

Empowerment of Women through Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan and Orissa, India

D.K. Manavalan

Asia Department

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Sida Evaluation 00/31

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Sida Evaluation 00/31
Commissioned by Sida, Asia Department

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Registration No.: U11 Bi 1.11.3/ISS
Date of Final Report: November, 2000
Printed in Stockholm, Sweden 2000
ISBN 91 586 8873 0
ISSN 1401-0402

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Acknowledgement

The Embassy of Sweden Offered a contract for an evaluation of programme supported by Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) on “Empowerment of Women through Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan and Orissa. This is a very unique opportunity for me to refresh my experiences and memories of tenure of charge as secretary of the departments of Rural Development and Panchayat under the Government of West Bengal. West Bengal is one of the premier states in India, which took initiatives to develop effective Panchayati Raj system by implementing the provisions of 73rd Constitutional Amendment. They took also lead to introduce effective training programme for elected members of PRIs and empowerment of elected women members. Visiting rural areas and meeting with members of Panchayati Raj Institutions and those associated with programmes of empowerment of women has further enhanced my experience in the field.

During the course of the evaluation process I had unique opportunity to come in close contact with senior members of Institute of Social Sciences, field staff and others associated with this programme of empowerment. I gratefully acknowledge the support and assistance given by all of them during preparation for the conduct of evaluation, providing with necessary documents, conduct of field visits and collection of evidence.

My special acknowledgement to be recorded for the co-operation extended to me by the members of the panchayati community, elected representative especially women and past members of Panchayati Raj Institutions, Non-Government Organisations, members of civil society.

I would like to acknowledge my appreciation in the special way to Dr. George Mathew, Director, Institute of Social Sciences for his valuable inputs to help me to complete my task. Dr. Bidyut Mohanty and Dr. Ramesh C Nayak, the programme coordinators located in the ISS headquarters were of great assistance to me.

I would like to record my deep appreciation to Ms. Rita Sarin presently Director, Hunger Project, who was earlier consulting associate with SIDA for her support and encouragement.

Finally, I would record my deep appreciation to the staff of ISS for help rendered to me by way of secretarial assistance for completing work connected with this evaluation report.

D.K. MANAVALAN

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Summary

The main objective of the project was “Empowering Women through Panchayats in Rajasthan and Orissa”. Three districts from each state were selected for the study. The participation of women in Panchayat and Gram Sabha meetings were monitored and evaluated by the ISS project staff. The experiences from these districts shows, even men PRI members are not aware of the powers and functions of Panchayats. In the second stage of the programme both men and women members to be included under study. Since the literacy level is very low in these districts except Jagatsinghpur district in Orissa in comparison to the state average there is a need for more awareness generation programmes for both PRI members and village people. Thus awareness generation programmes on powers and functions of panchayats, campaign against social evils and on going developmental works of government agencies will be great help to these PRI members. The network with local level NGOs working on similar developmental issues be taken to widen the base of ISS work these districts. The training of PRI members should be given and on continuous phases. Since, the majority of Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti members are comparatively better educated and can manage their work for themselves emphasis should be on gram panchayat members.

The number of gram panchayats both men and women headed under study should be increased to 25 in each district.

The new strategy for the programmes recommended are:

1. The men PRI members to be brought under the programme.
2. Awareness programmes both for PRI members and villagers to be intensified.
3. Along with video shows on success stories of panchayats, sports and cultural activities should be included in the training programmes for PRI members.
4. Training of Trainers (TOTs) to be included in the programme activities.
5. Networking with local NGOs, Women’s Association and grassroots level organisations should be part of the activities.
6. ISS should prepare training modules in simple regional languages both for field level staff and PRI members.
7. In order to facilitate better management and control there is need to strengthen staff of Project Coordinators.
8. The salaries and honorarium of the project staff need to be revised.

1. Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions

The Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi observed:

“If an ancestral treasure lying buried in a corner of the house unknown to the members of the family were suddenly discovered, what a celebration it would occasion. Similarly, women’s marvellous power is lying dormant. If the women of Asia wake up they will dazzle the world”.

- 1.2 The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, which becomes part of the Constitution on 24th April 1993, has brought about a silent revolution in the country. Together with the 74th Amendments it facilitated the entry of about *one million women* into public life.
- 1.3 Conferences on Panchayati Raj and political, social and economic empowerment of women are held each year by Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) Elected representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and members of NGOs, prominent academicians, social workers, government officials and media persons representing the states of India participate in these important events.
- 1.4 The ISS 1995 conference discussed the problems facing the panchayats with a special focus on the problems of women members and office bearers in particular. There was absolute unanimity among the participants on the steps to be taken for strengthening the system in such a way that women can play *their designated role* in building *self-reliant prosperous villages* and through this a vibrant and strong India. Some of the recommendations pertaining to measures to be taken to empower women elected representatives recommended by the conference are enumerated below.
- 1.5
 - a) In order to enable the members and office bearers of panchayats, particularly women, to carry out their functions efficiently and effectively, suitable awareness-generation, education and training programmes should be organised. The methodology and contents of training should be practical and oriented to solving problems. Considerable experience and knowledge is available at the local levels. They must be fully tapped. Local NGOs, social activists, and women office bearers and members themselves should be actively associated in imparting training. There is great need for awareness generation in the community particularly in under-developed regions. NGO’s and grassroot workers should take the lead in this matter and organise awareness campaigns on a large scale.
 - b) Effective campaigns to eradicate social evils like dowry, child marriage, early marriage and untouchability must be launched.
 - c) Information sharing is an essential component if the Panchayati Raj system is to succeed. People at large should know what is happening. Various measures have to be taken to introduce appropriate measures to reach out information in an understandable manner even to illiterate elected women members of panchayats.
 - d) The gram panchayat must meet regularly as stipulated under rules and orders.
 - e) Among the multifarious functions entrusted to panchayats education of women, specially the girl child, should receive top priority.

- f) Funds should be made available to panchayats through tax assignments and sharing of taxes and grants.
 - g) Panchayat should try to raise internal resources to become self-reliant which would help them to function in a free and autonomous manner.
 - h) Women members should be inducted in standing committees including those for planning, finance and vigilance. Panchayati Raj bodies should function in such a way that they do not tend to become another bureaucracy. They must develop and retain the character of sub-governing institutions committed to public good with compassion and sharing and should develop participatory character in approach.
 - i) NGOs and other autonomous organisations have a crucial role in women's development, particularly in areas of education, health and capacity building.
 - j) Men also have to be sensitized to women's legitimate rights.
 - k) Eliminate middleman and exploiting organisations and empower women to get the fruits of their labour through strong marketing networks.
 - l) Make all efforts to achieve political empowerment of women so as to become effective partners in the decision-making process, thereby leading towards achieving decentralised planning. Through this process visible changes will take place in the patriarchal, caste ridden, hierarchical society into more egalitarian and just society through making *women elected representative as agents of change*.
- 1.6 A typical Indian village is fragmented by caste, party politics and social hierarchies and our aim is that village communities, consisting of both women and men to be brought together by principle of unity that must go beyond each one of them. This society has to endeavour itself through time. It gathers up the past and prepare for the future by means of panchayat community in which each member is an heir and possesses certain talents that enrich their identity and whose fruits must develop. Each individual owes loyalty to the communities which he or she is a part of and respect those in authority who have charge of the common good. This philosophy has to be inculcated in the mind of every individual to understand their responsibility and contribution to the panchayat and the community. Every member of the gram sabha have to be empowered to understand the philosophy of common good and support all causes and action for the common good.
- 1.7 Participation of the greatest number in the panchayat community on issues relating to economic and social goals, to revitalising traditional cultural and recreational activities, traditional crafts and skills to various professions and matters relating to political affairs would result in better prosperity. This type of socialisation also expresses the natural tendencies for human beings to associate with one another for attaining objectives that exceed individual capabilities. This develops qualities of persons, especially the sense of initiative responsibility and helps guarantee his rights.
- 1.8 Empowerment is an essential ingredient to bringing out originality and individual initiative for serving the common cause of the village communities.

2. Political and Social Empowerment

The Constitution of India recognizes the political rights of women *without any discrimination, distinction or qualification*, to participate in the decision-making process at all levels. After five decades of strides in democracy and development, women's participation and their role in public life has not made the desired headway. The field reality is that women's constitutional right in decision-making at all levels, whether national or local is still marginal.

- 2.1 The Lok Sabha general elections between 1989–1999 clearly showed that voting by women has declined. In the 1989 general elections approximately 71 per cent of men voted in contrast only 43 per cent of the women voted and in 1991 elections 52 per cent of men voted when there were 47 per cent women who voted. It would not be far from truth to state that no serious effort appears to have been made to mobilise women as an important political constituency by any political party.
- 2.2 Statistics indicate that the proportion of women contestants in parliamentary constituencies has not increased significantly over the years. Political parties seem reluctant to field women candidates. In the 1993 Lok Sabha there were only 35 women members in the house of 543 members and in the Rajya Sabha 28 women in the house of 245. The records of subsequent parliaments, also indicate similar trends.
- 2.3 Generally speaking, the Indian society and its dominant culture over the centuries have downgraded the status of women, socially and economically depriving them of opportunities for development, participation and management. Women, who form the majority of country's illiterate, are underpaid or unpaid servants of society and family with no chance of expressing free opinions of their own. They are also objects of oppression or subjects of welfare. They are often relegated to the background and marginalised.
- 2.4 The process of empowerment will open a new vista of human resource development to them and bring them in the mainstream of social and economic development. The task that faces the government and society in setting right this inequality in sharing of power in a diverse and complex country with many religions and linguistic variations is how to overcome the attitudinal, institutional, cultural and social restrictions that have grown over the centuries.
- 2.5 Women's progress has been painfully slow and even today they remain the poorest of the poor. In the emerging new economic order and liberalized world order the women who have lower level skills will get further marginalised. Almost 90 per cent women in employment work in the unorganised sectors and therefore outside the purview of protection. The provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendments and the Panchayati Raj Acts would give opportunities for their socio-political advancement. Guided and well-planned empowerment thus, can make them overcome the inferior status in the family and society and emerge as capable equal partners of men. Such equal participation will lead to a qualitative change not merely in women's lives but in the functioning of public institutions and nature of politics in our democracy.

3. Awareness

Knowledge is power. Deprivation of knowledge is reflection of their lack of awareness of various issues, agencies, procedures, schemes, projects and methods of management. Information on these and access to such information therefore becomes critical in their empowerment. The corner stone of the strategy to help women empower themselves is to facilitate various processes of action through which awareness can be generated. This will evolve dissemination of information and training in handling and using media appropriately. The identification of the training process and training needs of persons involved at different levels of Panchayati Raj and selection of training institutions is a major theme of empowerment.

4. Political Education

- a) Those women who have already entered panchayats through elections need to be politically educated and informed regarding the concepts and relevance of Panchayati Raj institutions, the functioning of state machinery, the Indian Constitution, the nature of Indian democracy and the policies and programmes for women and other weaker sections of the society.
- b) Women in the community who are by definition members of gram sabha who participate in election by way of contesting or voting would need training for campaigning in election or questioning the candidate. Political education can be imparted on the basis of concrete information, information on social issues, the current political development and trends, legislation, developmental schemes and other topics. Policy information and political mobilisation are mutually strengthening and would result in positive people's movement for implementing many social-economic reforms which have had a tardy progress. Political training should aim at tapping their hidden potential and it should seek to build political awareness on the basis of collectively common interest and community development.
- c) **Role of Catalytic Organisation**
Political action groups, the National Service Volunteers and woman study groups, agricultural extension institutions as well as agricultural colleges and universities, and social work departments can be mobilised as link organisation to play the role of catalyst. These institutions can provide necessary inputs for political education. Further, women's self-help groups, social activists, Mahila Mandals and grassroots level NGOs add positive vigour to the process. Networking and effective linkages open up new vistas.

5. Economic Empowerment of Women in Panchayat

The constitutionally mandated panchayats were visualised as institutions of self-governance. States would devolve power to the PRIs and give them resources and responsibilities so that they emerge *as institutions of self-governance* instead of remaining as agencies for developmental administration only. As the process of devolution is slow, it requires pressure from women's groups to force state governments to act fast and issue notifications to make it possible and practically brought to the field. Empowerment of women in political terms is a must to ensure this process.

- 5.1 The empowerment of powerless sections of society – women, Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes (SC/STs) – does not happen by merely giving them representation in the PRIs. The 73rd Constitution Amendment promises that through a representative democracy, that is, by giving representation to socially and economically disadvantaged sections, PRIs will gradually be transformed from merely representative to participatory bodies. This, in fact, was implied in the provision of 1/3 representation to women. It envisages a shift from meeting the developmental needs of the people to enabling them to undertake developmental planning and bring about a change in development perspective. Democratic decentralisation presupposes that people not only have control over the resources but also have a perspective as to how to plan and allocate the resources at the local level.

6. Devolution of powers by State Governments a must for empowerment

The 11th Schedule of the amendment of the Constitution specifies 29 areas of responsibility covering all aspects of village life, which states may transfer to panchayats. (Annexe 1) – along with sufficient resources and decision making authority. As mentioned, many states are yet to establish and accomplish this important task.

- 6.1 Out of the 11th Schedule some of the areas that women members bear primary responsibility for are noted below:
- 1) Agriculture, including agriculture extension
 - 2) Minor irrigation, water management and watershed management
 - 3) Animal husbandry, dairy and poultry
 - 4) Fisheries
 - 5) Social forestry and farm forestry
 - 6) Minor forest produce – MFP
 - 7) Drinking water
 - 8) Fuel and fodder
 - 9) Poverty alleviation programmes
 - 10) Education, including primary and secondary schools
 - 11) Adult and non-formal education

- 12) Health and sanitation, including hospitals and primary health centres (PHCs)
- 13) Family welfare
- 14) Women and child development,
- 15) Social welfare, including welfare of the handicapped and mentally retarded, and
- 16) Maintenance of community assets.

These indicate that there is an urgent need for State governments to issue notifications specifying devolution of administrative and financial powers to the panchayats.

7. Sida's commitment to Women Empowerment through action programmes and research in Rajasthan: 1996

In 1996, with Sida support, ISS selected Rajasthan to launch an experimental project to take initiatives for action to empower elected women representatives of panchayats after the panchayat elections in 1995. What really motivated ISS is the basic recommendation given by the Conference on Panchayati Raj and political, social and economical empowerment of women held in April 1995. For India to build up a broad-based, solid foundation for economic and social progress it must uproot the last vestiges of feudalism and instill democratic values and practices. The people who live in the villages of India must become authors of their own lives and become sensitive to the needs of women, and women must be respected and supported in the process of development.

- 7.2 Initially ISS selected three districts representing three distinct geographical regions of state (Alwar, Pali and Rajsamand). Each district is different in terms of agricultural patterns, socio-economic development and history of people's participation in the freedom struggle. Annexe 2, give details of zilla parishads, panchayat samitis and gram panchayats in the whole state. This also gives the total number of zilla parishads, panchayat samitis and gram panchayats selected for studies. The number of cases chosen for studies in the three districts were 3 zilla parishads with six women from them, 6 panchayat samitis with 18 women from them and 16 gram panchayats with 48 women from them.

8. Second stage of Programme (January 1997 to December 2000)

Based on the experiences gathered in Rajasthan and the positive results observed, the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) supported a three-year programme: "Empowerment of Women through Panchayats in Rajasthan and Orissa", beginning January 1997. The areas identified for implementation of this programme are three districts of Rajasthan (Alwar, Kota, Pali) and three districts of Orissa (Jagatsinghpur, Nuapada, Rayagada).

- 8.1 The long-term objectives of this innovative project and action plan is to work towards political empowerment of women, that is, to prepare them fully to become effective partners in the decision making process, thereby leading towards the envisaged decentralised planning proc-

ess. The second objective is to bring about change in the patriarchal, caste-ridden hierarchical society into a more egalitarian and just society through making elected women representatives as “agents of change”. Further, efforts should be made to generate a development process that is more gender-friendly, and finally, to strengthen the third tier of village level institutions including the Gram Sabhas, which are the lifeline of panchayat system.

8.2 Short Term Objectives

- to examine the nature and extent of women’s participation in Panchayati Raj institutions in the light of their social background factors – class, caste, age, education, marital status – and to identify the factors (both within the public and private sphere) which may hinder their participation in the political process and democratic institutions at different levels.
- to closely identify concerns and priorities raised by women in meetings and analyse the treatment meted out to them within the gender dynamics and background of the elected women representatives.
- to articulate, give expression to and find solutions to the problems and conflicts which women members might be facing in their work.
- to help them to take up issues with higher authorities.
- to instill confidence among women members by providing opportunities to meet their peers, share experiences and learn about their political rights and powers.
- to monitor performance of women panchayat members and to codify the lessons learnt for wider dissemination for the benefit of women in other districts in the same state as well as in other states.

8.3 Study Areas of the Project

The status of women in Rajasthan is very low, and this is reflected in zero female literacy rates in some villages, higher incidence of female infanticide, low female sex ratio and patriarchal society. In Rajasthan, the districts selected for the study are Alwar, Kota and Pali, which also represent divergent problems, caste, low female literacy and patriarchal society. On the other hand, in Orissa, the status of women is relatively high. However, a majority of the tribal population lives in abject poverty and ignorance, incapable of receiving the fruits of growth percolating down to them. The districts identified for the project (Jagatsinghpur, Nuapara, Rayagada) also represented varying sections of ethnic populations at different levels of socio-economic development.

- 8.4 Among the non-tribal population in both States, the benefits of development reach women the last; where they do reach they reach slowly and haltingly. The development process for the past fifty years, both in Rajasthan and the coastal areas of Orissa, has created a middle class income population, but there is need for empowerment of women in these communities.
- 8.5 The panchayat elections in Rajasthan were conducted in February 1995 and after the expiry of the term, elections were held again in 2000. The project study was made for the panchayats elected for the term 1995–2000, even though the project could be started only in 1996–98. The newly elected members are being contacted by ISS. On the other hand, in Orissa, panchayat elections were held in January 1997 and they will in all likelihood continue in office till 2002. So the project districts in Orissa had the opportunity to study women who were freshly elected.

8.6 Annexe 2 gives details of the profile of the districts in Rajasthan and Orissa.

- a) Keeping the above parameters in mind, the ISS planned a programme of action in the six districts for the three years, i.e. 1998, 1999, 2000. The work related to monitoring the performance of elected women representatives in Panchayats was taken up in the initial programme. Questionnaires on women's participation in PRIs were prepared and distributed among the investigators. After compilation of data a thorough analysis was made and results were used for further intervention.
- b) A detailed paper on the social background of the women panchayat members who are within the project was prepared and published as a source material for using during the training programme. These directories were found to be quite valuable and the women members regarded them as valuable possessions.
- c) For the members of panchayats, a one-day training programme was organised. About 30 elected members, both men and women, from two panchayats underwent training simultaneously. This was done with a view that men also will be sensitised through their participation so that they can get a clear understanding of the role of women in Panchayats and in society.

The content and methods of the training undertaken by the ISS can be given as follows:

- i) Interactive discussions instead of structural lectures;
- ii) Role-plays.
- iii) Simple learning materials in Hindi and Oriya were prepared and distributed and used extensively with required photographs and illustrations;
- iv) Case studies of success and failures of women in panchayats were explained. There was reporting about the initiative taken by various members of panchayats who received training during the first stage of the project;
- v) Rajasthan and Orissa Panchayat Acts were prepared in simple Oriya and Hindi as background materials and explained to the members in the interactive sessions;
- vi) Video film shows were a strong and integral part of the training programme. Video film shows on women's empowerment and thereafter discussions were significant impact on the minds of the people, especially those who are illiterate world benefited maximum with this exercise. The ISS organised regular video shows to impress upon the Panchayat members about their role and the requirements of empowerment.
- d) The directory of the women members under study (one page for each member with a passport size photograph, her address, and other important details) was prepared and distributed. This step provided information to the people in the Panchayats and other parts of the State about the elected members. It has enhanced women's status and boosted their self-esteem in the society.
- e) Appropriate banners carrying messages such as "Women's Political Empowerment is through Panchayats" were displayed in the village streets, market places and other common public areas. Appropriate wall writings in the selected villages, blocks with an objective of creating the much needed atmosphere and awareness about panchayats and women's participation in it, were encouraged.

- f) Two-day conferences at the inter-village panchayat, inter-block panchayat and district and state levels were organised. The conferences focussed on issues such as the importance of grassroots level democracy, role of local government and development of society, women's participation in decision-making and many other relevant topics. Such programmes held in the panchayats boosted the morale of panchayat members, especially women, which otherwise got sidelined by vested interests.
 - g) Case studies and profile of women members were prepared. This included their struggle for success, difficulties in achieving their aspirations and their suggestions for rectification of the system.
- 8.7 The Institute was responsive to situations that arose from time to time. This approach facilitated maximisation of benefits to the target group as envisaged in the programme. The Institute is making an effort to make these districts into model districts from the point of functioning of the panchayats. The grant given by Sida was utilised in the broad framework of investing in people for creating much-needed social capital as well as institutions in order to build a society where women and men are equal partners.

9. Purpose and Scope of evaluation

The constitutionally mandated panchayat bodies were visualised as institutions of self-governance, and state governments are to devolve administrative and financial powers to the PRIs and give them resources so that these bodies reach the level of taking care of their affairs themselves. This process of devolution is slow but could be made faster if the elected members, specially the women, are empowered, and that empowerment of women in political terms is a must to ensure this process. It is also to be evaluated about a positive shift from meeting only the development needs of the people to enabling them to undertake development planning and bring about a change in development perceptive. How far the intervention through the activities and programmes of action brought out these changes.

- 9.1 The evaluation also envisages the nature and extent of women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutions in the light of their social background and factors such as class, caste, age, education, marital status and other identifiable factors, which hinder their participation in the political process, and democratic institutions.
- 9.2 Regional variances, differential economic development, availability of infrastructure and education levels indicate different priorities and issues for different areas and villages. The community and members of the panchayats have their own perceptions about their needs in terms of social and economic development. How far ISS interventions have made them (women) raise these issues at the panchayat level including the gram sabhas are to seen. Were there appreciable changes on the treatment meted out to suggestions and firm recommendation of women members? When the women members are brought to level of confidence which enables them to articulate and select suitable solutions to the problems and issues that they raise for the benefit of the common good, there is great need to prepare them for taking up various issues to the higher authorities including the zilla parishad, and in the governmental level to the BDO and collector.

- 9.3 Exchange of ideas with women members of other panchayats and sharing of experiences and learning about the progress made by them is a very important aspect of the objectives of the interventions. All these interventions would add to enhanced functional efficiency and completion of projects and programmes in the panchayat for imparting social justice. These achievements made by the women members through their own initiative and efforts are codified for larger exchange and wider dissemination for the benefit of women in other districts.

10. Thematic level – Grassroot level intensive contact

The relevance of empowerment of women through the programme intervention adopted and introduced by ISS is well-focussed taking into consideration how far these composite exercises introduced by ISS have given progressive shape to the overall objectives of the programmes.

- a) The first task of the programme was to make initial informal contact with the elected representatives important members of village and communities and express the intent of ISS on what exactly they were planning to introduce into the Panchayati Raj system. This was a difficult task which ISS could establish through a group of dedicated local level youth, both boys and girls, the more among them being girls. These investigators were motivated and trained with the specific tasks of interventions from time to time. A majority of the elected women ward members of the panchayats were illiterate only 10% of them had completed Class 10 and 70% attended school up to Class 5, the remaining had not received any formal education. Initially, very frequent visits were made by the investigators, block level coordinators and district level coordinators to ascertain the eagerness and willingness of these women members to take up the planned empowerment programme. During the course of field visits for evaluation it was strongly expressed by the village elders and the members of the civil society that elected members of the panchayat were very keen to get acquire knowledge about various aspects of the panchayat programme and its effective functioning. In the absence of any organised programme of this nature initiated by the government or any other body these women came very close to ISS field staff and started to open up and express their difficulties and grievances to get the required help and assistance. The transparency of the communication between these women and the investigators and coordinators was one of the most important composition of empowerment. Once the initial ice is broken the village communities come forward to support the investigators in their work of providing elected members with more information and training.
- b) Thereafter, workshops were organised in which 32 to 40 representatives participated and various subjects were introduced such as highlights of the Constitutional Amendment Act, powers of the panchayats, duties of the elected members, responsibilities of gram panchayats and conduct of Gram Sabha meetings. After this, periodical visits were made to oversee the performance of the elected members in discharging their duties as envisaged under the Act. Initially there were difficulties, but by gradual motivation and encouragement many of them shed their shyness and came out openly to express how they intended to solve the problems of the village community. After a period of three months, training programmes were organised with specific subjects introduced to them in a simple manner so that during these interactive sessions they could clarify their doubts about various aspects of their functioning. Local government officials from the development departments, prominent members of NGOs, college

teachers dealing with social sciences also gave their valuable time and made efforts to be associated with these programmes. The most important and striking result of this is that the women members learn the art of effective articulation to make their suggestions and recommendations clearly and logically to the authorities. They felt very enthused when they acquired the skill of taking interview with senior block development officials to represent the case of the village in development.

- c. The above interventions made it possible to introduce to these members the importance of holding periodical Gram sabhas with well regulated agenda points and also explain to the members of other village the progress made in various socio-economic activities. Gram sabhas were at first attended very thinly; with the efforts of the investigators and active members the attendance grew in strength and the quality of participation improved. Many of these women members expressed their happiness that well coordinated and orchestrated gram sabha meetings brought out meaningful and useful suggestions for the composite planned development of the village. The minutes of these meetings were recorded with the help of investigators and sent to the panchayat meetings for their consideration and support. These efforts brought about an indirect pressure on the authorities of panchayat hierarchy to clear sanctions for the projects. Some of the panchayat women sarpanches were keen to take up these issues with the Block Development Officers for getting their genuine needs met. All these improvements were possible with the continuous efforts of the field staff working for the project. After a period of one year a district level convention was organised in which about 250 women representatives participated. This gave them the opportunity to exchange ideas and share information on the progress made in their respective panchayats. After this convention field level activities were intensified through field visits and maintaining of close contact by the field staff.

10.1 Observations of the field study on the impact of the programmatic interventions can be summarised as follows:

- a) In the light of social background factors – caste, age, education level and other factors – the interventions by the ISS brought all these women representatives under one umbrella. Caste and class barriers narrowed down. Parda system, and shyness among village women started disappearing. They acquired courage to express their views both in formal and informal gatherings.
- b) The women started showing keen interest to learn more about panchayat administration and community development.
- c) These changes amongst the women brought respectability for them in the community.
- d) With the help of the field staff they started taking initiatives to solve problems in the community.
- e) The women acquired the confidence to share their experiences and also learn from their peers.
- f) The women were encouraged to meet higher authorities of the government and represent their problems before them.
- g) There is a wind of change in the panchayats as these women are acting as “agents of change”.
- h) In the course of discussions they complained that the panchayats are not provided with

adequate funds from the state government to meet their development needs.

- i) They are getting slowly sensitised to the issues concerning social evils; they need more support to equip them for awareness and programme interventions in this area.
- j) Great eagerness is demonstrated by the women to accomplish social justice for the marginalised and underprivileged.
- k) A majority of them pleaded that they need more intervention for improving their awareness and functional capabilities.
- l) They have started organising women's groups for income generating activities and thrift societies and need more support.
- m) Initiatives are required for raising income from the Panchayat's common assets, MFP sale, etc.
- n) The secretaries to the panchayats have started co-operating better with woman sarpanches. This has improved the administration of Panchayats.
- o) Block level officers are looking at the quality of change in the study area and then to expand the programme to other areas.

10.2 Periodicity and extent of the Gram Sabha meetings and improved participation of women voters in these meetings added a new dimension to the participatory approach of PRI. Minutes were prepared and sent up to Gram Sabhas. Gram Panchayat is acquiring the status of a neutral body to take care of the problems of the villages without any prejudice and extraneous considerations. This will improve the happiness and satisfaction of the Gram Panchayats as a whole.

10.3 Even though ISS had made some arrangements to include male representatives in some of their programmes, it was observed that there is a need for introducing programmes for sensitising male members of the villages on gender issues and impressing upon them that women play as important a role as men in all activities of the community and that their potential must be used for development participation and management. This thematic change can be easily incorporated by ISS in their programmes without diluting the theme "empowerment of women for social change".

10.4 Knowledge is power and its application brings about positive changes in the society. *Awareness creation is an important area which requires emphasis for future interventions in the programme.* Twenty-nine specific areas of responsibility covering all aspects of village life shown in the Amendments requires detailed introduction with such schemes under various Ministries and Departments. This will have to be prepared in detail by way of modules and effectively introduced to the panchayat. ISS will have to prepare necessary material for it as well as prepare the trainers.

11. Thematic Capacity of the ISS and Field Staff

– Field Staff as a friend and philosopher

ISS was founded in 1985 as a registered society to study contemporary social, political and economic issues, and problems that confront the country, in an inter-disciplinary perspective and make its findings and recommendations to the members of the decision-making organisations at various levels.

- 11.1 ISS has a highly qualified, motivated and experienced Director who is supported by research faculty consisting of senior fellows and senior research officers to add to its academic and research standard. Institute also seeks to build a large community of concerned scholars and activists engaged in ushering in a humane and just society. Recently the Institute has been permanently located in a building of its own in the prestigious institutional area of Vasant Kunj. The Institute provides high quality facilities for top class output. The Institute is capable of introducing the thematic of social relevance in an appropriate manner and gradually develop it as the programme progresses in spread and depth. So far the direction given by the ISS has had dramatic impact in the initial introduction of the theme “Empowerment of Women in the Panchayat”. in the most backward blocks of the underdeveloped districts. ISS has got the inherent capability to adopt and incorporate shifts for strengthening the programme and enlarging the scope.
- 11.2 ISS Headquarters have assigned responsibility to two senior research officers to coordinate field programmes and report to the director. Dr. Ramesh C. Nayak is in charge of Rajasthan and Dr. Ms. Bidyut Mohanty is in charge of Orissa. Detailed discussion and interviews with these officers have left positive impressions of their capabilities, methodology and application for having taken this programme to an effective level and demonstrated visible results in the field. They are a great asset to the programme.
- 11.3 At the state level according to the availability of retired senior personnel from the government or NGOs state coordinators were assigned. In Orissa Shri Nirakar Beura was inducted into the project as State Co-ordinator since its inception in 1997. His experience, commitment and vision was demonstrated through the results which have reached into the far-flung areas of Rayagada and Nuapara districts. He was in constant touch with grassroot level workers, community elders, members of civic society and local government staff engaged in the developmental activities of the state. Since January 1999, Shri K.K. Patnaik, former Director (Panchayats) and Rural Development has been Regional Co-ordinator of ISS in Bhubaneswar with his vast experience in the Department of Panchayats and Rural Development, he will be a great asset for the project. In Rajasthan the responsibility was given to Shri Kaushik the regional youth co-ordinator of Nehru Yuva Kendra Sanghatan. With his vast experience in working with youth and association with Mahilla Mandals and youth clubs, he could easily establish rapport with women members. Similarly, the contribution of the 6 district coordinators block coordinators and field investigators have contributed immensely to the success of the project. Kindly refer to Annexe 5.
- 11.4 Block co-ordinators and district co-ordinators as well as village level investigators were all motivated to the level needed to accomplish the tasks assigned to them. Their responsibility is given below.

11.5 The job of the State Co-ordinator is:

1. To assist project co-ordinator in preparing literature for training.
2. To assist the project co-ordinator in organising workshops, state level conference, and training programmes.
3. To assist in preparing wall posters and cloth banners on “Women’s Empowerment through Panchayats”.
4. Supervising the training and research work of district co-ordinators.
5. To report to the project co-ordinator every month.

11.6 District Co-ordinators

Each district is in charge of a district co-ordinator. These district co-ordinators are recruited from the respective districts. They are familiar with local needs and aspirations of the PRI members.

Their job is:

1. To coordinate research and training programmes at the district level.
2. To supervise the work of block co-ordinators.
3. To forward every months progress report to the state co-ordinator and project co-ordinator.

11.7 Job of Block Co-ordinator

The block co-ordinators are in charge of the block; their job is:

1. To co-ordinate research work and training programmes at block level.
2. To supervise the work of field investigators.
3. To accurately report every month’s progress to the district coordinator.
4. Organising Training and Awareness Programmes at Gram Panchayat level.
5. To assist in organising gram sabha meetings effectively.

11.8 Field Investigators

Field Investigators will work in the Gram Panchayat/village level under the guidance of block coordinators. These investigators will be recruited from the village level.

1. To report success and failure stories of Gram Panchayats and the women panchayat members to block/district coordinators
2. To suggest innovative ideas to the project co-ordinator regarding training/awareness programmes.
3. To motivate women to attend Gram Sabha meetings.
4. To assist block/district co-ordinators in organizing village level workshops, cultural and sports activities.

Apart from this, volunteers from among mainly retired technicians, bureaucrats, school teachers, and other such professionals can support the programme at the village level. They are paid only travel expenses. Being local they can be an asset to the project, when the project staff face problems.

11.9 During the course of field visits the field staff accompanied the consultant. Periodical discussions were made with them which give an insight into their commitment and interest in undertaking the task. Some of the female investigators and block co-ordinators who come from modest village backgrounds acquired quite good standard in their performance of the tasks assigned to them by associating with the project. In the light of the suggestions included in this report for thematic shift, appropriate refresher programmes will have to be arranged for these field staff. Advanced thematic changes need introduction of new techniques.

11.10 Training for the Elected Women Members

- ◆ Training is non-residential and for the day only.
- ◆ The medium of communication is the local language/dialect.
- ◆ The master trainers are project staff and active women panchayat members,
- ◆ ISS provides all literature on panchayats to master trainers.
- ◆ All participants are provided with reading materials on Panchayats prepared by ISS in Hindi/Oriya.
- ◆ The emphasis is more on group discussions rather than on classroom teachings.
- ◆ Cultural programmes and sports activities for women are organised to motivate them for effective participation.
- ◆ All members are personally invited by field investigators to these programmes.
- ◆ The training date and course content are announced before hand.
- ◆ Loud speakers, banners, posters are used for gram sabha meetings.

11.11 Activities

- i. National Conference on Women's Political Empowerment held on 24–26 April annually at New Delhi and since two years at state and district levels in study areas.
- ii. State Level Conference
- iii. Block level conference
- iv. Regional workshops on women's participation
- v. Cultural programmes and sports activities
- vi. Awareness camps for women on panchayats/gram sabhas
- vii. Training programmes
- viii. Exchange programmes

The details of all the activities are to be fully reported.

12. Sustainability of the interventions, both structurally and thematically

The people who live in the villages must become authors of their lives and sensitive to the special needs of women and give support in the process of development. The main objective of the programme is to work towards the political empowerment of women, that is, to prepare them fully to become effective partners in the decision-making process, thereby leading towards a gradual decentralised planning process. Women empowerment will bring about change in the patriarchal, caste-ridden hierarchical society, making it into a more egalitarian and just society, through elected women representatives as agents of this change. To make the programme more effective and practical, there is need for slight shift in the thematics and there by structural adjustment in the existing staffing. This includes networking and involvement of civil society numbers in the process. Indeed, there will be sure necessity for enhanced financial allotment to meet the required changes in the programmes and the emoluments of the staff. The enhanced grants will be utilised in the broad framework of investing in people for creating vibrant social capital and responsive institutions to build a society where women and men are equal partners.

- 12.1 The sustainability of the programme cannot be organised by the people themselves as this involves resources such as finance, competent organisational backup and effective interlinking with governmental organisations working in the field. The support from international bodies, multinational and bi-lateral organisations would be necessary for a decade to cover the backward areas and establish credible standards of developed human resources among the elected members. When such models are placed on the ground, government will be induced to incorporate budget provisions for the purpose of empowerment of the elected members in the neglected areas. Sida should consider extending long-term support for this programme to establish workable models of the empowerment of women through Panchayati Raj.
- 12.2 It was observed that the interventions made by ISS have shaken up district administrations to evolve systems for organising gram sabhas; some of the BDOs have sought assistance from the ISS staff and are scrutinizing the thematics introduced by ISS for improving the conduct of gram sabhas. The emerging interest and sincere efforts from the government side would bring rapid changes to the progressive path of sustainability. Well-prepared and people-friendly models laid on the ground would inspire organisations and bodies to support these efforts.

13. Observations at the field level

In order to economise on the administrative cost the field offices are established and run in a cost effective and austere way. In many places the district level co-ordinators and block level co-ordinators share the premises of the collaborating agencies. As indicated earlier, through modest training, motivation and the good standard of activities undertaken by them networking was made possible for them with other members of the village community, government agencies and other NGOs; these have added to their capacities for achieving good results. Further, structured refresher training with reserved thematics and added incentives by way of enhanced honoraria to meet the increasing costs of subsistence and travel will result in better implementation.

- 13.1 There is a need for covering all the women elected representatives in the block/panchayats under study. Special attention should be given to women who are panchayat members working under male sarpanches. Men should also be included in the training programme for sensitising them about the importance of the participation of women members in the Panchayati Raj administration. This can be worked out by the ISS.
- 13.2 The potential impact of the training programme and interventions was visible in the study area. Women's participation in the gram panchayat meeting and suggestions and decisions have brought about substantial efficiency in the running of the programmes, completion of programmes, and extension of social justice to the needy. It is observed that the level of articulation and identification issues requires more guidance. This can be attained only through continuous training programmes and exposure to the areas of responsibility assigned to them as per the 11th Schedule.
- 13.3 The project structure and the leadership operating it is very effective-proper guidelines are issued periodical field visits and interactive sections held and motivational approaches held out to staffs. The consultant participated in three interactive sections with staff and observed the effectiveness of their perception and field work. These processes along with proper guidance have build up confidence among the staff. The staff at the field level is largely women who are very sensitive to the needs of women PRI members. Periodical travel of the representatives to the block, district, state, and New Delhi accompanied by volunteers have added a new dimension of confidence in them.
- 13.4 Project management was done through clear-cut guidance, field visits and inspections and reports received from lower functionaries to the state level co-ordinators. This gave the required information for monitoring the programme and the progress made in the identifiable goals. Perhaps it will be necessary to make detail planning regarding time-bound activities for the modified programmes.

14. Recommendations

There is a need for greater awareness generations in the panchayat community for which more NGOs and grassroot workers should be networked. The vision must be to develop PRIs to develop and to retain the character of the sub-governing institutions committed to public good with compassion and sharing with participatory character and approach. We have to make panchayats in to arbiters of an egalitarian and just society through making women elected representative into agents of change. Equal participation will lead to better functioning of public institutions and transform nature of politics in our democracy.

- 14.1 There is a need for slight shift in the strategy as far as the coverage is concerned.
 - a) As indicated earlier, male members to be brought under the scheme, incorporating them at appropriate levels.
 - b) Greater thrust to be given in equipping ward members and sarpanches for the administrative and developmental role they have to perform.

- c) Introduce more traditional, cultural folk and sports competition to bring about cohesion among the village groups, especially the youth.
- d) Prepare modules containing material narrated in simple regional languages as resource/ training materials.
- e) Awareness has to be built up through interactive discussions and distribution of simple understandable materials.
- f) Evaluation of standard of performance of panchayat through local colleges and universities.
- g) Intensify awareness campaigns in the colleges and schools about empowerment of women and ISS/Sida activities in this area.
- h) In order to equip field staff organise training programmes at appropriate level at the initiative of ISS.
- i) In order to bring about quick results in political empowerment, net-working should be done with the local NGOs, women study centre, Mahila Mandals, grassroots level workers, etc. The universities and colleges in the locations can play very effective roles.
- j) Generation of self-employment through rural income-generating activities to supplement the income and also to occupy them profitably should be a priority area in the strategy. Model programmes can be encouraged through the project staff.

14.2 The vision approach adopted by ISS need not be renewed because of the fact that the programme itself is revolving round a vision of “Women elected representatives as agents of change,” women as capable, equal partners of men, an opportunity to develop hidden potential of women for serving the community, and finally to restore rights and equality enshrined in the Constitution. The vision is to take women to reach to the higher echelons of democratic institutions at state and national level.

- 14.3 I) The immediate goals are to make women PRIs to be able to articulate their aspirations, issues of importance to village communities, and also to make them aware of developmental programmes. They must equip themselves with the knowledge of their rights and equalities.
- II) Prepare elected gram panchayat members to know their duties, prepare them to effectively discharge their duties.
- III) Sensitisation to the eradication of social evils.
- IV) Implement the theme that ‘education is basic’ for strengthening democracy and ushering in development.
- V) Introduction of modern science and technology into village life.
- VI) Communities, specially male members, should acknowledge the role of women in the community.
- VII) Inculcate dignity of the human being and equality as the basic value of the society.

14.4 As mentioned earlier in the paragraph on thematic capacity of ISS and performance level of human resources available, there is no doubt that with required support and direction, ISS would be able to prepare the existing field staff to handle the shifts in strategies and introduce elements of upgradation to equip all concerned to reach the goals of the mission. The following suggestions are given in this regard.

- Taking into consideration the output of programme co-ordinators and the added responsibilities which will be thrust upon them, there is a need for upward revision of their emoluments. ISS could decide this upward revision and charge it to the project.
- Each of the programme coordinators may be given part-time secretariat service in preparation and compilation of reports.
- At present, state level co-ordinators are working on part-time basis and this arrangement may continue. They are managed well and motivated by the ISS headquarters. Taking into consideration the added responsibility which would be entrusted on them, there will be need to enhance honoraria paid to them.
- Most important and significant field staff management pertains to the motivation level and training of field staff so as to envisage better output through them at the field level. There is a need for an enhancement of honoraria and travel expenses on par with other voluntary organisations working in the field. These training programmes and upgradation of capability would make the field staff more committed and motivated. ISS has ample capacity to take up to this task.

14.5 Financial management of any programme is very vital for the successful achievement of the goals. Swedish International Development Agency was liberal in releasing grants for the programmes which started in 1996, thereafter in the second stage 1997–2000. Annexe – 3 give percentage break-up of the programme (Budget heads). It can be observed from the budget heads that for the period 1996–1997, the following are the details.

- i) salary for the programme coordinator and field investigator;
- ii) travel for field work;
- iii) questionnaire, books, stationary, infrastructure facility, work consultation.
- iv) and meeting and overheads.

But for the subsequent period 1998–2000, training programme budget head was added along with literature, background materials and stationery. An additional head for reports and publication was also added. The major expenditure was for salaries for programme coordinator and honoraria for field staff which consumed on an average 35 per cent, travel and field visits 15 per cent training programme expenditure 12.5 per cent, meetings and workshop and consultations varied between 25 per cent to 30 per cent, literature and background materials and stationary 5 per cent, reports and publications 2 per cent, and an average overhead expenditure between 5 to 7.5 per cent. For the period January 1998 to March 2000 consisting of 27 months, the total expenditure is about Rs. 43 lakhs. This indicates average project cost for each state per annum works out to be an average of Rs. 10 lakhs. Under the restructured and enhanced programme content there is a need to raise this financial allocation to Rs. 15 lakh average for each state covering about 25 panchayats. This would mean that for a block period of 2 years the allocation would come about Rs. 60 lakhs to cover both states. The proposed budget heads suggested:

1. Salaries for programme co-ordinators and field staff honoraria = 35 per cent
2. Travel and field visits = 15 per cent
3. Meetings, consultations and exchange visits = 17 per cent
4. Preparation of back ground materials and stationary = 5 per cent

5. Reports and publications and media = 5 per cent
6. Overhead including publicity = 5 per cent
7. Training programme including material = 18 per cent.

Details of minor heads will have to be prepared by ISS. The attached annexe 3 gives the details about the total expenditure for the financial year 1998, 1999 and 2000. It would be necessary to work out details of expenditure on training programmes meetings and consultations and rationalise it by using facilities available in the districts and other austere measures.

14.5 Empowerment of women in the Indian context is to bring about gender equality. Thematic approach to structural planning of the entire programme address the question related to gender equality. When 1/3 of the sarpanches in block are prepared well to manage the affairs of the gram panchayat and take decisions as per rules and regulations, chairing the meeting is one of the achievements reaching towards gender equality. Male ward members in the villages patiently listening to their female sarpanches will definitely bring about gender equality. ISS has very thoughtfully structured their approaches to remove the hurdles in a most gentle way by using interactive sessions, group discussions and other community actions. During the course of the visits in Rajasthan it was a pleasant surprise to listen to the achievements and experiences narrated by the former sarpanches and upa-sarpanches. They were full of confidence and hope about the full gender equality. Some of them have not attended formal schools, but the interventions through this programme have brought out their inner talents which changed their personalities and made them ready to serve the community. Some of them have sufficient calibre to be assigned as trainers for the future generation of elected members.

15. Informing about the programme

State government functionaries, having observed the success of periodical gram sabhas and the methodology adopted by field staff, have come to conclusion that at least the state government should make efforts to ensure conduct of effective gram sabha meetings. In Orissa, as per the government orders, block development officers are organising gram sabha meetings. They have approached ISS for the co-operation of then field staff. As and when the news of effective implementation of panchayat programmes through empowered and trained women members spreads, more requests will come to adopt similar practices. To quote an example, the woman sarpanch of panchayat Smt. Sulochana Das of Palosda Jagatsinghpur district was awarded the best performance certificate in Orissa for completion of all tasks. This can be achieved through proper reporting and media publicity. There is a need to hold periodical media conferences at state level and for co-ordinators and ISS to bring about public awareness at the national level to highlight the vision, mission and goal. ISS should also endorse their research publications to other states for replication of their model.

16. Activities in the log frame

In order to facilitate a well co-ordinated approach to programmes and completion of given task within the time frame, a log frame has been prepared for the second phase of the programme. The items of the activities enumerated in the log frame has to be expanded taking suggestions and recommendation incorporated in the earlier paras of the report. Periodical reporting at various stages and its analysis will give direction for taking corrective measures while senior staff make inspections in the field. These would also help generate confidence among the communities regarding the utility of the entire mission. Even though the requirement of publicity exercises has not been spelled out in the log frame, would have to be adopted and included in the second phase.

16.1 Activities for 2000–2002

1. To organise state/district/block level conventions to create awareness among women representatives.
2. Organising women representatives' visits to panchayats institutions of other states districts, and panchayats to get a first hand experience of the working of panchayat institutions.
3. To organise workshops on problems faced by women PRI members in completing various development programmes.
4. To organise Women's Empowerment Celebrations programme in New Delhi and other locations from 2001–03 April.
5. To organise awareness campaigns on 'Women's Empowerment is through Panchayats'.
6. Preparation for field contacts, recruitment of staff for the new panchayats to be covered in Rajasthan.
7. Preparation of literature for Training of Trainers (TOT) and PRI members training programme.
8. Rapport with village/panchayat and NGOs in study area.
9. Mobilising people for active participation in gram sabha meetings.
10. Training of trainers.
11. Training for elected PRI members in different phases.
12. Conduct of model panchayat meetings.
13. Networking with government officials, NGOs, youth Clubs, Mahila Mandals, and civil societies.
14. Organising gram panchayat/block/district level sports, folk song competition and cultural programmes relating to women's empowerment.
15. Appraisal of progress in empowerment by the members themselves – once in six months.
16. Awareness programmes on gender issues, social evils and supporting women's participation in grassroot politics.

17. Introduction of social development programmes and specific intervention as needed for the area.
18. Collection of socio-economic data on women's participation in PRIs and publication of research documents.
19. Publication of directory of newly elected women PRI members.
20. Leadership training for potential women candidates in Orissa.
21. Election study in Orissa (in 2002-3) as done in Rajasthan panchayat elections 2000.

17. Methodology

The methodology applied to carry out the assignment of consultancy was carried out through a variety of activities as suggested in the terms of reference:

- Field visits with required preparation and planning.
 - Focussed group discussions with elected women representatives.
 - A meeting with individual former sarpanches and ward members – this was done in Rajasthan only.
 - Individual discussions with the current office bearers of the panchayats.
 - Intensive interaction with village elders, present male sarpanches, college professors and lecturers of the colleges engaged in social science academics and members of other NGO groups operating in the area.
 - In each of the blocks sufficient time was utilised to deliberate with block development officers, panchayat officers and others connected social development programmes to ascertain their observations about the intervention and government's plans to introduce these programmes in more areas under their charge. Intensive discussions were held with ISS staff in its headquarters in Delhi and field staff at their respective offices and very detailed discussions were held with field investigators about their work towards achieving project goals.
 - The consultant had to take resource to secondary sources such as local media reporting, reports submitted by district level co-ordinators state level co-ordinators, and finally, documentation made by the ISS headquarters including a large number of useful and illustrative photographs giving empirical evidence depicting the intensity of the programme and the enthusiasm it evokes.
 - The consultant took the initiative to visit two panchayats each in control blocks where the study has not been undertaken and interacted with sarpanches and members. This gave an idea about the differences that exist in panchayats where interventions were not made.
- 17.1 The time framework given for the evaluation could not be adhered to nor could reports be submitted as stipulated because of the need for intensive travels in the interior areas of Orissa and the intervening holidays for puja.

17.2 The programme of field visits as per Annexe 4 was taken up after detailed discussion with ISS staff in the ISS headquarters who conveyed detailed instructions to field the staff about the programme and the need for intimating all concerned about the visits and requests for sparing valuable time of the personalities involved in our programmes. The consultant was accompanied by the respective project co-ordinators during the visits to the interior villages. Their presence at various levels of meetings and discussions with various sections of actors in support of programme for empowerment was useful. Annexe – gives details of various activities in the field.

18. Quick observations on field visits

- I. ISS headquarters and field staff worked as a well-knit team with clear-cut line of command, understanding, and communication regarding achievements and bottlenecks from time to time. Co-ordinated and orchestrated approach has won the confidence and respect of the village community. This fundamental strength would enable ISS to easily adopt the shifts recommended in the strategy. Intensification of programmes with additional contents will be conceived with required rapidity.
- II. Favourable response from village elders, NGO volunteers working in the area make operational capacity of ISS better.
- III. There is an urgent need for synchronised awareness generation programme all-round. This was the fundamental request from all quarters.
- IV. ISS must take up issues with the state government for gradual but prompt devolution of funds to reach panchayats. All our efforts for empowerment will become meaningless if parallel efforts are not made by state, centre and district administration to bring about the required degree of opportunity change to make gram panchayat emerge as institutions of self-governance.
- V. It was observed that majority of the women members desired to keep politics away while deciding socio-economic development proposals of the panchayats. This is a positive influence of the programme for empowerment.
- VI. Many of the former women members in Rajasthan who have gone through the training programme for three years have acquired the required potential to assist ISS as resource personnel.
- VII. It was found that many members desired to introduce social developmental programmes into the ambit of the project.
- VIII. There is a need for emphasising community action for better hygiene and sanitation in the villages.
- IX. In some of the affluent agricultural areas of Rajasthan, the panchayats in the study area have initiated establishment of private schools for better all-round education. Large number of girl children in uniforms attend.

- X. Vision, mission and goals achieved need to be intensively covered in the local national print media and electronic media. At the time of state and national level conventions state government, central government should support the good work of ISS and Sida to be known to the people.

19. Conclusion

73rd Constitution Amendment Act was legislated to give full opportunity for grassroots democracy to be strengthened with an added special right for women's participation in all the activities. As the field reality is that women's participation in decision-making at all levels, whether national or local, is still marginal, this calls for concerted and committed efforts with initial support from agencies such as committed NGOs to assist them in their efforts. Empowerment is an essential ingredient to uphold the dignity of individuals and bring out originality and initiative for working for the common good. The vision, mission and goals of the Women's Empowerment through Panchayati Raj project are laudable and appropriate for ushering in democratic decentralised developmental initiatives in the rural areas of India.

20. Summary

The main objective of the project was "Empowering Women through Panchayats in Rajasthan and Orissa". Three districts from each state were selected for the study. The participation of women in Panchayat and Gram Sabha meetings were monitored and evaluated by the ISS project staff. The experiences from these districts shows, even men PRI members are not aware of the powers and functions of Panchayats. In the second stage of the programme both men and women members to be included under study. Since the literacy level is very low in these districts except Jagatsinghpur district in Orissa in comparison to the state average there is a need for more awareness generation programmes for both PRI members and village people. Thus awareness generation programmes on powers and functions of panchayats, campaign against social evils and on going developmental works of government agencies will be great help to these PRI members. The network with local level NGOs working on similar developmental issues be taken to widen the base of ISS work these districts. The training of PRI members should be given and on continuous phases. Since, the majority of Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti members are comparatively better educated and can manage their work for themselves emphasis should be on gram panchayat members.

The number of gram panchayats both men and women headed under study should be increased to 25 in each district.

The new strategy for the programmes recommended are:

1. The men PRI members to be brought under the programme.
2. Awareness programmes both for PRI members and villagers to be intensified.

3. Along with video shows on success stories of panchayats, sports and cultural activities should be included in the training programmes for PRI members.
4. Training of Trainers (TOTs) to be included in the programme activities.
5. Networking with local NGOs, Women's Association and grassroots level organisations should be part of the activities.
6. ISS should prepare training modules in simple regional languages both for field level staff and PRI members.
7. In order to facilitate better management and control there is need to strengthen staff of Project Coordinators.
8. The salaries and honorarium of the project staff need to be revised.

Annexe

Empowering women through Panchayats in Rajasthan

by Dr. Ramesh C. Nayak

Project Co-ordinator, Rajasthan

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1992) is an important landmark in the history of women's participation at the grassroot level. For the first time 33 percent seats were reserved for women. Rajasthan was the second state to hold panchayat elections in 1994 after implementation of 73rd Amendment. In 1994 panchayat elections 38791 women were elected in PRIs of Rajasthan. Since the majority of these women elected were first timer and illiterate it was a great challenge for them to perform their functions. Also the local customs and traditions did not support women's active participation in politics and development work. After the panchayat elections were held newspapers reported women were treated with indifference by their male colleagues in the meetings. The bureaucracy did not treat them with dignity. In many instances they were used as proxy women and their male family members conducted panchayat meetings. Also the elected panchayat members faced violence and rape if they dare to come out alone to attend meetings. The working conditions were not congenial. Women were frustrated to work in the panchayat which has been vitiated with corruption, violence and petty mindedness. Even *dalit* women who were agricultural labourers before panchayat elections had to stop their wage labour after being elected as panch/sarpanch. Atrocities against *dalit* women members increased. There were instances from Rajasthan where *dalit* women sarpanches were not allowed to sit on chair in front of their upper caste male colleagues at Gram Panchayat meeting. There were many cases where no confidence motions were brought and passed by two third majority by their male colleagues to remove from their post. The worst victims were OBC and *dalit* women. Data from Alwar and Pali district of Rajasthan shows 61 no confidence motions were brought for hearing between 1996-98. ISS with a finance support from SIDA started the work in Rajasthan for the project in March 1996. To begin with relevant literature was reviewed, sample district were selected, interview schedules were prepared and pilot testing of the questionnaires were done. The project was launched in Alwar, Pali and Rajsamand districts on 2nd October (Gandhi Jayanti Day) to monitor and evaluate the performance of women PRI members. These districts represent three diverse socio-economic and cultural regions of the state. The main objective of the project was to understand women's participation at grassroot level. In these districts with the support of the local NGOs, Youth Education Society in Pali and Rajsamand and Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK) in Alwar we started monitoring the panchayat meetings.

Alwar

Alwar is situated in the eastern part of Rajasthan. It is 148 kms away from the state capital Jaipur. It is one of the biggest district of the state. It has 14 panchayat samitis and 478 gram panchayats. Both agriculturally and industrially it is one of the developed district. The major crops of the district are wheat, onion, pulses, oilseeds, cottons and sugarcane. Majority of its people are SCs, STs, OBCs and Meo Muslims. The district constitute part of Mewat region which has its distinct linguistic and cultural identity in Rajasthan.

Pali

Pali district is situated in western part of Rajasthan. It is 286 kms away from Jaipur. The district is situated in the semi-arid zone of Rajasthan. Both industrially and agriculturally it is one of the developed district. Majority of its people are Rajputs, STs and SCs. The Rajputs ruled over Rajasthan for centuries. They are main land owning caste in Pali. The district has 10 panchayat samitis

and 320 gram panchayats. The district is part of Marwar region of the state. It has its own distinct linguistic and cultural identity. This region has produced many prominent entrepreneurs in India.

Rajsamand

Rajsamand is situated in Southern part of Rajasthan. It came into existence in 1991. It was carved out of the erstwhile district of Udaipur. The district is 376 kms away from Jaipur. Majority of its people are OBCs, Rajputs, STs, and SCs. The district is backward in terms of agricultural development and infrastructure. Since 1980s the district has been main centre for “right to information” launched by Mazdur Kissan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS). The MKSS has been highlighting corruption at grassroot level and organising protest rally and public hearings at panchayat level. The district has 7 panchayat samitis (PSs) and 205 Gram Panchayats (GPs). The district is part of Mewar region of Rajasthan. This region has separate linguistic and cultural identity in Rajasthan. The three districts discussed above represent three distinct geographical region of the state. Each district is different in terms of its agricultural patterns, socio-economic development and the history of its women’s participation in politics. Thus these districts are representative sample of Rajasthan to understand the performance of elected women representatives in local bodies.

We selected 2 panchayat samitis and 4 gram panchayats from each district under study. All total we selected 72 elected women panchayat members under our programme. We recruited three district coordinators and 17 research investigators to assist the project coordinator in monitoring and evaluation work. Our project staff visited the GP, PS and ZP selected under study. They selected the basic information on these PRIs. We organised workshops at district headquarter and invited these elected panchayat members to attend these programmes. The women were enthusiastic about our programme. With their support and active participation we started our Ist phase of project work in 1996.

In the initial stage of the project our objective was monitoring the panchayat meetings. When our project staff visited panchayats meetings the panchayat officials were suspicious of our activities. Even the male members suspected our intention when we invited women PRI members to attend women’s Empowerment Day Celebrations at New Delhi from 24–26 April 1997. We realised that the women panchayat members are not informed about the date and venue of the panchayat meetings. Though the Rajasthan Panchayat Act says that a prior seven days notice to be given to all elected panchayat members. Even the women sarpanches complained the government officials from Engineering, Electricity, Irrigation department never consult them. Where as they consult secretary and male members. Their self esteem was very low. Even if the women attend panchayat meetings their participation was not satisfactory. They lacked about the procedures and proceeding of the meetings. Even they attend these meeting they leave in between or earlier than their male colleagues

ISS project staff in charge of Rajasthan decided to train these women members. In the mean time the male members demanded they should be included in all these activities otherwise they will not allow their women colleagues to attend these programmes. Youth Education Society’s (YES) Work in Rajsamand and Pali district was not satisfactory. The Research Investigators did not attend the panchayat meetings regularly. We decided to cancel our contract with YES. Also we decided to take Kota district instead of Rajsamand. The reason was NGOs like Seva Mandir, Astha and MKSS were very active on Rajsamand district. Kota district situated in South-Eastern part of Rajasthan is a separate linguistic and cultural zone. This district along with Bundi, Jhalawar and Baran is known as Hadoti region of Rajasthan. In this region NGO activities were negligible in comparison to other zones. Thus we decided to take Kota district. Also we decided to publish a directory of women PRI members selected under our study. School level slogan and painting competitions on women’s

empowerment were organised in these districts. Our field project staff had no idea on panchayat Acts powers and functions given to PRIs. Many panchayats had no Secretary and *gramsevak*. In Rajasthan one secretary is in charge of two to three panchayats. The workload for the secretary was too much. They could not give the time required for each panchayat. The women sarpanches who are illiterate and could just sign their names were in disadvantage to function in panchayats. Many of them even signed cheques and panchayat proceedings without knowing what is written on it. The secretaries took advantage of this situation. The first phase of training programme started in 1997. The training camps were organised at village panchayat level. We invited both women and men PRI members to these camps.

Our experience shows, the women never reach in time. We found that since they had no idea of these training programmes earlier they hesitate to attend women from agricultural labour households feel that they lose their daily wages if they attend such programmes. Women elected members from ZP did not attend this programme. They think they are higher in status to GP and PS members. They thought these training programme are for GP members. The PRIs women members are heterogeneous group on basis of their age, caste, education, and socio-economic background. Younger women in rural Rajasthan have to cook and take care of their children and family members. Even they have to take permission of their father-in-laws brother-in-laws and husbands to attend these programmes. Their elders thought it is meaningless to attend these training programmes. When the project coordinator met one woman sarpanch in Pali district and invited her to the training programme. She replied “If I make papad I will earn Rs.150 a day. Why should I waste my time in a training camp”. The project coordinator asked her, “why you wasted your money and energy in panchayat election. You could have invested in papad making. Also the project coordinator asked her to make arrangement for a training camp. We will show a video film on panchayat. She agreed to our proposal and motivated other women to attend it. In another training camp in Pali not a single women turn of for the programme. We found that women have to prepare their lunch and do many household works. We invited local BDO, retired bureaucrats, school teachers, NGOs as resource persons. The women members perceived ‘trainers’ as people who would solve their routine problems immediately. And when we specified our objectives they lose interest.

In the second phase of the training programme their attendance increased. They realized this project is for their benefit and they should attend it. By this time they had already attended our District/State/National Level conferences. We had established our rapport with these women. These women had already attended training programmes given by various departments of the state government. They could realised our training programmes were interactive and gender sensitive in comparison to state government sponsored training programmes which were mainly lectures by government officials. Since the majority of the women are illiterate it was a great challenge for us to train them. We simplified the PRI Act and gave them simple instruction. From our monitoring and evaluation study we had realized these women are signing cheques and official proceeding without asking the secretaries. We trained them to ask the Secretary before signing any paper. Also to sign in front of any educated and co-operating male colleague. After attending our training programme these women started asking the secretaries before signing any paper. The secretaries realised now these women will never allow them to work smoothly.

- (i) XI Schedule to the Constitution of India
- (ii) Total number of women PRI members selected for study.
- (iii) Financial statements indicating expenditure in the years 1997, 1998, 1999, upto March 2000.
- (iv) Itinerary of field visits of the Consultant.
- (v) List of ISS field staff working in the project areas
- (vi) Details of the persons interviewed during field visits to Rajasthan and Orissa
- (vii) Experience from the field – A report by Dr. Ramesh C. Nayak, Rajasthan Co-ordinator.
- (viii) Socio-economic profile of the districts under study.
- (ix) Specimen copies of field reports from investigator, Block co-ordinators, and State Co-ordinators.
- (x) Newspaper clippings and articles published related to the project.
- (xi) Pictorial description of the project activities.

Rajasthan at a Glance

1	Area	3,42,239 sq.kms.
2	Population	440.06 lakhs
3	Density of population	129
4	Sex Ratio (Females per 1000 males)	910
5	Literacy rate (Population aged 7 years and above)	38.55
6	Percentage of female literacy	20.44
7	Number of Villages	39810
8	Number of Zilla Parishad	32
9	Number of Panchayat Samitis	237
10	Number of Gram Panchayats	9185
11	Percentage of SCs	17.29
12	Percentage of STs	12.44
13	Average population in a Gram Panchayat	3750
14	Average villages in a Gram Panchayat	4.13
15	Total number of Lok Sabha seats	25
16	Total number of MLA seats	2000

Number of elected members in PRIs of Rajasthan 1994–2000

Sl.No.	Category	Zilla Parishad	Panchayat Samiti	Gram Panchayat
1	General	216	1145	57057
2	SCs	177	943	17904
3	STs	154	804	15616
4	OBCs	119	625	13137
5	Women	331	1740	33566
	Total	997	5257	137280

Chairpersons of the PRIs in Rajasthan 1994–2000

Sl.No.	Category	Zilla Parishad	Panchayat Samiti	Gram Panchayat
1	General	5	45	1941
2	SCs	6	41	1643
3	STs	5	36	1477
4	OBCs	5	35	1060
5	Women	10	80	3064
	Total	31	237	9185

List of Project staff working in Rajasthan

Dr. Ramesh C. Nayak Project Co-ordinator
Mr. S.P. Kaushik State Co-ordinator

Alwar

Ms. Renu Agarwal District Co-ordinator
Mr. Naveen K. Yadav Block Co-ordinator, Umren
Mr. Abhinandan Sharma Block Co-ordinator, Thanagaji
Mr. Binod Meena Field Investigator
Ms. Maitri Vashistha Field Investigator

Kota

Mr. Satyanarayan Suman District Co-ordinator
Mr. Brujbhusan Sharma Block Co-ordinator, Ladpura
Ms. Jaya Trivedi Block Co-ordinator, Sultanpur
Ms. Anita Field Investigator
Ms. Dimple Sharma Field Investigator

Pali

Ms. Kamala Jawahar Consultant
Dr. N.M. Purohit District Co-ordinator
Dr. M.S. Inda Block Co-ordinator, Bali
Ms. Hemalata Mehata Block Co-ordinator, Marwarh Junction
Ms. Vinita Vyas Field Investigator
Ms. Ranjana Field Investigator

List of Project Staff working in Orissa

Dr. Bidyut Mohanty	Project Co-ordinator
Mr. K.K. Patnaik	ISS Regional Co-ordinator, Eastern Region
Mr. Nirakar Beura	State Co-ordinator

Jagatsinghpur

Mr. Amarnath Parida	District Co-ordinator, Jagatsinghpur
Ms. Jolly Pattnaik	Block Co-ordinator, Kujanga, Jagatsinghpur

Ms. Banaprabha	Field Investigator
Ms. Meera Dash	
Ms. Anjali Pradhan	
Ms. Ratnamanjari Mohapatra	
Ms. Binita Rout	
Ms. Sukanti Behera	
Mr. Abhiram Samal	
Mr. Gyanranjan Mohanty	

Rayagada

Dr. Padma Ch. Mishra	District Co-ordinator, Rayagada
Mr. Sudarsan Rath	Block Co-ordinator, Bissam Cuttack, Rayagada

Mr. Santosh Kr. Naik	Field Investigator
Mr. Sankar Melaka	
Ms. Babita Gouda	
Ms. M. Rabanama	
Ms. K. Asha Kumari	
Ms. Pramita Satpathy	
Mr. Pramod Padhi	

Nuapara

Mr. Saroj Samal	District Co-ordinator, Nuapara
Ms. Sangita Pattnaik	Block Co-ordinator, Khariar, Nuapara

Ms. Neelima Nial	Field Investigator
Ms. Geetanjali Majhi	
Mr. Rabindra Kumar	
Mr. Ramchandra Sabar	
Ms. Basantamanjari Barik	
Ms. Bimanta Patel	
Ms. Sudhangini Panigrahi	
Ms. Kabyarani Sahoo	

Number of Women PRI members selected for study in Rajasthan

S.No.	Panchayat	Alwar	Kota	Pali	Total
1	Zilla Parishad	4	4	4	12
2	Panchayat Samiti	6	8	4	18
3	Gram Panchayat	40	45	35	120
	Total	50	57	43	150

Number of Women PRI members selected for study in Orissa

S.No.	Panchayat	Jagatsinghpur	Nuapara	Rayagada	Total
1	Zilla Parishad	9	5	8	22
2	Panchayat Samiti	17	14	12	43
3	Gram Panchayat	74	54	42	170
	Total	100	73	62	235

Details of the persons interviewed by D.K. Manavalan, Consultant during field visits to Rajasthan**Rajasthan**

Ms. Rekha Meena

Sarpanch, Bhogaru Gram Panchayat, Alwar

Ms. Mandodari Devi

Former Chairperson, Umren Panchayat Samiti, Alwar

Ms. Dakha Devi Banjara

Former Ward Panch, Bamambas Kankar Gram Panchayat, Alwar

Ms. Asha Devi

Former Sarpanch, Bhangdoli Gram Panchayat, Alwar

Ms. Shimburi Devi

Up-sarpanch, Bhangdoli Gram Panchayat, Alwar

Ms. Lila Devi

Former Up-sarpanch, Bhogaru Gram Panchayat, Alwar

Ms. Kisan Pyari

Former Ward Panch, Bhogaru Gram Panchayat, Alwar

Ms. Anandi Devi

Former Sarpanch, Kasaba Dehra Gram Panchayat, Alwar

Smt. Ladama Devi
Former Ward Panch, Kasaba Dehra Gram Panchayat, Alwar

Ms. Sushila Devi
Former Ward Panch, Kasaba Dehra Gram Panchayat, Alwar

Ms. Santosh Kumari
Member, Kota Zilla Parishad, Kota

Ms. Sugna Bai
Former Ward Panch, Naya Nohara Gram Panchayat, Kota

Ms. Nainiki Bai
Former Member, Sultanpur Panchayat Samiti, Kota

Ms. Ramanathi Bai
Former Sarpanch, Jalimpura Gram Panchayat, Kota

Ms. Ram Kanwar
Member, Ladpura Panchayat Samiti, Kota

Mr. Rajdheshyam Mimorta
Former Sarpanch, Sogaria Gram Panchayat, Kota

Ms. Lalita Bai
Former Sarpanch, Naya Nohara Gram Panchayat, Kota

Ms. Dwaraka Bai Bagadia
Former Sarpanch, Nimoda Gram Panchayat, Kota

Ms. Radha Rathod
Former Ward Member, Sogaria Gram Panchayat, Kota

Ms. Parbati Bai
Former Ward Member, Sorgaria Gram Panchayat, Kota

Block Development Officer
Sultanpur Panchayat Samiti, Kota

Mr. S.P. Kaushik
Youth Coordinator, Nehru Yuva Kendra, Alwar

Mr. Satyanarayan Suman
District Coordinator, Kota

Mr. B.B. Sharma
Block Coordinator, Ladpura Panchayat Samiti, Kota

Mrs. Jaya Trivedi
Block Coordinator, Sultanpura Panchayat Samiti, Kota

Mr. Abhinandan Sharma
Block Coordinator, Thanagji Panchayat Samiti Alwar

Mr. Naveen Kumar Yadav
Block Coordinator, Umren Panchayat Samiti, Alwar

Secretary, Sogaria Gram Panchayat, Kota

Orissa

Ms. Meena Rani Benera
Sarpanch, Gandikipur Gram Panchayat, Jagatsinghpur

Ms. Sandhya Rani Senapati
Sarpanch, Sabhamul Gram Panchayat, Jagatsinghpur

Ms. Jayanti Mishra
Sarpanch, Chatikona Gram Panchayat, Rayagada

Ms. Kamala Jakasia
Sarpanch, Jhigdi Gram Panchayat, Rayagada

Ms. Kulunji Ulka
Chairperson, Bissam Cuttack Panchayat Samiti, Rayagada

Ms. Nishika Sabitri
Sarpanch, Kotapeta Gram Panchayat, Rayagada

Ms. Surama Pradhan
Sarpanch, Pitamahar Gram Panchayat, Rayagada

Ms. Jakaka Pushpanjali
Member, Rayagada Panchayat Samiti, Rayagada

Ms. Chandrama Shabar
Ward Member, Duajhar Gram Panchayat, Nuapara

Ms. Mamita Pod
Ward Member, Duajhar Gram Panchayat, Nuapara

Ms. Sabita Jhankar
Ward Member, Nehna Gram Panchayat, Nuapara

Ms. Prabhati Panda
Naib-Sarpanch, Komna Gram Panchayat, Nuapara

Ms. Tulsi Pod
Ward Member, Komna Gram Panchayat, Nuapara

Ms. Sehati Nag
Naib-Sarpanch, Tikrapada Gram Panchayat, Nuapara

Ms. Taruni Raut		Ward Member, Tikrapada Panchayat, Nuapara
Ms. Radha Tandi		
Ms. Gomati Sunani		
Ms. Ahalya Dalpati		

Ms. Shasmita Jagat
Member, Nuapara Zilla Parishad, Nuapara

Block Development Officer, Komna
Panchayat Samiti, Nuapara

Secretary, Jigdi Gram Panchayat, Rayagada
Secretary, Chatikona Gram Panchayat, Rayagada

Dr. Dusmant Kumar Mohanty
Lecturer in Rayagada College

Dr. Henry and Mrs. Henry in Bissam Cuttack Christian Hospital Rayagada

Mr. Karunakar Patnaik
ISS Regional Co-ordinator, Eastern Region, Bhubaneswar

Mr. Nirakar Beura, State Coordinator

Mr. Amarnath Parida, District Co-ordinator, Jagatsinghpur

Ms. Jolly Patnaik, Block Co-ordinator, Jagatsinghpur

Dr. P.C. Mishra, District Co-ordinator, Rayagada

Dr. Sudarsan Rath, Block Co-ordinator, Rayagada

Mr. Ranjit Swain, District Co-ordinator, Nuapada

Ms. Sangita Patnaik, Block Co-ordinator, Nuapada

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