

Draft

A Case Study on Bearhatty Gram Panchayat

Best Practices of Panchayats

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Case Study of Bearhatty Gram Panchayat, Karnataka

1.0 Introduction

In 2005-06, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India introduced the Panchayat Empowerment and Accountability Incentive Scheme (PEAIS) to incentivize States and UTs to devolve powers to local bodies. Under this scheme, the best performing State/UT is awarded Rs 2 crore every year. Further, the Ministry also announces awards for the best Zilla Panchayats, Taluk Panchayats and Gram Panchayats for their performance in implementation of flagship schemes and execution of welfare programmes.

The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) developed a Devolution Index to measure the State/PRI's performance on the basis of devolution of three F's viz. finance, functions and functionaries. The assessment is carried out in two-stages with the first stage examining whether the State/UT has created conducive environment that enables the transfer of powers to the local bodies. Accordingly, the first stage checks whether the States have setup the District Planning Committee, established State Election Commission and State Finance Commission, and held PRI elections every five year. The Devolution Index is calculated for those States which have satisfied the criteria specified in the first stage. The three pillars in the Devolution Index capture either directly or indirectly the level of financial discretion, transfer of functions and steps taken to develop the capacity of functionaries of PRIs.

As for deciding the best panchayat at all the three levels i.e. Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti (called Panchayat Union in Tamil Nadu) and Zilla Parishad, it is done through a process of scoring based on the devolution index and responses to a questionnaire that capture important aspects relating to activities of a model Panchayats. Some of the parameters used include – regularity of panchayat meetings including those of gram sabha and standing committees, attendance in these meetings particularly the representation of SC and STs in the Gram Sabhas, discussions held and issues discussed, resolutions undertaken on various development works, identification of various beneficiaries, implementation of the State and Central Government schemes, efforts for achieving total sanitation, development of effective plans for raising own resources, systems for effective tax collection, strengthening of local institutions, capacity building of the elected representatives and the staff and having mechanism for transparency and accountability and so on. Bearhatty Gram Panchayat in The Nilgiris District is one of the eight panchayats from Tamil Nadu selected for award under the Panchayat Empowerment & Accountability Incentive Scheme (PEAIS) 2011-12.

2.0 Profile of Bearhatty Gram Panchayat

Bearhatty is situated in Coonoor block of the Nilgiris District in the state of Tamil Nadu. It is situated 14 kilometers from the district headquarters at Udthagamandalam. It consists of thirteen hamlets, namely, Bearhatty, Kambola, Kamarajapuram, Indra Nagar, Annai Nagar, Arul Nagar, Mel Bharath Nagar, Kalkuzhi, KilBharath Nagar, Forestdale, Shanmuga Nagar, ChinnaBandhisholai and Lions Colony. It is located close to the Wellington Cantonment Area.

Most of the villagers are employed as agricultural labourers in the surrounding tea plantations. In the block, the main sources of employment are plantations of tea, coffee, pepper, sandalwood, cardamom and clove.

Given its locations on the hills and heavy forest cover, wild animals such as bisons, elephants and cheetahs are frequently sighted in the area. It is also a site of tourism, which in the recent past has resulted in more and more land being acquired for the purposes of construction of hotels and lodges, posing a threat to the bio-diversity of the region. Coonoor Block is attempting to turn into a plastic-free zone

The Badaga community is the dominant population in the GP as well as in the district. The GP has five Adi Dravida (SC/ST) colonies.

The GP has three primary schools within its jurisdiction. However, there is only one playground available at the Bearhatty Panchayat Union Primary School. Children have to go to neighbouring villages or taluk headquarters for middle and high schools. The GP has two public distribution shops. For other facilities such as railway station and markets the people need to visit Coonoor, the block headquarter or Wellington Barracks.

The Panchayat office is located in Bearhatty hamlet. The Panchayat is headed by President and comprises nine ward members.

3.0 Awards and Recognition

The Panchayat has received a number of awards. The following Table provides information about the awards received the central and state governments. In addition, the panchayat president has also received awards from private bodies in recognition of her efforts in various areas. The panchayat president has recently been nominated to be a member of the Central Steering Committee



constituted under the Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan (RGPSA) with the objective of providing overall policy direction and monitor the progress of the scheme.

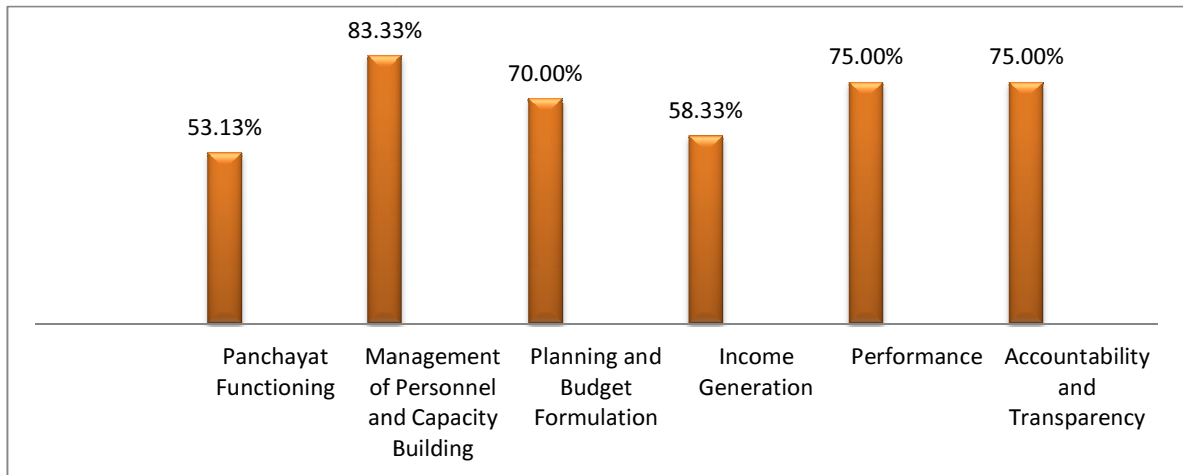
Table 1: List of Awards won by Bearhatty GP

| Name of the Award | For | Awarded by | Year of Award |
|--|---|---|---------------|
| Nirmal Gram Puraskar | Total Sanitation | The President of India | 2008 |
| Uthamar Gandhi Gram Panchayat Award | Best Panchayat | Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu | 2008-09 |
| Award for Effective and Efficient Work Done for Eradicating Child Labour | Eradiation of Child Labour | Department of Labour, Government of Tamil Nadu | 2008 |
| District Collector's Award | Upliftment and welfare of the Panchayat | District Collector | 2008 |
| Rashtriya Ekta Samman Award | | Governor, Tamil Nadu | 2010 |
| Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore Samman | | Governor, Tamil Nadu | 2011 |
| PanchayatSashakti Karan Puraskar | Panchayat Performance | Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India | 2012 |

4.0 Performance and Functioning of Bearhatty Gram Panchayat

The following graph shows the performance of the Panchayat across various PEAIS indicators. The Table below the graph provides the details of the performance across various indicators. What emerges from these is that while the GP has performed tasks that it is mandated to do, in some cases it has not followed prescribed procedures or maintained records such as establishing and conducting meetings of Standing Committees. The performance of Bearhatty Panchayat is directly linked with the performance and leadership style of its president. The President, Mrs.Rajeswari Devadass has been serving as President since 2006, this being her second term. This implied stability and consistency in the leadership which, to a large extent, is the determining factor behind certain best practices witnessed in the Panchayat. This section analyses the management practices and style, as it helps in explaining some of the PEAIS scores and also the best practices described later.

Diagram 1: Performance of Bearhatty Gram Panchayat as per PEAIS Indicators



Source: Bearhatty Panchayat Proposal for PEAIS Award

Table 2: Details of performance of Bearhatty GP as per PEAIS

| Indicator | Remarks |
|---|--|
| Panchayat Functioning | <p><u>Panchayat Meetings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has held 15 meetings when the mandated is 12 No meeting was cancelled due to lack of quorum Agenda and minutes circulated <p><u>Grama Sabhas</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six meetings held against the mandated four No adjournment due to lack of quorum Sufficiently represented by marginalised (SC/Women) Minutes maintained Social Audit of MGNREGA/PDS conducted <p><u>Standing Committees</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standing committees formed on appointment/welfare/health, water and sanitation/PDS/works/ agricultural products/ Education No meetings were however conducted |
| Management of Personnel and Capacity Building | <p><u>Training of Elected Representatives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panchayat President attended Panchayati Raj Department's Training Programmes <p><u>Officials at Panchayat Meetings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attended by officials of Rural Development/Revenue/Health/Electricity Board/ Horticulture/ |

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| | <p>Co-operative/ highways/ social welfare/ Police/ transport</p> <p><u>Review of Work of Officials</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing of officials' experiences but no review of work done by officials |
| Planning and Budget Formulation | <p><u>Preparation of Annual Plan:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual plan prepared and submitted in advance <p><u>Process of Preparation of Plan:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed in Gram Sabha/ with various stakeholders with their suggestions being partially incorporated <p><u>Budget</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget prepared as per norms • Gender budget also prepared |
| Income Generation | <p><u>Planning for own income</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six acres of Panchayat land has been leased for rent • However no new assets for income generation created <p><u>Collection of Dues</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • House tax and professional tax was collected <p><u>Voluntary Contributions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donations in the sectors of health, education, disaster relief was received by the Panchayat from NGOs and local Trusts |
| Performance | <p><u>Physical Achievement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical targets set under KHS/ IAY/RIS and MGNREGS were successfully met <p><u>Expenditure against allotment:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocated amount under various schemes was spent <p><u>Expenditure on SC/ST</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earmarked allocation was expended <p><u>Expenditure on Women:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil <p><u>Expenditure of Untied Funds:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil <p><u>Civic Duties:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 100% streetlight coverage |

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| | <p>2. 100% drainage facility</p> <p>3. Nirmal Gram Puraskar awardee</p> <p>4. 100% registration of birth and death</p> <p><u>Panchayat and Local Insitution:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening of schools, PDS shops, Health facilities and Anganwadis <p><u>Community Groups:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SHGs. Women groups, minority groups, youth groups, SC/St groups <p><u>Special Initiatives:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differently abled, HIV+, sex-workers, lepers. Awarded for intitutive taken for abolition of child labour by the District. <p><u>IEC Initiatives:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social issues such as unsociability (?), child labour, inter-caste marriage • Local Issues such as family problems, marital issues and property litigations |
| Accountability and Transparency | <p><u>Maintenance of Accounts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GP accounts are maintained in prescribed format, updated and authenticated and have been placed before the Gram Sabha. They are however not computerized. <p><u>Audit:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 11 out of 54 audit paras are pending <p><u>Grievance Redressal</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31 grievances were received and all were addressed <p><u>Compliance to RTI Act:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One application received and replied. Not sent to appeal. |

Source: Bearhatty Panchayat Proposal for PEAIS Award

5.0 Enabling Management Practices

- Frequent Gram Sabhas in changing locations:*** Gram sabhas are conducted regularly and frequently in Bearhatty, as mentioned in the PEAIS score Table. These Sabhas are conducted in different hamlets on rotation to ensure that people from all parts of the Panchayat get a chance to participate. This has resulted in improving attendance at these meetings as well as increasing awareness levels among the public about the activities of the Panchayat.

- b. ***Enabling president-member relationship:*** The president and ward members share a very cordial and warm relationship which helps in decision making and delivery of services. According to the members of the GP as well as the records maintained, these meetings are held on a monthly basis and act as platforms to raise issues, discuss and reach consensus that act as the basis of the GPs decisions. The president is aware of the needs and situation of different wards, and is also aware of the personal strengths and limitations of the ward members. Her caring attitude towards the ward members has helped her establish a warm relationship.
- c. ***Regular GP - community communication:*** The nine ward members serve as the medium of communication with their respective wards on behalf of the GP and vice versa. There is a high level of interaction between the elected representatives and the people. Regular communication between the GP members and people serves as a feedback channel helping the GP understand the issues better.
- d. ***Contextual Planning and Allocation:*** An effort to plan and allocate money taking contextual needs of the respective wards was visible in this panchayat. The distribution of PEAIS Award Money is an example. Bearhatty GP was awarded Rs. 9 lakh for winning the PEAIS award. The money was disbursed equally among the 9 wards. The tagline that they decided to adopt was 9 lakhs - 9 wards. The works undertaken varied from one to the other: while it included improving of drainage facilities in one ward, the other ward decided to improve the graveyard facilities, and so on. The priorities were decided through Gram Sabha meetings ensuring that communities also had a say in the decision.
- e. ***Active Media Relationship Building:*** The GP president has engaged in building relationship with local journalists leading to high visibility in the media. The activities and achievements of the GP are regularly covered giving the GP a wide publicity, which in turn helps in resource generation and gaining recognition.

As mentioned earlier, the enthusiastic leadership where the GP president herself makes a lot of efforts in terms of running around to get permissions and sanctions has played a major role in the GP performance. However, it has also led to undermining of certain processes such as non-organisation of the Standing Committees meetings. While the Standing Committees have not been constituted as required, no meetings had been organised. As other mechanisms such as monthly ward member meeting and regular Gram Sabha have been taking care of the issues, the absence of Standing Committee meetings have not had any adverse effect on the functioning of the GP.

6.0 Good Practices

This section documents some of the successful initiatives of the Panchayat that can easily be termed as best practices. These are:

- Enabling the needy citizens to access and receive social security benefits (pensions)
- Accessing and enhancing resources through diverse means and sources
- Improving the sanitation condition of the Panchayat

a. Enabling the needy citizens to access and receive social security benefits (pensions)

The Nilgiris District in Tamil Nadu records the lowest number of beneficiaries of social pension schemes while Bearhatty GP boasts of being one of the highest in the state. Bearhatty Gram Panchayat took special initiatives to enlist all eligible beneficiaries and help them access their social security entitlements. The details of the benefits that these pensions carry in Tamil Nadu are given Annex. Most people reported receiving a monthly pension of nearly Rs. 1000.

In 2006, the new president realized that only two persons from the Panchayat were receiving the pensions whereas the number of eligible persons appeared to be much larger. The lack of awareness and cumbersome procedures of getting the application sanctioned appeared to be the two major hurdles. The GP tried to address these through the following measures:

Step 1 - Awareness Camps

The GP organized a series of camps in 2007-2008 to spread awareness about various social security pension schemes, their eligibility criteria and application processes. At these camps people were informed about the different social pension schemes provided by the government, the eligibility criteria and the documents needed to enroll under this scheme. GP members played a pivotal role in gathering people to attend these camps as well as to help them in organizing the necessary documents to enlist under these schemes.

Step 2 - Assistance in submission of applications and their processing

The block development office is responsible for collection, scrutiny and recommendation of applications for social security pensions. The GP provided and continues to provide assistance to eligible citizens in submitting their applications and following these up.

Step 3 - Use of GP Resources to fasten the sanction process

During 2007-09, a large number of applications with all necessary documentations from eligible persons were submitted to the block office. However, the block office was not prepared to process such large numbers and cited the 'shortage of manpower' as the reasons to explain the delays in processing. Having mobilized a large number of people to apply and created their hopes, the GP did not want to allow such hurdles to disable the process. The Bearhatty GP decided through consensus and appointed a person in the block office to assist them in the processing of the applications. The GP bore all the costs of this additional staff till the time all the backlog applications from Bearhatty panchayat were cleared. Since then

the number of new applicants has reduced but the GP continues to assist eligible citizens in accessing the schemes.

The Impact

As a result of these efforts from the GP, the number of pension beneficiaries in Bearhatty Panchayat has gone up from 2 in 2006 to a total of 652 in 2013 (Table 3). Consultations with a large number of beneficiaries in two localities revealed that these pensions fulfill their role of providing an assured source of income for those who often do not have any other form of support. A large number of old men and women, widows and destitute persons reported using the pension for leading an independent and dignified life. While some consider the pension amount of Rs. 1000 per month to be insufficient, they acknowledge the important role it has played in giving them the sense of security and stability. Some of them substantiate their social pension income with MGNREGA earnings. A number of them reported being at the mercy of their children who often abandoned or ill-treated them till they started receiving the pensions. They also reported absence of any malpractice in the delivery, as the pensions are disbursed regularly through a Bank Delivery Van in the first half of each month.

Table 3: Number of pension scheme beneficiaries enrolled in Bearhatty GP

| Year /period | Upto 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | 2012-13 | Total |
|---|---------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| New Beneficiaries under Pension Schemes | 2 (total till then) | 10 | 300 | 90 | 25 | 75 | 125 | 25 | 652 |

Source: Bearhatty Gram Panchayat Documents

b. Accessing and enhancing resources through diverse means and sources

The GP has successfully mobilised resources in various forms. While some of these are in the form of donations and individual contributions, others relate to generation of own source revenue through diverse means. What is remarkable here is the ability of the GP to identify the possibility of accessing some resource and then pursuing that with perseverance to secure that access.

However, the record keeping and documentation of these efforts are weak and there is ample scope for improvement. Here, we detail out some of these initiatives.

- Mobilising resources for schools

The GP has tried to take advantage of all possible routes to generate resource for local schools. Three important sources have been tapped for this purpose. One of those was the Badaga community persons living outside the Nilgiris. The president approached them for donations appealing to their sense of responsibility towards their home land and it worked well. The GP also houses several tea estates and therefore has the presence of affluent business families. The president has mobilised resources approaching these families. The

third source has been the Army officers and their families as the GP also houses part of the Wellington Cantonment area. While in some cases the donations are received in cash, they are received in kind in others. Some of the results of these efforts were very much visible in the local schools:

School Furniture: All the three schools under the GP are equipped with child-friendly furniture. The government usually does not supply furniture to primary schools and sitting on the floor can be a little difficult in this area because of the cold climatic conditions. The funds for this initiative were raised from local donors and carry the names of the donors. The furniture is well-designed for small children and allows regroupings to suit child-friendly pedagogical practices.



Uniforms: The State government distributes three sets of uniforms per child. An additional set of uniform is purchased from the donations received through private donors by the GP. The GP collects the funds, purchases the uniforms centrally and then distributes among the school going children who attend the three government schools in the GP.



- Connecting with NGOs for funds and disaster relief

In addition, the GP also played active role in establishing links with NGOs and other institutions for fund raising purposes. The area experienced devastating floods a few years ago. The GP played an important role in raising funds through NGOs and other charitable institutions to provide relief to flood affected victims. Relief was distributed in the form of food, clothes and other materials. The GP has also been successful in generating funds for other aspects such as building toilets. This is discussed in a section.

- Panchayat's own Tea Plantation

The GP owns six acres of tea-plantation area which until recently was poorly maintained. This had resulted in over growth of tea and other shrubs in the area, making it a haven for wild animals. Some parts had also been encroached upon by some villagers. In the past, the Panchayat had not shown much interest and therefore people had started viewing it as a land that no one owned. The GP president undertook several steps to first clear the dense overgrowth, remove weeds and reclaim the tea estate. Once the estate was ready for plantation, the GP started the process to lease it out. The estate has currently been leased out at Rs. 31,000 per annum ? for a period of 3 years. This is the first such utilization of this land in the last 25 years.

- Forest Land Revenue

The Panchayat owned nine acres of forest land. Although it held the *patta* for this land the revenue generated used to go to the Revenue Department of the state government. This was despite the fact that GP was responsible for the maintenance of the land. The GP took the initiative to stake claim to the revenue from this land. To achieve this, it submitted three jamabandis with the Revenue Department and the local Tehsil Office. After a lot of running around and pursuing, it finally got the orders in 2011. The GP is now receiving the money generated through the minor forest produce and other revenue from this land. Although the revenue through this source is small, it is seen as a significant development from the perspective of gaining the GP's control over its own resources.

Impact on Own Source Revenue (OSR)

The Own Source Revenue (OSR) of the Panchayat has doubled during the five year period of 2008-09 and 2012-13 (Table 4). Since the area is affluent and amenable for business, the tax collection capacity is relatively higher. House tax forms an important component of the total Own Source Revenue. The share of OSR in total revenue has also gone up from 22 to 26 percent, this being higher in intervening years (Table 5). The contribution from tea plantation and forest land is relatively small presently but it is likely to go up in future.

Table 4: Own Source Revenue (OSR) of Bearhatty GP

| Source | 2008-09 | 2009-10 | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | 2012-13 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| House Tax | 260847 | 270737 | 331992 | 347687 | 516124 |
| Professional Tax | 12057 | 24129 | 8188 | 7382 | 24080 |
| Business Tax | 7350 | 14195 | 31050 | 31520 | 35340 |
| Library Tax | 26179 | 27180 | 33301 | 34874 | 51729 |
| Building/License Fee | 38946 | 6590 | 79513 | 61654 | 71161 |
| Sales tax | 11304 | 22708 | 7705 | 6825 | - |
| Income from Tea Plantation | 10000 | 10000 | 31000 | - | - |
| Income from rights of the forest products sold | - | - | - | - | 12000 |
| Bank Interest and other income ¹ | 29015 | 22234 | 32432 | 147030 | 94572 |
| Sale of Items (old items, iron bars, etc.) | 3500 | - | - | - | - |
| Fees and Surcharges ² | 12474 | 8526 | 7684 | 7484 | 16476 |
| Total | 411672 | 406299 | 562865 | 644456 | 821482 |

Source: Bearhatty Gram Panchayat Annual Budgets

1: This includes interest received from bank and other income

2: This includes registration fees, advertisement fees; D&O license fee, surcharge, and education tax.

Table 5: Share of OSR in Total Receipts for Bearhatty GP

| | 2008-09 | 2009-10 | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | 2012-13 |
|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| OSR | 411672 | 406299 | 562865 | 644456 | 821482 |
| Total Receipts* | 1892040 | 1857298 | 1818481 | 2120990 | 3102502 |
| Share of OSR in Total Receipts (in %) | 21.75 | 21.87 | 30.95 | 30.38 | 26.47 |

Source: Bearhatty Gram Panchayat Annual Budgets

*The total receipts are taken before adding opening balance.

Note: For 2010-11, award money on account of Uthamar Gandhi Best Panchayat Prize of Rs 5,00,000 was subtracted in the calculation of total receipts. For 2012-13, award money from PEAIS of Rs. 9,00,000 was subtracted in the calculation of total receipts.

Table 4 and 5 do not reflect the amount of resources that have been mobilized through GP efforts but disbursed directly to schools or other institutions/individuals/households. It would be a good practice to keep separate records of the resources generated through various other sources in cash or kind, source of contribution, year, purpose and the name of the recipient organization / household / individual as the case may be.

c. Improving the sanitation condition of the Panchayat

Bearhatty Gram Panchayat was awarded the Nirmal Gram Puraskar in 2008. This appears to be a well-deserved recognition as 600 individual household toilets were constructed during the immediately preceding year (2007-08) it. The discussions with the president revealed that this was her first “mission” after becoming the GP president. Being a resident of the Panchayat, she had often noticed the practice of open defecation being common among many people, especially those belonging to poorer economic groups. A strong motivation to end this practice led her to work hard on promoting sanitation facilities in the GP area.

Step 1: Awareness Building

The community, especially the areas that needed the toilets most, did not necessarily have any idea about the need for healthy sanitation practices. Thus, the GP had to first spread awareness about sanitation and its importance to a healthy life. Awareness campaigns were organized in different parts of the GP for this purpose. Next challenge was to deal with the lack of knowledge about the uses, need and benefits of individual household toilets. To address this need, the GP decided to target school children and through them reach their parents. School-children were primarily targeted and used as a medium of sowing interest, raising awareness and pursuing their parents to take toilet construction on a priority basis. An intensive campaign was launched in schools for this purpose.

Step 2: Support in accessing subsidy / loans

In order to facilitate the construction of toilets, the GP assisted interested households in seeking loans from Banks for the same and to access the subsidy that was being provided by the Government. These efforts included providing information, forwarding applications and also help in getting sanctions. As a result, the number of individual household toilets increased from only 60 in 2005-06 to 761 in 2012-13. As mentioned earlier, 600 of these were built in a single year 2007-08 (Table 6). The management of the subsidy, however, appeared to be an issue in some cases. A number of households reported that they had not received the subsidy funds though the construction has been completed.

Table 6: Number of Individual Toilets in Bearhatty GP

| Year | Upto 2005-06 | 2006- 07 | 2007- 08 | 2008- 09 | 2009- 10 | 2010- 11 | 2011- 12 | 2012- 13 | Total |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| Individual Household Toilets | 60 | 50 | 600 | 20 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 7 | 761 |

Source: Bearhatty Gram Panchayat Documents

Step 3- Accessing NGOs and other organisations for public / community toilets construction

The GP also accessed local non-government sources for building toilets and improve the sanitation conditions. One such example is money generated through RDO Trust, a local NGO active in the Nilgiris. This was used for building both individual household and public complexes in the localities where the inhabitants found it difficult to provide the matching grant needed to access the government subsidy to build toilets.

The Impact

One visible impact of the sanitation campaign is absence of open defecation sights that were apparently very common till a few years ago. However, a number of households reported that current water crisis was forcing them to resort to open defecation again despite the presence of toilets within the premises. Water crisis was reported to be serious in some hamlets. This shows that access to continuous source of water is a necessary condition for toilets to be in regular use.

The GP president also reported the maintenance of public toilets as a major area of concern. She described the fund allocations for maintenance as inadequate. The GP hires part time sanitary workers using its own resources; this was reported to be insufficient. Thus, while the construction of toilets was undertaken in mission mode with intense information and education activities, its execution in the later stages of the process seem to have faltered with the issues of water supply and delayed reimbursement. Hence, renewed efforts need to be made to ensure that the original objectives of improving the sanitary conditions are met while making sanitation an intrinsic aspect in the lives of the people in the GP.

The GP is in the process of taking further steps in improving the sanitary conditions in the GP in the form of a Solid Waste Management Plant within the GP jurisdiction. For this, they have started collecting segregated waste (of three kinds: biodegradable, non-biodegradable and glass) from the households. The part time sanitary workers hired by the GP assist in this collection process. The GP has also identified a plot of land for the setting up of the SWM plant.

It is difficult to ascertain the impact on health status without going in to the health records. However, people's perception is that the cases of illnesses such as diarrhea have gone down.

Other noteworthy Initiatives

The GP has organised a number of awareness campaigns on varied issues such as sexual abuse, HIV/AIDS awareness, alcoholism and de-addiction, safety and security of women in collaboration with local NGOs and activists. These campaigns have been of great use in creating awareness.

7. Conclusion

The Bearhatty Gram Panchayat's performance is highly dependent on the president's leadership skills and other attributes. The president's position is reserved for women and the reservation carries on for two terms in Tamil Nadu. This is her second term as president. We here try to discern the factors that have helped in good performance of the GP by classifying those into two major categories: (i) Personal attributes, and (ii) Policy and Institutional factors

Personal Attributes of the President

The interaction with the president and others helped us filter the following three dimensions as the most important factors in making her a good leader:

- Education



The President is highly educated and well-exposed. She has a Masters in Science (M. Sc.) in Child Development and Family Relationships. She was also conferred with an honorary doctorate by the International Tamil University, Maryland, USA in 2011. She was previously employed as a teacher in St. Hildas School in Ooty. She has also worked with differently-abled children. These experiences, according to her, gave her an opportunity to interact with

the most marginalized, and developed a sense of social responsibility.

Being educated, she is highly confident and articulate, which helps her in the meetings with others, especially the District Collector or Army officers or the business community located in the Panchayat. She is able to articulate and argue, and therefore commands a lot of respect among officials. Being highly educated gives her an edge over many others who are not as educated.

- Socially / politically networked

The president comes from an affluent family with a history of engagement in social and community activities. Her family's network facilitates her social enterprising skills in tapping new sources of donations and contributions. Most of the donors who have come forward are people who are known to her through her family, thereby making them more approachable and responsive to her requests. This has enhanced her performance as the President of the GP.

She is a widow in her late 50s. She derives strong support and encouragement from her son who encouraged her to contest the election for the first term. Her son is a young business man and the president of a Tamil film actor fan club. This allows him access to Youth Clubs and

other similar organisations that have helped the president in the campaigns as well as in later functioning. However, he does not partake in the daily running of the Panchayat.

- Highly motivated and ambitious

Mrs Devadass is a highly motivated, social-work oriented and caring person. She appeared to have a genuine interest in the welfare of the community, which she channelizes through her role as the President of the Gram Panchayat. She is also politically ambitious though does not have definite plans. She is aware of the fact that the Badaga community, to which she belongs, is under represented in the State Assembly and the Council of Ministers, and therefore there is space for people with leadership qualities and proven track record.

Policy and Institutional factors

The analysis of the GP performance and interaction with a cross-section of stakeholders helped us cull the following policy and institutional factors that seem to have played a role:

- Reservation for women seems to work

In general, the feedback about the president being effective was linked to her being a woman; this included the officials that she deals with as well as the people belonging to the Panchayat. Women are perceived to be ‘more honest, sincere and responsive’. In most cases, the officials attributed these features to the majority of women presidents that they are dealing with. It can be inferred that reservation for women seems to help not only for giving them an opportunity but also in terms of governance and performance of the Panchayat.

- Two consecutive term reservation helps

Mrs. Devadass is currently serving her second term as President. She said that her re-election has made her much more confident and encouraged her to do more for the community. She is now much better acquainted with the issues that the Panchayat has, more aware of her duties and responsibilities, and more experienced in dealing with the official procedures and requirements. Therefore, it emerges that it helps to have the roaster for reservation continue for two terms in order to enable the candidates get a better grip of the role and improves their performance.

- Training has limited impact

The officials interacted with highlighted that though the panchayat members attend the training programmes, they do not attach much importance and therefore do not benefit from those. This was identified as a general issue for the whole state and not specific to this Panchayat. The panchayat members felt that most training programmes just provide information and is not much helpful. What emerges is a need to revisit the training strategy and delivery in order to make it more relevant and meaningful.

- Awards help in motivating

Recognition and awards have indeed helped in raising the motivation level of the Panchayat members and president. The GP president shared that she was not aware of any award when she joined as president but was happy to receive them, and now looks forward to further recognition from diverse sources. Other ward members also demonstrated a sense of pride in having bagged those awards and it was clear that these have played a role in keeping the motivation level high. The awards also help in gaining respect among officials and others, and making them more responsive towards the GP's needs.

The analysis of the GP performance also led to emergence of two concerns that have a bearing on the GP performance. One is the fact that the GP's performance is essentially linked with the president's performance. This raises some issues about institutional development. The other is the dependence on state government for schemes which change if the political parties in power change. Some programmes come to an end abruptly making it difficult for the panchayats to explain. We are merely highlighting these issues here as they are not specific to this GP.

Annex 1: Details of available pension schemes (Centre and State)

| Name of Scheme | Provider | Eligibility | Amount |
|---|-------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension | Central Scheme (part of NSAP) | Age 60 years and above BPL Must have no source of income Must not possess property value more than Rs. 5000/- Must not be professional beggars | Central Contribution: Rs 200 p.m (uptil 79 years) Rs. 500 (80 years and above) Additionally the state might contribute |
| 2. Indira Gandhi National Disabled Pension | Central Scheme (part of NSAP) | Age: 18 years to 59 years 80% disability and above BPL Must have no source of income Must not possess property value more than Rs. 5000/- Must not be professional beggars | Central Contribution: Rs 200 p.m Additionally the state might contribute |
| 3. Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension | Central Scheme (part of NSAP) | Age: 40 to 59 years BPL Must have no source of income Must not possess property value more than Rs. 5000/- Must not be professional beggars Shouldn't have remarried | Central Contribution: Rs 200 p.m Additionally the state might contribute |
| 4. Destitute Widow Pension | State Scheme (Govt of TN) | Age: 18 years and above Must have no source of income Must not possess property value more than Rs. 5000/- Must not be professional beggars Shouldn't have remarried | Rs. 400/ month 2kgs of rice for those taking nutritious meals 4 kgs of rice for those not taking nutritious meals Diwali/ Pongal – 1 sari/ woman or 1 dhoti/ man |
| 5. Disabled Pension | State Scheme (Govt of TN) | Age: 45 years and above (no age limit for the blind) Must not be supported by son (or son's son aged above 20 years) Must have no source of income Must not possess property value more than Rs. 5000/- Must not be professional beggars Unfit to work | Rs. 400/ month 2kgs of rice for those taking nutritious meals 4 kgs of rice for those not taking nutritious meals |

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| | | (In special cases District Collector can award beneficiaries below 45 years) | |
| 6. Destitute Agriculture Laboures Pension | State Scheme (Govt of TN) | Age: 60 years and above Must not be supported by son (or son's son aged above 20 years) Must have no source of income Must not possess property value more than Rs. 5000/- Must not be professional beggars | Rs. 400/ month 2kgs of rice for those taking nutritious meals 4 kgs of rice for those not taking nutritious meals |
| 7. Deserted and Destitute Wives Pension | State Scheme (Govt of TN) | Age: 30 years and above Residing in Tamil Nadu Separated/ living alone for 5 years Must have no source of income Must not possess property value more than Rs. 5000/- Must not be professional beggars | Rs. 400/ month 2kgs of rice for those taking nutritious meals 4 kgs of rice for those not taking nutritious meals |
| 8. Destitute Spinsters Pension | State Scheme (Govt of TN) | Age: 50 years and above Unmarried Must have no source of income Must not possess property value more than Rs. 5000/- Must not be professional beggars | Rs. 400/ month 2kgs of rice for those taking nutritious meals 4 kgs of rice for those not taking nutritious meals |

Source: National Social Assistance Programme website and Government of Tamil Nadu website