

## People Participation in Decentralised Planning at the Grassroots: Status Analysis from Selected States in India

Dr.R.Chinnadurai<sup>1</sup>, Dr.R.Aruna Jayamani<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad, Telangana.

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad, Telangana

### ABSTRACT

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are the responsible organ of local self-governance and agents of development at the grassroots. As per 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, PRIs are responsible for plan and implement the schemes for economic development and social justice in their respective constituency. Gram Panchayats need to develop a five-year "Shelf of Projects" which involves identification of problems, prioritisation of problems and preparation of projects for solve the problems and strive for overall development. With a view to enable Panchayats to discharge their mandates as enshrined in the state Panchayat Acts, the Central Government has already instructed the states to make efforts to devolve 29 subjects to the PRIs. Based on the Constitution mandates, the Ministry of Panchayat Raj, Govt. of India has created an enormous opportunities for responsive local governance through the XIVth Finance Commission for the Gram Panchayats. It earmarked Rs. 200,292.2crores to panchayats and encouraged the states to do needful for empowerment of gram panchayats to make them to deliver basic services responsibly and efficiently. The fifteen Finance Commission also earmarked huge funds from the current financial year onwards and with significant contribution of allocating funds to the block panchayat and district panchayat with the ratio of 15% and 10% respectively from the funds allocated to the Gram Panchayats. This study made an attempt to understand the real picture on process of preparation Gram Panchayat Development Plan, status of people participation in the planning process and quality of plan. The study was conducted in five states namely Kerala, Maharashtra, Bihar, Sikkim and Punjab. The data based inferences are presented in this paper for wider understanding and better strengthening of the planning at the grassroot.

### INTRODUCTION:

In India 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, in the year 1992 on Panchayat Raj was an historic event in the evolution of Indian democracy. It provides necessary powers to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to function as institutions of local self-governance. As per the Act, PRIs are responsible for plan and implement the schemes for economic development and social justice in their respective constituency. Gram Panchayats need to develop a five-year "Shelf of Projects" which involves identification of problems, prioritisation of problems and preparation of projects for solve the problems and strive for overall development. In order to identify projects for improving rural accessibility, the Gram Panchayat need to have an adequate overview of resources and infrastructure constraints hampering social and economic development in their region. With a view to enable Panchayats to discharge their mandates as enshrined in the state Panchayat Acts, the Central Government has already instructed the states to make efforts to devolve 29 subjects to the PRIs. Further, to enable to plan for sector specific development by preparing strategies and formulate projects to be included in the Gram panchayat (GP) plan, each GP has to setup 5-7 working groups depending on the requirements. The working groups should however cover all the issues that the GP wants to address. The strategy of participatory planning should be demand driven, need based and diagnostic. It should also be

perspective in nature and would entail preparation of five year perspective plan. For the purpose, the GPs to be equipped with required capacity for plan through facilitating group discussion, seeking stakeholder views, receiving experts inputs, subject specific group works and organise ward sabha and gram sabha meetings ultimately consolidation of Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP).

The process of planning requires activities namely, understanding existing situation of development through Data collection, mapping of resources, identification of problems and causes, preparation of projects and linking with fund envelops and making convergence plan.

Based on the Constitution mandates, the Ministry of Panchayat Raj, Govt. of India has created an enormous opportunities for responsive local governance through the XIVth Finance Commission for the Gram Panchayats. It earmarked Rs. 200,292.2crores to panchayats and encouraged the states to do needful for empowerment of gram panchayats to make them to deliver basic services responsibly and efficiently. In addition, the MGNREGS which is the most important flagship programme of the ministry of Rural Development allocates around 50,000 Crores every year to the panchayats. Further, the panchayats also receives funds from state government schemes, the State Finance Commission (SFC) grants, generates Own Source Revenue and funds from other agencies. The fifteen Finance Commission also earmarked huge funds from the current financial year

onwards and with significant contribution of allocating funds to the block panchayat and district panchayat with the ratio of 15% and 10% respectively from the funds allocated to the Gram Panchayats.

With this background, the present study made an attempt to understand the status of the plan preparation (GPDP) by GPs and the level of people participation in gram sabha. The study was conducted in five states with objective understanding the process of GP level planning, People Participation with a focus on the role of disadvantaged sections, and their issues in the GPDP. Sikkim, Punjab, Kerala, Maharashtra and Bihar were selected for the study based on the higher and lower devolution index states. The respondents were members of committees of GP and people residing in the selected gram panchayats.

## 2. Field Data Presentation on the views of Respondents

### 2.1 Participation in Gram Sabha

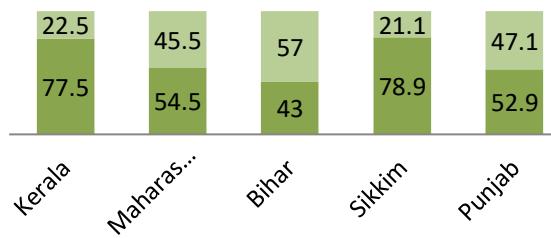
In the democratic decentralization process, Gram Sabha occupies pivotal role being it is a constitutional body representing all the eligible voters of the gram panchayat. It facilitates people to meet and discuss various issues pertaining to them and their region. It has responsibility of protecting its people and has to strive for the better livelihoods of people. Basically, the Gram Sabha has to meet atleast four times in a year with a quorum attendance of 10% or minimum 100 voters. Gram Sabha is having lot of powers in decision making on development works to be planned and implemented in the gram panchayat. Therefore, it plays key role in preparation and implementation of GPDP.

Gram Sabha is a forum to meet, discuss, debate and analyze on the development and related administrative actions and thereby, ensure transparency and accountability in functioning of the Panchayat. It supposes to act as watchdog in the interest of village communities by monitoring the functioning of the Gram Panchayat. However, in reality as the findings of the various studies, the Gram Sabhas have not reached up to the expectations of the 73rd constitutional amendment of the Indian Constitution. Socio-cultural misconceptions, prevailing social hierarchy and economic status created complexity of problems hindering the process of democracy at the bottom.

The patriarchy society and norms underestimating rural poor women and prevent the public participation. Data from the study, only 59.6% respondents participated in the gram Sabha meetings with high percentage in Kerala, Sikkim, only 50% in the states of Punjab and Haryana. Only 43% participated in the GSs in Bihar.

Figure -1. Do you participate in Gram Sabha Meeting GPDP

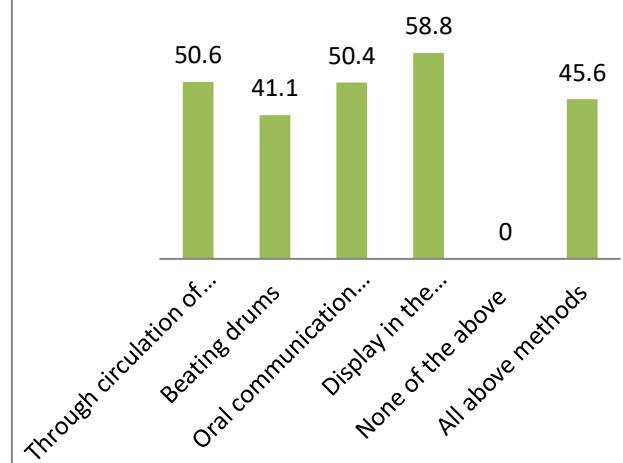
■ Yes ■ No



### 2.2 Methods of Social Mobilisation for Gram Sabha and other Meetings

Social mobilization is the cornerstone for successful conduct of Gram Sabha. It is also important for participatory planning and implementation of rural development projects in the field of infrastructure development and poverty alleviation. It will help to gain more wisdom in action for maintaining transparency and accountability. Further, it strengthens local institutional democracy with adequate human resources. Social mobilisation depends on the capacity of the leadership who intend to organise. The panchayats are making efforts to mobilise people through various methods and strategies to reach maximum mass of citizens for Gram Sabha. Some better performing panchayats having enthusiastic leaders use number of effective methods and strategies like Orientation Programs, Wall writing, Kalajathras, circulation of Posters and Pamphlets, Yatra, Meetings, Audio/visual, communicating through Panchayat Mitras, etc.

Figure .2 Methods of Social Mobilisation

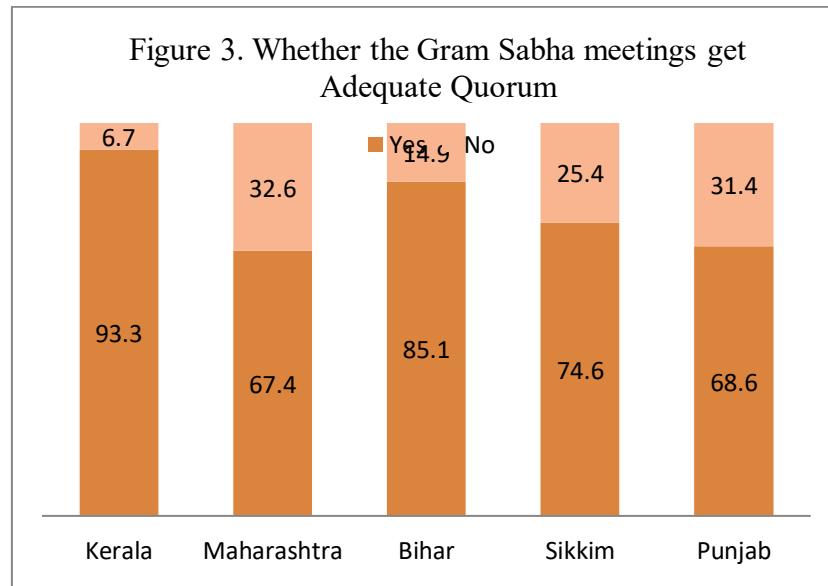


### 2.3 Status of Quorum for Gram Sabha meetings

According to the provisions of constitution, the quorum for Gramsabha should not less than 1/10 of the membership or 100 members whichever is less. There should be a minimum of 10 members from each ward of the Panchayat area and among them 30% must be women. The number of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe

members must be in proportion to their population. In study area, majority people agreed on mobilisation of adequate quorum to the gram Sabha meetings. Further, responded it is highly impossible to mobilise 1/10 of the

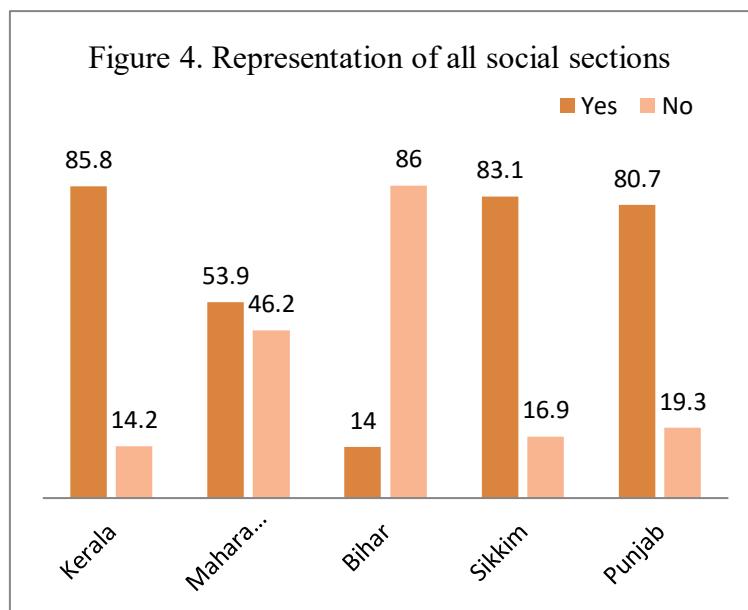
membership of the electorate of the panchayat but able to bring around 100 people giving mandate responsibility to the Ward Members to bring atleast 10 – 15 people from their wards.



#### 2.4 Representation from all Social Sections in Gram Sabha

The factor determining rural people's participation is the level of awareness on different programs and their perceived benefits in their lives, which in turn is determined by the level of education especially functional education of the people. It is clear from data and analysis more than 62 percent households all together reported, gramsabha meetings were conducted with representation from all sections. The panchayats made efforts to

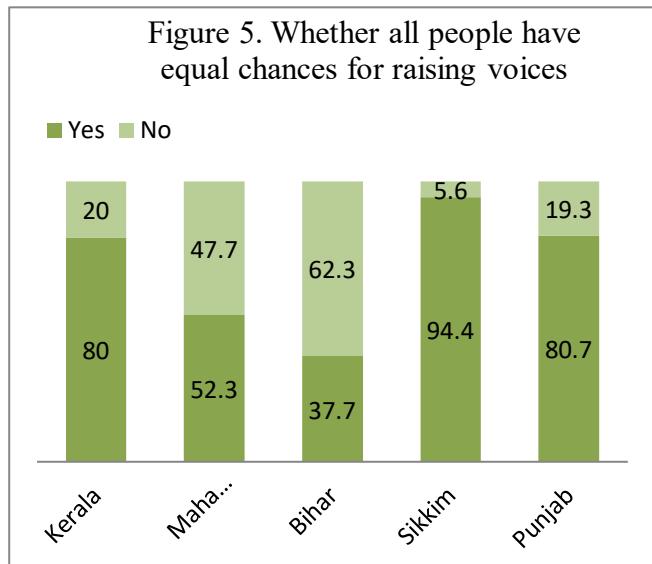
mobilise one third representation of women. Not only women, social sections and low economic groups, minorities, physically challenged also encouraged to participate in Gram Sabha meetings. But in the case of Bihar, it was not happened, only the elected representatives sit and make decisions regarding selection of works and beneficiaries. Even in Maharashtra also less efforts or less interest was shown by the elected representatives to mobilise people from all sections of the society.



**2.5 Status of chances for raising voices** It was observed in most cases, the Mukhia (Village President) or members of dominant caste decides who will get what within the panchayat. Even in mono-caste villages, the rich and muscle power use to dominate the others and influence local decisions. It is quiet common in all over the country

and very open in the north Indian states. The dominant class and caste in rural society controls poor and deprived sections. Though the constitution attempted to change the situation, and minimize the political and social divide in the villages, reality reveals, there is no much change in the mindset of dominant classes and castes in the rural

society. It is noticed from the responses of the study respondents, in the state of Bihar and Maharashtra chances for raising voices on public issues is very less for socially and economically weaker sections. In other states like Kerala, Sikkim and Punjab the scenario is far better. It was due to caste less religious system and high literacy in those states.



## 2.6 Participation of Respondents in GP Development Activities

Many literatures of similar studies report positively, people participation not only in the meetings but also involve in implementation of development activities within the panchayat. Especially successful and beacon leadership panchayats get very good support from people both in the form of physical and also intellectual participation from all sections of the society. In the study region, it was enquired on the people's participation in development activities, it was noticed, except the state of Bihar, significant percentage of people agreed on participation in development activities. It was found high percentage of people participation (78.9 percent) in Sikkim and (77.5 percent) in Kerala. Overall data reflects around 60 percent were interested to participate or participated in developmental activities of the panchayats. The remaining people in respective states especially from Bihar, Punjab and Maharashtra reported for non-participation due to lack of personal interest as well as negligence by the GPs. Few respondents also opined lack of opportunities to participate in panchayat activities due to ineffective performance of the panchayats and lack of planning or implementation as per the provisions and guidelines of the government. In general, it is noticed, people do not have motivation, vice-versa panchayats also do not have transparency in taking public into the development process due to the fear of disclosing the

corruptive practices of the elected and official mechanism.

## 2.7 Type of participation in the Panchayat activities

Based on the responses of the sample respondents regarding type of participation in gram sabha meetings, around 62% participate with full involvement by discussing in detail about the various activities of GP, especially implementation of State and Central Government welfare and development schemes. They contribute in terms of ideas and developing of strategies for the benefit of local community in improving the life style of the people. Out of total respondents who agreed for participation, around 26%, (state percentage Kerala (31.2%), Maharashtra (16.7%), Bihar (22.4%), Sikkim (17.9%) and Punjab (36.5%)) reported, they partially participate in the GP meetings due to their low awareness and low capacity to understand the issues. Furthermore, 12.2% from all the study states especially in Bihar and Sikkim reported silent participation.

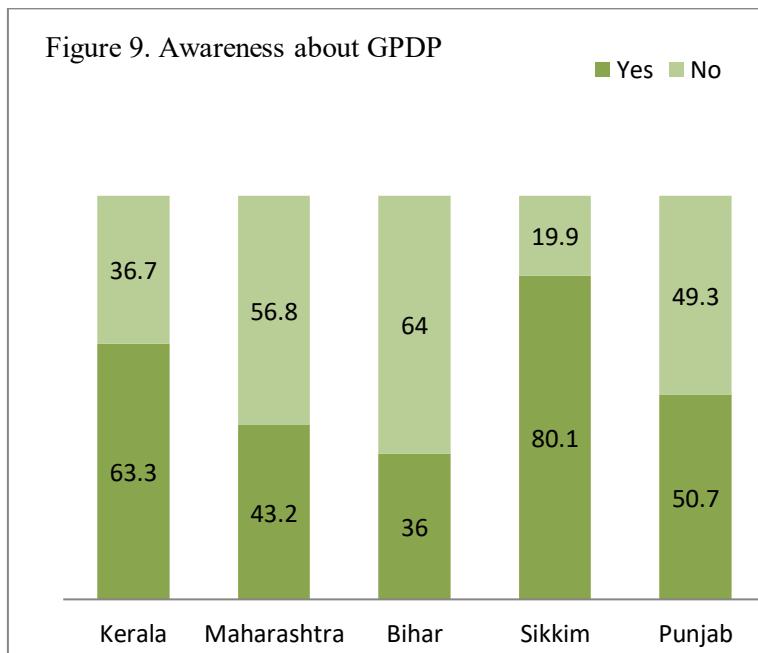
## 3. 1 Discussion Related to GPDP

The major objective of the present study is to verify whether the selected GPs adhere to the principles and guidelines of GPDP in preparation of village development plans. For the purpose of preparation of GPDP, the Ministry of Panchayat Raj, Government of India issued broad guidelines to the state governments to follow or develop state specific guidelines focusing on the strengthening of existing infrastructures and creating new infrastructures to fulfil the basic services for the people within the panchayat.

### 3.1 Awareness about GPDP

The level of awareness and understanding about the principles and guidelines among the people including elected representatives are crucial for preparation of development plans for the villages. It requires enormous efforts and action oriented initiatives by the panchayats to create awareness among the citizens. It is also essential to make people to understand their own problems and possible solutions, which are pre-requisite before going for planning. It is understood from the study, around 52 percent know about the GPDP but almost equal percentages of people do not know about the GPDP. Among the states, higher level of awareness reported in Sikkim and Kerala, also around 50 percent in Punjab. In the states like Bihar and Maharashtra, majority people did not know about the GPDP. Even people who said having awareness about GPDP expressed their understanding on listing of activities of people's needs as 'plan of the panchayat'. Every state has their own name for GPDP in local language but the real spirit of preparation of GPDP is missing even so called advanced state in the field of Panchayat Development namely Kerala.

Figure 9. Awareness about GPDP

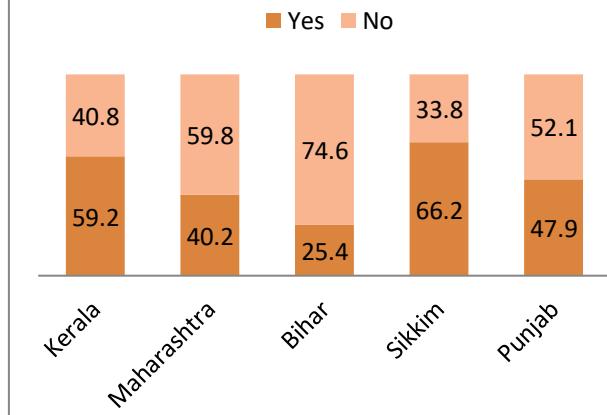


### 3.2 Dissemination of information on preparation of GPDP

It is the role of respective state government to instruct and guide the Gram Panchayats by providing adequate capacity and to create appropriate mechanism or institutional arrangements for preparation of GPDP in each Gram Panchayat. As for as issuing of notifications and guidelines, all the states have done mandatorily. But implementation of the guidelines and extending real support for preparation of plans by the panchayats are lacking in majority states. Monitoring the planning process and scrutinizing the quality of the plans are not taking place in any of the states except Kerala. Therefore, the states instructed the GPs and in turn gram panchayats also conducted gram sabha meetings for preparation and finalization of GPDPs as mandatory function. The study reflects majority people were not informed about the preparation of GPDP. The people were called to attend Gram Sabha meeting like any other panchayat meeting and resolutions were passed and approved in a ceremonial way.

Invariably, all the sample GPs including advanced states like Kerala and Sikkim prepared list of activities and budget estimation on repairing or construction of infrastructures related to drinking water, road, street light, drainage, sanitation and office buildings.

Figure 10. Dissemination of information on preparation of GPDP

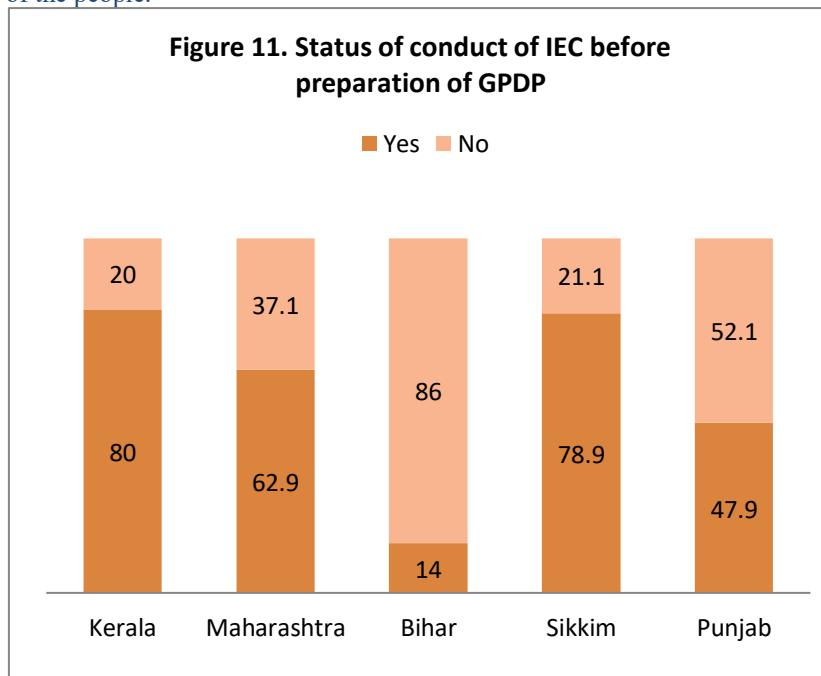


### 3.3 Status of conduct of IEC Before Preparation of GPDP

It is also important to conduct a number of IEC activities before preparation of GPDP, disseminating information on the need and importance of plan preparation. The panchayats have to be equipped with adequate knowledge on how to conduct planning process.

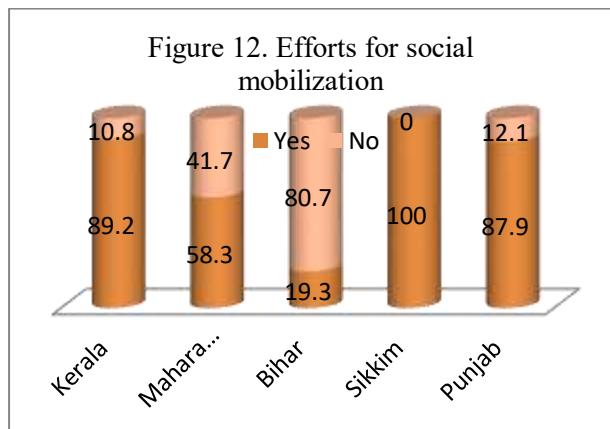
People mobilization and participation in the process is vital to prepare participatory plan at the grassroots. But, due to lack of knowledge and motivation even among the elected representatives hamper the development planning process. The GP committees are responsible for planning and implementation of the development works and they also not oriented properly on the importance of planning. The status of IEC activities about GPDP in the study states reflects less efforts on carrying information dissemination which resulted in around 45 percent people did not know the IEC activities conducted by the GPs. Further interactions with the respondents and elected representatives revealed, the panchayats prepare some posters and less effective methods of communication as mandatory requirement which resulted in lack of

awareness on majority of the people.



#### 4.1 Efforts for Social Mobilization

The decentralization process mainly relies on participatory planning and action. It requires more and more people participation in the activities of panchayat. Due to better awareness through various medium and increased level of education envisaged people to participate in panchayat development activities at certain extent at the grass root level. Real democratic decentralization expects all sections people participation, including marginalized and weaker sections. Due to lack of self interest and motivation, less percentage of people only come forward voluntarily and involve with the panchayats. But, to ensure real participation, the panchayat has to make adequate efforts to educate, motivate and mobilise people for development decision making and planning. This scenario was enquired with the respondents which reported around 70 percent have agreed on panchayat efforts on social mobilization. Further discussion revealed on the percentage of people participate in gram sabha meeting would be less than 10 percent of the total voters population of the panchayat.



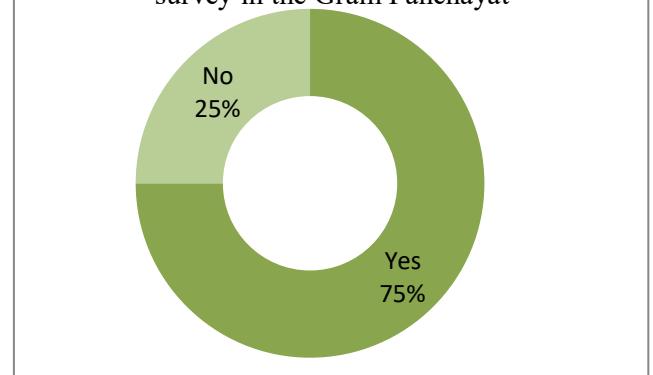
#### 5. Process of GPDP

#### 5.1 Status of Conduct of Household Survey in the Gram Panchayat

It is very important to have updated data about all the households and their socio-economic particulars of the residents. For this purpose, the panchayats have to conduct household survey to collect required information especially related to population, their problems and needs. But in reality, the panchayats are handicapped with data, majority are relying on census data which is published once in ten years and required dimensions may not be available. Lack of data would hamper the development focus and to understand real issues and problems. The study shows positive responses on conduct of household survey by the panchayats except in the state of Bihar. Except in Kerala, other states gram panchayats maintain poor documentation and face difficulties in data display.

Majority of the panchayats from the study region are not having basic particulars related to resources, capacity, perennial problems, production and productivity of the various sectors, etc. They have only particulars related to population, households, literacy and other very few parameters. Therefore, data required for development and welfare of the people are missing and which are essential for preparation of village development plans.

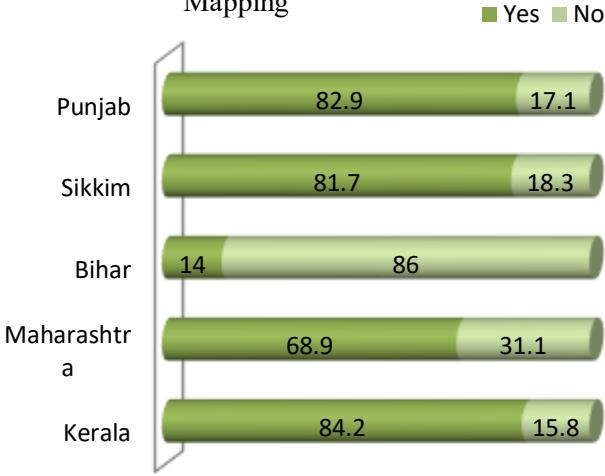
**Figure 13. Status of conduct of household survey in the Gram Panchayat**



## 5.2 Status of PRA Conducted – Mapping

In the GPDG guideline, conduct of PRA is one of the important activities for ensuring the people involvement in the planning process. Further, it will help to understand people problems and build better relationship which will lead to transparent administration and decentralised decision making. It is interesting to note, majority respondents (66.2%) from the study region reported for conduct of PRA exercises like transact walk, social mapping and resource mapping to identify problems and potentials of the gram panchayat. But detailed interaction revealed PRA were not conducted in full spirit for identification of problems and needs, they conducted for documentation purpose. The exercises were failure due to lack of expertise on using the techniques for collection of data. But somehow problems were noted especially related to infrastructure availability and gap identification.

Figure 14. Whether PRA conducted – Mapping



## 5.3 Status of conduct of Stocktaking, Situation Analysis and Prioritisation of Needs

In the series of activities to be conducted in the process of planning, identifying problems, needs and potentials on the region, stock taking focuses to identify the infrastructures available and gap. Situation analysis will obtain particulars related to present status of gram panchayat development. Infrastructures are basis for any region development which has to be planned appropriately to implement over a period of time. The situation analysis will help us to analyse the problems and their causes to find out appropriate solutions. It is found from the study regions, 53.4 percent respondents agreed on panchayats conducting of stock taking, similarly 61.5 percent reported conduct of situation analysis. Further to mention, around 38 percent reported for non-conduct of situation analysis but majority accepted conduct of stock taking. Being GPDG focused only on infrastructure development in the study panchayats, they discuss and find only infrastructure gap and need. In the case of prioritisation of problems and needs, around 40 percent accepted and remaining 60 percent were reported negatively. The reasons quoted by the respondents were majority of the works undertaken by the panchayats are scheme bound, in which guidelines were issued by the government on items and areas of expenditure, therefore choice of projects based prioritisation would be difficult.

Figure 16. Prioritisation of problems and needs

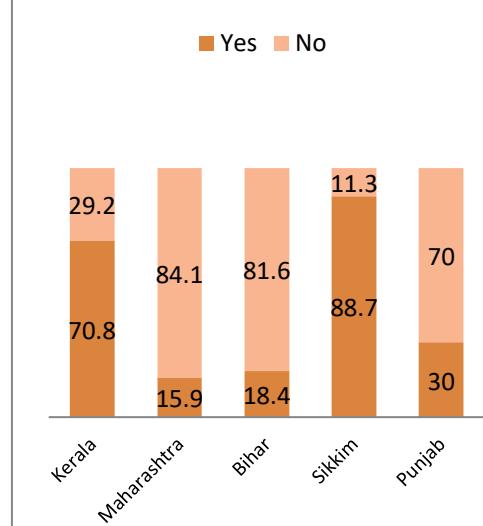
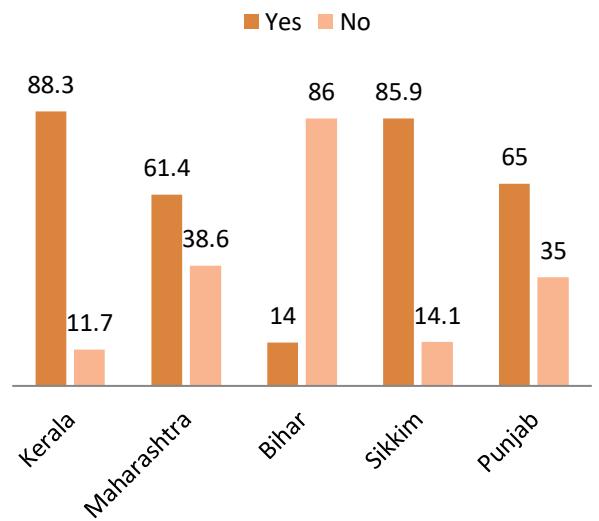


Figure 17. Status of Situation Analysis



## 5.4 Have your Panchayat done 'Panchayat Visioning'

Developing 'VISION' for the gram panchayat means – it is a kind of visualisation of level of development expected to be achieved after long period of 15-20 years. Further to

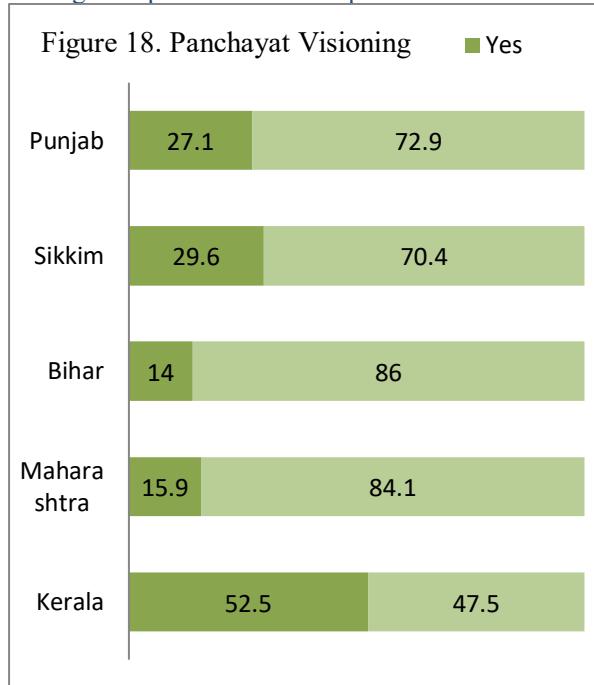
say, it is dreaming on creating a model village which will create a poverty free egalitarian society through developing all dimensions of the village life. The panchayat development is mainly based on long term

vision based on the resources available in the panchayats. The GPDP guidelines also give much weightage to prepare holistic development plan considering the performance of the various sectors like agriculture-allied sectors, rural industries and natural resources of the region.

Visioning for the GP is completely absent in all the panchayat of the study states. Either elected representatives, officials or people of any category do not aware about 'Visioning'. Long term development thinking is missing in any of the GPDP in the study regions. Intellectual capacity and subject expertise are necessary for the visioning.

Due to lack of adequate expertise and technical knowhow the panchayats acting like an agency of implementing state and central government schemes and projects. Visioning and resource inventory requires technical experts to take the panchayats at certain scale of development in the long run. Respondents from study area reported except from Kerala, other states majority were reported for non-compliance of the guideline of GPDP. Further discussion with the elected representatives as well as people along with standing committee members revealed on lack of capacity to plan, make vision and lack of adequate personnel hamper the process of preparation of long term plan for the development.

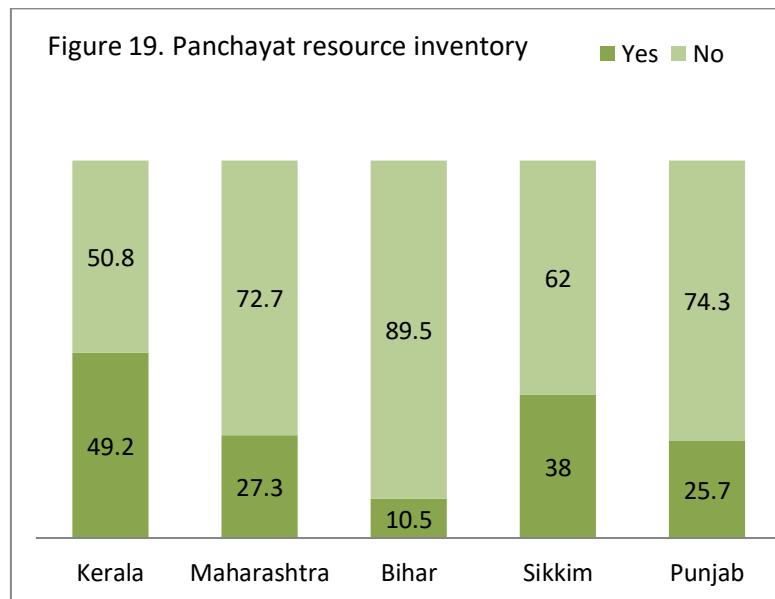
Figure 18. Panchayat Visioning ■ Yes



### 5.5 Status of conduct of Panchayat Resource Inventory

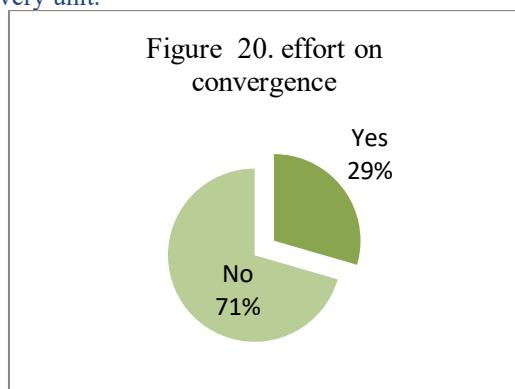
Each gram panchayat has to prepare panchayat Resource Inventory covering all the sectors, sections and schemes. Potential of the gram panchayat to be considered as resources in the field of agriculture and allied sectors, industrial and services activities possibilities, ways to use of human resources, other opportunities pertaining to the village have to be augmented for detailed planning. The schemes of state governments and schemes and projects rooted through the gram panchayat have to be identified. Year wise quantum of financial resources expected through various sources including own resources, contributions from people and institutions to be also listed. This process called Resource Inventory of the panchayat. It will help the planning team to think and appropriately allocate to prioritised activities in GPDP. This process is not taking place in any of the gram panchayat in the study region including the state of Kerala. The GPs only make the list of schemes implemented and works to be earmarked regarding receipt of funds, only approximate estimation were prepared based on the previous year's receipt. Uncertainty of fund receipt is prevailing in all the states due to fund crunch at state level and performance linked fund release by the central government.

In any of the sample states, resource inventory was not prepared as per the expected level or guidelines issued for the purpose. Somewhat better attempt had made in Kerala due to the state government support and also having specific mechanism for the planning.



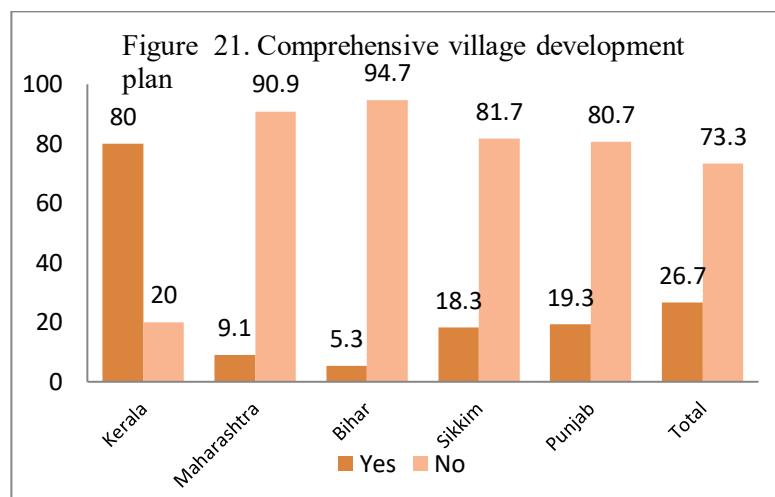
### 5.6 Effort on convergence

It is understood from the study region that, convergence is not taking place effectively in implementation of different schemes which reflected in duplication of works. It was reported by 70.5 percent respondents negatively for convergence in GPDP. As it was mentioned, the panchayats are acting as a bottom most government agency for implementation of various schemes. Moreover, a number of schemes are also implemented by different departments on their own without having consent with the panchayats. Departmental coordination and convergence at higher level may create environment for convergence at lower level. People do not have attitude that panchayat has responsibility for the development of its jurisdiction; they feel panchayats are basic services delivery unit.



### 5.7 Nature of GPDP

Comprehensive development plan has focus on long term development in the lead sector through appropriate use of local resources including man power and preparation of realistic plan. It also aimed to create employment opportunities, infrastructures for development, improving primary education and ultimately empowerment of people. It aims at bringing required level of development in all fields to ensure the basic needs, creating conducive environment for people's livelihood, strategies for climate resilience, increasing production and productivity in agricultural and allied sectors and try to achieve better standard of living to all households on a sustainable basis. Preparation of such plans require subject knowledge, planning experts and technical support mechanism which are not available for the panchayat in majority of the states except very few states like Kerala and certain extent Sikkim. The field responses reveals, 73.3 percent reported on the plans prepared are not comprehensive. In majority cases, the plans are the budget estimate of the wish list containing 2-3 pages prepared by the elected representatives of the Gram Panchayat and passed in the panchayat meeting as GPDP.



## 6. Consolidated findings

□ The field based evidences of the present study clearly reveals that, the mission and process of the GPDP is not taking place as intended spirit of the constitutional 73rd amendment provisions. As mentioned in many occasions of this report, the GPDP is a ceremonial exercise for preparation of a wish list and annual activities to be carried in the panchayat only focused for the purpose of receiving funds under central and state finance commissions. Moreover, it is budget estimation for the scheme based activities to be carried out every year. Kerala can be said to be better i.e. around 50% of Panchayats somewhat adhering the provisions of the GPDP guidelines in actual preparation.

□ The decentralisation process mainly relies on people participation in every activity, decision making and implementation. Each GP has to form mandatorily three standing committees one each for - Finance, Development and Welfare. In reality, the gram panchayats have formed few committees as per the notification of respective State Government but role and responsibilities were not known to the committees. The committees are not meet for the specific purpose. The field reality reflects, all the study panchayats still follow the traditional planning approach of enlisting the needs, the planning is done on adhoc basis and is primarily supply driven. The plan is basically extracted from the Gram Sabha resolution which consists of the wish list of the Panchayats and influential people of the village. Moreover, in the traditional planning approach, voices of the poor and the weak are often not heard which results in lop sided planning. Therefore, more active in participation of panchayat activities will lead to have more access to basic services and GPs beneficiaries oriented schemes.

□ In this regard, it is recommended that, complete

sensitization is required to all the stakeholders of the Gram Panchayat to follow the spirit and intention of the 73rd constitutional amendment. The importance, need and relevance of GPDP in the effort of the gram Panchayat development are to be explained to the elected representatives and officials particularly the members of standing committees.

## 7. Conclusion

In India discussions and action on development are placing more emphasis on good governance and democratic institutions. Good democratic governance, fully accountable to people and providing opportunities for all to participate effectively in all debates and decisions that affect their lives alone can respond effectively to the needs of poor people for better living. To strengthen the status of preparation of GPDP requires motivation and Leadership, attitudes towards development and continuous Capacity building for elected representatives. Suitable administrative mechanism with Technical efficiency in collection digitalisation and management of data are also important to realise real GPDP. To realise the 'Thought of comprehensive development and visionistic approach for planning' needs extensive orientation and expertise support. Inactive working groups need to be vibrated through verities of trainings. There is need to eliminate corruption and regulate the power equations among officials and ERs for coordinated effort on preparation of GPDP. Finally, institutional partnership and Inclusion of subject specialists, planning experts and department representatives in the planning core group will bring change in the quality of GPDP

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