

Committee, Village Education Committee, Social Justice Committee, Public Resources Committee, Infrastructure Committee, Social Security Committee and Agriculture Committee. The heads of the seven committees constitute the eighth committee called the Village Development Committee headed by elected Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat. The criteria of reservation has been

uniformly applied as per the conditions articulated in the 73rd Amendment. The quorum of Gram Sabha has been enhanced from 10 per cent to 20 per cent where 33 per cent participation of women is mandatory. The Maharashtra government has also set up a task force to move in this direction involving eminent scholars and practitioners working towards grassroot governance.

Operational Challenges in Strengthening PRIs

Enactment of provisions in the Constitution as well as creating amendments in the states legislative assemblies reflect a political will in favour of decentralisation. The format adopted by different states is demonstrated in Annexure XXXIII. This is a necessary condition rather than a sufficient one. The acid test of genuine political will in favour of decentralised democratic governance is reflected if the political leadership and bureaucratic machinery back them up with adequate funds functions and functionaries. It would be worthwhile to identify supportive and prohibitive intentions expressed by the legislative bodies, executives as well as the Judiciary for the promotion of decentralised governance. This part of the report will look into some of the examples across the states round certain areas.

Salient issues emerging for effecting grassroot governance

Establishment of institutional mechanisms for PRIs

The states demonstrated their supportive political will for strengthening decentralised governance by conducting panchayat elections. Madhya Pradesh was the first state to hold elections of Panchayati Raj Institutions in May 1994, demonstrating its commitment for decentralisation by announcing elections and conducting it in January 2000 soon after completion of the five-year term.

The states which took a reasonably long time for getting the elections done are Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand and Punjab. The status of elections of PRIs in different states is given in Annexure XXXIV.

The state of Punjab made certain provisions contrary to the Constitutional provisions, therefore, the Punjab and Haryana High Court repeated such provisions. Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat used the conditions of drought as reasons for postponement of elections. Elections in Bihar could be held after 23 years in April 2001. The Government of Gujarat during the panchayat elections announced to reward rupees one hundred thousand for the unanimous choice of representatives, however, people exercise their democratic rights and in about 90 per cent panchayats elections were fought.

One of the newly created states Chhattisgarh, has yet to establish the State Election Commission (SEC). Article 243K has vested the SECs with the superintendence, direction and control of the conduct of panchayat elections. In the absence of such a commission, by-elections to a large number of posts in panchayats of all the three tiers are lying vacant even after six months, again violating the Constitutional provisions (Panchayati Raj Update November 2002).

In the states where elections were done, show various examples which reflect that Panchayati Raj Institutions have not been empowered. It is imperative for the state governments to form District Planning Committees under Section 243(2-D). However, in states like Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Goa and Gujarat, these committees have yet not been formed. Establishing Zilla Sarkar in Madhya Pradesh and nominating a Minister as President of the district planning body takes away power and importance of representatives of the three tier PRI structure. Annexure XXXV provides details on the committees formed in different states.

Similarly, many of the governments have neither promoted or nor looked into the implications of creating parallel structures at the local, district and state levels. Under many development programmes, parallel committees have been formed, e.g., Janmabhoomi Programme in Andhra Pradesh, Village Development Committees in Haryana, Joint Forestry Management Committee in Gujarat, Watershed Committees in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and many other states, Water Users Committees in Uttar Pradesh etc. Such systematic efforts of promoting parallel programmes by passing the Constitutionally mandated and democratically elected bodies put question mark on the deep down commitments of the states in favour of decentralisation. The

resources transferred under such centrally sponsored or supported by bilateral and multilateral funds are many times more than received by panchayats from their regular centrally sponsored schemes and state funds.

Some of the provisions which have been contradicting the powers devolved to panchayats under rules, the PESA provisions which is a step ahead than the 73rd Amendment to recognise Gram Sabhas as the decision making and executive body. Some of the provisions of the Act and contradictions of the powers enjoyed by the government can be seen through the illustration of Madhya Pradesh. The situation is not different in other states where PESA has been enacted.

Impediments to the Implementation of PESA in Madhya Pradesh

| Subject | Explanation of the Provision |
|--|--|
| Section-4 (g) of PESA | Reservation of seats in Panchayat is in proportion to the population of resident communities. This offers a chance to coexisting powerful communities (other than tribes) to supersede tribal representatives of panchayats. Therefore, the dominance of caste communities may persist even in scheduled areas. |
| Section-4 (i) of PESA | State still has the power to plan and implement development projects (e.g., power stations, dams, industries, mines, canals, parles, etc.). Only 'consultation' with Gram Sabha or Panchayat is necessitated prior to the acquisition of land in scheduled areas. The word 'consultation'—has always been misinterpreted and misused by state authorities while acquiring lands under the Land Acquisition Act, 1999. Development projects are still a major threat to tribal populations. |
| Section-4(j) PESA, Section 129(c) Clause (3) & (4) and Section 129(d) Clause (3) of Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act 1993 | Management and control of 'small ponds' (<3 acre size) has been given to panchayats. The larger ponds and reservoirs are controlled by either Janpad Panchayat/Zila Panchayat or Irrigation/Fisheries Department. Moreover, no favourable Amendment has been carried over in Rule 8(1) & 9 of Madhya Pradesh Forest Rules, 1960, to give autonomy to the Gram Sabha if it uses the water bodies in reserved forests. |
| Section 4(k) & (l) of Extension Act, Rule-7 of Madhya Pradesh Minor Minerals Rules 1996 | For minor minerals in Schedule-I, the recommendations of Gram Sabha for Panchayats are made mandatory before the grant of prospecting or mining lease. There are fears that in practice the contractors usually misuse their money power to get the lease. There is no clear rule for contractors/officials who confer leases. Moreover, nothing is said about 'major minerals' although its extraction causes major havoc on tribal lands. |
| Section-4 (m) Clause (ii) of PESA | In Extension Act, Gram Sabha has been given ownership over minor forest produce. But, on the other hand, no amendment has yet been made in Madhya Pradesh Forest Rules, 1960, Article 32(d) & 76 of Indian Forest Act 1927, (applicable in Madhya Pradesh too) concerning minor forest produce, which are still controlled and owned by the Department of Forests. |
| Section-4 (m) Clause (v) of PESA | Despite the provision to exercise control over money lending to STs, the Gram Sabhas are not yet empowered to do so in the Money Lending Act, for it is not amended so far. |

Contd... Impediments to the Implementation of PESA in Madhya Pradesh

| Subject | Explanation of the Provision |
|---|---|
| Section-4 (m) Clause (vi) of PESA, Section 129(C) Clause-2, Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, '93 Section 4(m) Clause(i) of PESA, Section-61 (e) of Madhya Pradesh Excise Act 1995 | Gram Sabha can exercise control over voluntary organisations in respective village, but it can face difficulty as there is no such provision in the Madhya Pradesh Societies Registration Act, 1973. Revised in 1999. Gram Sabha is not empowered to control or close down those liquor manufacturing sources that were created before the enactment of Extension Act, i.e., 1996; whereas in reality most villages have such liquor sources established before 1996. |
| Directive Principles (Article 39-b), Section-129 (c), clause-3 the Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1993 | Gram Sabha is empowered to manage and control natural resources including 'forests.' It is obviously impossible to exercise such control until a favourable amendment in the Indian Forest Act, 1997. Provisions are there in JFM Resolution of Madhya Pradesh, 1996, to accommodate panchayats in VFC/FPC, but no adequate mechanism has been developed to give full control to Panchayat or Gram Sabha for managing or using the forests or forest products. |
| Section-31(a) of Madhya Pradesh Village Courts Act 1996 | Gram Sabha is given power to handle matters related to social justice, but it has very little power and scope. Moreover, sufficient favourable Amendments have not yet been made in the Indian Penal Code, 1860; Penal Process Code, Cattle Trespass Act, 1871; Indian Forest Act 1927; Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972; Police Act, and many others. |
| Section-4(m) (vii) of PESA | Gram Sabha has the power to control local plans and resources for development related activities. Plans such as watershed development, joint forest management, poverty alleviation and other externally sponsored/imposed plans do not usually take into consideration the major role of Gram Sabha. They are still being implemented in scheduled areas too as they used to be. |

Source: Status of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Madhya Pradesh (1995-2000), Samarthan, 2000

Even after the 10 years of existence of PRIs in different states with the first term or second term of election, actual efforts made by the government for the transfer of funds, functions and functionaries are varying in nature. By and large, lesser proportion of funds have been transferred to the PRIs.

The Annexure XXXVI reflects the status of such efforts across the states, clearly showing that a large number of departments are yet to be transferred by the state governments. The efforts of development administration are to retain power and resources in their hands rather than trusting local institutions and devolving such powers in real terms.

Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Sikkim, Karnataka and Kerala have devolved a large number of functions, but the control over the functionaries is yet to be devolved. The most crucial

aspect of the devolution depends on transferring the funds to the PRIs, which many of the progressive states have yet not done. Karnataka attains a position of devolving funds of all the departments whereas Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Tamil Nadu have yet not begun the process of transferring departments and functions. The controls exercised in different states using either bureaucracy or legislative bodies is given in Annexure XXXV.

Women, tribals and dalits as panchayat leaders

The Constitutional conditionality of reservation of women and other disadvantaged sections on the seats elected at all the three tiers of PRIs is a path-breaking positive discrimination. A large number of women, Dalit and tribals got elected for the first time as Gram Panchayat members, heads of

Panchayats, Block and District Presidents. Emergence of such a large number of leaders from these sections has challenged the existing power centres at the local level. Moreover, the stereotypes prevalent within the top political leadership and bureaucracy is yet to change to accept them respecting and making efforts to build their capacities rather than accusing them for weak capacities.

The other decision of the Government of Madhya Pradesh enacted after February 2000 elections that Panchayat representatives will have no more than two children has serious implications for women as leaders. Shashi Yadav, 40, OBC Sarpanch of Kanawati in Neemuch district became the first victim. She gave birth to the third child on 25 September 2001 and the district administration quickly processed and disqualified her from the post (Panchayati Raj update, January 2000) In May 2002, a petition was filed by Chander Singh, Sunar Janpad Panchayat President and his wife Rukmini Bai, Sarpanch of Aroliya village of Sajapur district on a show cause notice served by the district collector for having a third child. A divisional bench of Madhya Pradesh High court, on the 17 May, stayed this provision of the Panchayati Raj. In the state of Chhattisgarh which got separated from Madhya Pradesh in November 2000, there were 106 such cases/complaints when representatives having more than two children can be declared as illegible. In the state of Himachal Pradesh, for elected panchayat representative under Himachal Pradesh Panchayat Act 1994 section 131(1) for giving birth to the third child (Panchayat update September 2002)

Creation of such provisions clearly demonstrates in sensitivity towards women representatives, especially in the context that there is no such provision created for the Members of the Parliaments or MLAs. Women being Dalit or Tribal representatives who are elected first time as leaders have been harassed by the legal provisions, attitudes of the administrative machinery and made dominated societal structures. There are several incidences of harassment in all the states.

Lata Yadav, Sarpanch of Sawamkheda village of Hoshangabad district, Madhya Pradesh is forced to live in Bhopal as she does not find her village safe. The male deputy Sarpanch resents to work under her leadership. Similarly, case of Suman Mahajan

Karkale, the youngest woman Sarpanch of Maharashtra belonging to Pethvadez village in Nanded district reflects harassment of strong feudal male forces for not functioning as a puppet in their hands. Suman got elected after previous Sarpanch Sangita Gaikwad's death under mysterious circumstances. A graduate, Suman took full charge of her duties making the local feudal male leaders restless. The local leaders are so influential that even the administrative machinery is unable to take necessary action and she knows that initiating legal proceeding against the Sarpanch and others would mean more sufferings for herself. (Panchayat Update, August 2002)

There are numerous examples of stereotype male-dominated attitudes reflected at the community level or by the administrative machinery. A study conducted by National Commission for Women, on the Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions taking a sample of six states, clearly demonstrates that many of the officials have humiliated the women representatives, demotivated and labelling them as 'illiterate.' Officials asked to send their husbands and advised them to take care of household chores and children. It is clearly perceived by the women that officials find it easy to settle commission on development grants with men comfortably (page 39).

Nevertheless, the decision of Madhya Pradesh Government was lauded that in the village Patna-Tamoli of Panna district where Sati was committed on 6 August 2002 will not receive any financial grant for the next two years. The meeting chaired by the Chief Minister of the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs also requested the Central Government for not extending any financial assistance to that Panchayat for the next two years (Panchayat Update, August 2002).

The situation of Dalit representatives in PRIs at Gram Panchayat, Block and District level remains largely unacceptable by the upper caste and class forces with numerous examples of Dalit or tribal leaders facing insults in Gram Sabha or Block or district level meetings as well as while dealing with the government officials. The Madhya Pradesh Government demonstrated a strong political will by taking up Dalit Agenda and adopting the Bhopal Declaration in January 2002. Community land

available in Panchayats is being distributed among the landless Dalits. The conflicts and opposition becomes far more apparent and acrimonious in the areas and regions where feudal systems still exist or the proportion of Dalits is insignificant.

Devolution of financial resources to the PRIs

The test of decentralisation and strengthening decentralisation lies in the desire of the Government to transfer funds to the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The recommendation of the Eleventh Finance Commission (EC) for grant amounting to Rs 100 billion for the PRIs and Rs 80 billion for municipalities has been accepted by the Union Government for 2000-01 to 2004-05. The total expenditure of PRIs and ULBs as a percentage of GDP was 5.53 per cent in 1992-93, prior to 73rd and 74th Amendment. It jumped to 12.24 per cent in 1997-98 registering more than 117 per cent growth in five years (Oommen, Oct 2000: Page 2). Emergence of PRIs has significant implications for the allocation of development resources in centre-state relationship.

There are some of the conditions laid down by the EFC for transfer of funds with the transfer of powers and responsibilities under Act 243G and 243W of the Constitution. Some of them are the following:

- i. Local body grants shall be released to the states completing the election process of all the bodies at all the levels. In case of delay in holding local body election in time, funds will be deducted proportionately.

- ii. States are expected to devolve responsibilities, powers and resources upon the PRIs, ULBs are envisaged in schedule XI and XII respectively. This should be done by the 31 March 2002, otherwise 25 per cent of the grants meant for PRIs and ULBs will be withheld.
- iii. States should furnish a certificate stating that the grants have been released only to the selected local bodies and utilised for the determined purpose. The UBGs shall neither be diverted for any other purpose nor the grant should be withheld by the state government.
- iv. The local bodies shall raise matching resources not less than 25 per cent of the grants received from the union government in case of PRIs. In case any local bodies are unable to provide the matching contribution, the state government should provide the balance within three months to the concerned local body.
- v. These grants will be unconditional except that they should not be used for payments of salaries and wages.

Source: Panchayati Raj Update August 2001

The recommendations of the Eleventh Finance Commission are favourable to strengthening the positions of the local self governance bodies. Some of the conditionalities imposed through the financial allocations do pressurise the State Governments to take necessary actions to promote decentralisation.

The following tabulation reflects the status of revenue and expenditure of Gram Panchayats in different states. The table demonstrates the will and

Contribution of Own Revenue by the States for PRIs (1997-1998)

| Nil | Proportion of own revenue and total revenue | | | | |
|-------------------|---|-------------|-----------|----------------|---------------|
| | 0-5% | 5-10% | 10-20% | 20-40% | 40% and above |
| Arunachal Pradesh | Himachal Pradesh | Maharashtra | Assam | Andhra Pradesh | |
| Jammu & Kashmir | Madhya Pradesh | Tamil Nadu | Karnataka | Goa | Haryana |
| Bihar | Mizoram | West Bengal | Kerala | Gujarat | Punjab |
| Mizoram | Orissa | | Meghalaya | | |
| Nagaland | Rajasthan | | | | |
| | Tripura | | | | |
| | Uttar Pradesh | | | | |

ability of the states to mobilise their own resources and to provide financial support to the local bodies for their development efforts and administration.

The table clearly reflects that the proportion of contribution as own revenue is dependent on the economy of the state as most of the poorer states are unable to contribute more than 5 per cent of the total revenue provided to the panchayats. The variations within the category of 0-5 per cent contribution, however, reflect their commitment for PRIs. Uttar Pradesh in 1997-98 contributed 0.52 per cent whereas Madhya Pradesh contributed 3.98 per cent and Rajasthan 1.68 per cent. Maharashtra being a relatively better off state could contribute only 6.75 per cent of the own revenue in 1997-98.

There is a consistent decline in own revenue contribution in most of the states, However, the level of contribution has not significantly changed from the period 1991-92 to 1997-98, i.e., pre 73rd Amendment and Post Amendment. In some of the progressively known states for decentralisation, viz., Kerala, there is a significant drop, i.e., from 35.93 per cent in 1991-92 to 22.32 per cent in 1996-97 and to 13.31 per cent in 1997-98. There is a significant improvement in own revenue contribution in the state of Punjab where it has gone up from 21.26 per cent in 1991-92 to 38.81 per cent in 1996-97 and 45.57 per cent in 1997-98.

The pattern of expenditure of the total revenue on the core services, i.e., water supply, street lighting, sanitation and road has been assessed against the other expenses. The basic expectations of citizens expressed in many of the micro studies conducted are primarily related with the provision of the core/basic services. The following table presents

details of the states, which have invested in favour of the core services.

The table clearly reflects that limited states have focused on investing on the core services as only Tamil Nadu has made an investment beyond 40 per cent in 1997-98. Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, known for pro-decentralised governance, spend less than 20 per cent of the total resources on core services. This is also related with the fact that most of the department dealing with core services have yet not devolved their resources to the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Large variations in pro-decentralised policies and income and expenditure depend on the incentives and disincentives associated with centre-state transfer of funds. The principles of interstate distribution resources to local bodies among the states is based on the criteria of 40 per cent weightage on population and only 20 per cent weightage is given to the index of decentralisation. The decentralisation index followed by per capita income (distance from the highest) 20 per cent, revenue efforts 10 per cent and geographical area 10 per cent. There is heavy weightage given to the population, therefore, efforts of decentralisation become insignificant. Kerala finds only tenth place in the EFC's decentralisation index whereas Bihar which has not responded to the conditionalities of the 73rd Amendment remain on the sixth place in the decentralisation index relating to panchayats. Owing to high weightage given to population, Bihar attains second place in the composite index. (Oommen, ISS Discussion paper, series 6, October 2000 pp. 10-11).

The ground realities of devolution of funds at the grassroot level have been studied in Gujarat by

Expenditure of the Total Revenue of the PRIs on Core Services in 1997-1998

| Up to 20% | 20% - 40% | 40% and above |
|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Kerala | Assam | Tamil Nadu |
| Madhya Pradesh | Andhra Pradesh | |
| Maharashtra | Goa | |
| Meghalaya | Gujarat | |
| Mizoram | Karnataka | |
| Orissa | Punjab | |
| Uttar Pradesh | | |
| West Bengal | | |

Unnati in 1999 highlighting that only 12 per cent of the women and 40 per cent of the Sarpanch have good knowledge about Panchayat Finances. About 87 per cent male members do not have any understanding about Panchayat Finance.

The study of Gujarat and a similar study conducted in Madhya Pradesh in July 2000 by PRIA, Delhi based on peoples perspective recommends that:

- State and Central Government should provide untied grants to panchayats.
- Sarpanch and Panches of Gram Panchayats should be intimated separately about the amount and timing of the release of the fund.
- Complicated system of accounting of different programme should be simplified and a unified system be applied.
- The panchayat budgeting should be simplified for promotion of participation of the villages/ Gram Sabha members.
- All the social sector programmes should be implemented through panchayats. Agencies involved in social sector initiatives should work in co-ordination with the social sector committees of Gram Panchayats rather than creating parallel structures.

1. Establishment of strong leadership base and competitive politics: Strong leadership has emerged in the form of elected representatives in the three-tier structure. The reservation for the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes as well as for women has given them opportunities to acquire positions of decision making which otherwise must have been denied to them. Several examples of women taking control of Gram Panchayats management coming out of their traditional roles are becoming visible in numbers in different parts of the country.

The leadership at Zilla and Janpad level has gained strength to raise their issues and make the bureaucratic system more accountable. As the district level elections are held with clear identities of the political parties competitive politics has taken place. The leadership abilities of the representatives at all the level is assessed on the basis of capacity to mobilise government grants/subsidies in their constituency. The leadership of PRI representatives especially at the Zilla and Janpad level have started behaving like

their MLAs and MPs and viewing their careers as of MLAs or MPs.

The challenge continues to exist as to how to make elected representatives accountable to the people, where the representatives maintain constant relationship with the citizens to engage in planning and meeting their aspirations. The proximity of the local institutions with the people is the greatest strength. In order to exert pressure on the PRIs to move towards greater direct form of democracy, favourable mechanisms, citizens level become imperative.

2. Establishing grassroots governance with existing old decentralised forms of management: Over the last ten years, the government has accepted decentralisation process as enshrined in the 73rd Amendment. The states have implemented the format of devolution of powers to the local bodies in varying degrees. Some of the states appear to be quite progressive whereas others are less receptive. The overall analysis reflects that even those states where power has been devolved in letter need to translate it in true spirit. If the functions and functionaries of various departments are transferred, the funds have not been transferred. The office orders and departmental decision do not take into consideration the Constitutional provision under the Panchayati Raj Act or PESA, therefore, at times contradictory orders are the issues which disable local self governance institutions to get empowered.

There is a need to give a fresh look to build a vision of grassroots democracy and development and introduce more transformational systems adaptable to grassroots governance. Practice of local level planning, decision making, transparency and accountability has very limited meaning in the present day context, where a centralised rigid system and attitudes dominate at the local, district, state and national level. Moreover, the bureaucratic systems and procedures which provide direction to the PRIs do not demonstrate respect and recognise agrarian dominated lifestyle and management practices of the rural communities.

3. The existing agrarian economic relationship coupled with feudal social practices and attitudes are the greatest impediment for the citizen dreaming

good governance or participatory governance, especially in the underdeveloped states of the country. Those who have acquired positions as representatives in panchayats at all the three levels due to reservation have not been able to utilise their best capacities in the interest of their institutions. Creation of local self governance institutions has created necessary conditions through Constitutional provisions for people to descent and participate in collective decision making. Yet this is not sufficient. It demands enormous energy and resources parallelly deployed for strengthening citizens capacities through quality education, access to information in simplified forms, capacity building of emerging leaders in development management and States strong will to support positive initiatives of the grassroots governance. Till then, decentralised governance will be seen as a cheap substitute of relinquishing development responsibility by the state, off loading it to Panchayati Raj Institutions by devolving departments and functions. PRIs will not attain recognition as people's organisations. Participation needs to be seen beyond local contribution in cash or kind in development programmes. Promoting people plans and respect for their aspirations and building trust with them is pertinent so that they can make mistakes, learn from them and feel responsible for their own actions.

4. The civil society which includes the voluntary agencies whether involved in programme delivery mode or in support functions through capacity building and action research need to support the issues of grassroots governance. Those who are closer to the grassroots are most suited to provide support to the newly merged leaders as well as invisible citizens to define their dreams, build visions for their society and implement it. There is need for a larger fraternity of voluntary organisations to strengthen the voices of the citizen's leaders to deal with the powerful interest groups at the community level, legislative level, administrative level as well as in the Judiciary.

Media has not captured the positive side of the grassroots governance in a balanced manner rather

the cases of corruption, harassment have been the highlight more than the success stories. Public opinion is build by the media and concerns of the common citizen and their participation can be catalysed by the media more effectively. There is a need for large-scale sensitisation of the media on the matters of grassroots governance, especially of their field level staff. There is a dearth of positive examples in well documented form which the voluntary agencies and academic institutions may complement for publication and wider dissemination through mass media.

The academic institutions especially at the town and lower level, i.e., intermediate and degree colleges, have grown in a sizeable proportion in the country. These academic institutions do not pay attention to preparing concerned citizen and volunteers to support leaders of local self governance. There is a need to review the role of NSS and course curriculum of colleges and schools to include updated knowledge on grassroots democracy, provisions of 73rd Amendments and state Acts, participatory planning, social audit and principles of good governance. The trained human resources in the form of teachers and students need to focus on systematic studies on the issues of grassroots democracy as well as function as trainers/facilitators for the citizens and local leaders in conducting micro planning, providing models of conflict resolution and consensus building in Gram Sabhas.

Challenges for deepening grassroots governance are enormous as it is still in its infancy. There is a need for collectivising strength with everyone within the system and outside the system to transform it into empowerment mode building it block by block from the bottom. It is true that such a large-scale transformation and support to the institutions of local self-governance is not possible solely by the state machinery or various civil society organisations. A comprehensive effort of all the positive forces can address the concerns of grassroots governance and demonstrate that participatory or direct democracy is not a dream but a practiced reality.