CITIZENS' ADVOCACY TO STRENGTHEN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE

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In India policies are in place for decentralizing political process to the local level, but often do not function well. The Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) is involved in popular education and action research as a means of empowering citizens to assume greater roles in local government. In this study I first provide the context for this work, then describe the advocacy and educational processes used by PRIA.

The Governance Context in India

The Indian population is a polygenetic melting pot of various mosaics. Of its 1.03 billion people, the literacy rate is 65.38 % (male 75.85 %, female 54.16 %) (Census, 2001). India has 18 officially recognized languages. However, there are more than 1,650 languages spoken as the mother tongue of different population groups.

The Indian Constitution provides for a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic, with 28 States and 7 Union Territories. The Constitution is federal in structure with unitary features. About three-quarter of India's population live in more than half a million villages. India has many distinctions to its credit: the world's largest (and most fractious) democracy, second largest population, third largest economy in terms of GDP, and the largest celluloid-dream (movie) maker. This reputation is offset by tragic images of human deprivation, poverty, and suffering. Even after about 50 years of planned development based on the primacy of the State role, more than one-third of Indians are officially poor, and two-thirds are undernourished or malnourished. A large majority of Indians are still vulnerable to rising prices, unemployment, illiteracy, declining incomes, and disease. There is evidence of substantial income disparities among states, between rural and urban areas, and among various population groups within a state. Inter-state inequities, in terms of human development, are often glaring.

One of the lessons emerging from a wide range of recent development experiences is that public action and participation can play a powerful role in promoting essential aspects of quality of life, even at an early stage of development (see Dreze & Gazdar, 1997). One of the major limitations of the Indian parliamentary democracy has been its centralized nature. While India succeeded in getting freedom from foreign rule in 1947, its centralized democracy has failed in freeing Indians from the yokes of deprivation, disparity, and discrimination.

"I am not interested," said Mahatma Gandhi, "in freeing India merely from the English yoke. I am bent upon freeing India from any yoke whatever." The search for ways to rebuild an India free from the yokes of deprivation, disparity, and discrimination proceeded along with the struggle against foreign rule. It was recognized that political, economic, social, and cultural spheres of life were interdependent. Thus evolved the concept of village republics and village self-sufficiency through the creation of a self-reliant village economy and local self-government. Mahatma Gandhi elaborated on this idea:

Each village must be a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is necessity. In this structure composed of innumerable villages there will be an ever-widening, never-ascending circle. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose center will be individual, always ready to perish for the circle of villages till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units. Therefore the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle, but will give strength to all within and will derive its own strength from it.

The 73rd Amendment and Concomitant Developments

The recent Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 which came into force on 24th April 1993, was meant to provide constitutional sanction to Panchayats and establish "democracy at the grassroots level as it is at the State level or National level."[1] Except for three northeastern states (having tribal councils) and two urban Union Territories (UTs), all States/UTs coming under the purview of this Act have amended their Panchayat Acts to conform with the Central Act. The Gram Sabha or village assembly, comprising all persons above 18 years of age and eligible to vote, has been envisaged as the foundation of the Panchayati Raj system. There are three tiers of Panchayats: Gram Panchayat, at the village level; Panchayat Samiti, at the intermediate level; and Zilla Parishad, at the district level.

States with populations less than 2 million have not constituted the Panchayat at the intermediate level. As a result, at present, there are about 3 million elected representatives of Panchayats at all levels. These members represent more than 220,000 Gram Panchayats, about 6,000 Panchayat Samitis, and about 500 Zilla Parishads. All seats in a Panchayat at every level are filled by elections from respective territorial constituencies. Not less than one-third of the total seats for membership, as well as the office of chairperson in each tier, have been reserved for women. Reservation for weaker castes and tribes — Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Backward-Dalits — has been provided at all levels in proportion to their population in the Panchayats.

To supervise, direct, and control the regular and smooth elections to Panchayats, a State Election Commission has been constituted in every State and UT. The Act has ensured constitution of a State Finance Commission in every State/UT, for every five years, to suggest measures to strengthen the finances of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). To promote bottom-up-planning, the District Planning Committee (DPC) in every district has been accorded constitutional status. An indicative list of 29 items is provided in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. Panchayats are expected to play leading roles in the planning and implementation of works related to these 29 items. The spirit of the Constitution visualizes Panchayats as institutions of self-governance. However, giving due consideration to the federal structure of our polity, most of the financial powers and authorities to be endowed on Panchayats have been left

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[1] The then Minister of Rural Development, while moving the Bill to further amend the Constitution of India, Debate on Constitution (73rd Amendment) Bill, Lok Sabha 1992.

to the discretion of the concerned State Legislature. Consequently, the powers and functions endowed to the PRIs vary from State to State.

Ground Reality

Panchayats as constitutionally decentralized institutions have come into being. But they can't be a solution to one and all ills of governance. The reality is quite harsh. The rigid patriarchal structure inhibits women's participation in public affairs. Moreover, a majority of the elected representatives are first timers with little or no prior knowledge of the functioning of PRIs. Many of the women who are PRI members are illiterate and have to comply with social taboos and patriarchal values. These women members, as per the rigid rules of patriarchy, are expected to be shy and submissive resulting in weak articulation skills. It is not easy for the hitherto excluded groups to participate actively in the development process. The literacy level among SC/ST and women is quite low. Also at local levels, the powers held by some individuals have traditionally always superseded the limit legitimized by social institutions. If the people and their institutions are not active, the State and its institutions, whether in a centralized or decentralized form, continue to dominate. Under these conditions, people's ability to exercise options in civil society interactions and within social hierarchies often becomes the requisite condition for the local government to be responsive and accountable. People must participate in all spheres of their government. It means people have to be made aware of their roles and responsibilities. Citizens should express their choices freely and fairly in electing their representatives. People's councils should effectively take control of their own government, the Panchayati Raj.

Solution?

The main issue is how to move forward? How to reach out to millions of people residing in innumerable hamlets? How to educate them regarding their roles and responsibilities as voters, as elected representatives, and as Gram Sabha members? It requires a number of civil society organizations to come together with a shared understanding and common concern. It requires citizen advocacy to strengthen institutions of local self-governance.

Citizens' advocacy means people-centred advocacy efforts. It has two components. On one hand, advocacy begins from within. It implies reaching out to citizens, making them aware and capable of effectively participating in democratic processes. It helps in creating pressure from below and provides strength to institutions from within. Citizens' bargaining and articulation powers are enhanced. On the other hand, civil society organizations facilitate the process of advocacy for strengthening democracy at the local level. Organizations undertake action research to build knowledge on different issues of local self-governance. These knowledge-building processes bring different stakeholders together on a common platform to exert pressure on state and union governments for the creation of an enabling policy environment. It helps the institutions in gaining strength from outside.

PRIA's Efforts in Promoting Citizens' Advocacy

Programmatic interventions (being undertaken by PRIA and its partners) to strengthen PRIs encompass a wide variety of methods used in enhancing and strengthening capacity at the individual, institutional, and sectoral levels. The remainder of this paper deals with PRIA's advocacy strategies to strengthen democracy at the local level, in three sections. The first section deals with advocacy from within. It provides an overview of PRIA's efforts to build networks, coalitions, and alliances of like-minded individuals and organizations for expanding its reach to Panchayats in many states of the country. It entails convening fora of such diverse yet commonly concerned actors. It involves lobbying, campaigning, and public education through a variety of methods. It describes how people are educated to effectively participate in democratic processes at the local level. The second section deals with participatory research, which enables citizens to articulate their demands and negotiate for them. Citizens and civil society organizations come together to demand the genuine devolution of power and authority. This demand is based on systematic research findings. The participatory research process induces a number of social processes that lead to strengthening of democracy at the local level. The third section concludes the paper by summarizing the issues and challenges of doing citizen advocacy.

Advocacy from Within

Reaching to People Through a Network of Civil Society Organizations

PRIs are spread over the length and breadth of the country. It is almost impossible for any one organization to reach out to the critical mass of Panchayats in all states. So it is imperative to build networks, coalitions, and alliances of like-minded individuals and organizations to expand the reach to Panchayats in the areas of intervention. However, it is also required that there be a common understanding, a common perspective on PRIs among collaborating organizations.

PRIA's Perspective

1. PRIs are to be viewed as institutions of local self-governance, and not as mere implementers of centrally determined development programs. Bottom-up comprehensive planning, based on a micro-planning exercise, is to be the basis of self-governance. PRIs should not be allowed to become the third tier of development administration.

2. Emphasis must be placed on active participation in decision-making by women (and other weaker sections) with a view to enhance their role, status, and leadership in local self-governance.

3. Interventions in strengthening PRIs should focus on building, promoting, and empowering new leadership among women, Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes, and Dalits.

4. PRIs should assert their access to and control over local natural and human resources, as well as other development resources available from state and national governments.

5. Strengthening PRIs will entail clarity of their roles, systems of governance, accountability, transparency, and inter-linkages.

When PRIA decided to undertake a joint program to strengthen PRIs, it shared its perspective on Panchayats with its collaborating partners and a common understanding was reached. With this perspective on Panchayats and mutually agreed strategies, a nation-wide programmatic intervention (Joint Action Programme — JAP) to strengthen PRIs was initiated in 1995 in nine states through a Network of Collaborating Regional Support Organizations (NCRSOs) comprising a number of support organizations in different states. These states were Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. In each of these states one Regional Support Organization (RSO) spearheaded the PRI program for strengthening grassroots democracy in that state. The RSO in turn formed a network of civil society organizations in that state. These networks included grassroots NGOs, women's and youth groups, community-based organizations, etc. Thus a three-tier strategy was operationalized to reach Panchayats in many villages in many states. PRIA co-ordinates the nation-wide program out of Delhi. The RSO (second tier) does the same in the state and builds the capacities of those grassroots organizations (NGOs/CBOs) and individuals who work directly with Panchayats. At the third stage, these NGOs build and enhance the capacities of elected representatives and Gram Sabha members. This three-stage process has helped PRIA and its partners in scaling up and deepening the programmatic interventions to strengthen PRIs.

Strengthening Partnership to Strengthen Panchayat Raj Institutions

In 1995, very few organizations in India were interested in working for Panchayats. PRIA initiated this program in collaboration with six RSOs. A shared understanding was reached and a common framework for programmatic interventions (with state specific flexibilities) was drawn. PRIA, as a project holder, sought funds in a combined proposal for programmatic interventions in some of the Gram Panchayats in nine states. By the end of 1997, a total of about 200 NGOs across nine states became active partners in intervening in about 1,500 Gram Panchayats in these states.

PRIA and its partners are now working together in 16 states of the country. There is one RSO in each state, including PRIA's own field offices in three states (Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh) which act as RSOs in these states. The states being covered are UP, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Uttaranchal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Sikkim. The program in its extensive form has been able to reach to members of about one lakh (100,000) Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas in the country. The Joint Action Programme now involves thousands of organizations ranging from small CBOs such as women's groups to bigger support organizations and institutions such as Gandhigram University in Tamil Nadu. More and more individuals, organizations, and funders are showing their interest in joining and/or funding this program.

The whole intervention has made a clear-cut impact on institutions in the sense that many of the organizations which had some inhibitions (in dealing with the issues of Panchayats) are now

actively involved with the program to strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions. These networks provide a ready platform for citizens to undertake advocacy efforts.

Educating People to Act

PRIA's study on *Civil Society in the New Millennium* envisages a shared dream of the citizens of India. Indians want peace, education, and socio-economic security. They want to act and act responsibly towards shaping such a society and governance. But there seems to be discernible inertia and apathy among many people. It can be attributed to many factors including illiteracy and poverty. Moreover, top-down policies pursued by government have created a dependency syndrome among most Indians. Under these circumstances the role of civil society organizations becomes very important in providing the much required momentum to people's voices. Once energized, people take control of their destiny and act suitably to shape it.

Pre-election voters' awareness campaign (PEVAC). Elections to Panchayats are exercises of the utmost importance in participatory democracy. It is a time when citizens have power to exercise their choices, voices, and action in electing leaders who would be their Panchayat representatives. But the majority of citizens are not even aware of their right to vote. Citizens need to be made aware of and informed about PRIs as institutions of local self-governance. Citizens need to demonstrate assertive, caring, and ethical leadership after understanding their roles and responsibilities. How can that be accomplished? Every citizen cannot be approached individually. With limited resources and time, a campaign mode of intervention can be undertaken to engage citizens (Gram Sabha members) in the election process.

PRIA and its partners have undertaken a Pre-Election Voters' Awareness Campaign (PEVAC) in those states where the second round of Panchayat elections has taken place. These states are Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh. PEVAC was conceived as an organized, scheduled set of activities in order to inform, motivate, and promote action among citizens. The objectives of PEVAC were: (i) to enhance citizen participation, especially women and Dalits, in the election process; (ii) to create an enabling environment for free and fair elections; and (iii) to involve most of the local civil society organizations during PEVAC to widen the reach and effectiveness of campaign. It also aimed to create a common platform for CSOs for further actions to strengthen participatory democracy at the local level.

PEVAC usually starts with planning and strategy meetings with partner organizations. Each partner takes responsibility to anchor the campaign in a particular locality (field area of the partner). The actual campaign starts about 15 days prior to election day. During this period, people are made aware about the preparation of the voters list. Meetings with community-based organizations (CBOs) are organized. Easily understandable learning materials (posters, pamphlets, etc.) are prepared. Posters are distributed; folk groups are engaged in disseminating the messages through folk songs and dances (Kala Jatha). The public address system mounted on vehicles are used to play audio and video cassettes on the roles and responsibilities of citizens as voters.

In the whole process of PEVAC, a deliberate attempt is made to involve different types of organizations, including government departments, the State Election Commission, and the local administration. National and vernacular media is also involved in this process. PEVAC begins as a result of the efforts of some CSOs, but at a later stage, as has been experienced in different states, the campaign is jointly owned by all citizens, NGOs, CBOs, media, and the government. PRIA's impact studies in different states have shown that PEVAC was able to effectively educate people about their roles and responsibilities. Citizens, in turn, participated in democracy building at local levels. The voting percentages in the areas of intervention were significantly enhanced. Election processes in those areas went smoothly and the number of dummy candidates was drastically reduced.

The awareness campaign (PEVAC) has provided strength to the pedestal of participatory democracy at the local level. It has created a vibrant network of CSOs in the intervention areas. Following the Panchayat elections, when PRIA undertook a program to train elected representatives, the same network of CSOs was involved in training newly elected representatives. Now the same network is engaged in a mobilization campaign, which is intended to strengthen people's participation in Gram Sabha (people's council) meetings. The network advocates with citizens to use their rights in making Panchayats transparent, accountable, and responsive institutions of local self-governance.

Advocacy for Institutions

The public and policy environment for people's participation in governance is indifferent, if not downright hostile. Positive support from Union and State governments is required for the genuine and functional devolution of financial resources and authorities to PRIs. Intense advocacy efforts are required to influence policy changes at the Union and State levels. Policy advocacy entails influencing policies from the vantage point of enabling participation and empowerment of the marginalized. It comprises systematic and ongoing analysis and review of existing policies, their implementation and reformation.

To advocate for changes in government policy, in addition to public pressure, well documented macro level 'proofs of ground reality' become imperative. So, PRIA and its partners are engaged in the systematic documentation of different processes. Participatory research efforts aimed at building the capacity of the people and CSOs are regularly undertaken. Simultaneously the findings of these studies are widely disseminated to create pressure (from different quarters) to bring about enabling policies, which help people in strengthening democracy at the local level. The process of advocacy for institutions of local self-governance begins at the people level where the citizens are involved in the research process not as mere respondents, but more as action researchers. A typical research and advocacy process is a collaborative effort of many stakeholders who get involved with the process in different roles at different stages. In general, there are five stages in undertaking advocacy for institutions. These are:

- Joint ownership of the research process;
- Citizens as researchers/analysts;
- Multi-stakeholder dialogues;

- Using many platforms to say the same things; and
- Follow-up.

Joint Ownership of the Research Process

PRIA and/or its partners do not decide the agenda of research. It comes from the people. All the studies undertaken by PRIA and its partners (on the finances of Panchayats, women's leadership, micro-planning, the status of PRIs in different states, etc.) were demand driven. Citizens wanted to know about these issues and they wanted to act in the light of knowledge gathered about these issues.

Once issues to be studied are finalized, PRIA and its partners debate over research methodologies and researchers for the study. The research methodologies selected are people friendly and participatory. Researchers should be from local areas (usually members of local partner NGOs or interested individuals). There must be a team of researchers: both male and female. This team (comprising members of the RSO and local NGO/CBO) is oriented by the RSO in that state before it starts eliciting and exchanging information with the respondents. Feedback from team members is incorporated in the research design. Thus the research process is equally owned by all. Everyone involved in the process contributes as per her/his expertise. A researcher from PRIA who may be well versed with sophisticated research methodologies and refined languages is at par with the local research team member whose contribution in the form of eliciting required information is not less in any way.

Citizens as Researchers/Analysts

The information eliciting process is planned so that there are exchanges of information between investigators and respondents. Investigators are asked to take with themselves information that may be of vital use to the respondents. For example, when a study on women's leadership was initiated, every research team prepared a document containing the details of support available to women of that particular area from government schemes and NGOs. This information was shared with respondents in lieu of information sought from them

Also citizens are advised to act, not be mere respondents to the questionnaires used by the local researchers. They are encouraged to ask questions and share their perceptions on the issue being researched. Focused group discussions are also organized to get analytical information from respondents. When the first draft report is ready, it is shared with groups of respondents. They are requested to analyze the data in their own way and to provide their comments on the draft report. This way respondents take on the role of researchers/analysts and their feedback enriches the report. At the same time, this sharing stimulates citizens to think about the research issue, and in turn helps in mobilizing grassroots support for advocacy efforts.

Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues

The 73rd Amendment Act of the Indian Parliament created space for constitutional Panchayats. Consequently, the conformity acts of State Legislatures provided shape to these PRIs. The

functional and financial responsibilities which used to lie with the different agencies of the Union and State governments were transferred to Panchayats. Thus in the whole process of decentralization, a number of stakeholders have their stakes. Some of them help the process, while many others act against it. Many times it is because of a lack of understanding or lack of communication that people unwittingly act against the process of strengthening participatory democracy at the local level.

So, it helps if all the stakeholders are involved from the very beginning in advocacy efforts for strengthening PRIs. Multi-stakeholder dialogues and the sharing of responsibilities help in understanding each other's point of view. It also helps in bridging communication gaps, if there are any. But above all, this process brings the backing of a large number of forces (different stakeholders) to induce momentum in pro-Panchayat policies.

Advocacy for Strengthening the Financial Status of Panchayats

The study on the *Status of Finances of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India* was initiated by PRIA in 10 states of the country. The study was undertaken by different RSOs in different states. Districts, Block and Panchayats were selected for eliciting data on the finances of Panchayats. A local research team comprising members of the RSO and local NGO/CBO interacted with Panchayat members and concerned government officials. A draft report was prepared about the status of Panchayat finance in that district. A district level workshop was organized to share the findings of the draft report. Representatives (from the same district) of Panchayats, local administration, media, academia, political parties, NGOs, and other CSOs were invited to this district level workshop. This (draft) report was shared in the workshop and participants were requested to analyze the report and provide their suggestions to improve it. Participants' feedback was incorporated and district level reports were finalized. The same processes were followed in all districts of all states.

Based on these district level reports, a State level report was prepared and state level workshops were organized in all states. The state level representatives of all the stakeholders (as in the case of the district workshops) were invited to the workshop. The same process to receive feedback was followed and state level reports were finalized. Then a summary report on the findings of the study was prepared for each state. The state level summary reports were shared with all those who matter in framing policies for Panchayats at the state level. Since a number of stakeholders were involved from the very beginning (district and state level workshops), most of the policy makers knew that people were aware of the study, its findings, and its processes. So, they were already under psychological pressure. With the backing of its owners (all those who were associated with this study including Panchayats, administration, media, academia, politicians, etc.), this study was able to bring some policy level changes in many states.

By collating the state level reports a national report was prepared and shared in a national seminar in Delhi. A summarized version of this national report was disseminated to all the Members of Parliament, secretaries and other department officials, national media, institutions and NGOs working to strengthen PRIs. The study report sensitized citizens, media, NGOs,

bureaucrats, ministers, and political parties about the rather weak status of finances in PRIs. Different governments took a number of pro-Panchayat initiatives.

Using Many Platforms to Say the Same Things

When advocacy begins at the people's level and reaches the policy makers' level via multi-stakeholder dialogues, it creates a situation where policy makers are virtually compelled to take decisions. People pressure their elected representatives, while the media helps in general sensitization, and other CSOs voice their concern for local self-governance.

PRIA and its partners use many platforms and all the opportunities available to share their concern for the weak state of PRIs. The echoes of the voices from different corners awaken the slumbering executive to think and act. For example, when PRIA had an opportunity to offer its services to the high powered National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC), it helped bring issues of concern regarding PRIs to the notice of NCRWC.

PRIA is a member of different committees of the Planning Commission and Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. It uses all opportunities (as a member of these committees) to pressure the government to bring enabling policies for local self-governance. Similarly RSOs in different states mobilize people's opinion for PRIs. Partner NGOs do the same at the local level. Thus the same issues are raised at the local, district, state, and national levels. Policy makers are virtually assailed by voices from many different quarters and come under duress to take necessary action.

Follow-up

The follow-up of advocacy efforts is as important as (or even more important than) undertaking the effort. There must be continuous communication linkages with all stakeholders. Everyone should be regularly updated about developments in advocacy efforts. Accountability of all the partners involved in advocacy should be fixed. The documentation of efforts and the provision of regular opportunities for sharing with stakeholders help to keep the issues alive. Citizens' advocacy is not a unidirectional and one-time affair. It requires continuous effort and follow-up of that effort.

Issues and Concerns

There is no doubt that the institutions of local self-governance should be strengthened to be participatory, responsive, transparent, and accountable. For this, citizens should be educated and people's bodies such as Gram Sabhas must be strengthened to act as custodians of grassroots democracy. The capacities of PRI members should to be enhanced through training and workshops.

But doing all this requires macro level efforts. Meaningful, issue focused, and effective alliances are to be made and sustained. Building a network of diverse groups and organizations around an issue such as strengthening PRIs is a very difficult task. Panchayats are political bodies and often local NGOs are part of local politics. That may create problems in sustaining the network.

Thus it adds to the responsibilities of organizations such as PRIA to build the capacities of civil society organizations for this purpose.

Citizens' advocacy combines networking, knowledge building, information dissemination, and policy advocacy with a multitude of stakeholders. Assuring effective linkages between interventions and their manifestations is very crucial for the effectiveness of the advocacy effort.

Advocacy with government officials is a problematic area. Officials attuned over the years to the top-down model, need to be sensitized to the new realities of local self-governance and take them in their stride.

The Panchayati Raj Institutions should be given control, responsibility, and authority over all the resources lying in their geographical jurisdiction. They should be held accountable for local matters by their voters, the Gram Sabha. It must be ensured that women and Dalits participate actively and effectively in local self-governance. The state-led and other types of project committees should collaborate (not be played up as competitors) with PRIs, and PRIs should provide a space to these community organizations.

The CSOs have played a very effective role in making people more and more conscious of their roles and rights. However, sustained and more aggressive interventions are needed to deepen democratic local self-governance, keeping the state as a reference point. Citizen advocacy has to be promoted on an extensive and sustained basis to improve different aspects of local self-governance. The whole intervention needs to be scaled up. This requires a scaling up of creative individual and collaborative efforts of civil society and the government to strengthen local self-governance.

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