

Constraints in Role Performance of Gram Panchayat in Agriculture

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Abstract

A study was conducted in Pusa block of Samastipur district in Bihar to find out and prioritize the constraints in role performance of Gram Panchayats in agriculture. The total number of respondents (Gram Panchayat members including Mukhiya) selected for the study was 75. An open ended schedule was devised to identify and Garrett ranking technique (1981) was used to prioritize the constraints. The results of the study show that lack of maintenance of resource inventory, provision of funds mostly at the end of the financial year, non availability of committed cash and kind in matching amount at the appropriate time, sub standard quality of production inputs, inadequate availability of technical and non technical manpower, inadequate and lack of timely availability of production inputs, lack of technical know-how, lack of viable and need oriented projects, insufficient computer facilities etc. were among the most important perceived constraints.

Introduction

Panchayati Raj Institutions are not only the foundations of democracy in the country, but also help decentralize governmental power. Panchayati Raj is mainly expected to promote economic, political and social development in rural India. In the three-tier system of Panchayati Raj, the non-officials are playing an important role of establishing linkage between the officials and rural people. Members elected to the various Panchayati Raj Institutions are therefore, very important not because they are politically influential, but because they are direct carriers of various developmental programmes. People are convinced to a great extent by them. Gram Panchayat is the third and important tier of Panchayati Raj System at village level. In all the Gram Panchayats, one-third seats are reserved for women. So, the role of women in village development is very crucial. Their participation in various activities of village development will certainly decide the speed and success of rural development programmes implemented by the State and Central government. Nayak (2004) reported that among the factors which hinder the performance of Gram Panchayat,

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lack of arrangement of proper training facilities for the panchayat representatives was significant. The present study aimed at identifying and prioritizing the constraints that the Gram Panchayat faced in carrying out their activities in the field of agriculture.

Methodology

This study was undertaken in purposively selected Samastipur district of Bihar state. Out of twenty blocks of Samastipur district, Pusa block was selected to represent the whole district. From Pusa block, eight Gram Panchayats were selected for this study, and forty villages in total were drawn randomly from the selected Gram Panchayats. Seventy-five Gram Panchayat members were randomly selected from Pusa block using multistage sampling procedure. An open-ended interview schedule was devised to list out the constraints faced by the Gram Panchayat members in performing their role. Twelve constraints with the highest frequency were screened out and the *Mukhiya* were asked to rank these twelve constraints according to the degree of importance as they perceived it. Since all the constraints were not ranked by all the Gram Panchayat Pradhans, the ranking technique of Garrett (1981) was used for final prioritization of the constraints.

Results and Discussion

Identification of Constraints - The following constraints were hindering the performance of the Gram Panchayat as perceived and identified by the Gram Panchayat members.

- i. Inadequate availability of technical and non-technical manpower in comparison to heavy workload.
- ii. Lack of motivation among beneficiaries for mobilization of resources.
- iii. Inadequate and lack of timely availability of production inputs.
- iv. Sub-Standard Quality of production inputs.
- v. Lack of technical know-how for scientific planning and implementation of programmes and projects.
- vi. Lack of maintenance of resource inventory of Gram Panchayat.
- vii. Inadequate coordination with financial institutions.
- viii. Non-availability of committed cash and kind in matching amount at the appointed time.
- ix. Lack of proper transport facilities.
- x. Lack of viable and need oriented projects, resulting in poor participation of the general masses in decision making.
- xi. Lack of Computer facilities.
- xii. Provision of funds to the Gram Panchayat mostly by the end of the financial year and demanding utilization certificate before completion of work.

Most of the Gram Panchayats in the study had limited records regarding physical as well as human resources in their offices. In the absence of complete records they found it difficult to prepare plans and programmes properly. Provision of funds mostly by the end of the financial year led to delay in getting funds and less time was available for the completion of the project. It was difficult to consult the local people and form appropriate committees. Asking for the utilization certificate within a stipulated date created a number of problems as in most cases the work was actually not completed.

Table 1. Final Ranking of the Constraints

Sl. No.	Constraint	Mean Score (Score*/Freq.)	Rank
1.	Lack of maintenance of resource inventory of Gram Panchayat	90.66	I
2.	Provision of funds to the Gram Panchayat mostly by the end of the financial year and demanding for utilization certificate before completion of work	82.66	II
3.	Non-availability of committed cash and kind in matching amount at the appointed time	77.33	III
4.	Sub-Standard Quality of production inputs	73.33	IV
5.	Inadequate availability of technical and non technical man power in comparison to heavy workload	72.00	V
6.	Lack of motivation among beneficiaries for mobilization of resources	68.00	VI
7.	Inadequate and lack of timely availability of production inputs	56.00	VII
8.	Lack of technical know-how for scientific planning and implementation of programmes and projects	49.33	VIII
9.	Lack of viable and need oriented projects, resulting in poor participation of the general masses in decision making	45.33	IX
10.	Inadequate coordination with financial institutions	41.33	X
11.	Lack of proper transport facilities	38.66	XI
12.	Lack of Computer facilities	33.33	XII

*sum of scores obtained in transmutation of order of merit

At the beginning of the financial year the Gram Panchayats were asked to prepare their annual plan and submit the same to the Panchayat Samiti. On the basis of the plan, commitment was made on the part of the government for a specific amount of fund both in cash and kind to be sanctioned for the financial year to each Gram Panchayat. However, during the financial year, Government could not provide the committed amount of fund to the Gram Panchayats, as a result of which they were unable to meet their commitments made to the beneficiaries, the final outcome being loss of mutual trust and confidence.

Sub-standard quality of the production inputs, supplied to the Gram Panchayats from the Government was also an important road block in carrying out the

development activities with respect to agriculture. The members were disappointed with the fact that the inputs, supplied to them were neither timely nor in sufficient quantity to satisfy the needs of the farmers. Many a time, the production inputs were supplied to them in the rainy season. As most of the gram panchayats did not have adequate storage facilities, the inputs got either damp or spoiled.

In comparison to the heavy workload, inadequate availability of technical and non-technical manpower and delay in filling up of the vacancies at the proper time further aggravated the problem. Due to lack of computer facilities the Gram Panchayats were not able to meet the heavy workload by compensating the inadequacy of manpower. The Gram Panchayat Pradhans reported that people had been reluctant in paying panchayat taxes on a timely basis and it was also difficult to convince them to pay taxes for development of their locality. Job assistants and field oriented staff with a little or no technical expertise were unable to prepare the development schemes for their effective implementation.

As most of the development programmes were neither need based nor demand driven, majority of the Gram Panchayats were faced with lack of peoples' participation in decision making, problem of coordination between the Gram Panchayats and banks resulting in delay in recovery of loans from the farmers. Due to poor transport facilities, it sometimes became very difficult for the members to maintain contact with the other development agencies and organizations.

Role Performance of Elected Women Panchayat members

There are 29 roles earmarked for Gram Panchayats. These cover almost all the areas of rural development including sanitation, health, transportation, economic and social activities and various aspects of agricultural improvement. In the list of roles, there were at least two areas which could be explicitly divided into two separate roles. Thus, with a purpose of convenience in securing response from the respondents against the independent items, the final list contained as many as 33 statements of areas of developments. The women members were requested to offer their opinion as to what extent they performed these roles individually with respect to the Gram Panchayats. The observations are recorded in Table 2.

It is revealed from table 2 that the jobs mentioned at Sl.No. 24 and 26 i.e. selection of candidates from amongst the eligible for Indira Awas Yojana and deciding strategy and allotment of resources under Sunishcit Rojgar Yojana were performed by more than 24 percent of respondents. As many as 58.66 percent members were found to attend to the job of selection of beneficiaries for Indira Awas Yojana. Their role performance was recorded to be of high intensity. However, only

4.0 percent respondents were found to perform this job with very high satisfaction. The rest 37.33 percent EWVPMs had medium to low levels of satisfaction in performance of even this role. Similarly, the same percentage of women members drew maximum satisfaction from their role performance with respect to the programme of Sunischit Rojgar Yojna. The majority however expressed medium to low satisfaction only with respect to performance of other 29 activities of gram Panchayats, Surprisingly, certain jobs did not involve the members at all and naturally, therefore, in those cases the members indicated least satisfaction from their role.

For example the works listed at serial no. 17 and 31 i.e. Conversion of Barren land into agriculture land and construction of Anganwadi center building were reported to be the roles of low satisfaction by all the respondents, Similarly more than 90 percent EWVPMs expressed low satisfaction in terms of performance of 6 roles of Gram Panchayats. These roles are listed at serial no. 15, 16, 18, 20, 21 and 30, Further 70% to 90% percent of the respondents expressed low satisfaction from their performance in respect of roles listed at Sl. No. 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 19, 22 and 23. It may be interesting to know that there were only six items i.e. 24, 27, 32, 3, 28 and 33 respectively, which registered minimum respondents (24.0%), (24.0%), (24.0%), (22.66%), (21.33%) and (20.00%), respectively expressing low satisfaction from their performance.

Thus, it is revealed that performance of roles by the members as expressed by the respondents did not have high satisfaction for them with respect to most of the activities. The low performance by the members indicated that works were still awaited to be taken up by Gram Panchayats, since only a few jobs were being handled at present by the Gram Panchayats. Chances of participation of the members in the activities of Gram Panchayat were quite limited. This lead to low satisfaction of the members from their performance as representatives to the Gram Panchayats. Kuraria *et.al.* (1997) also reported that majority of respondents had low performance.

Table 2. Degree of satisfaction of Elected Village Panchayat Members in performance of various roles in gram Panchayats
n₁=75

Sl. No.	Roles	Degree of satisfaction in role performance			
		Low <25 %	Medium 25-50 %	High 50-75 %	Very High >75 %
1.	Medical checkup and health related other works	63 (84.0)	6 (8.0)	2 (2.66)	4 (5.34)
2.	Cleanliness	65(86.66)	4 (5.34)	4 (5.34)	2 (2.66)
3.	Supervision /distribution of medicine through R.H.C. location	17(22.66)	48 (64.0)	10 (13.33)	0 (0.0)
4.	Water supply and conservation	64 (85.33)	11(14.66)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
5.	Accounting of data as per govt. requirement	20 (26.66)	49 (65.33)	4 (5.34)	2 (2.66)
6.	Removal of encroachments	53 (70.66)	16 (21.33)	6 (8.0)	0 (0.0)
7.	Growth in Agriculture Production	65 (86.66)	10 (10.33)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
8.	Handling Dacoity and Fire in the village	58 (77.33)	5 (6.66)	3 (4.0)	9 (12.0)
9.	Maintenance of building / property of Gram Panchayat	30(40.0)	18 (24.0)	25 (33.33)	2 (2.66)
10.	Settlement of Panchayat land	65(86.66)	8 (10.66)	2 (2.66)	0 (0.0)
11.	Planning for and supervision of veterinary hospital	66 (88.0)	5 (6.66)	4 (5.34)	0 (0.0)
12.	Planning for and supervision of cattle breeding	64 (85.33)	11(14.66)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
13.	Planning for and supervision of Cattle immunization	63(84.0)	10 (13.33)	2 (2.0)	0 (0.0)
14.	Maintenance of water supply and irrigation related works and preservation and development	51(68.0)	18(24.0)	6 (8.0)	0 (0.0)
15.	Preparation of need based budget for production and supply of water for village	68(90.66)	4(5.34)	3(4.0)	0(0.0)
16.	Determination of minimum limit of Agricultural production with an aim to increase production	72(96.0)	3 (4.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
17.	Conversion of Barren land into agriculture land	75(100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
18.	Selection of beneficiaries under Annapurna Yojana and Antyodaya Anna Yojana	72(96.0)	3 (4.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
19.	Organizing Voluntary labour for community work	63(84.0)	5 (6.66)	4 (5.34)	3 (4.0)
20.	Establishment and registration of small scale industries	73(97.33)	2 (2.66)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
21.	Co-ordination with Khadi Gramodyog	71(94.66)	4 (5.34)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)

Sl. No.	Roles	Degree of satisfaction in role performance			
		Low <25%	Medium 25-50%	High 50-75%	Very High >75%
22.	Implementation of J.R.Y. works/Planning	55 (73.33)	12(6.0)	4 (5.34)	4 (5.34)
23.	Implementation of Swarn Jayanti Self employment schemes	60(80.0)	10(13.33)	5 (6.66)	0 (0.0)
24.	Selection of candidates as beneficiaries of Indira Awas Yojana	18(24.0)	10 (13.33)	44(58.66)	3(4.0)
25.	Selection of beneficiaries under P.M. Gramodyog Yojana	48 (64.0)	10 (13.33)	7(9.33)	10(13.33)
26.	Strategy planning and allocation of means under Sunishchit Rojgar Yojna	28(37.33)	6 (8.0)	38 (50.66)	3 (4.0)
27.	Construction and Maintenance of roads	18 (24.0)	47(62.66)	10(13.33)	0 (0.0)
28.	Policy work related with primary education	16 (21.33)	47(62.66)	9 (12.0)	03(4.0)
29.	Supervision/ distribution of medicine through P.H.C. location.	26 (34.66)	34(45.33)	12(16.0)	3(4.0)
30.	Construction of ICDS office cum Godown	72(96.0)	3 (4.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
31.	Construction of Anganbari centre building	75(100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
32.	Distribution of food during medical checkup camps	18(24.0)	45 (60.0)	0 (0.0)	12(16.0)
33.	Selection of new beneficiaries under Annapurna Yojana and Antyodaya Anna Yojana	15(20.0)	55 (73.33)	0 (0.0)	5 (6.66)

Conclusion

As gram panchayats operate at the grass root level of the society to promote overall development of the rural masses, ensuring peoples participation should be the prime goal of this organization. Lack of resource inventory and lack of viable, need oriented projects were important contributors for under achievement of objectives. If these constraints are addressed, other factors such as participation of the masses and interest of financial agencies could be secured. Therefore, a judicious combination of efforts is needed by all the three tiers to overcome the perceived constraints and thereby make the Gram Panchayat a trust worthy organization for the rural people. The upper tier structures will remain like a weak tower until and unless they are built on a strong foundation of a smoothly working gram panchayat.

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