

Power to Rural India- Empowerment of Panchayats

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Panchayati Raj Institutions in India are the backbone of our democracy. To promote a decentralized, participative & holistic planning process for the local elected bodies and make them more meaningful a number of initiatives have been taken by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

The Backward Region Grant Fund

This Scheme promotes decentralized, participative & holistic planning process, as an essential condition for getting BRGF grant. It bridges the critical gaps in development and builds capacity of PRIs & official functionaries. The evaluation study done recently shows that BRGF is extremely useful in meeting the local needs and PRIs and States have acquired good experience in planning and implementing the Scheme. Out of the plan outlay of Rs.4670 Cr. for 2009-10 for BRGF, Rs. 3240 Cr has already been released to States by 31st December 2009.

e-Governance Project

e-PRI is identified as one of the Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) under NeGP. It proposes to provide a whole range of IT related services such as Decentralized Database & Planning, PRI Budgeting & Accounting, Implementation & monitoring of Central and State sector schemes, Citizen-centric Services, Unique codes to Panchayats and Individuals, Essential GIS based applications, On-line Self-learning medium for elected representatives and official functionaries. e-PRI has the potential to revolutionize PRIs as the symbol of modernity & efficiency and induce mass ICT culture.

e-PRI envisages providing computing facilities along with connectivity to all the 2.36 lac Panchayats at a tentative cost of Rs. 4500 cr. over 3 years. Panchayats being the basic unit for planning and implementation of Cenral/States programmes & schemes, e-PRI would, in a way, be the umbrella MMP. Government would, therefore, give high priority to e-PRI under NeGP. Information and Service Needs Assessment, Business Process Engineering and Detailed Budget Reports for 27 States has already been done and the Project is ready for roll out.

50% Reservation for Women

The President in her Address to the Parliament on 4.6.09 had mentioned the intent to provide fifty percent reservation for women in Panchayats as women suffer multiple deprivations of class, caste and gender and enhancing reservation in Panchayats will lead to more women entering the public sphere.

Accordingly, on 27.08.2009, the Cabinet approved the proposal to amend Articles 243 D to provide 50% reservation for women in seats and also offices of Chairpersons in all 3 tiers of Panchayats. Minister of Panchayati Raj introduced the Constitutional (One Hundred and Tenth) Amendment Bill, 2009 in the Lok Sabha on 26.11.2009.

Presently, out of approx 28.18 Lakhs elected representatives of Panchayats, 36.87% are women. With the proposed Constitutional Amendment, the number of elected women representatives is expected to rise to more than 14 lakhs.

Devolution of Functions, Finance and Functionaries to PRIs

Panchayats are the grassroot democratic institutions and need to be further empowered through effective devolution of functions, finances and functionaries (3Fs) following the principles of subsidiarity and centrality of Panchayats. This would also ensure convergence of plethora of schemes and pooling of resources through holistic planning by Panchayats. Panchayat Empowerment and Accountability Incentive Scheme, which aims at incentivising States to devolve 3Fs to Panchayats and Panchayats to be more transparent and accountable, would be given higher allocation based on a devolution index.

'Year of the Gram Sabha'

50 years of Panchayati Raj was commemorated on 2nd Oct.09. Given the criticality of Gram Sabhas in self-governance and transparent and accountable functioning of the Gram Panchayats. 2.10.2009 to 2.10.2010 is being observed as 'Year of the Gram Sabha'. Apart from making all efforts to ensure effective functioning of the Gram Sabhas, following action are being taken; legal, policy and programme changes required for empowering the Panchayats particularly the Gram Sabhas; building systems & processes for ensuring greater efficiency, transparency & accountability of the Panchayats, and launching mass awareness of and specific activities by the Gram Sabhas & Panchayats.

Nyaya Panchayat Bill, 2009

The current justice delivery system is perceived as expensive, time-consuming, procedure-ridden, technical and difficult to comprehend, which prevents the poor from approaching the legal system with their grievances. To mitigate such hardships, the Ministry has proposed a Nyaya Panchayats Bill. The Nyaya Panchayats will ensure participatory and people-oriented system of justice with greater scope for mediation, conciliation and compromise. Being closer to the people geographically and psychologically, the Nyaya Panchayats would be the ideal forum to save time, trouble and expenses of parties and witnesses. It would also reduce the workload of judiciary.

Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan


It is a scheme for the Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) to build their confidence and capacity so that they get over the institutional, societal and political constraints that prevent them from active participation in rural local self government. 22 States have formed the Core Committee and organized the State Level Sammelans. 9 State Support Centres have been established under the scheme. (Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Sikkim, Kerala, West Bengal and Andaman & Nicobar Island). 11 States have been conducted training sensitization programme under the scheme. (Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Kerala, Assam, Andaman & Nicobar Island and Sikkim)

47 Divisional Level Sammelans have been organized in 11 States. (Chhattisgarh, Goa, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Manipur, Uttarakhand, West Bengal and Andaman & Nicobar Island). State Level Association of EWRs/EYRs has been formed in the States of Goa and Sikkim.

Rural Business Hubs (RBH) Scheme

The RBH scheme has been started in 2007, to spread the benefits of India's rapid economic development to the rural areas through the medium of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). RBH is a participatory development model for the rural areas of the country that is built on the platform of 4 P, i.e. Public-Private-Panchayat-Partnership. The RBH initiative is aimed at moving from mere livelihood support to promoting rural prosperity, increasing rural non-farm incomes and augmenting rural employment.

35 districts have been identified for focused RBH intervention in consultation with State Governments. Services of reputed organizations have been enlisted as Gateway Agencies for supporting Panchayats in identification of

potential RBHs and their development. Financial assistance to 49 projects has been extended for establishment of RBH. Also, RBH is being evaluated for possible upscaling in the future. ****Deputy Director (M & C), Press Information Bureau, New Delhi.** 

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