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Social audit

Non-panchayat members to scrutinize panchayat accounts

Women leaders

Reservation encourages women to lead

E-enablement

Smooth functioning, transparency and good governance

The Panchayat

EMERGING PERSPECTIVES

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EMERGING PERSPECTIVES

- 8 Panchayat Revenues and Fiscal Decentralisation**
Manish Gupta
- 14 Gram Sabha and Social Audit**
George Mathew
- 18 Panchayat and Disaster Management**
Mahi Pal
- 24 Saakshar Bharat and the Panchayat**
Tanu Shikha Arya
- 28 New Leadership: the Panchayat and Women**
Nupur Tiwari
- 32 The Panchayat and Women's Empowerment**
N Sivanna
- 36 The E-panchayat and Rural India**
Avtar Singh Sahota
- 40 E-enablement of the Panchayat**
Nirmala Buch

INITIATIVES

- 44 E-governance for Mewat**
Shruti Kapoor and Anjali Makhija
- 46 Chandauli: Digitising a Minority Village**
Rina Mukherji
- 50 E-governance in Maharashtra**
Rina Mukherji
- 52 Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan: Emerging Trends**
Anita Brandon
- 58 New Leadership in Odisha**
Joe Madiath
- 60 The Story of Rukkanapalle**
Karuna Vakati Aakella

- 64 Experiences from Sikkim Making MGNREGA Deliver**

Sandeep Tambe

- 67 A Career in Rural Development**

Saraswati Raju

IN BRIEF

2 Letters; **5** Editor's note; **6** Backgrounder: Panchayati Raj Institutions; **23** Term power; **49** Term power rating

Expert Panel



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E-GOVERNANCE FOR MEWAT

E-GOVERNANCE AND DIGITISATION IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS HAVE A LOT OF POTENTIAL IN INDIA, AND CAN BE SUCCESSFULLY USED TO CHECK CORRUPTION AT THE RURAL LEVEL. HOWEVER, IN PLACES WITH LOW LITERACY LEVELS, AND NO PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE, A LOT WILL NEED TO BE DONE TO PUT MATTERS INTO PLACE.

By **Shruti Kapoor and Anjali Makhija**

E-governance and digitisation in panchayati raj institutions have a lot of potential in India and can be successfully used to check corruption at the grass root. However, in places with low literacy and no physical infrastructure, a lot will need to be done to put matters in place.

E-panchayat, a mission mode project undertaken by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, to introduce and strengthen E-governance in panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) holds a lot of merit. It is intended to provide software solutions to the rural sector by making government services accessible to the common man, thus bringing about transparency and accountability in the maintenance of accounts and other transactions including payments and receipts, and hence, better credibility of PRIs.

E-governance is currently in different levels of implementation in various states. In Andhra Pradesh it has been introduced in the areas of birth and death registrations, house tax assessment, demand collections and trade licences. This was operationalised in 475 gram panchayat units identified by the government (epanchayat-pris.ap.nic.in). In Maharashtra, 33 zila parishad bodies, 351 panchayat samiti bodies, and 27900 gram panchayat units were equipped with desktop computers, and printer-cum-scanner machines. All zila parishad and panchayat samiti and around 22000 gram panchayat units enjoy internet connectiv-

ity. The achievement earned Maharashtra the Rs 50 lakh prize in 2011-12 for the best E-panchayat implementation in India (it.maharashtra.gov.in). In Kerala E-governance comprises E-districts and E-gram services. The Pampakuda Panchayat in Ernakulam was declared the first digital panchayat in Kerala by the State Chief Minister Oomen Chandy on June 28, 2014.

The scope of e-governance in Haryana is tremendous. Computers have been provided to zila parishad bodies at the district level, the panchayat samiti units at the block level and at the engineering wing. The development and panchayat department (DPD) of the State is in the process of introduction of e-Panchayat for panchayati raj institutions (PRIs). The DPD in Haryana has identified 2294 clusters for 6081 gram panchayat units for digitisation (haryanapanchayat.com).

The Mewat challenge

Mewat is Haryana's most backward district with a total literacy rate of just 54.08 per cent and a female literacy rate as low as 36.6 per cent (Census 2011). A 2010 panchayat training programme by the Sehgal Foundation revealed that 50 per cent of newly elected panchayat members of this region were illiterate. Of the literate 32 per cent were school dropouts. Given this situation, imparting digital training to panchayat members can pose



a major challenge. In many states, a Rajiv Gandhi Seva Kendra is set up to provide the physical space for panchayat offices. The Kendra also serves as a hub for disseminating technologies and convergence of various government programmes. In Mewat, however, there are few such interventions. The absence of physical infrastructure to support E-panchayats is a major hindrance. Despite these challenges, the district is well connected through mobile and phone based internet. There are two community radio stations in the area—the Alfaz-e-Mewat set up by the Sehgal Foundation is managed by a well-trained team from the community. The station provides information on aspects that apply to Mewat's daily life. There is a great demand for information and communication technology (ICT) tools and English and computers hold a lot of potential. Sehgal Foundation's Good Rural Governance (GRG) programme imparts information to people on government schemes and entitlements and assists in building capacities of the panchayat. Implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) has already increased the enrolment of girls in schools. In coming years, female literacy will inevitably increase. Meanwhile, special drives to provide functional literacy to elected women representatives need to be undertaken. This will promote meaningful participation of elected women representatives in the panchayat and minimise the proxy role played by husbands or

E-governance can go a long way in addressing FUND MISALLOCATION AND MONEY LAUNDERING by the privileged few.

sons in the governance process of the region. One of the bottlenecks for E-governance, illiteracy, will also be addressed.

The potential is vast, challenges many, and the willingness of the community, many being first generation learners, to adopt technology is very forthcoming. With some support from the government and civil society, Mewat can be set on the right path towards digitisation at the panchayat level. E-governance can go a long way in addressing fund misallocation and money laundering by the privileged few. It will be the best tool to take Mewat forward and bring it at par with other developed districts in Haryana and the rest of the country.

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PHOTO COURTESY: ANJALI MAKHIJA