

Promoting Good Rural Governance for effective delivery of services to citizens

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Villagers in several rural parts in India still do not have proper access and reach to various social and economic opportunities. Even though schemes and services are abundant, the communication gap between the government and the people acts as a major constraint in accessing services. People miss opportunities for proper education, healthcare facilities, etc., which directly hinder their development. To address such problems, Sehgal Foundation designed an initiative, *Sushasan Abhi* (Good Governance Now!), providing a platform for villagers to understand their rights, learn how to access public services, and take active participation in addressing and solving their own problems along with the government officials and development communicators.

Sushasan Abhi works to increase citizen awareness of key government programs, including providing a toll-free helpline to address queries and problems related to services, government programs, agriculture, etc. The initiative includes legal awareness camps to share information on legal services and create awareness on sanitation and cleanliness (related to the dream of Clean India), all of which empower villagers and encourages them to celebrate and use their own power.

Local community members gather in Village Leadership Schools (VLS), which meet twice a month in classroom trainings set up to teach about rights and entitlements. The trained VLS members are called *sushasan champions*.

Since Sehgal Foundation first expanded good rural governance work in Bihar, Punas village in Samastipur district has seen sushasan champions bringing about positive changes along with the active participation and cooperation of the community.

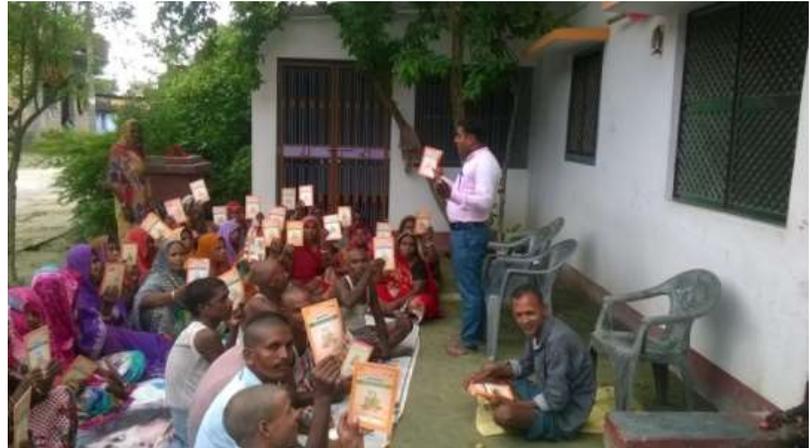
Nirmala Devi and Pramod Ram, both residents of Punas village, have been active sushasan champions since 2016.

"I work as a sushasan champion in my village and have been associated with the foundation team since two years. Because of the good governance training received, I learnt about the various schemes provided by the government for us and managed to get a MGNREGA Card (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) delivered to most of my fellow



villagers, and I also managed to provide pension card to almost 100 people in a camp organized in our village. Along with the other sushasan champions, we also organized a sanitation drive in our village to raise awareness about the importance of toilets, which resulted in their construction under our initiative,” said Nirmala Devi.

Consistent challenges emerge for sushasan champions in working for the betterment of the community. Attempts to bring positive change in people’s behavior so they will accept something new requires bridging the gap between the local governing bodies and the community and promoting community participation.



The champions overcome these challenges by focusing on sustainable solutions.

Shankar Singh and Ram Prakash Singh, sushasan champions from Bazidpur village, Samastipur, played an instrumental role in increasing awareness about safe drinking water among fellow villagers.

“Even if the government provides schemes for us, we do not have any medium or information on how to access the schemes. After attending the community meetings and trainings, we were able to help fellow villagers access the *Shram Sansadhan* scheme, where 150 labor cards were provided to the people,” said Shankar Singh.

Ram Prakash Singh added, “We also raised awareness on sanitation and building toilets and because of our efforts almost 90 percent of people in our village now have toilets at their homes. We are extremely grateful to the team for their efforts for the good governance initiative and motivating us in all the activities that we do and also helping us in the process of accessing the schemes and services. One of the major learning that we owe to the team is instilling community participation in us and helping us realize our individual rights.”

(Upasana Upadhyaya is working with Sehgal Foundation as an Ideosync UNESCO Information Fellow)