

Sevagram Gramakendra

An Initiative to Deepen Democracy



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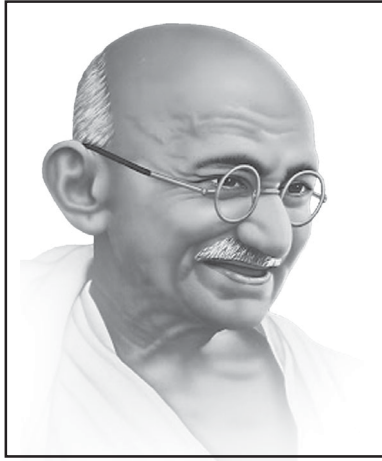
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“Democracy is a great institution and therefore it is liable to be greatly abused. The remedy, therefore, is not avoidance of democracy, but reduction of possibility of abuse to a minimum.”

Foreword

Kerala decentralization continues to be a model for other Indian States as it is built on the strong foundation of people's participation. After two decades of the 73rd constitutional amendment it is time to evaluate the state of decentralized governance in the State. It has succeeded in creating a number of innovative models of participatory planning and replicable practices, but there has been a steady decline in the participation of people in Gram Sabha and the micro level organizations that came into being as supporting bodies of decentralized governance. It shows that local govts have not succeeded in gaining people's trust and confidence. People's participation would be ensured when the local govts develop the capacity to perform their functions in an effective and transparent manner by utilizing the powers and responsibilities bestowed on them.

The present situation calls for systematic and continuous efforts to enhance people's participation in local governance Gram Sabha is the smallest participatory forum approved by the Constitution. It is the forum for direct democracy, where every citizen gets opportunity to be part of the decision making process. The way the Gram Sabha functions now is not at all satisfactory. The unwieldy size of the Gram Sabha and lack of an office to carry out its functions are impediments in effective functioning. Inclusive and sustainable development can be achieved only by activating Gram Sabha.

The Guidelines of the 12th Five Year Plan of the Government of Kerala provides for setting up Gramkendra/Wardkendra in each ward of all local govts; both rural and urban. A ward is an electoral constituency

of local government with number of voters ranging from 1000 to 2000. The Gramkendra is envisaged as a center for the citizens of the ward to meet and discuss the development activities of the ward. It also functions as the office of all micro level organizations related to Local governments and an extension centre of the local government office. The centre will be known as Sevagram - Gramkendra in panchayats and 'Sevagram - Ward Kendra' in urban local bodies.

KILA published a Handbook entitled 'Sevagram-Gramkendra/ Wardkendra' for the purpose of imparting training to local govt. functionaries. It is edited by Dr. Peter. M Raj, Associate Professor and Mr. P.V. Ramakrishnan, Extension Faculty and Ms. Gitanjali, Training Associate are Associate Editors. Supporters of decentralization from outside Kerala have evinced interest in the initiative of the Govt of Kerala to set up Gramkendras in all panchayats. The content of the Handbook published in Malayalam is translated to English and certain parts are revised to help the readers understand better the Kerala context. I am grateful to Prof. P Lakshmanan for translating and revising the Handbook and making it more friendly to readers from outside the State.

Dr. P P Balan
Director.

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Relevance of Village Swaraj

Is the concept of Village Swaraj relevant in modern India? To find the answer to the question we have to examine what was the concept of Gandhiji about Village Swaraj. Following are quotations from his writings and speech that express his views on Village Swaraj, decentralization and local govts.

- “ ***The word swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word meaning self-rule and self-restraint and not free from all restraint which “independence” often means.***
- “ ***True democracy cannot be worked out by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked out from below by the people of every village.***
- “ ***Centralization as a system is inconsistent with a nonviolent structure of society.***
- “ ***Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be a republic or panchayat having full powers. It follow, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world.***
- “ ***The power and functions, which cannot be efficiently discharged at the local level, should alone be transferred to govts at higher level.***

“ ***Under Gram Swaraj all the people in the village would jointly and cooperatively share and share alike the use of village resources for the welfare of all in the village; no private ownership, no state ownership; the village would be trustee and not owner... therefore there would be neither exploitation nor repression.***”

Other ideas associated with Village Swaraj are ***supremacy of man, body labour, equality, swadeshi, cooperation, Satyagraha, equality of religious, panchayatiraj and new education.*** Is the Village Swaraj an Utopian idea? Gandhiji himself was aware of the criticism, but he defended it as the only alternative to the prevailing systems of govt that cannot deliver the world from the evils of starvation, inequality, suffering and war.

One flaw that we find in the concept of Village Swaraj is inconsistency. Gandhiji said, ***“I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things.”*** Little wonder that some of his early ideas are not consistent with his later ideas regarding Village Swaraj.

In the present context of globalization can we create local govts that can function as self-reliant, self-sufficient, self-sustainable village republics capable of defending themselves against the whole world? Can our villages or panchayats create ‘Ramarajya’ or Kingdom of God on earth as envisaged by Gandhiji? It cannot be done if we try to recreate the ancient panchayats of our country, because it is impossible “to put back the hands of the clock of progress”. The world is changing and changing fast. Even countries cannot be self sufficient and self-sustainable in the present world scenario, let alone villages and panchayats. Total political and economic independence of a village and the ideals of nonviolence, satyagraha, trusteeship etc. cannot be realized in the true sense in the modern world. So what should we do to establish Village Swaraj in our country?

The answer to the question lies in the way of winning Poorna Swaraj suggested by Gandhiji. It was in the Sevagram Ashram that he started the practical experiments of village reconstruction. He wrote, ***“the constructive Programme is the truthful and nonviolent way of winning Poorna Swaraj.”*** Unlike his early descriptions of ideal village that promise an idyllic life to all, the interventions that he included in

the Constructive Programme are more pragmatic and suitable to the changing conditions of rural India. The relevance of Village Swaraj has to be found in how far those interventions can be adopted or adapted to suit the changed and changing economic, political and social conditions of our country. The interventions are intended to achieve the following objectives.

- 1 Communal unity
- 2 Prohibition
- 3 Village industries
- 4 Khadi
- 5 New or Basic education
- 6 Women empowerment
- 7 Provincial language
- 8 National language
- 9 Economic equality
- 10 Bread labour
- 11 Removal of untouchability
- 12 Village sanitation
- 13 Education in health and hygiene
- 14 Adult education
- 15 Cattle development
- 16 Service to lepers
- 17 Service to farmers
- 18 Service to Adivasis
- 19 Service to students

Add a few more items relevant to our own time, delete a few that are no longer relevant and modify some items in the list and we get a list of interventions that can be executed by the local govts of modern India more effectively than the higher tiers of govt. The programmes and schemes maybe envisaged and devised at the central or state level, but if the panchayats are empowered they can do better, the

micro level planning and implementation. The legal framework of local govts is made with the 73rd and 74th amendments to the constitution and the conformity legislations by the State govts. What is missing is decentralization of more powers and devolution of functions, functionaries and funds to local govts to enable them to perform their responsibilities, most of which are suggested by Gandhiji in his Constructive Programme. That is the relevance of Gandhiji in modern times and that is why we need him more today than ever before.



Democratic Decentralization in Kerala

The local govts that came into existence all over India in consequence to the 73 & 74 constitutional amendments are not uniform in structure or functions. The panchayats of South India are comparatively larger in size and population where as their counterparts in North India are smaller in both respects. Among the Gram Panchayats of North India those of Bihar, U.P, Rajastan, M.P and Punjab are smaller with an average population of 2000. Punjab has the smallest Grama Panchayats in the country with an average population of 1200.

In the North East, West Bengal and Manipur have Gram Panchayats having an average of 5000 people. In the case of such smaller panchayats it is easier to realize the concept of an independent local self govt for each village. Though the revenue village is not coterminous with the Gram Panchayat, in the present discourse a Gram Panchayat is treated as an equivalent of a village. The smaller the village the better is the opportunity for people to participate in local governance. Local administration and service delivery can also be made more effective. If power is devolved to such panchayats people would feel the presence of a local govt that is capable of addressing their felt needs regarding development and welfare.

A different situation exists in Kerala. The Gram Panchayats are bigger in size and population. The size of a ward is almost equal to the size of a Gram panchayat in other Indian States. A Gram Panchayat is divided into 13 to 23 wards. Each ward is an electoral constituency from which a member is elected to the panchayat council. The mandatory provision of one Gram Sabha for a panchayat is not practical

in the State. To meet the constitutional requirement a ward is considered a village and an assembly of all voters of a ward is defined as the Gram Sabha of the ward. Each ward has population ranging from 1000 to 2000 and above. Thus a Gram Panchayat in Kerala has as many Gram Sabhas as the number of wards.

The Gram Sabha is the smallest constitutionally mandated unit that plays a vital role in local governance. The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act has endowed the Gram Sabha with the following powers, functions and rights

- a to render assistance in the collection and compilation of details required to formulate development plans of the panchayat;
- b to formulate the proposals and fixing of priority of schemes and development programmes to be implemented in the area of Village Panchayat;
- c to prepare and submit to the Village Panchayat final list of eligible beneficiaries in the order of priority relating to the beneficiary oriented schemes on the basis of the criteria fixed;
- d to render assistance to implement effectively the development schemes by providing facilities locally required;
- e to provide and mobilise voluntary service and contribution in cash or in kind necessary for the development plans;
- f suggesting the location of street lights, street or community water taps, public wells, public sanitation units, irrigation facilities and such other public utility schemes;
- g to formulate schemes to impart awareness on matters of public interest like cleanliness, environmental protection, pollution control and to give protection against social evils like corruption, illicit and clandestine transactions;
- h to promote harmony and unity among various groups of people within the area of the Gram Sabha and to organize arts and sports festivals to develop good-will among the people of that locality;
- i to monitor and render assistance to the beneficiary committees engaged in the developmental activities within the area of the Village Panchayat;

- j to verify the eligibility of persons getting various kinds of welfare assistance from the Government such as pensions and subsidies;
- k to collect information regarding the detailed estimates of works proposed to be implemented in the area of Grama Sabha ;
- l to make available details regarding the services to be rendered and the activities proposed to be done by the officials in the succeeding three months;
- m to know the rationale behind every decision taken by the panchayat regarding the area of the Grama Sabha;
- n to know the follow up action taken on the decisions of the Grama Sabha and the detailed reasons for not implementing any of the decisions;
- o to co-operate with the employees of the village panchayats in the sanitation processes and rendering voluntary service for the removal of garbage;
- p to find out the deficiencies in the arrangements for water supply, street lighting etc. within the area of the Grama Sabha and to suggest remedial measures;
- q to assist the activities of parent-teacher associations of the schools within the area of the Grama Sabha;
- r to assist the public health activities especially prevention of diseases and family welfare, within the area of the Grama Sabha;
- s to perform such other functions as may be prescribed from time to time.

The Gram Sabha has the following rights:

- To know about the budgetary provisions, the details of plan outlay, item wise allocation of funds and details of public works within in the area of Grama Sabha.
- To discuss the Audit Report or the Performance Audit Report and make suggestions and recommendations to the Grama Panchayat.
- To pass resolutions on majority basis in respect of any issue within its jurisdiction.
- To constitute general or subcommittees for detailed discussion and implementation of schemes.

- To Select beneficiaries of schemes, projects and plans and prepare priority list.

The quorum of Grama Sabha is 10% of the registered voters and it is mandatory to convene at least four meetings of Grama Sabha a year. The officers of the Gram Panchayat should attend the meeting of Grama Sabha.

Limitations and Challenges

Despite the powers, rights and functions assigned to the Grama Sabha, the initial enthusiasm of people in the Grama Sabha has gradually faded and at present the institution of Grama Sabha is facing many challenges and limitations. They are:

- i Declining participation in the meeting of Grama Sabha
- ii Middle class people keep away from Grama Sabha making it an assembly of BPL families
- iii Grama Sabha does not meet regularly. In some wards there are no meeting halls that can accommodate the members
- iv Because of the unwieldy size of the Grama Sabha, that is more than 200 voters, discussion on each agenda, consolidation of group reports and recording of minutes and decisions are not done properly
- v There is no regular follow-up for the decisions taken in the Grama Sabha. Hence people have lost faith in the efficacy of the Grama Sabha.
- vi Even though participation of women has increased because of the active involvement of Kudumbasree- the Neighbour hood Groups of women- the increase in participation is only quantitative and not qualitative
- vii The absence of officials in the meeting spoils the seriousness of the proceedings
- viii In the absence of an office, the Grama Sabha is not able to scrutinize the applications for benefits under various schemes and ensure objective selection of beneficiaries. Although the Grama Sabha is the authority to fix the priority of beneficiaries, the unsystematic nature of the proceedings erodes the faith of people in beneficiary selection.

- ix The service of technical experts is not made available to the Grama Sabha to monitor the implementation of public works projects. So monitoring by Grama Sabha is not done effectively.
- x There is no system to redress the complaints of people when the decisions and suggestions of the Grama Sabha are ignored by the panchayat without any justification.
- xii Grama Sabha has not succeeded in creating awareness of the people regarding citizens' rights and the tools of good governance like the Ombudsman, Appellate, Tribunal, Social Audit, Citizens' Charter etc.

Attempts to Strengthen Grama Sabha

- All Grama Sabha facilitators were given training in 2009. A Handbook on the functions and responsibilities of Grama Sabha was distributed widely to sensitize the public.
- Immediately after the election to local govts, training was imparted to all elected members in 2010 and there was a module on Grama Sabha in the training.
- KILA conducts joint training for the elected members and officials of Local Governments and the functions and rights of Grama Sabha is a focus area in the training.
- A massive training programme covering more than 20000 wards was conducted in 2012 to sensitise the Grama Sabha members about the importance of Grama Sabha.
- A campaign under the leadership of the Minister for LSG called "Gramayatra" was conducted, for which special Grama Sabha was organised with greater participation of people.
- Special Grama Sabha was organised for children, the aged, the differently abled and other marginalised groups.
- In 2013 Grama Sabha was organised in all Local Governments to sensitise members about Drinking Water and Sanitation. A pamphlet on the theme was distributed to all participants.

All the attempts had some impact on the people, but could not produce the desired result. The Govt of Kerala, after several consultations with stake holders decided to introduce a substructure of Grama Sabha

called Neighborhood Sabha, strengthen the Ward Development Committee and start Sevagram Gramkendra/Wardkendra in all wards of all local govts. with a view to ensure effective functioning of Grama Sabha. The details of the Govt Order no MS/112/2014 dated 25-06-2014 regarding Sevagram Gramkendra, Ward Development Committee and Neighborhood Sabha are given in Chapter 3,4 and 5.



Sevagram Gramkendra

Sevagram is the name of the ashram that Gandhiji started at Wardha to function as the headquarters of the Village Industries Association that he established in 1934. It is while residing in Sevagram that Gandhiji developed his ideas of village swaraj and the constructive Programme for rural development. Earlier Gandhiji was greatly influenced by John Ruskin's views especially on the dignity of labour expressed in "Unto This Last". The origin of his grand concept of **sarvodaya** meaning 'welfare of all' can be traced back to Ruskin's book. Gandhiji experimented with village industries, sanitation, agriculture, cattle farming, health diet etc from this centre and devised the constructive programme as a means to implement his idea of village service.

The proposed 'Kendra' or centre to be set up in all wards of local govts of Kerala is called Sevagram Gramkendra in panchayats and Sevagram Wardkendra in municipalities. As it is the hub of all activities relating to local governance and development it is named after the Sevagram established by Gandhiji for village uplift. The Gramakendra is envisaged as the office of the Grama Sabha and the substructures of Grama Sabha like the Ward Development Committee, Neighborhood Sabhas and other micro level organizations that came into being as part of institutionalization of decentralized governance. It would also function as an extension centre of the administrative office of local govt mainly for service delivery and integration of development and welfare activities.

Gram Kendra

- ◆ A permanent office of Grama Sabha for members to meet and discuss problems
- ◆ A centre to follow up the decisions of Grama Sabha
- ◆ Service delivery centre of local govts
- ◆ Information centre of the ward
- ◆ Centre for providing the services of officials of local govt
- ◆ Centre to integrate socio-cultural and environmental activities of the ward

Objectives

Gramakendras aim at facilitating community governance. At present the flow of power from Lok Sabha to Gram Sabha is interrupted at the level of the panchayat or municipal council. To make decentralization of power happen the present style of functioning of Gram Sabha should change and Gram Sabha should become a forum of participatory democracy. So Gramkendra should function as

- i a permanent meeting place of Gram Sabha members
- ii an office of local govt officials at ward level
- iii information centre that collects and disseminate information about development and welfare schemes.
- iv extension of local govt office to deliver services
- v centre for integrating all development and welfare schemes implemented in the ward
- vi centre for promoting social and cultural activities
- vii resource centre that enlists the service of experienced persons and experts for public good.
- viii centre to carry out sensitization activities against social evils such as dowry, luxurious ceremonies, child marriage etc. and take steps to prevent them
- ix centre to impart life skill education, adolescent education and provide counseling service

- x office of the Gram Sabha in rural area and the office of Ward Sabha in urban area
- xi office of Ward Development Committee, Health and Sanitation Committee, Working Groups, Vigilance Committee, Environment Committee, Area Development society of Kudumbasree, Literacy Committee, Coordination Committee of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Pain and Palliative Care Committee and other ward level committees approved by the local govt.
- xii office of Neighborhood Sabha, Oorukkootam and Fisher folks Association
- xiii information centre where list of beneficiaries of all development schemes, BPL families, beneficiaries of food subsidy schemes, beneficiaries of unemployment dole and welfare pensions are kept and made available for the public
- xiv a place with a Notice Board that displays the orders, notifications and all other documents for public information.
- xv centre for sharing experience of local experts and important persons
- xvi the field office of all local govt functionaries such as Junior Health Inspector, Junior Public Health Nurse, Asha worker, Anganwadi functionaries, Village Extension Officer, Agriculture Assistant, Livestock Inspector, ICDS supervisor, Literacy worker and SC-ST promoter. The details of their services should be displayed in the Notice Board and the report of their activities presented in the Ward Development Committee once in three months.

Functionaries and Functions

- a The Elected Member of the ward, who is also the convener of the Gram Sabha is responsible for the functioning of the Gramakendra and the Secretary of the local govt is the custodian of the office and its assets.
- b The Local Govt Council shall appoint an official from its office or an officer of an institution transferred to the local govt to assist the Grama Sabha convener to do the work in connection with the Gramakendra.

The official thus appointed shall perform the following duties

- √ attend the meeting of Ward Development Committee
- √ Report the decisions and directions of the panchayat in the meeting
- √ Make available the necessary records and documents from the panchayat
- √ Report the decisions and suggestions of the Ward Development Committee to the panchayat
- √ Forward the applications received from the people to the panchayat
- √ Maintain all records relating to the Gramakendra.

The Ward Development Committee may appoint volunteers to assist the official in effective functioning of the Gramakendra

Working Hours

The Gramakendra should be open from 3pm to 7pm on 5 days a week. The Ward Development Committee should make available the service of a volunteer in the office during working time.

Office

The Gramakendra may be located in any of the following offices of the local govt.

- Anganawadi
- Health Sub-centre
- Community Hall
- Panchayat Shopping Complex
- Any other public building

If none of the above buildings is available an office of 25 Square metre area may be hired. Rs 50000 may be earmarked annually to meet the rent, stationery and other charges. The Ward Development Committee may mobilise additional resources in cash or kind. Necessary furniture for the office may be purchased using Development Fund or Own Fund of the local govt. A Board of 120 X 90 cm size made of aluminum or metal sheet with the name Sevagram-Gramkendra, a picture of Gandhiji, the name of local govt and the number and name of ward written in blue letters on white surface should be installed in front of the office.

Specimen

..... GP/Muni/Muni Corporation.



Picture of
Gandhiji

Sevagram Gramkendra

Ward no

Name of ward.....



Ward Development Committee

- Democratic forum at ward level
- Organising body of ward level activities
- Monitoring body of development schemes

The effective implementation of Gram Sabha resolutions is vested in the Ward Development Committee. The Ward Development Committee consists of representatives selected from Neighborhood Sabhas and the experts selected by Gram Sabha. The elected member of the ward is the Chairperson. The Ward Development Committee is responsible

Constitution of Ward Development Committee

- Maximum 25 members
- Elected Member of the ward is the Chairperson
- Representatives of all Neighborhood Sabhas are members
- Five experts selected by Gram Sabha
- One representative each from ex-elected members, Residents Associations and Community Organizations.

The Local Government should issue order constituting a Ward Development Committee in each ward with the Elected Member as Chairperson and the following as members (Ward Development Committee need not be constituted in the wards of Urban Local Bodies

where Ward Committees are constituted as per section 45 of the Kerala Municipalities Act.)

- 1 A male and female member elected from each Neighborhood Sabha
- 2 Six respectable residents of the ward; three men and three women.
- 3 Representatives of Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Fisher folk in proportion to their population.
- 4 Five experts selected from farmers, teachers, doctors, engineers, professionals, retired officials etc.
- 5 One representative each from ex-elected members, Residents Associations and Community Organizations.

Members of category 2, 3, 4 & 5 are to be selected by the Gram Sabha.

- a Total members of Ward Development Committee should not exceed 25.
- b A member of the Committee should be elected Convener by the majority
- c If a member is absent in 3 consecutive meetings of the committee, the person may be removed by unanimous decision and another person elected in his/her place. When the Chairperson's position falls vacant the Local Government can appoint the Elected Member of a nearby ward as Chairperson. When the position of convener falls vacant another person is elected to the position in 30 days.

The term of Ward Development Committee is two and a half years, but it may be reconstituted whenever ward delimitation takes place.

Functions and Duties

- 1 Identify the development needs and report them to the Local Government
- 2 Assist the scrutiny of applications by individuals and families for benefits under various development schemes and prepare priority list of beneficiaries
- 3 Give notice to all members of Gram Sabha about Gram Sabha meeting

- 4 Assist in the systematic conduct of Gram Sabha and recording minutes and resolutions
- 5 Assist in convening Special Gram Sabha of SC, ST, Fisher folk, Children, Women, Youth, Senior Citizens, Differently Abled Persons etc and the planning and implementation of programmes for the categories.
- 6 Enhance participation of people in all development and welfare activities
- 7 Monitor the development schemes and functions of Local Government and present the monitoring reports in the Gram Sabha
- 8 Conduct Social Audit and present the report in the Gram Sabha. Social Audit should cover all public institutions
- 9 Assist in extending the services of all public institutions to the people
- 10 Keep vigil against all unlawful activities in the ward such as unauthorized constructions, destructions of water bodies, illegal mining, environmental pollution and degradation and report them to the authorities concerned.
- 11 Keep vigil against violence against women, children, the aged and the differently abled and initiate redressal measures.
- 12 Examine whether all decisions taken in the Gram Sabha are implemented and assist in their implementation.
- 13 Conduct periodical adalats to settle disputes and avoid litigation. Organise legal literacy classes with the cooperation of Kerala Legal Service Society.
- 14 Organise Gramotsav once a year
- 15 Create a linkage between local people and the Local Government
- 16 Assist in integrating all local economic development activities of Self Employment Groups, Neighborhood Groups and Entrepreneurs
- 17 Organise community programmes like Blood Grouping Camps, promotion of agriculture, waste management, biocultivation, sports and arts festivals, cultural programmes etc. in collaboration with Community Based organisations and Non Governmental Organisations.

Special Functions

Each Ward Development Committee can take up special functions depending on the needs, resources and potential of the locality. Examples of special functions are given below.

a) *Local Economic Development*

- Self Sufficiency in vegetable
- Total bio cultivation

b) *Social Justice*

- Liquor free, Drug free ward
- Tobacco free ward
- Drinking water for all
- Child friendly ward
- Dowry free ward
- Litigation free ward

c) *Environment Protection*

- Ward free of plastic carry bags
- Social and water conservation
- Afforestation
- Total sanitation
- Protection of water sources

Meeting

The Ward Development Committee should meet at least once a month, and if necessary special meeting may be convened. Notice of meeting showing venue, date, time and agenda should be issued to members 3 days before the meeting.

- i Notice should be displayed in the Notice Board of the Gramkendra.
- ii Quorum of the meeting is one third of the total members
- iii The chairperson shall preside over the meeting and in his/her absence, a person selected form the members present shall preside.

- iv The convener shall fix the agenda in consultation with the Chairperson and the agenda shall be read out in the beginning of the meeting.
- v Any addition to the agenda should be approved by the majority of members present.
- vi There should be a Minutes Book to record the proceedings and decisions and it should be kept under the custody of the Convener. The minutes Book is a public document and should be made available to the public for perusal and certified copy may be given on payment of copying charge.
- vii The proceedings and decisions of the meeting should be recorded in the minutes during the meeting itself and read out in the end. The chairperson, Convener and all members present should sign the minutes
- viii A copy of the decisions must be forwarded to the Local Government.



Neighborhood Sabha

Neighborhood sabhas are envisaged as substructure of Gram Sabha. The members of 50 to 100 families living in a neighborhood are members of a Neighborhood Sabha. All families residing in a ward are covered under the structure and the total number of Neighborhood Sabhas in a ward depends on the total number of families in the ward. As a substructure of Grama Sabha they meet and discuss in advance the subjects to be discussed in the Gram Sabha. They also oversee the timely implementation of all decisions of the Gram Sabha.

Structure

- 1 In each ward Neighborhood Sabhas must be constituted consisting of the members of 50 to 100 families living in a neighborhood.
- 2 The Registered Residents Associations of Urban Local Bodies are considered as Neighborhood Sabhas. The families not covered by Residents Associations must also be included in the Neighborhood Sabha of the locality.
- 3 The area of operation of a Neighborhood Sabha shall be decided by the Ward Development Committee,
- 4 All voters residing within the area shall be members of the Neighborhood Sabha.
- 5 Each Neighborhood Sabha shall elect an eleven member Working Committee from among the members.

Functions and Duties

- a Make suggestions regarding the development activities and their priority in the Gram Sabha
- b Inform all families within the area about the development projects implemented in the ward and mobilise voluntary work and participation of people in plan implementation.
- c Take necessary steps to make sure that all members of Neighborhood Sabha participate in the Gram Sabha.
- d Render assistance to Beneficiary Committee in project implementation
- e Mobilise resources for development and welfare schemes.
- f Scrutinize the applications of individuals and families for benefits under various schemes and prepare the priority list of beneficiaries.
- g Monitor the development schemes including public works implemented in the area
- h Conduct survey and collect data about local population
- i Protect public assets and conduct campaign against social evils.
- j Sensitise people about sanitation and the necessity to keep water resources free from pollution.
- k Prepare and present in the Gram Sabha monitoring and annual report of the Neighborhood Sabha and the public institutions functioning in the area.
- l Report to the panchayat any unauthorised construction, filling of paddy field or wetland, illegal mining and other activities that cause pollution and damage the environment.
- m Report to the panchayat any act of violence against women, children or the differently abled and take steps for prevention of such acts.
- n Identify the marginalised and the destitute and take steps to bring them to the mainstream.
- o Try to ensure the cooperation and presence of the experienced and educated persons of the locality in the functioning of Neighbourhood Sabha.

- p Organise the students and the youth and ensure their participation in development and social work.
- q Identify the families without house, toilet or drinking water and take steps to address their problems.
- r Report the activities of Neighborhood Sabha in the meeting of the Ward Development Committee and assist the Ward Development Committee to implement its decisions.
- s Organise the annual meeting of the Neighborhood Sabha as a socio cultural programme participating all families.

Special Functions

A Neighborhood Sabha can select any of the following special functions considering the needs, problems, potential and conditions of the locality.

Local Economic Development

- Self sufficiency in vegetable cultivation
- Total biocultivation

Social Welfare

- Liquor free, Drug free ward
- Litigation free ward
- Dowry free ward
- Tobacco free ward
- Drinking water for all
- Child friendly ward

Environment Protection

- Ward free of plastic carry bags
- Soil and Water Conservation
- Afforestation
- Waste free ward
- Total sanitation

- Conservation of nature and environment
- Protection of water sources.

The above mentioned activities are only examples. Each Ward Sabha can devise its own activities that suit the locality.

Meeting

- 1 The Neighbourhood Sabha should meet every three months and if necessary in between the three months. The convener should fix the date of the meeting in consultation with the Chairperson and issue notice to all members showing the venue, date, time and agenda 3 days before the meeting. Notice should also be displayed in public institutions and places.
- 2 The Elected Member of the ward should be informed of the meeting in advance.
- 3 The Chairperson presides over the meeting and in his/her absence anybody selected from those present presides.
- 4 All decisions taken in the meeting should be recorded in the minutes book by the convener or the person authorised and read out publicly at the end of the meeting. The minutes must be signed by the chairperson and ten others present in the meeting.
- 5 The duration of Neighbourhood Sabha is two and a half years, but it may be reconstituted when ward delimitation takes place
- 6 Quorum of the meeting is 10% of total members.

Executive Committee

- There will be total 11 members, out of which 6 will be women
- A Chairperson and a Convener shall be selected from among the committee members.
- Proportionate representation shall be given to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Fisher folk.

Functions

- Coordinate all activities of Neighbourhood Sabha

- Assist the Neighbourhood Sabha to monitor all development activities.
- Prepare and present in the meeting of Neighbourhood Sabha report of all development activities.
- Present an annual report of activities in the meeting of Neighbourhood Sabha.
- Draft a bylaw for the Neighbourhood Sabha and obtain the approval of the govt.

Meeting

- The Executive Committee meets at least once a month. The Convener shall fix the date in consultation with the Chairperson and issue notice to all members showing the venue, date and agenda before three days.
- The meeting shall be presided over by the Chairperson and in the absence of the Chairperson by a member selected from those present.
- A Minutes Book should be maintained to record minutes by the Convener.
- The decisions of the meeting should be read out to the meeting and signed by the Chairperson and three others present.
- The quorum of the meeting is 6 members.
- The duration of the Executive Committee will be two and a half years, but the Committee will be reconstituted whenever ward delimitation takes place.