed in the Gram Sabha should be prepared and given in time. Further, periodical reports on exercise of powers and fulfilment of responsibilities. by the Gram Sabha must also be given to the Panchayats punctually. The Gram Sabha Coordinator assists in this task by preparing the minutes. At present only those activities discussed in the Gram Sabha are recorded in the minutes. Reports on activities which come under the jurisdiction of the Gram Sabha- though not discussed in the Gram Sabha- have also to be prepared and recorded in the Gram Sabha minutes. The preparation of this report can be done either by the Ward Development Committee or the Gram Sabha Organising Committee. What is required is a report on its functioning, vis-a-vis its powers and

responsibilities during the period between two Gram Sabhas. It has to be included in the minutes and given to the Panchayat Committee in time.

### **Ensure Participation of Officials in the Gram Sabha**

In the Gram Sabha where plan proposals are discussed, participation of members of the related working groups and officials has to be ensured. Their presence is essential to explain in clear terms the draft proposals and their objectives, and to lead the discussion for their prioritisation based on people's suggestions. It also facilitates effective linking of schemes, proper explanations on possible legal hurdles in the implementation, on shortage of funds, on technical skills and other problems. By making people realise these aspects, their cooperation can be ensured, additional resource mobilisation made possible and scheme implementation becomes more smooth and effective through the sharing of people's practical wisdom. Further, it helps in creating greater awareness among Gram Sabha members on the proposed activities and in

promoting goodwill without any misunderstanding. To ensure the participation of officials, the members of the sub-committee responsible for organizing Gram Sabhas must convene meetings of officials and working groups at different stages, conduct the required planning and review and present the related report in the Panchayat Samiti and Gram Sabha.

### **Facilitators of Gram Sabha /Ward Sabha**

To make the discussions on planning in the Gram Sabha /Ward Sabhas productive, two Facilitators have to be appointed in each of them. Ideally they should be selected unanimously from among the members of the Working Group, Ward Development Committee or the Gram Sabha Organising Committee. Of the two Facilitators, one must be a woman and the other a man. The members of the Panchayat Committee, representing different political parties, must arrive at a consensus and choose two Facilitators for each Ward.

In the Gram Sabha / Ward Sabha, it is the responsibility of the Facilitators to present the

*It is the responsibility of facilitators to present the planning strategy in the Gram Sabha / Ward sabha and lead the discussion in the sub-group. Joint meetings of members of the Working Group and Facilitators must be held to prepare an action plan to make the discussions in the Gram Sabha meaningful.*



*The Gram Sabha / Ward Sabha is also the forum where people can play their role in scheme formulation and its prioritisation. As a democratic forum, it has a very important place in governance under the Panchayati Raj system.*



- planning strategy and lead the discussions in the sub-group. A joint meeting of Working Group members and Facilitators must be held to prepare an action plan to enrich the discussion in the Gram Sabha / Ward Sabha.
- Compilation of the views and suggestions of the members of the different sub-groups and its presentation in the concluding session is also the responsibility of the Facilitators. In short, the Facilitators have an important role in determining the academic level of the Gram Sabha discussions. Those who can handle this responsibility must, therefore, be considered at the time of selection.

#### **Plan Discussion in the Gram Sabha / Ward Sabha**

- The Gram Sabhas / Ward Sabhas provide the forum where people can involve themselves in the formulation of schemes and suggest priorities. The Hon.High Court of Kerala has made it clear that the Panchayat Committees do not have the authority to effect any change unilaterally in the plan priorities proposed by the Gram Sabha.

• The following are the important

documents on planning to be printed and distributed in the Gram Sabha / Ward Sabha:

1. The report on general review of the prevailing situation, prepared by the Working Groups.
2. Draft project proposals as part of the 'Plan', resource mobilisation, changes, if any, made in the development report and if so why?
3. Report reviewing the previous year's activities and statement of accounts [income and expenditure]

#### **The Gram Sabha's Office**

The activities in a Ward or Panchayat are much more than what they used to be in the past. Likewise the role of a Member has also become bigger. As decentralisation aims at extending the power to the people to solve their problems, to a level that is within their reach, creation of the required facilities is very essential. In this content, the office of the Gram Sabha is the most important.

What is sought to be achieved with a Gram Sabha Office?

1. An office for the Ward Member in their

- Ward. It has, however, to be ensured that the Member is present in the office on particular days for a certain duration.
2. Collection of tax, distribution of application forms, monthly visit of the President and Secretary of the Panchayat [date and time to be fixed] can be organised in this office.
  3. It can be made the office of the Agro-clinic Centre [when the Agricultural Officer /Agricultural Assistant will be present has to be indicated ],office of the Centre for continuing education, office of the S.T /S.C Promoters, office of the Ward Development Committee / Gram Sabha Organising Committee, office of Kudumbashree, office of the Ward Vigilance Committee etc.
  4. If this office can be developed into a facility which the people appreciate and feel as absolutely essential, it would be possible to mobilise the resources for its functioning locally and make it more efficient.
  5. A board with the name of the Gram Sabha office and that of the offices functioning

- there, must be put up.
6. Copies of application forms or their samples to be submitted to the Panchayat or other institutions, must be made available here.
  7. It would facilitate the safe storage of all information pertaining to the Ward as well as particulars of various organisations in the Ward.
  8. To keep different maps of the Ward.
  9. In due course, it should evolve into an Information Centre of the Ward.

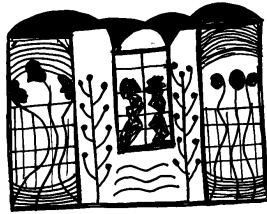
#### Micro Projects

Everyone has to share responsibility as already mentioned, to make the Gram Sabha functional. They must feel that it is their programme that is being planned and implemented. For this, decentralisation of power must be complemented by decentralisation of planning as well, which will enable people from different sections to play their role . The best way to facilitate this is to go for micro projects.

For formulating micro projects at the local level in small groups, the panchayat level

*Compared to the olden times, diverse activities are taking place these days in the Wards / panchayats. The role of the panchayat member has, therefore, become much larger.*





***To facilitate the formulation of small projects at the local level by small groups, the panchayat level working group must rise to the level of the planning committee of the panchayat.***

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working group must rise to the level of a planning committee of the panchayat. The members of the Development Committee / Gram Sabha Organising Committee have to be trained for preparing projects. The subjects in which projects are to be prepared locally are to be decided by the Working Group. To meet the requirements of a small area or to solve local problems, the projects could be for community drinking water supply, renovation / protection of ponds, cleaning of canals, construction of check dams, rain water pits, soil conservation measures, crop production, total cleanliness, informal education, trainings, micro / small enterprises, marketing, construction of small culverts, etc. Projects of a similar nature could be combined to make Ward level projects and depending on the technical nature and availability of funds, into panchayat level projects. Long term projects can also be prepared, with an annual break-up of the programme. For preparing a project, while discussing the cause, remedy and nature of intervention, the share of the panchayat must be reckoned as the last resort to ensure maximum utilisation of the local resources. It

should be possible for the Working Group to impart training on these lines.

Special attention must be bestowed on features like voluntary work, contributions, beneficiaries' share. so as to use the panchayat's share to further help this approach. On the basis of the concept of the overall development strategy of the panchayat and the features of each Ward, the aspect to be given more importance has to be chosen. The amount to be set aside for this can then be decided, to be supplemented by voluntary action and contributions. Micro projects for that Ward can accordingly be collected. While doing this, it is the responsibility of the working groups to ensure that instructions on sectoral division, women, S.C / S.T, children's welfare etc. are duly complied with. The sector-wise division should, therefore, be done before imparting training. For example, few Wards may be ideally suited for rice cultivation, few may be better suited for mixed cropping, another to solve the problem of drinking water and civil works in some others. Thus the approach should be to accommodate the entire panchayat over a period of 5 years. By

giving greater attention to the special problems of each Ward it is possible to avoid repetition, of programmes and thereby unnecessary expenses as well.

Projects prepared in this manner must be examined by the Working Group which can make changes if any are required, before including them in the plan. The implementation of these projects has to be done at the local level itself. It would also facilitate proper evaluation. The exercise should ideally be carried out under the Standing Committee for Development, by about January, to ensure their implementation as envisaged. If planned accordingly, the projects can be formulated in March, allocation of funds done in April and the draft presented in the Gram Sabha. It would enable the voters to attend the Gram Sabha and participate in the discussions in an effective manner.

### **Gram Sabhas and Policy Formulation**

Local self governments as institutions working closely with people, must necessarily formulate clear policies in their areas of intervention. People's participation in the process is, however, essential to ensure its

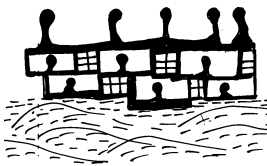


credibility. Often, while planning a project of a permanent nature like one to solve the drinking water problem, bringing about changes in the living habits of the people is unavoidable. There are many related aspects like reducing misuse of water, measures to collect and store water, steps to raise ground water level, construction activities, precautionary measures to prevent environmental pollution and the panchayat's water policy has, therefore, to be formulated in a manner that make people realise the changes required in their habits. To facilitate this, the draft policy prepared on the basis of

*Special attention must be given to aspects like voluntary work, contributions, beneficiaries' share etc and use of panchayat's share accordingly, to derive maximum advantage.*



***Brief summary and suggestions of public forums must be exhibited on the Gram Sabha office board, newsboard etc. and discussed in the Neighbourhood Groups.***



- the preliminary discussions in the
- Neighbourhood Groups, Self-Help Groups and
- CBOs, must be presented in the Gram Sabha
- for finalisation. In this manner policies on
- women, health, agriculture, poverty
- eradication etc. can be formulated by each
- panchayat to suit its conditions.

**Public Forums /Platforms**

- Public forums can be organised at Ward,
- Panchayat, Block and District levels. The
- discussion here, however, is on Ward level
- forums. Experts in various fields, officials,
- retired persons, people interested in
- decentralised planning and public affairs,
- people's representatives from different tiers,
- members of the Ward Development
- Committee, representatives of ADS [Area
- Development Society], members of the Gram
- Sabha Organising Committee, representatives
- of various organisations and trade unions and
- any one interested in the Ward can participate
- in the forum. It can meet once, twice or thrice
- in a month, depending on requirement.

- People's problems, those at different
- levels of governance, matters to be taken up in

the Gram Sabha, issues already discussed in the Gram Sabha, functioning of institutions, new ideas and can be discussed and presented in the Gram Sabha, to institutions at different tiers of governance, organisations and political parties . Their suggestions can then be discussed in the public forum and appropriate follow-up action pursued. It can be transformed into a regular feature with meetings taking place at the same venue and at the same time.

What is its importance? It provides a forum to analyse new rules or laws, to point out the inadequacies in decisions, to take up the problems that arise at different times with the appropriate authorities, to render support whenever required, to link up persons from all sectors, to discuss local problems and find remedies, to share ideas etc.

Who has to coordinate? This task should be the responsibility of the Organising Committee that is formed after every Gram Sabha for the next Gram Sabha.

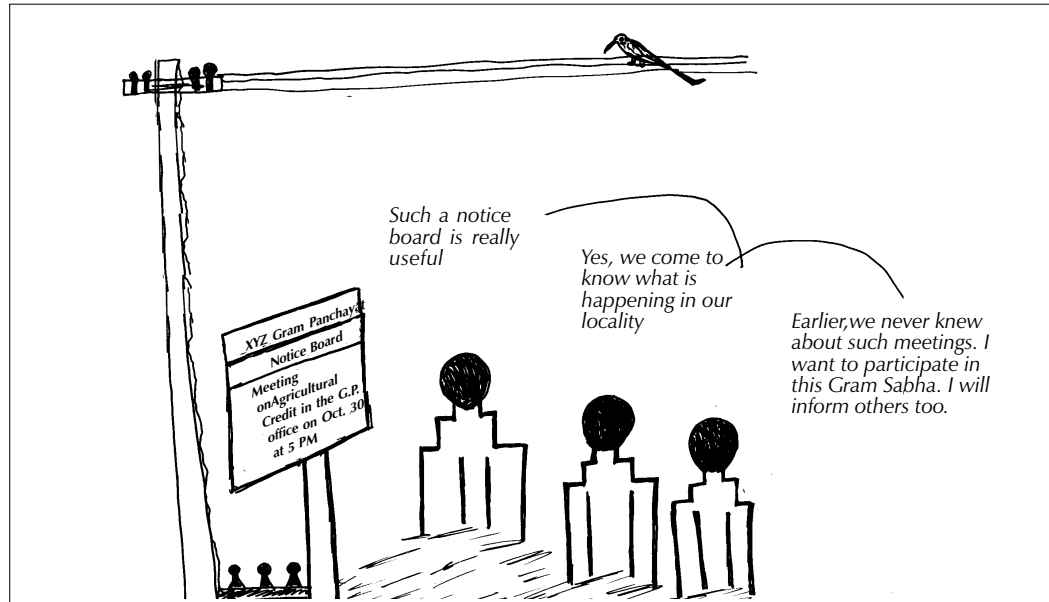
What should be the agenda? Who has to preside?

The agenda can be decided at the

beginning of the meeting in accordance with the suggestions of the participants. Each time a different person can be chosen to preside.

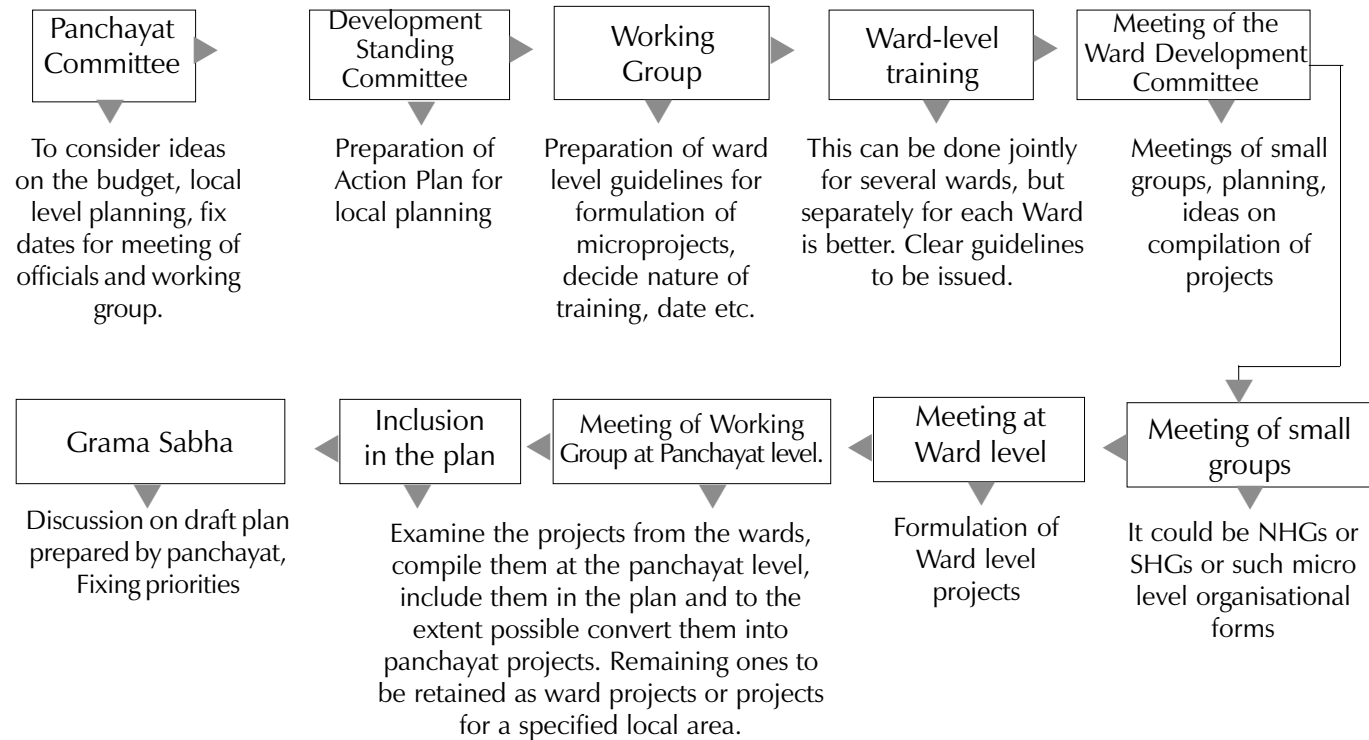
A summary of the discussions and suggestions in the meeting must be displayed on the notice board in the Gram Sabha office and news board and discussed in the

Neighbourhood Groups. Further, the participants must discuss them at their levels and bring them up to a practical plane. This way the governance, the Gram Sabha and the Neighbourhood Groups can be further strengthened.



*Micro projects must be formulated in a manner that facilitates maximum resource*

### Different Stages in the Formulation of Micro Projects



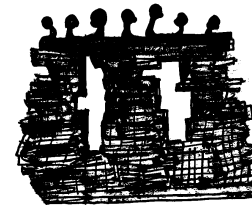
## NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUPS AND GRAM SABHA

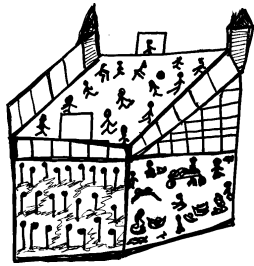
Neighbourhood Groups have an important role in making public administration more efficient by empowering the Gram Sabhas. During the days of People's planning many panchayats proved the strength of these groups. But unfortunately this was not sustained through proper follow up action. The reasons are:

- The Panchayat Committees did not reckon them as an important tier below the Gram Sabha.
- Their role was restricted to organisation of Gram Sabhas.
- A clear concept on the role of Neighbourhood Groups was lacking.
- Their role in public administration was not clear.
- A natural link was not / could not be established with functions like planning, implementation and working of subject groups.
- No political will to accept them and sustain them as a tier in governance.
- Reluctance to decentralise powers.
- Ignorance about division of responsibilities
- Their success turned out to be the result of the efforts of one or two individuals.
- They were not perceived as a permanent institution in Panchayati Raj , and as a result, one after the other the Panchayat Committees used or discarded them as they liked. This affected their survival.

Many reasons like these could be cited. What could be a neighbourhood? A group of around 50 houses, close to each other as per the landscape, can be called a neighbourhood. Members of all these households will be members of the group. However, in the prevailing circumstances, there are few things to be borne in mind while organizing these groups.

*During the days of 'People's Planning', many panchayats proved the strength of Neighbourhood Groups. But unfortunately there was no follow-up action to sustain this strength.*





*A group of around 50 houses that are geographically close to each other can be called a neighbourhood. Families of all these houses will be members of the group. There are a few things to be borne in mind while forming Neighbourhood Groups.*

- • It should not cause a split in the existing Self Help Groups [Kudumbeshree units] and similar men's groups. Neighbourhood Groups must be formed by including others in addition to the families of the members of such units.
- • The grouping should not be done on the basis of house numbers, but by linking adjoining houses. The neighbourhood register can be prepared by noting the numbers of those houses.
- • Care must be taken to ensure the inclusion of all households in the Ward.
- • An Organising Committee may be formed at the Ward level to organise Neighbourhood Groups.
- • Meetings of groups have to be convened to elect the chairperson, vice-chairperson, convener, joint convener, treasurer etc.
- • Further, the selection of those who will be responsible for the different subjects related to the panchayat [depending on the number of working groups and in those names themselves] can also be done. Either the chairperson or the convener of the Neighbourhood Group must be a woman.

Likewise, either the vice chairperson or joint convener must also be a woman. The convener / secretary of the self help group can be made responsible for women's affairs. An executive committee of neighbourhoods can be formed with all these responsible persons. Sub-committees can be formed with those responsible for each subject group and those from the subject groups who are interested in neighbourhoods. Further, the Kudumbashree unit [Self Help Group], men's group, children's group etc which are within the area of a neighbourhood can also be considered as sub-committees of Neighbourhood Groups. It may, therefore, be helpful to include the responsible persons from these groups also in the sub-committee.

#### **Ward Development Committee**

The members of the executive committees of the Neighbourhood Groups together form the general body of the Ward Development Committee. In addition, one representative each, nominated in writing, from all the political parties and voluntary organisations in the Ward, must also be made members. They will be

members of the Ward Executive as well. The chairpersons of the Neighbourhood Groups, convenors, chairperson of the ADS, convenor etc. will also be members of the Ward Executive Committee. The Ward Member will be the convenor of the Ward Development Committee. Other functionaries like chairman, vice chairman, joint convenor and subject groups in-charge. have to be elected. These subject groups in charge together with those having the same responsibility in the Neighbourhood Groups constitute the Subject Group Committee in a Ward.

#### **Panchayat Development Committee**

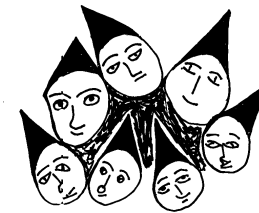
In this manner, at the panchayat level, with these persons, bodies like panchayat general body, executive committee and subject groups can be formed. While forming the subject group at the panchayat level, the chairman and convenor of each working group have to be the chairman and convenor of the group on the same subject. The chairman, convenor, and joint convenor of the Ward level subject group will be members. Ideally the President and Secretary of the

panchayat should be made chairman and convenor respectively of the Panchayat Development Committee. Likewise, the chairman of the panchayat level subject group, convenor, panchayat level representatives of political parties and voluntary organisations, Ward chair person, convenor, 3 persons as representatives of the convenors of all Neighbourhood Groups and chairpersons of CDS can function as the Executive Committee members.

While formulating and implementing a project or when the working group has to discuss matters in greater detail, the task can be carried out in a more efficient and smooth manner by organising a meeting of the subject group from panchayat level to the members of the subject sub-committee of the neighbourhood.

#### **Tasks and Responsibilities of Neighbourhood Groups :**

- Organising Gram Sabhas, greater participation – in terms of numbers as well as quality.
- 1. Get prior information on the agenda for



*A self-help group [Kudumbashree unit], men's group, children's group etc within a neighbourhood can be considered as sub-committees of the Neighbourhood Group. It would be helpful if those who are mainly responsible in these units are included in the executive committee.*

*While formulating or implementing a project or when the working group has to have further discussions on it, the exercise can be made more effective and smooth by organizing a meeting of the subject groups.*



- the Gram Sabha, discuss in the
- Neighbourhood Groups, participate in
- the different subject groups and reach a
- clear understanding on issues to be raised
- during the meeting.
- 2. Ensure participation of everyone from the
- Neighbourhood Groups in the Gram
- Sabha and decide who will join which
- group
- 3. Resolutions to be presented in the Gram
- Sabha must be discussed and kept ready
- while participating.
- 4. Activities – those already carried out and
- those proposed – of Neighbourhood
- Groups must be presented in the Gram
- Sabha.
- • Responsible for preparation of the
- primary list of beneficiaries.
- 1. The order of priority of beneficiaries can
- also be kept ready by the Neighbourhood
- Groups.
- 2. The norms prescribed by the panchayat
- can be discussed in the group.
- 3. The application forms can be distributed
- through the group.
- 4. Scrutiny of applications can be done in

the group. This would prevent benefits going to ineligible persons.

- Each Neighbourhood Group must prepare and keep ready particulars of resources, requirements, suggestions, area map, public institutions, public properties and land with regard to its area of operation.
- Each group must prepare a master plan for development of its area, indicating the role of the neighbourhood, that of the groups jointly, that of the Ward Development Committee and the nature of help required from the panchayat.
- Problems, disputes and complaints coming up in the group should be considered in the group itself. Only those that cannot be settled at that level should be taken to the Ward Development Committee, Panchayat Development Committee or Panchayat Vigilance Committee.
- Assist the group's sub-committees like Kudumbashree unit, men's group and children's group. Particulars of their activities must be presented in the meetings of the group, discussed and

**1**

We should actively participate in the next Gram Sabha. How can we do that? Is it enough that we say something?

There is no point in simply making a speech. We should jointly discuss and decide our problems.

**2**

We should sit together and discuss

It could be atrocities we suffer, unemployment, drinking water, environment, agriculture or any problem we face

How can we understand our problems

**3**

Is it enough that only our SHG discusses matters?

No, every SHG should discuss

We should be ready with suggestions on who can do what

**4**

Is it enough to discuss only women's issues.

It is not only identifying our problems. We should try to give suggestions and solutions to all issues. Because all of them affect us.

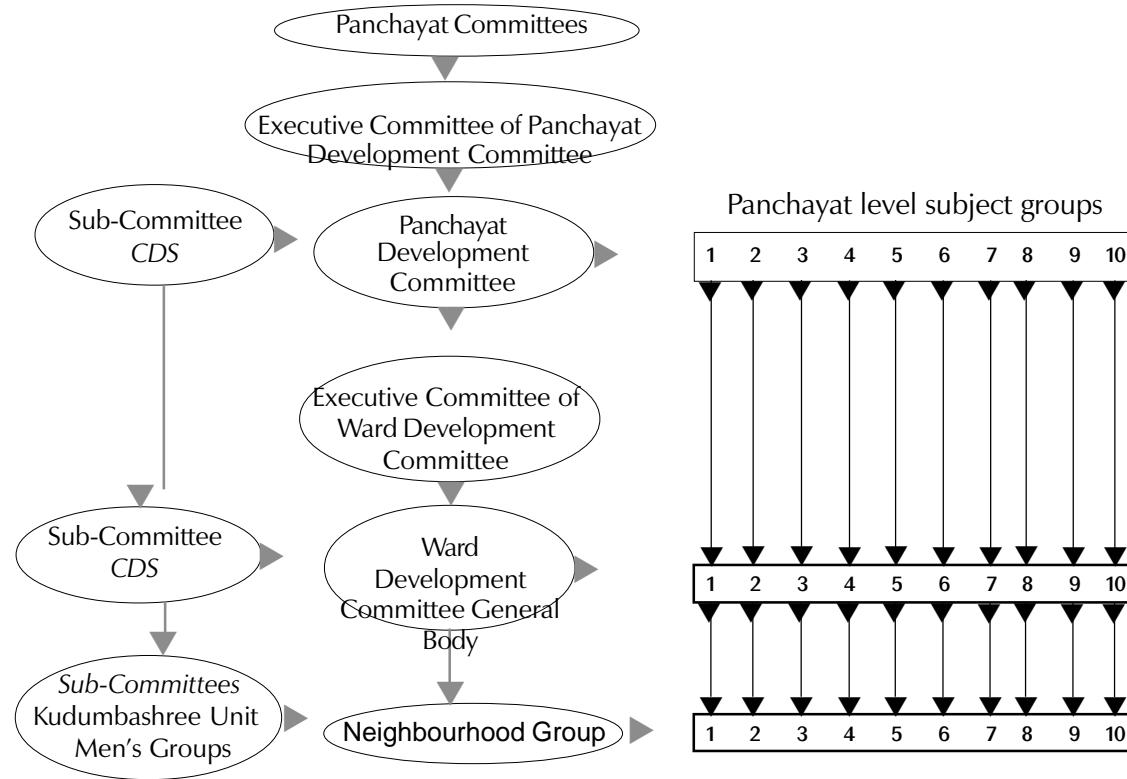
No, we should discuss all issues. Because all of them affect us.

*The Neighbourhood Groups can, on the basis of the master plan, prepare and submit small projects as per instructions from the panchayat.*



- appraised for suggesting future course of action.
- • The Neighbourhood Groups must maintain the registers required.
- • Must organise various awareness promotion classes. This can also be done jointly by the groups.
- • Observe /celebrate important days.
- • Honour elderly people; those who have gained recognition in different fields etc.
- • Organise programmes on art appreciation and events like arts and sports competitions [for children and adults] Festivals like 'Kerala Day' could be planned and conducted from neighbourhood level onwards.
- • Neighbourhood Groups must take up issues of protection and performance appraisal of public institutions within their area [offices, schools, Krishi Bhavan, hospital etc. and public property like road, culvert, bridge, electric lines with the help of the Electricity Board, street light, waiting shed, market etc.] Matters pertaining to these must be presented for discussion in the Gram Sabha.
- Neighbourhood Groups can also prepare and present small projects based on their master plan, duly complying with the instructions from the panchayat.
- Assist in the proper utilisation of benefits given to neighbourhoods and implementation of common programmes and in continuous monitoring and appraisal. These should be presented in the Gram Sabha.
- Prevent / oppose destruction of public property, anti-social activities etc. and bring up these matters for discussion in the Gram Sabha.
- Undertake construction activities.
- Make arrangements and interventions to provide from the Neighbourhood Groups to the Gram Sabha and the Panchayat, persons with the required skill or competence in various fields.
- Provide voluntary work and contributions.
- Prepare micro projects on working of Neighbourhood Groups, to solve problems, to augment production, to promote employment opportunities etc.
- Discuss and prepare material on topics

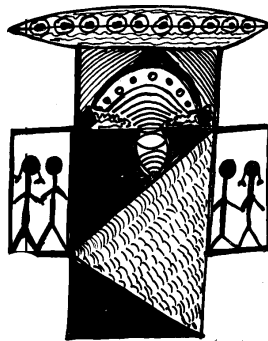
## Organisational Set-up of Neighbourhood Groups



*The Neighbourhood Groups should have the freedom to carry out any activity that can be envisaged at the local level.*

like the role of every citizen, Ward as a whole and the Panchayat to find lasting solutions for the problems in the neighbourhood, what changes are required in their living habits and what are the essential requirements for this. These must be discussed in the Gram Sabha for its approval, compiled and presented to the panchayat. The

Panchayat has to formulate its policy on this basis. The Neighbourhood Groups must have the freedom to take up any activity that can be envisaged at the local level. They can also raise funds like medical aid fund, emergency fund etc. It would be worthwhile if a local level guidebook can be prepared by combining all these ideas.



## 6

### TOWARDS IDEAL GRAM SABHA

The Gram Sabha is the institution that facilitates people's participation in governance and the forum, within their reach, where they can exercise their power in an effective manner. It is, therefore, very important that Gram Sabha, the solidarity of the ultimate authorities viz the voters, realises its full potential within the existing laws and functions accordingly. It can be effective and truly participative only if it enables people to exercise their powers, rights and responsibilities while also providing solid support to their efforts to solve various local problems. There are certain matters which require our collective thinking and action.

- People must be made aware of Gram Sabha's powers, responsibilities, manner of functioning and follow-up action. This cannot be achieved merely through words. Instead, practical demonstration is required. Around 10 to 15 persons in

the area of a Gram Sabha mainly from members of Neighbourhood Groups, members of Ward Development Committee and Gram Sabha Organising Committee must be trained to acquire a thorough awareness of these matters and the capacity to intervene effectively as well as to inspire others to do likewise. Further, those who are leaders of local governments must ensure that these constituents are involved and assigned responsibilities in the Panchayat's activities. Also, the government orders received by the panchayat, changes in the rules and regulations etc. must be communicated to them through a permanent arrangement, as it will strengthen the process of governance with greater support from the people.

- By organising a Gram Sabha campaign it is possible to bring to the Gram Sabha

*The Gram Sabha is a  
solidarity of the  
ultimate authorities-  
the voters*



**GRAM SABHA**

65

*The Gram Sabha must become an open forum where everyone's views, suggestions and problems are discussed.*



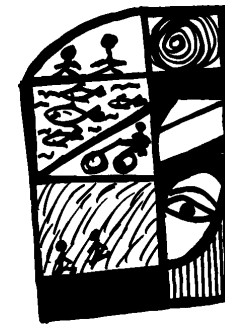
- experts from different fields educated and experienced persons and create an opportunity to utilise their talents. In due course, it should be possible to spread the message that people with civic sense should feel ashamed if they refrain from participating in the Gram Sabha
- Organisations have an important role in promoting people's participation in the Gram Sabha. Further these organisations can help in clarifying the role of individuals, organisations and officialdom in development, in social audit, in making the Gram Sabha a pressure group that controls governance and in bringing common problems before the Gram Sabha.
- Gram Sabha and decentralised governance must be included in the school syllabus. Even before that, under the aegis of community based organisations including Neighbourhood Groups, children must be encouraged to conduct studies [present status of Gram Sabha, potentials, development perspective, identification of local problems, finding ways of solving etc.]

- and to present them in the Gram Sabha for discussion. Those that can be made part of the plan must be included accordingly. This would provide opportunities to the younger generation to intervene and resort to practical application of their learnings, which in turn would bring about a positive change in their outlook, promote a sense of purpose in life as well as social commitment. The children's groups under the Kudumbashree units can be used for this.
- The Gram Sabha must become the open forum where everyone can express their views and suggestions, present their problems and discuss matters to find solutions.
- It should be possible to speak openly about issues that affect everyone like education, health, drinking water, food, housing and living conditions and seek remedies collectively.
- The discussion and related thinking on different problems / subjects in the Gram Sabha must cover aspects like their cause, remedy, each one's role etc. to ensure the credibility of the Gram Sabha.

- The particulars of beneficiaries, of services rendered by the Panchayat as well as institutions under it [by way of certificates, records etc, as service or part of a development programme to solve some problem ] during the previous three months must be presented in the Gram Sabha. [Though everyone residing in a Panchayat area is benefited one way or the other by the services offered by the Panchayat, the general tendency is to deride them as of no use and question the very purpose of their participation in Gram Sabhas !]
- All complaints and disputes reported to the Panchayat [except those of a confidential nature ] should be brought before the Gram Sabha. Further, opportunities must be created to facilitate the participation of police officers in the Gram Sabhas.
- The decisions taken in the previous Gram Sabha must be read out in the next Gram Sabha followed by a discussion on the action taken.
- For matters related to two wards, joint committees have to be constituted and

- action taken.
- Eligibility norms and priority considerations must be discussed in detail in Neighbourhood Groups and then presented in the Gram Sabha for discussion and finalisation.
- Special Gram Sabhas have to be convened to discuss income/ expenditure accounts. It may be helpful to discuss it beforehand in the Neighbourhood Groups. In these Gram Sabhas as well as those on planning, participation of representatives of financial institutions and members of elected committees wherever they exist [eg. Hospital Development Committee] will be very useful.
- On issues related to the powers of the panchayat, problems, disputes and obstacles before the panchayat [in governance, development and in the exercise of regulatory authority], there should be collective discussion in the Gram Sabha and joint intervention for redressal.
- The names and other particulars of the members of the Working Groups for different sectors constituted at the

***Matters like eligibility norms, priority criteria must be presented in the Gram Sabha and finalised after discussion.***





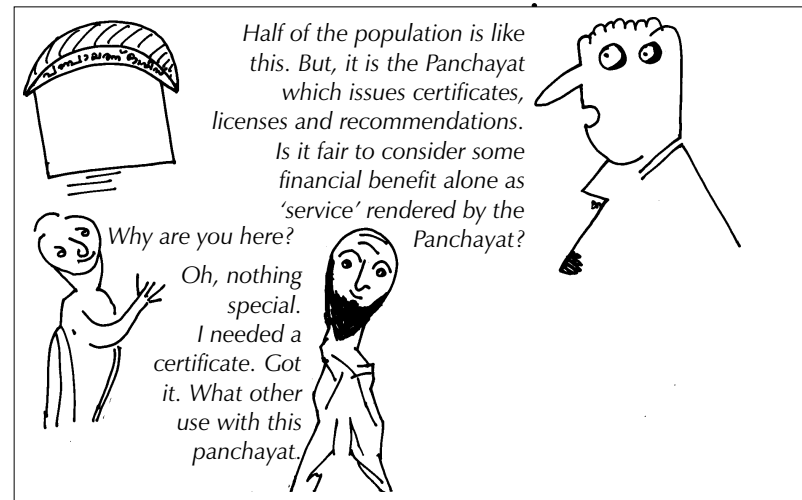
*The Gram Sabha must get the opportunity to appraise the day to day functioning as well as overall performance of institutions within its area.*

- Panchayat level, should be presented in the Gram Sabha for planning. Later, the report of the working group must be presented by the Secretary of the panchayat in his capacity as the Convenor of the group. The monitoring reports from the Working Groups must also be presented by the groups concerned in the subsequent Gram Sabhas.
- Gram Sabhas must have the opportunity and the required training to appraise the day to day functioning of institutions located in their area as well as the general performance of others.
- Instead of thinking that with the raising of these issues our task is over and it is the duty of the panchayat to help us in all possible ways, people must realise their responsibilities and obligations and the need for collective efforts to solve their problems. This is very essential for the efficient functioning of Gram Sabhas.
- A citizens' charter containing information on matters like services available from the Panchayat Office and institutions transferred to the Panchayat, what is the basis on which such services are rendered,

what requires to be done for that, their nature and time factor should be published to make the people knowledgeable and responsive. The Gram Sabha must also monitor regularly its functioning.

- The people should be convinced that public institutions, buildings, property etc. belong to them and their protection is the people's responsibility. The local people / Neighbourhood Groups should be made responsible for periodical maintenance and monitoring of their functioning and on the basis of their reports the Gram Sabha should appraise their performance. It need not be such institutions alone. Take for example a road. Practices like stacking materials like sand, soil, stones, timber etc on the side of the road causing hindrance to traffic, filling of drains dumping of garbage on the road must be taken up for discussion in the Gram Sabha. The Neighbourhood Groups as well as the Gram Sabha should be prepared to propose to the Panchayat appropriate local regulations and monitor their implementation.

- On these lines people should be made to believe that all that is common belongs to them and is their responsibility; all related issues have, therefore, to be sorted out through their intervention, monitored and discussed in the Gram Sabha.
- When a Gram Sabha is described as an instrument that facilitates people's participation in governance, it should not be perceived merely as governance by Gram Panchayat. The Gram Sabha must become a people's assembly that has the right as well authority to appraise the performance of all governing bodies from the central government downwards, because its members are citizens with voting rights.
- The performance of all committees in the panchayat must be reported in the Gram Sabha [except matters of a confidential nature handled by the Vigilance Committee]
- Issues discussed on the Panchayat / Ward level platforms, decisions and activities planned must be presented in the Gram Sabha.



With the power secured in this manner and with the firm conviction that every voter is the final authority, the Gram Sabhas as the people's platforms have the ultimate authority as well as responsibility to appraise the performance of the governing institutions and public servants. They can intervene to correct, to assist, to contribute and to make locally applicable rules that will facilitate good governance.

***Through the public forum, it is possible to strengthen the governance, the Gram Sabha and activities of the Neighbourhood Groups.***