

# Strengthening of Panchayati Raj Institutions by Continuous Capacity Building and Training (CB&T)

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## ABSTRACT

To cherish and actualize the goal of 'Gram Swaraj', Panchayati Raj Institution (PRIs) have been established. These are a kind of rural local governments entrusted with the responsibilities to prepare plan and implement schemes for economic development and social justice in rural India. Since ancient times, the Panchayati Raj played a vital role in building the rural society. By providing justice and developing the rural areas, the Panchayati Raj has cultivated the rural democracy and continued to play a vital role in building the rural democracy. Grassroots democracy is a pivotal to the Nation Building. The people at grassroots should be empowered to develop themselves. For this gigantic efforts are needed. Although, the 73rd constitutional amendment is the milestone in strengthening of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI). The People at grass-roots should be empowered to develop themselves. For this gigantic efforts are needed. A number of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) assign important role to PRIs for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in rural India, PRIs will have to play a key role. However, Capacity Building & Training (CB&T) of PRIs remain a huge challenge with nearly three million elected representative (ERs) in the country. A scientific Training Need Analysis (TNA) is required to design specific training and capacity building programme for various tiers of ERs and Official of PRIs. It aims enabling Panchayat ERs to upgrade their knowledge and skill to better perform their responsibilities towards to Panchayats. It is also aims to equip the officials' better to function as technical advisors and trainers and to orient them to respective more respective and learns from the ground level experience of ERs. It aims at improving the vigor of practice of grass root level democracy through promoting the effective functioning of the Gram Sabhas.

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## 1. Introduction

India is a vast Country with many states that have a population of more than 125 Crores. Democratically, for governing such a country necessitates reversal tiers of Government. Introduction of a Panchayati Raj Institute (PRIs) is considered one of the most innovative and significant initiative for achieving the intended fruits of Rural Development Programmes through people's initiatives and Participation. These institutions are considered as training grounds for democracy and political education.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional Amendment mandates to Rural Government, to plan activities for economic development and social justice.<sup>1</sup> The constitution provides for the devolution of power and responsibility to panchayats including the 29 matters listed in the 11<sup>th</sup> schedule. In this respect, most of the states have enacted state Panchayati Raj Acts and Rules, in which they have indicated solicits with regards to which functions would be devolved to Panchayats<sup>2</sup>.

However, effective devolution has still to be accomplished, primarily thoroughly a process do activity mapping to ensues the concomitant and simultaneous devolution of functions, funds and functionaries to panchayats at all there level. The greatest challenge facing all stakeholders is to ensure the capability of panchayats to effectively perform the responsibilities entrusted to them. The absence of training continues to be used as an alibi for non-devolution of functions,

or for disempowering panchayat despite the well-grounded fact that the exercise of responsibilities is, in self, the optimal mode of capacity building & Training (CB&T)<sup>3</sup>. Effective impel mutation do the provisions of part-IX of the constitutional will require the capacity building of elected representatives (ERs) and officials of PRIs. This would encompass training provisions for functionaries, technical assistance end host of other supporting staff to panchayats.

Efforts for strengthening PRIs gained momentum with the creation of a separate Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) in 2004. In accordance with the decision of the conference of Chief Minister held on 29-30 June, 2004, MoPR organized seven round tables across the country (Kolkata, Mysore, Raipur, Chandigarh, Shri Nagar, Guwahati and Jaipur) which discussed almost all subjects pertinent to Panchayati Raj such as effective devolution of functions, functionaries and finances empowerment of Gram Sabha, reservation in Panchayati Raj, Panchayati Raj Jurisdiction, and Panchayati Raj, Panchayati Raj elections & qualities and it enabled e-governance for panchayats etc.<sup>4</sup>

The seventh round table conference held in Jaipur on 17-19 December, 2004. Mainly focused on capacity Building and Training (CB&T) required for the PRIs. The recommendations made at this conference led to development of National Capacity Building Framework (NCBF). However, CB&T of PRIs remain a huge challenge with three million.

## 2. Challenges of CB&T for ERs & Functionaries of PRIs

Elected representatives (ERs) in the country, most of the states did not possess the adequate physical & soft-infrastructure, technical expertise and management capabilities. To address the challenge of covering the huge volumes of ERs and officials of PRIs, to empower PRIs and enable them to function as local self-Government in the letter and spirit of article 243G, their capabilities have to be built through systematic training. For that, a scientific Training Need Analysis (TNA) is required to design specific training and capacity building programmes for various tiers of ERs and official of PRIs.

The NCBF aims at addressing the capacity building needs of four categories of stakeholders. It includes ERs comprising of presidents, vice-presidents and members of Districts Panchayats, Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen of intermediate Panchayats and Gram Panchayat officials working with panchayat such as Gram Sachiv, Junior-Engineer (JE), Anganwari Worker, Public Health Worker and Panchayat's own employees, pressure group within gram sabha such as Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Community Based Organization (CBOs); and ERs and official of high levels of Government<sup>6</sup>.

The NCBF has four basic objectives such as to enable panchayat ERs to upgrade their knowledge and skill to better perform their responsibilities towards the Panchayats. In particular, it aims to expose them to the modalities of caste and gender the training which enable the ERs to comprehend their own situation and find answers to their problems, it will also enable them to think constructively. It helps them in equipping them with the operational skill required for day to day performance while implementing various programmes of Government<sup>7</sup>.

The framework aims to equip the officials better to function as technical advisors, and training and to orient them to respect, be more responsive and learn from the ground level experience of ERs.

It aims at improving the vigor of grass root level democracy through promoting the effective functioning of the Gram Sabhas. It includes special efforts to sensitize the members, political parties, representatives in the legislatures, Civil Society Organization (CSOs) and citizens anticipating about Panchayati Raj as an effective level of local Government. The national experience with local Government across the country for more than two decades of PRIs functioning has definitely proved that it is one of the best available service delivery has certain positive feature viz social inclusion, participatory Governance, accountability and responsiveness due to its proximity to voters and functional transparency. Can these positive parameters be collectively channeled to enable the PRIs to overcome functional limitations and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals with an incremental leap?

Hence, there is a dire need to rework on the capacity development issues of both ERs and functionaries, which can address the core and chronic problems being experienced therein. Simultaneously, the capacity building of PRs functionaries in terms of enabling them to adopt technologies, number of initiatives are in the implementation. For enabling the functioning of panchayats by leveraging information and communication technology (ICT) over the year is also intended. National Information Center (NIC) has developed very

comprehensive and user friendly platform for enablement of most of the services and functions of the panchayats<sup>8</sup>.

However, due to innumerable reasons and constraints like inadequate training and capacity building, lack of continued hand holding, the panchayat functionaries are not efficient enough. IT applications are not put to full use by majority of the panchayats across the states. There is no adequate follow up to migrate them to the ICT platform. Some states have come up with their own IT applications and attempting to rollout or use them for improving the functioning of the panchayats. Therefore, there is a need for launching a campaign to finish the task and strengthen the hands of the panchayats<sup>9</sup>.

Several states used to organize capacity building programmes for ERs and functionaries with State Institutes of Rural Development (SIRDs) as the anchoring institutions, complimented by Extension Training Centers (ETCs), Regional Training Centers (RTCs) under overall of National Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (NIRD&PR) some of states, viz Karnataka had evolved training through Satellite Communication (SATCOM) which was able to reach to all 175 Talukas and their gram panchayats by organizing training sessions with least thematic transmission loss in terms of contents. Similarly, SIRD of Chhattisgarh also commenced the process but due to technical problems had to do away with the transmission. Few others SIRDs and ETCs opted to have video conferencing facilities viz, Rajasthan, which did not sustain. We need to evolve coverage, qualitative, and quantitative reach in terms of content delivery. The MoPR has been stressing on need for providing at least one round of training to all (100%) the ERs and support functionaries every year. The states require a comprehensive package of strategies, identified cadre of resource persons and sound micro planning to achieve the huge task of 100% coverage. However, some states are lagging behind because of various gaps. Some of the identified gaps are discussed below:-

- There is acute shortage of permanent faculty members in SIRDs and ETCs located in states for providing training to the ERs and officials of PRIs. New faculty members posted in SIRDs & ETCs do not have much exposure to the PRI, system. Some of them do not have specialization in any stream of expertise related to PRIs. Though, they may have training skills but lack of experience in PRIs related activities is a drawback. In order to develop their capacities, systematic training plan for each faculty member has not been developed or adhered to. Moreover, lack of adequate support staff for faculty members' effect their effective functioning. Besides these, faculty members are overloaded with many administrative activities. The need of almost all SIRDs & ETCs are either pure administrator (either IAS or from State Civil Service) or pure academician, there is dearth of mixture of above two<sup>10</sup>.
- Majority of the stakeholders consider panchayat training like a ritual and formality. It is normally a one-time affair and a common module is used for all. The same topic is repeated many times. Moreover, most of the training institutes lack effective regional, District and sub district level regional centers for training. The training modules developed by various institutions are generic and common. No district/region specific

issues are captured in the training modules. Moreover, training material is developed without paper consultation with end users. Besides these, handbooks prepared for training are rich in contents but not interactive enough and also not based on the principles of adult learning. There seems to be a huge technology gap in a capacity building process. The methods of training programme are mostly lecture based and done in a one way communication mode. There are problems with regards to computers and availability of electricity. The institutional strengthening of PRIs is not given importance, though operational plans are prepared for training a large number of PRI functionaries and ERs. The cascading strategy in many cases is not supplementary by other modes. The satellite communication (SATCOM) project, though appropriate for effective outreach and coverage, is not being properly utilized<sup>11</sup>.

- There is lack of sound institutional mechanism for promoting research activities. Moreover, there is dearth of specific staff for research activities. Research and evaluation studies are not undertaken on the priority basis. It is also pertinent to mention that there is no effective coordination between SIRD, ETCs, ATIS (Administrative Training Institutes) and departmental training Institutes. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).
- The expertise in training of PRIs are also not being worked in a systematic way by all the training institutes. However, PRIs specific activities of NGOs are shared with SIRDs in some cases. It is also observed that due lack of a desired level of resource sharing, training programmes are just one-time structured events, without proper follow up and support. Marginalized groups like women and SCs need more focused attention and differential treatment during training.
- Evaluation and impact assessment of training is still weak aspect in most of the States. Currently, the focus is on the achievement of output levels rather than the achievement of outcome levels. Therefore, the states tend to focus more on the quantitative achievement of training coverage. Besides this, most of states do not have a systematic monitoring system for training. However States have tried to incorporate monitoring in the CB&T efforts<sup>12</sup>.

### 3. Suggestions:-

From the above discussion, it may be suggested that there exists a big capacity development gap which has to be address through appropriate strategies and plans of action. PRIs have various capacity needs which no single Institution can support and satisfy by itself. It needs convergence on various issues. First, is to prepare a five year State Capacity Building Perspective Plan as part of NCBF. In order to implement this plan, a State Capacity Development Coordination Committee with members drawn from various training Institutes (Concerned with PRIs); line departments (developed to PRIs) and NGOs may be constituted.

It has been also observed that various Initiatives, approaches, strategies, activities are tried out by different states with varying degrees of success. However, since 2009, for the first time, the Regional Workshops for cussed on CB&T name provided a platform for sharing the same with other's experience. However, this needs to be further development through a variety of approaches. The ICT based mediums such as Youtube, Wikis, Networking Platforms Solution Exchange e-forms, and so on should be encouraged. Various departments like Education, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Fisheries, Industries and Revenue have developed training institution at the state, regional and district levels. These institutions have moderate levels of training infrastructure. These can be identified as districts level partner institute by the SIRDs can be availed for training of PRIs, Functionaries in general and for sector specific training in particular. SIRD can also consider outsource some of its training activities to sector specific training institutions or local NGOs who have adequate expertise and are known for their credibility and professionalism. In this model, module, hand books, training and presentation material should be centrally developed by SIRDs/ETCs while training management should be looked after by the district level partner should be looked after the district level partner. Each district should have an expert consultant/coordinator look after academic aspects and for maintaining quality choices.

There is also a need to establish a database of target groups training modules and material available in different training institutes to avoid duplication and to share resources.

Development of human resources is an important issue in the regard. A large number of training of trainers (TOT) is organized over the year to create a pool of master trainers. However, there is a huge gap in terms of quality, coverage and content delivery and lack of date regarding master trainers. There is a need to certify the already trained master trainers along with additional enrolment of Master Trainers with an attempt for beginning their competencies, knowledge and skills to a desired standard.

The intrinsic experiences of ERs, gained through year of sustained efforts in managing local governance, can be tapped and built upon further to contribute towards enhancing their own potentials for growth that benefit the system and structure of PRIs. Such experienced RPs/former ERs can become trainers/resource persons to motivate and inspire leadership development of other newly elected will be the best way forward and thus be a part of the capacity building and training framework. The overall capacity development strategy should focus on dissemination of information on government policies, procedures etc., which is referred to as "Orientation" and exposure to processes such as planning, teamwork, conflict resolution etc. which is referred to as skill training.

Though the training institutes, like SIRDs and ETCs have competent faculty and senior officials, a need for improving the teaching/training style of trainers was felt. Traditional classroom style training is the usual mechanism for training, which could be made more attractive and interactive through appropriate learning tools and modules. There is a need to guide the faculty and resource persons on the best options and flexible methodologies to deliver specific training modules.

NCBF is social inclusion framework highlights the need to bring SCs, STs and Women into the circuit of political decision

making structures. In this regards, it is suggested that SCs, STs and Women should be given special attention in training programme.

There is a need for enhancing the level of motivation for participating in the training programme. Motivational level of ERs needs to be enhanced by devising a system of providing for participation in training programme.

The training programme schedules need to take in to account local contextual factors like festivals, local events, agriculture peak session, access cut off periods during monsoon/snow fall, school vacations, wedding session etc.

Logistic arrangement are one of the most important part of training. A well-organized training should have an easily accessible venue, which is easy to locate with a vibrant learning environment, proper reading arrangement. Adequate lighting, fans and ventilation, appropriate arrangement for lunch and refreshment, drinking water, a first aid kit, a reach for taking care of children accompanying the elected women representatives, separate toilets for men and women etc. the above mentioned factors play a crucial role in making the training memorable experience.

The methods of delivery of lecture to a large extent influences the effectiveness of the training most of the training focuses largely on the contents and has a minimal focus on the mode of delivering. As generally observed, training delivering is mostly done through lectures or accompanied by Power Point (PPT) slides with lots of text. Such training may be the theoretically sound, but may not be absorbed well by an audience with no or minimal literacy, rural background and no track record of learning methods. It is suggested that a variety of delivering approaches like animation, graphics, storytelling and case studies may be adopted as per the requirement.

The helpline is another initiative aimed at supporting and handholding the ERs in implementing the learning their day to day work.

Exposure visits for the ERs to model panchayats or learning sites within the state or outside the state has been another effective capacity building initiative. Exposure visits provide an immense learning experience and have a much higher learning potential than any class room training. The MoPR has been actively promoting exposure visits as a learning strategy and many of the states have initiated the practice to vary extents.

Though many of the states have initiated the practice of exposure visits, the coverage currently is minimal and needs to be enhanced much more. There is also a need to identify and develop more learning and demonstration sites across the states. The MoPR initiated process of identifying PRIs, which can be developed as demonstration sites, during the regional workshops. During the workshops, the officers representing various states were asked to nominate some Gram Panchayat from their respective State where some good work has been reported, and which could be explained as destination for undertaking exposures.

There is also a need to carry out a Training Need Assessment (TNA). A periodic TNA is a primary requisite for training design. The MoPR should develop a uniform TNA model and module, which could then be followed by all the

states. A uniform methodology will ensure uniform implementation and will help bridge the gap in quality of such studies across states.

Experience sharing regional workshop can be of great help in learning new things and also in motivating states. Regular workshop is held every year with focus on different theme such as ICT usage in CB&T, training design and training aids and communication for clarity.

Detailed annual training calendar is prepared which details out month wise training schedule with detail about type of training programme, duration, venue, the clientele and name of course coordinator, participants are informed about the training well in advance, SIRDs & ETCs contacts the District Level Officers regarding the training programme, who in turn inform the participants to attend the programme. There after SIRDs & ETCs sends invitation letter by e-mail and contacts through telephonically etc. Trainers are informed well in advance and adequate numbers of trainers are provided at each training location. Appropriate training and reference materials are made available to participants the infrastructure provides vibrant learning environment with, proper seating and acoustic arrangement, adequate lighting, fans and ventilation, appropriate arrangement for lunch and refreshment, drinking water, a first aid kit, separate toilets for men and women etc.

However, networking with NGO partners at district and block level needs to be nurtured and strengthened in order to expand outreach.

#### 4. Conclusion

Institutional capacity building exposure visit and regular hand holding of ERs and functionaries of PRIs are as important as empowerment through devolution of Functions, funds and functionaries for them to emerge as really effective institutions of local self-governance in rural India. MoPR and State Governments have been making various efforts in this regards. However, field realities of CB&T of PRIs are not very encouraging. While impressive training infrastructure have emerged utilizing fund from schemes such as RGPSA and fund for capacity building after delinking of RGPSA there is much to be desired in terms of developments of qualified and experienced regular faculty and empanelled resource persons with these training institutions.

To overcome this challenge, collaboration with academic institutions and NGOs, utilizing services of peer trainers from good performing panchayats may be encouraged vigorously. Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have provided an opportunity where the Government of India (GoI) and State Government have once again starting giving attention to the Panchayats. It is high time that utility of Panchayat in transforming rural India is provide through enabling them to effectively deliver public goods and services by Panchayats and make policy makers to realize the importance of investing human and financial resources in capacity building of Panchayats.

The basic objectives of CB&T of ERs and functionaries of PRIs are enabling to upgrade their knowledge and hail to better perform their responsibilities.

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