

The road to
TRANSFORMING A VILLAGE

*Learnings from Tata Trusts' DELTA Last Mile Linkage Project
(Period: March 2017 to Feb. 2019)*

A Joint Initiative of Tata Trusts & District Administration, Chandrapur (Maharashtra)

TATA TRUSTS

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The document draws on our learnings from DELTA Last Mile Linkage Project, in Chandrapur (Maharashtra) and relies on the field experiences of our team. Any individuals/parties using this as a reference document must acknowledge Tata Trusts as the author.

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1 FELT NEED & IMPETUS FOR CHANGE

MICROPLANNING SO FAR

"We need an alternative vision in which the well-being of people and the living systems of the planet that is their home, come first" (Korten as cited by C J Schenck & H Louw 1995)

Participatory micro-planning is a people-centered approach that decentralizes the planning process to reflect the needs and aspirations of the community. It places emphasis on a community's ownership of their own development trajectory. The importance of decentralized planning has been recognized right from the First five year plan (FYP)¹. Yet, India's tryst with participatory planning - led by empowered local governments and owned by communities - is still at its nascent stages. The First FYP stressed on district level planning, following which District Development Councils were set up by the Second FYP period. The Fourth FYP, recognized the importance of planning at district level where *"plan formulation being closely related to the preferences of the people and to the physical conditions of the area"*² were stated as some of the main benefits of local level planning. Consequently, the Planning commission set up detailed guidelines for district level planning. Despite these efforts, no significant progress was made to strengthen local administration and PRI bodies, to make community-centric planning a reality. Any progress towards empowerment of local bodies was continuously diluted in the shadows of centrally sponsored schemes and missions, thus forcing a top-down approach. According to the Planning Commission "...these initiatives in district planning tapered away as these local planning exercises were not linked to the annual planning process in most states."³

However, there have been many localized efforts of micro-planning in India, albeit issue or sector specific. Microplanning has been long used for healthcare and education sectors (e.g. Ninth FYP declared Early Childhood Education as a priority and suggested use of micro-planning to augment community involvement, for better plan outcomes⁴). The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) uses microplanning for "the delivery of RI [Routine Immunization] services to a community"⁵. UNICEF's work in this area is also particularly laudable. Their Child-Friendly Village Planning Project⁶, organized in Krishnagiri District (Tamil Nadu), focused on Reproductive and Child Health, Child Development and Nutrition, HIV/AIDS, Education, Sanitation and Child Protection. UNICEF also piloted the "Integrated District Approach through Village Planning" in 17 districts across 14 states in India.

Reflecting on the impact of the program, a UNICEF evaluation report stated, *"Micro planning is resource intensive and requires budgets at the district level to allow for implementation of the plans. Yet the planning processes at all levels are still top down, which makes local level planning very challenging."*⁷ Evidently, most efforts have been sector/issue specific. The biggest hurdle in implementing holistic microplanning exercise is the difficulty in fully integrating the plans within the existing government machinery, and lack of fiscal empowerment of Local bodies (until the 14th Finance Commission (FC)).



Tata Trusts' DELTA program was designed to revitalize community-centric development planning by carefully addressing the short comings of the traditional approach, and creating a successful model for data (evidence) based, collaborative-planning framework.

DEVELOPING A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON MICROPLANNING

In the spirit of the 73rd and 74th Amendments, the Kerala government declared the 9th FYP as People's Plan (1995). It was the first state government to allocate 30-40% of plan funds for the local governments⁸, preceding the 14th FC's recommendations. On a central government level, Ministry of Rural Development's Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) (2014), was the first concerted effort to formalize bottom-up planning, legitimizing the role of **Village Development Plans (VDP)**. It gave the MPs pivotal role and the District Collectors were expected to coordinate the planning process. Around the same time the 14th FC mandated assigned fund transfers to the gram panchayats, disbursed semi-annually. The local governance systems received a double impetus both in terms of being recognized as base units of planning and receiving necessary financial bandwidth.

Tata trusts' **Data Evaluation Learning Technology & Analysis (DELTA)** program was conceptualized in response to these positive developments. It was designed and conceptualized by the Data Driven Governance team within Tata Trusts. DELTA is a technology backed framework for community-centric microplanning, that supports collection and analysis of exhaustive data on individual, household and institutional (Schools, Anganwadi, Village, Gram Panchayat, Health Centres) levels, taking the village as the base unit of planning. It is a digital approach to assessment of current status of community, its needs and aspirations, by combining survey data with Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools to sketch a well-rounded picture of the village.

It was designed to support an inclusive, sustainable planning model, which is able to remain evidence based and community-centric, even at scale.

Previous decentralization approaches did not succeed because they could not establish the community's and its local government's agency, in leading the planning process – from drafting to implementation. They also could not integrate these plans with the existing system, indirectly reducing the legitimacy of the "participatory" aspect of planning. To overcome these issues, DELTA focused on three prerequisites (See Figure1):

a) ***Proactive Stakeholder participation*** (answers who should the plan be made for and by whom)

It is critical to place the stakeholders at the center, to ensure the plan reflects the needs/aspirations of the community and is cognizant of the available resource and human capacities. Community's participation is key to a rights based approach to development. A critical aspect of this is revitalizing community bodies such as Gram Sabhas and building the technical capacity of the PRI members. The buy-in of the local governments ensures that the village level plan exercise is integrated with the processes at the district level. It is also

important to effectively communicate the importance of such a decentralized system for optimizing plan outcomes, right up to the district level.

b) ***Dynamic Information Systems*** (focuses on What/Where should the plan target)

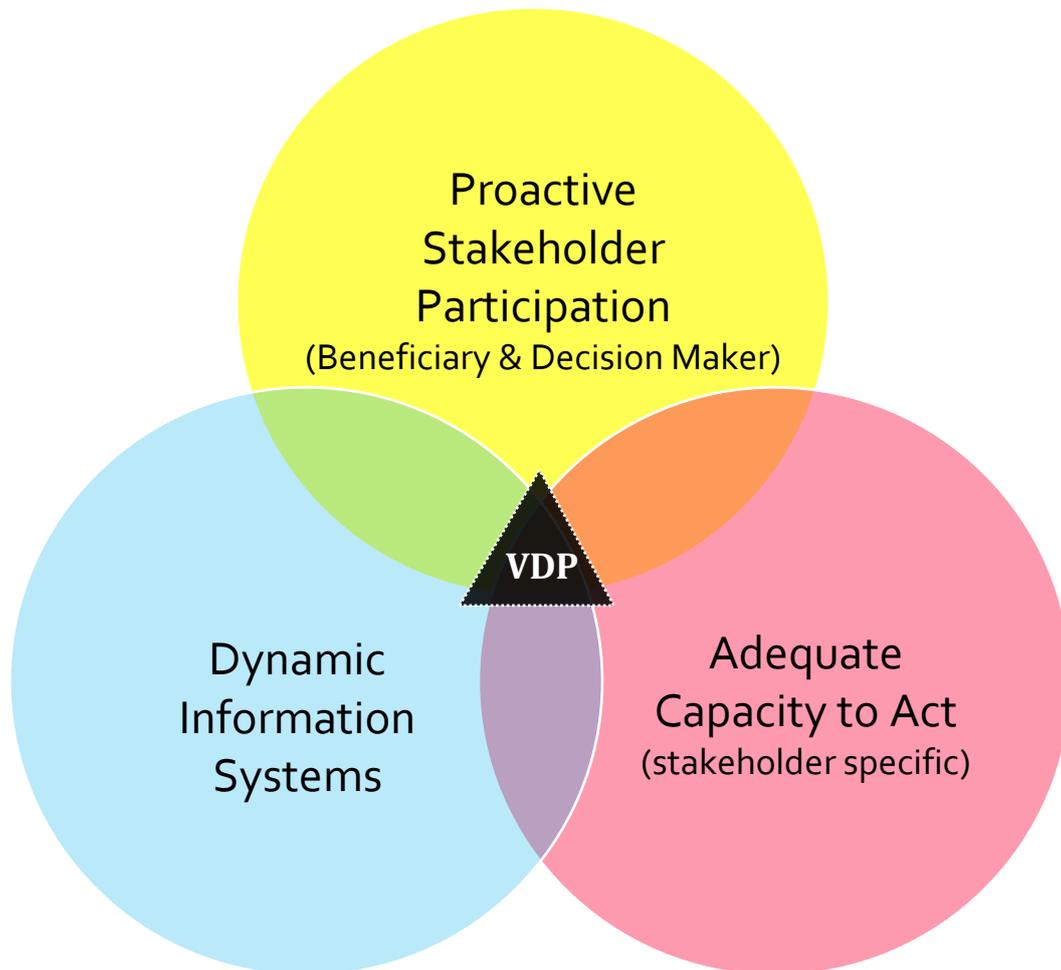
This includes *i*) village and institution-wise exhaustive datasets for updated information at the fingertips of partner communities and decision makers *ii*) PRA outcomes for contextual knowledge, *iii*) an integrated platform/dashboard to host and analyze this data and *iv*) open communication channels between communities, PRI members and local administrators. We used technology to reduce information asymmetry between different actors in the planning process, to promote accountability and transparency.

c) ***Adequate Capacity to Act*** (focuses on How an inclusive plan should be formed and Why implemented)

Even when the stakeholders are aware of their roles, responsibilities & rights, and have updated, granular data to inform their decisions, their ability to take action is constrained due to various reasons, such as insufficient knowledge of the plan process (in the community), inadequate technical capacity to process the data/information available into actionables and lack of community's convening power (in case of disempowered community bodies like Gram Sabhas). *Capacity to act*, in this holistic sense, is at the base of both ensuring continued stakeholder participation and dynamic information system. DELTA process gave utmost priority to awareness and capacity building of all actors, to support transition into a data-driven planning process. This included technical training of members of local administration, PRIs and community to understand the data that is collected from their village (its purpose and uses), and to become conversant with the technology used to collect, maintain and analyze this data. The entire exercise is tailored to suit their specific roles.

The first phase of DELTA process was taken up in three blocks (Mul, Pombhurna & Jiwati) of Chandrapur district in Maharashtra in 2015-16. Exhaustive survey was conducted to cover all individuals and all community institutions. The individual survey collected information on Demography, education, health, water and sanitation and livelihoods. The PRA exercises and the data thus collected informed the Village Development Plans that were prepared for 290 villages (115 Gram Panchayats). The data is hosted on the DELTA Dashboard, a powerful digital tool in the hands of development administrators and peoples' representatives to apply the 3A (Access, Analysis & Action) approach that helps prioritize need-based & time bound development for the beneficiary communities. The dashboard allowed for analysis of data at different scales, across indicators and geographies. Relevant scheme and fund related information is also hosted on the dashboard, along with space for data updation and progress tracking mechanism. This allows for identification of convergence opportunities and prioritization of targets given resource envelope. It even created a path to identify gaps of service and implementation of individual benefit schemes. This was very helpful to the administrators and representatives in the subsequent periods to discuss, prioritize and work with strategies & coordination to mitigate the basic needs of communities and attain sustainable development of people.

Figure 1 : Prerequisites of Sustainable Microplanning process and their components



▲ Community-centric, evidence based **Village development plan** that is supported by a sustainable planning

- **Who** i) Community (beneficiary and owner of plan),
ii) PRI members (Facilitators and custodians of the VDP)
iii) Local Administration (responsible for optimization of fund utilization and outcomes)
- **Action without Agency**– Where stakeholders wish to participate and have desired information but lack adequate knowledge or established process to convert information to plans and plans to outcomes.
- **What/Where** – Data, supporting technology and open communication channels (between all stakeholders) that allows for evidence based decision making, in designing the focus and targets of VDP.
- **Agency constrained by lack of usable information**
Lack of granular, updated data and technology to analyze it across regions, themes cannot lead to optimized plan outcomes.
- **Why/How** – These are mechanisms (like a social audit), platforms (like a Gram Sabha meetings) or technical capacities (such as ability to work with data and its host technology) that re-inforce a community’s agency and assist all decision makers to design and act on the VDP
- **Capacity without incentive to Act** – Technical capacities and information can become externalized in a system, where stakeholders are not sensitized to the merit of the process

DELTA LAST MILE LINKAGE PROGRAM

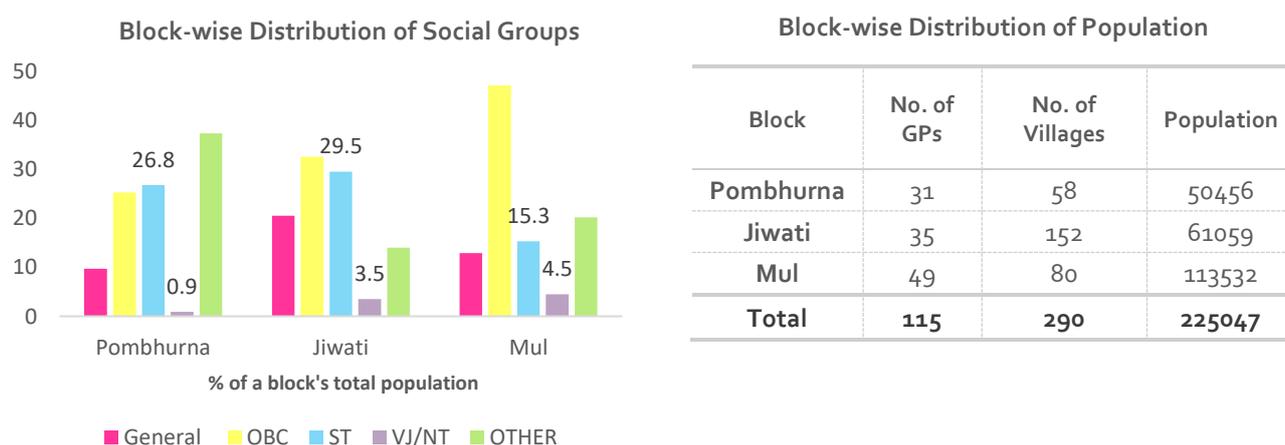
The first phase of DELTA set the base for inclusive micro-planning in Mul, Jiwati and Pombhurna blocks in Chandrapur. The Last Mile Linkage program was an effort towards creating a well-rounded platform integrating technological, social and administrative pathways towards implementation of community vetted development plans. It was rolled out in the project area March 2017 onwards, to implement the Village Development Plans (VDP) and work on the developmental gaps that were identified from analysis of data that had been collected through the DELTA survey exercise (2016), covering all the Gram Panchayats of Mul, Pombhurna & Jiwati blocks. The project was a felt need of the administrators and representatives subsequent to DELTA to provide handholding support in implementation of VDPs, and augment technical capacities for both community and administrators.

Last Mile Linkage program was an initiative of Tata Trusts, in partnership with the District Administration of Chandrapur. Jan Seva Gramin Vikas Va Shikshan Pratisthan, an organization having wide experience in community development, provided implementation support for the project. The project was implemented over two years, with an intent to empower the beneficiary communities, and strengthen development planning & implementation process. Our team of facilitators and field experts worked towards improving coordination and communication between different stakeholders in the process, facilitating last-mile knowledge/information transfer, and empowering communities to participate, contribute and thus sustain development in the project area. In the following sections we will cover in detail the approach, modality and outcomes of the Last Mile Linkage project and its significant impact on the communities it served.

Scope

The term of the Last Mile project was for two calendar years, i.e. from 1st March 2017 till 28th February 2019. The operational area of the program was the same as in the first phase, i.e. **290 villages spreading across 115 Gram Panchayats, in 3 blocks of Chandrapur district**. Nearly 22% of the total population in Mul(15.3%), Pombhurna(26.8%) and Jiwati(29.5%) belong to Scheduled Tribes (DELTA household survey 2016) (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Block-wise Population and distribution of social groups



Purpose and Model-Panchayat Approach

The Last Mile Linkage program was designed with the vision to empower communities to control their development trajectory from the front wheel. The primary purpose of the project was to bring holistic development in 115 Gram Panchayats through implementation of VDPs & convergence of resources at Gram Panchayat level. It was important for us that the program be able to create 'lighthouse' examples of bottom-up planning, with active involvement of the all stakeholders. With this vision in mind 12 panchayats were chosen (4 in each block) as Model Panchayats, where the program's engagement with community was intensified. Essentially, our field team was structured to ensure our presence in each of the three blocks (block coordinators) and every gram panchayat (Gram Panchayat Coordinator) (the HR structure of the project will be discussed in greater detail in section 4). For the model panchayats, we also had representatives in every village (Village Coordinators) to deepen our engagement with the communities and give impetus to their plan-implementation.

There were four key areas of focus for the program:

1. **Community Empowerment and Mobilization** - At the heart of a microplanning process is participation of informed and pro-active stakeholders. Concerted efforts were made to ensure community bodies like Gram Sabhas are revitalized and information gap is bridged for the last member of the community. We especially focused on women, youth and village level institutions, so they may in-turn pick up the baton and continue supporting their community.
2. **Enabling Plan Process:** To support the planning exercise and ensure evidence based decision making, focus was on creating both information centers and a cohort of active community volunteers who could support these centers and dissemination of information into their communities. Unique social audit method, using wall paintings on community buildings, were employed to ensure accountability and transparency in the process. An important part of the 'enabling' plan process was to ensure the buy-in and continued support of the local government officials and functionaries.
3. **Model Panchayats:** A gram panchayat is commonly thought of as a base unit for decentralized planning in India. In the Last Mile Linkage program, our Model Panchayat system took the panchayat as the unit of administration but the village was treated as the base unit for planning. The objective was to use practice based arguments to suggest what an ideal bottom-up planning system structure should look like, for it to be sustainable.
4. **Inclusive Village Development Plan:** The VDP is the primary instrument and outcome of the planning process. The DELTA survey data and PRA information helped in creating a requirement shelf for every village. The journey from there to a VDP required community members to deliberate on and prioritize items for the shelf. The feasibility of the VDP and alignment with existing plan process was essential to ensure its formal uptake for all villages in our project area.

In the next section we will look at each of these areas and their working.

2 CATALYZING TRANSFORMATION

COMMUNITY AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Initiatives like DELTA and the last mile linkage program are only as successful as their uptake by the community, beyond the program's horizon. The goal was never to establish a 'DELTA' microplanning process – it was to use DELTA framework to catalyze community driven micro planning in our project areas. From the very beginning, we stressed on the revitalization of community forums and groups to become platforms where people could voice their opinion and take collective decisions. We focused on three tasks to achieve this – *i*) strengthen **Gram Sabhas** as platforms that bring together citizens & PRI leaders; *ii*) empower women through active **Mahila Sabhas**, to be the voice of their communities; *iii*) create sustainable community resources by training youth **volunteers as change-makers**.

Last Mile Linkage program focused on strengthening of Gram Sabhas by regularizing it, increasing participation of people in discussions, building environment to accommodate demands of people, informing people about development schemes, facilitating decisions on prioritization of agenda, and supporting in mobilization of communities during the project period.



Gram Sabha (15th August, 2018), Mohadi Rayyatwari, Pombhurna

In two years of the program duration, we saw a marked increase in the participation numbers in Gram Sabhas, where people began actively raising their demands and participating in discussions, acknowledging their roles in development and contributing in possible ways towards implementation of development projects. We were able to sustainably hold quarterly Gram Sabhas to support periodic discussions and stock-taking. Gram Sabha Assessment forms were used to ensure that the platform was effectively used (See Appendix 1 for a sample of the form). Eventually, by 2018, there was a marked increase in number of Gram Sabhas and also the participation levels (see figure 3).

Strengthening of Mahila Sabha was one of the key strategies in Last Mile linkage program, to empower women. In fact, it was felt that greater participation in Mahila Sabhas resulted in a more vibrant Gram Sabhas – where voices of diverse groups were being heard and decisions were more inclusive.



Mahila Sabha, Mul

As the participation of women increased their issues started creating space in the Gram Sabha dialogues, which would otherwise not be addressed, for instance discussions around menstrual hygiene, pre/postnatal care, child malnutrition and so on. What was even more impressive was the impetus to solutions for societal or behavioral issues- such as rampant alcohol abuse, lack of sanitation etc. – with greater support from women.

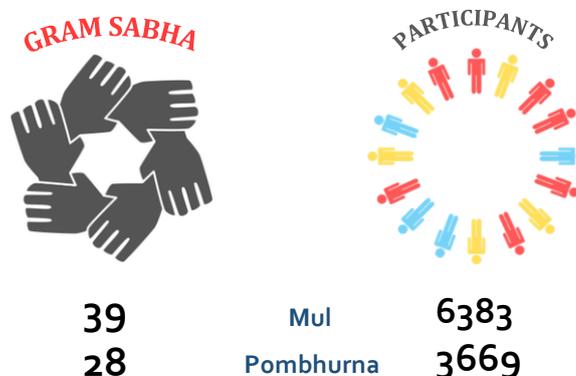


Figure 3 Participation for the landmark 2nd October Gram Sabha (2018)

Capacity Building of Village Volunteers was an important part of ensuring the sustainability of the project’s objective of empowering the communities to take ownership of their development trajectories. Youth volunteers can be catalyst of change by becoming conduits of information accessible to the last member in the community. Active volunteers are live testaments of a community’s ability to lead its own journey to development, thereby encouraging more people to take courage and participate. To channelize this force, the Last Mile Linkage Project selected youth volunteers from each project village and provided them training on six core areas (see Figure 4) to

guide them in developing a supportive environment for the community that in-turn, could garner participation of the people in the village development process and implementation of VDPs. During the project period, a total number of 3155 youth volunteers were trained from project villages from all 115 GPs to shoulder responsibilities at community level.

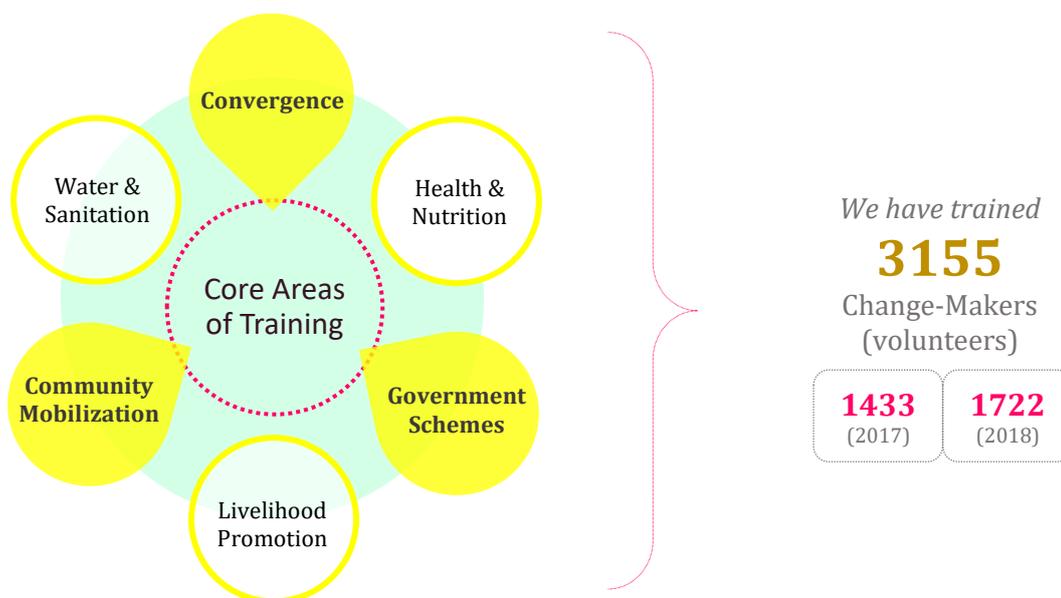


Figure 4 Core Areas of Training for Community Volunteers

AN 'ENABLING' PLANNING PROCESS

As we discussed before, lack of streamlined planning process - one that can take care of coordination between different stakeholders, relay of information between communities and decision makers and ensures accountability & transparency – erodes a stakeholder's agency, irrespective of their interest and diminishes the plans ability to be inclusive and sustainable. Within the Last Mile Linkage Project, we endeavored to create an "enabling" process that could embody all the functions we discussed. There were three support elements of the plan process:

i. Convergence Meetings:

- a. We conducted *panchayat level meetings* across all 115 GPs for our field coordinators, volunteers and elected members to come together discuss the VDPs and development needs of the villages, describe the need of coordination between different actors, explore the areas of convergence and take commitments from the functionaries on targets that were collectively agreed upon.

- b. Coordination Meetings at the block and district level were held by order of the district administration, to ensure open channels of communication between all moving parts in our planning machinery, including local governments officials, our field coordinators, volunteers, our project team and community members. The block and district level meetings were a very important step in legitimizing the planning process. The same has been covered in greater detail in Chapter 3.
 - c. These meeting (block and GP level) were separate from the supplementary periodic meetings that our field coordinators convened with specific departments at the block level and also with representatives of all community institutions including school teachers/principal, anganwadi workers, Asha workers, ANM, Sarpanch, Gram Sevak and so on. These meetings ensured our coordinators and in turn the youth volunteers remained connected with all the moving parts in the planning machinery.
 - ii. **Information Support System:** Access to information is at the base of sustaining a rights based system like the micro-planning model. It was imperative that all community members be able to participate actively and equally in the decision making process.
 - a. Panchayat Resource Groups (PRG) were created across 115 GPs with members of Gram Panchayat and people, from within the community and outside, with thematic knowledge in the areas of education, health, nutrition, tribal, forest etc. The PRG helped in awareness building and advocacy and helped in aligning the needs and aspiration of the community (as enshrined in the VDP) to the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (a GP level statutory plan document) – this ensured implementation support for all items in the plan.
 - b. Village Resource Group (VRG) were specifically formed for the 12 Model Panchayats. Their function was similar to a PRG, but with greater proximity to the community members the VRG were able to use their meetings to address issues and problems of the community and convert their discussions into collective action.
 - c. Village Information Centers (VIC) were village level support institutions in our Model Panchayats to provide developmental information to the citizens as per their need, such as gaining access to developmental schemes and, channelize collective action, and track implementation of village development plan, periodically. VIC were supported by youth volunteers trained under the Last Mile Linkage Program. These centers assisted the Gram Panchayat in collection of information, supporting planning process, mobilizing people for events and assisting delivery of services to citizens. Community was also provided e-services to access information and linkage to different schemes at these centers. Meetings were taken and notices were served on behalf of the Gram Panchayat to aware, mobilize and inform people in development process. They are designed to sustain the initiatives of the project after its completion with support of village volunteers and departmental volunteers.

iii. **Social Audit Mechanism:** One of the core strategies of Last Mile project to build ownership of community towards the plan process and document (VDP) and bring transparency in development process. We needed a mechanism which could facilitate public reporting of Implementation progress of VDP line items. The solution was simple but the results powerful. We painted the priority list from a VDP (that was chosen by collective will during a Gram Sabha) and painted it on community walls in the form of a tracker. The tracker included information on three things – **i)** description of priority item and target that needs to be achieved; **ii)** progress of implementation; **iii)** in case of delay, there was a remarks column to specify the reason. VDPs were painted in all villages of 115 GPs and were updated regularly to give the status of their implementation to the community.

To paint mark a status update, the community needed to agree on the status (work completed, in-progress or stalled/cancelled). The discussions could happen in Gram Sabhas, but in most cases they were spontaneous, since the conspicuous wall paintings were painted in locations with high footfall. Information is a strong tool in the hands of people. Being able to track and question the progress of the VDPs gave the community members a strong sense of agency. The simple approach was perhaps our most effective tool in mobilizing communities.



VDPs Painted on Public Walls in Babrala (left) and Borchandali (right) GPs, Mul

MODEL PANCHAYATS – A POLICY CASE

Last Mile Project developed 12 model Gram Panchayats, to create best-practice cases for inclusive microplanning process - including VDP implementation, linkage of individuals to Govt. schemes, information outreach, ownership of community to VDPs, people’s participation in development process, data based decision making, tracking of VDPs, community action for development and so on. In each of these model GPs one Village Coordinator was placed to see the work process more closely and handhold institutions, organizations and CBOs to attain development goals embedded in the VDPs, as identified through collective community decisions and DELTA survey process. The Village coordinator (VC), along with youth volunteers became anchors of the program at the community level. For the administration, the VC bridged the resource/capacity gap that hampered last mile connect for the local government. For the community, active youth volunteers and the VC were a testament to the impact of informed decision making. They acted as conduits of information between the community and the local governments (through the GP and Block level field coordinators). Having a last mile connect improved implementation outcomes and gave a boost to community mobilization activities. VCs also facilitated timely update of data – at the source of data generation – another factor that can potentially improve granular efficiency of planning.

Model Panchayats chosen were Uthalpeth, Borchandli, Chichala, Bhavrala in Mul; Ambedhanora, Umri Poddar, Jungaon, Ghatkul in Pombhurna; and Bhari, Ambejhari, Dewlaguda, Kodepur in Jiwati.

VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT PLAN – BY THE PEOPLE

Village Development Plans were outputs of DELTA process that was taken up in 2016 which were later integrated to prepare Panchayat Development Plans (PDPs) at Gram panchayat level. In their first version VDPs were basically requirement shelf that reflected the needs of the people as captured in the survey. A total of 290 VDPs and 115 PDPs were made. Eventually they were presented before the Gram Sabhas to discuss and incorporate the aspirations & demands of the people as needed. In Last Mile Linkage project, we focused on the implementation of the VDP target items. The average percentage of VDP implementation across 115 GPs is 58.1%.

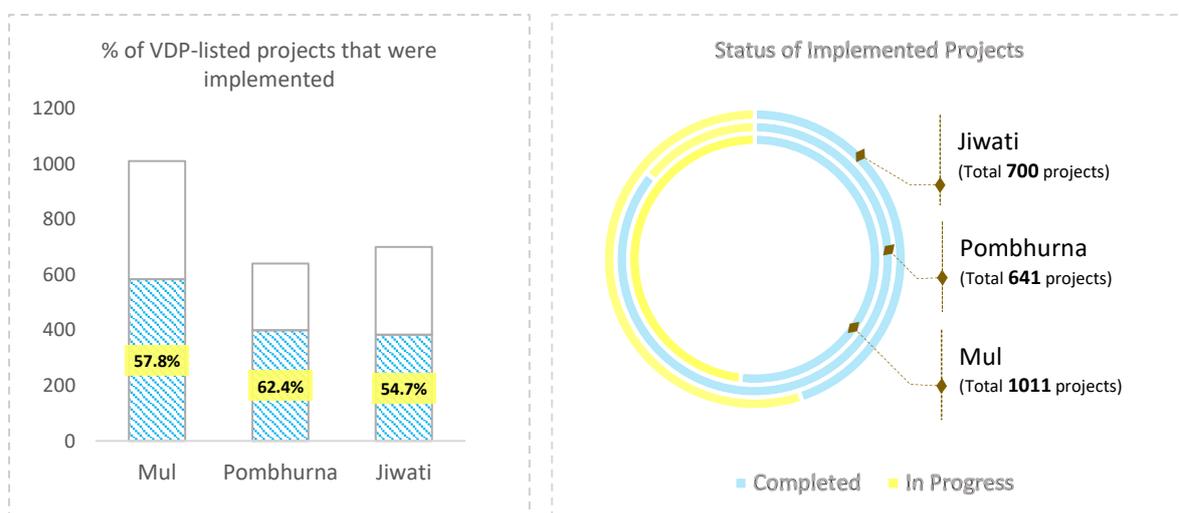


Figure 5: Block-wise Status of Projects listed in the VDP

There were three important steps before we moved to the implementation phase, to ensure that the VDP was not just a DELTA project outcome but a legitimate, actionable planning instrument:

- i. **Validation of VDPs:** The VDPs were based on year-old DELTA survey data. There was a need to validate them with respective Gram Panchayats to check if the line items were still relevant and also to incorporate any additional items to address current pressing demands of the community.
- ii. **Prioritization of VDPs:** In the interest of time given finite project duration and the available resource envelope to fund the VDP, it was considered prudent to list out top 20 priority items, in consultation with the GP body and Gram Sabha. Prioritization helped focus the project team's efforts, thereby improving implementation outcomes.
- iii. **GPDP Preparation:** As we discussed earlier, it was important that the VDPs be treated as official plan instruments since they reflected the will of the Gram Sabha and the aspirations of the community. Therefore, we aligned the VDPs with the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP), which is an annual action plan for every GPs to work towards development of communities using funds available with them under state & central finance commission grants.

Optimizing VDP implementation meant being able to efficiently map available funds and schemes to the priority list. The first step towards implementation was ensuring complete document coverage for the community members, to facilitate their access to relevant schemes and benefits. Adequate and fair access is at the heart of a rights based approach to planning. **85%** of all individual who applied for any essential documents received them by the end of the project cycle. This allowed them access to schemes and benefits worth more than **₹ 34 Crores**, across the three blocks. Additionally, benefits worth more than **₹ 62 Crores** also reached the people in the form of community projects such as construction of roads, provision of toilets in the Anganwadi etc. In this sense, all our support endeavors fell into four buckets –

- i) where benefits accrued to individual/community due to our efforts for non-budgeted items (such as essential documents) – even when no direct monetary benefits were realized through this process, it had huge positive externalities by ensuring further access to previously unavailable schemes;
- ii) where benefits accrued against budgeted item (such as helping concerned individuals file documents for access to Ujjala Yojana, PMAY, MNREGA and so on);
- iii) where requests had already been raised for certain schemes, but benefits accrued due to our regular follow-up with concerned authorities (such as for SBM, Gharkul Yojana etc.)
- iv) where benefits were promised against registration for access to schemes (such as health insurance, Ayushman Bharat, any skill training program etc.)

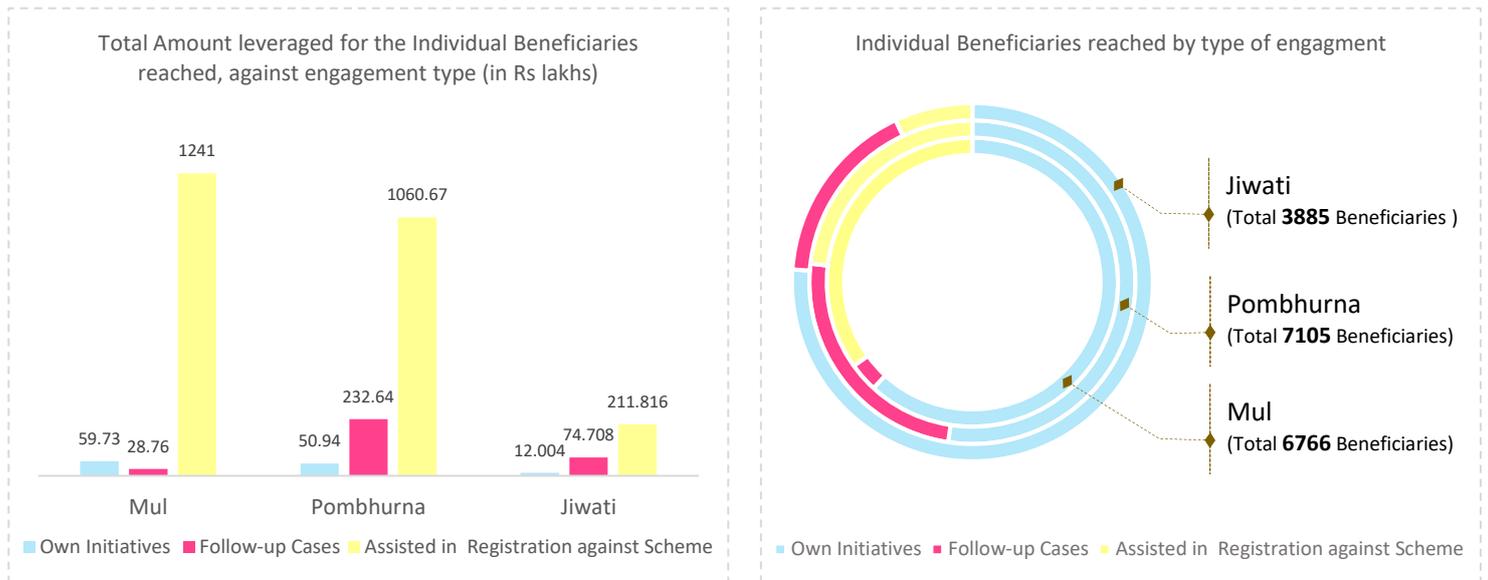


Figure 6: Block-wise summary of individual beneficiaries reached

The top schemes/initiatives by number of people they benefited include providing access to necessary documentation, Swachh Bharat Mission, Ujjwala Gas Yojana, Health related (including Ayushman Bharat, other insurances and camps), MNREGA and Housing schemes (including PMAY, IAY, among others)

The VDP Implementation process benefited hugely from the **DELTA Dashboard**, which is a powerful tool developed under the project to ease access to data, analyze data and track progress of development plans. The primary information collected through DELTA process were hosted on the dashboard with options to update on periodic intervals and find the status of development in the project area under select sectors and indicators. The target users of the dashboard are administrative officers and functionaries working with different departments for the project areas. In 2018 the institutional information from School, AWCs, Health Centers, Gram panchayats and villages were further updated to make it more useful as a tool for development planning. We also organized training of GP, block and district level functionaries to help them become better acquainted with the technology and provide them hand hold support to use the dashboard for development planning and implementation. The dashboard allows data to be viewed across indicators and regions. For decision makers, this allows them to access the necessary information to increase granular efficiency of resource allocation and therefore, the plan outcome.

Every positive outcome from the VDP implementation encouraged communities to put their faith in the planning process and engage more deeply in decision making that affects them and their communities. This success of this journey propelled community mobilization more than any verbal campaign could have.

3 CONNECTING THE DECISION MAKERS

We have covered in considerable detail the role of our field teams and community volunteers in the Last Mile Linkage Project and how they have been instrumental in empowering our partner communities to take the first steps towards participating in an informed planning process. In this chapter, we focus on the involvement of the administration and the pivotal role they play in supporting the process and giving it the required legitimacy by facilitating implementation of key VDP items.

A transparent planning process requires all stakeholders to be able to participate equally. Working with the administration and gaining their support for the project was key to ensuring its sustainability and success. Through-out the duration of the project the local government across levels, from the District Collector, Block Development Officers, right up to the Gram Sevak, played an important and active role in this process. To ensure accountability and close coordination between stakeholders, Block and District Coordination Committees were created, with the support of the District Collector of Chandrapur.

Block-level Coordination Committee (BCC) met on a monthly basis, under the chairmanship of the SDM of the concerned block. BCC included BDO, CDPO, BEO, TMO and all other block-level department heads or leads and block-level representatives from our project team. During the project period total number of **36** BCC meetings were held in all 3 blocks that proved to be building blocks for success of this project.

District Coordination Committee (DCC) was scheduled to meet every quarter. It included District level Heads of Departments of Rural Development, Education, Health, Nutrition, WASH, Food and Civil Supplies, Rural Construction, Lead Bank Manager and other district representatives under the Chairmanship of Collector and CEO-Zilla Parishad as Co-Chairperson. These meetings monitored the progress of the Last Mile Linkage Project's work, implementation of and issues with regard to implementation of VDPs, and linkage of individuals to schemes and other relevant matters.

Block or Panchayat Samiti is a good administrative level where every department has its presence and controls sub-block level works and functions. Hence, coordination at block level was necessary to advocate for the implementation of VDPs and address community-level development needs. Besides in many cases efforts of our ground team alone were not enough and express support of the concerned department authorities is needed to cover the distance between planning and implementation.



Here, the BCC becomes an ideal platform for facilitating timely discussions and coordination across concerned department, instead of holding separate meetings with every department

Forums like Block Coordination Committee have been very useful & effective in meeting the needs of people and bringing interdepartmental coordination and implementation of schemes easy and need based. 32 settlements with majority primitive tribal groups, in Jiwati block, were not part of any records in the block office. Last Mile Linkage Project worked with government officials in their enumeration and facilitated their access to government schemes.

Other than BCC and DCC meetings, the project also worked towards routinization of Gram Sevak visits to their Gram Panchayat office & s/he and their in-office availability for at least three days in a week, for the communities to directly interact with them. This simple intervention increased people's access to essential services from the panchayat and local government. Over time Gram Sabhas have also seen participation of Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad members, making them more fruitful. This has tremendously helped people to repose faith in Gram Sabha process.

During the project period, **550+** convergence meetings were conducted with participation from Gram panchayat officials and 5500+ community level participants



4 PASSING THE BATON TO THE COMMUNITY

At the end of this two-year long journey, the greatest takeaway from a project such as this would be to leave behind sustainable changes that the community takes up in our absence. It has been rewarding, to see the community members change from being 'reluctant audience' in a Gram Sabha to 'active participants'. A few tell-tale signs leave us with the hope that our beneficiary communities have taken their first steps towards leading an informed, inclusive and collaborative planning process.

For instance, in Uthalpet (Mul), there was a felt need for skill development towards alternate livelihood options. Our field team helped organize a training session for mushroom farming. We received very high participation for the session and eventually many of the learners were able to turn their training into a profitable business. The young entrepreneurs, soon, came together to start 'Uthalpet Farmers' Produce Company limited'. This company not only did well at home but managed to attract attention of people in neighboring villages (who had either been part of a similar training or were keen to learn). Slowly the company has grown and collectively sells all produce from Uthalpet and neighboring villages, at handsome profits, in nearby *haats*.



Skill Training- Mushroom Farming, Uthalpet, Mul



Scheme and Document Advisory Camp, Mul

Our field teams have organized information camps, circulated posters, banners etc. many times during the course of the project to ensure information reaches every person in the community. Over time, as the youth volunteers became more confident in their knowledge, this process was replaced by conversations between our volunteers and the community members. Slowly, as they saw results, people accepted the volunteers as their knowledge source. The volunteers feel confident enough to lead our camps, with help from the Village coordinator. Most importantly, as our program phases out, we see no difference in the reliance of the community on their 'youth leaders' and also no significant drop in the volunteers' enthusiasm to support their community.

Another example of community leadership is from Dighori in Pombhurna. Even post alcohol ban in Chandrapur, the village suffered high rate of alcohol abuse. Being close to the highway, there were many liquor shops near the village, allowing for easy supply. Our coordinator tried speaking to the community to raise awareness, but effects were short lived. Complaints were made to the police, but to no avail. Our coordinator decided to seek the help of women and youth leaders in the community, talking to them about the social issues that accompany such high rate of alcohol abuse in a village. With their support alone, police complaint was filed and 200 boxes of banned liquor were recovered from the nearby shops.



200 boxes of Illegal Alcohol Caught, Dighori, Pombhurna



Updating VDP Wall Painting, Junasurla, Mul

We have spoken about how communities became proactive in the planning process over time. The question is, however, will they sustain this momentum post the project duration. The trends we see are encouraging. The wall paintings are still being used to track implementation of the VDP. Volunteers, in most model panchayats, continue to support their society. The block level administration was very supportive of our work, which they believed also streamlined their process.

In the end, change does not happen overnight. But leaving behind 'enabling' structures like the wall painting, trained volunteers-turned-changemakers, activated Gram and Mahila Sabhas, Block & District Level Convergence meetings, among other, we continue to support the change.

(Note: All community stories have been collected by our team members during their visits to the project areas)

APPENDIX I: GRAM SABHA ASSESSMENT FORMS

ग्रामसभा निरीक्षण फॉर्म

- ग्रामपंचायत आणि तालुक्याचे नाव:
- ग्रामसभेची तारीख:
- ग्रामसभेची अध्यक्षता कोणी केली? (नाव आणि पद) :
- ग्राम सभामध्ये उपस्थित असलेल्या सहभागीचे तपशील:

क्र.	सहभागीचा प्रकार	पुरुष	स्त्री	एकूण
I.	ग्रामपंचायत सदस्य			
II.	गपंचायतचे नागरिक			
III.	ग्रामपंचायत पातळीवरील सरकारी अधिकारी			
IV.	इतर अधिकारी (अ-शासकीय)			
V.	महिला बचत गटातील सदस्य			
VI.	युवक क्लब / इतर सीबीओ सदस्य			
VII.	इतर PRI सदस्य (ZPM, PSM etc.)			
VIII.	आमंत्रित अतिथी			
IX.	वरील प्रकार सोडून, इतर कोणतीही व्यक्ती			
	एकूण			

- सामील झालेल्या लोकांशी काही चेकलिस्ट (Put ✓ mark)

सरपंच	Samitisabhya	नायब सरपंच	जिल्हा परिषद अधिकारी	PEO	GRS	तालुका अधिकारी
शिक्षक	आशा	ANM/MPHW	AWW	VAW	Krusaka sathi	Gram sathi
SEM	SBM Motivator	MLA Representative	MP Representative	MLA	BDO	MP

- गावांचे प्रतिनिधित्व (ग्राम पंचायतील सर्व गावाचे नाव लिहा):

7. Agenda followed in Gram sabha (ग्रामसभा अनुसरणे विषय)

अ.क्र.	चर्चा विषय	अ.क्र.	चर्चा विषय
१.	मागील सभेचे अहवाल वाचन करून कायम करणे.	२.	शौचालयाचा वापर व बांधकाम करणे.
३.	रोजगार हमी योजनेचा आराखडा तयार करणे .	४.	वृक्ष लागावड व संगोपन या विषयी चर्चा करणे.
५.	कुपोषण कमी करण्याबाबत आढावा घेणे.	६.	टाटा ट्रस्ट च्या माध्यमातून गावात चालू असलेले कामे या विषयी चर्चा करणे.
७.	शासकीय योजनांची माहिती देणे.	८.	महात्मा गांधी तंटामुक्त समितीची निवड करणे.
९.	सर्व प्रस्तापित कामाना मंजुरी देणे	१०.	अध्यक्षांच्या परवानगीने वेळेवर येणारे विषय

- ग्रामपंचायतने ग्रामसभेपूर्वी नोटीस जारी केली होती का? होय/नाही
- होय तर, नोटीसमध्ये विषय नमूद केलेले होते का? होय/नाही
- नाही तर, विषय ग्रामसभेच्या दिवसापूर्वी ठरवला गेला का? होय/नाही
- ग्रामसभे मधील विषय कोणी ठरविले? (नाव आणि पद)
- जर विषय नोटीसमध्ये होता, तर कोणत्या विषयवर चर्चा झाली नाही?
- ग्रामसभेत Last Mile Linkage प्रकल्पाबद्दल काही विषय होते का? होय/नाही
- होय, तर कोणते?
- सहभाग माहिती
 - ग्रामपंचायत सदस्य सहभागी होते का? होय तर, किती पु.
 - ग्रामपंचायत पातळीवरील सरकारी अधिकारी चर्चेत सहभागी झाले होते का? होय तर, ते कोण होते
 - ग्रामसभेत गावातील सामान्य नागरिक सहभागी झाले का?
 - होय असल्यास, कोणत्याही नागरिकाने काही प्रश्न विचारला का? होय तर, ते प्रश्न कशाबद्दल होते?
 - चर्चेत मुख्य व्यक्ती कोण होते? (नाव आणि पद) सरपंच, तंटामुक्त अध्यक्ष गावपाटील व इतर

- ग्रामसभेचे ठिकाण कोठे होते?
- ग्रामसभेसाठी बसण्याची व्यवस्था किती केली होती?
- तिथे काही व्यासपीठ किंवा व्हीआयपी / अतिथी आमंत्रित होते का? होय/नाही
- ग्रामसभेसाठी ध्वनी तंत्र व्यवस्था होती का? होय/नाही
- ग्रामसभेची वेळ: ग्रामसभेची प्रारंभ वेळ. ग्रामसभेची कालवधी.

- ग्रामसभेमध्ये घेतलेले निर्णय

- ग्राम सभे बरोबर इतर कोणतेही कार्यक्रम तिथे होतो का?
- नोंदणी केल्यावर त्या दिवशी सही झाली होती का? होय/नाही
- त्या दिवशी लिहिलेल्या ग्रामसभेचे ठराव झाले का? होय/नाही
- ग्रामसभेबद्दल इतर कोणतीही माहिती/अनुभव?
- ग्रामपंचायत मधील एकूण निवडून आलेले सदस्य. पु. , स्त्री एकूण.
- ग्रामपंचायत मधील एकूण मतदार. स्त्री. एकूण

This section has information on the name of GP and Village and the Date of the Sabha. Additionally, there is record of who presides over the Sabha

There is a record of nature of participation in the Gram Sabha – including details on if the participant was a GP member, citizen, administrative officer, SHG member, Youth or any other club member, guests or other PRI members.

List is maintained to record presence of all members whose participation in the Gram Sabha is necessary (excluding the community members, whose counts are recorded in a different section). These include MLA, MP, Block level officials, representatives of Community Institutions such as Schools, Anganwadi, Health Centers and so on.

This section records the main Agenda that is being followed by the Gram Sabha (the specimen has examples recorded for a Gram Sabha in Ambezari GP, Jiwati and includes items such as reviewing previous meeting reports, decision provision of toilets, tree plantation, employment guarantee plan, discuss Last Mile Linkage VDP and its progress, among others)

Q8-9 record the efforts at disseminating information about the Gram Sabha, in the public and the efficacy of the efforts. The next questions record if the Gram Sabha was able to formally take any decisions and actors that were involved in the discussions and decision making process.

This section records logistic aspects of organizing the Gram Sabha such as location, equipment, duration of meeting.

This section records if the formal decisions taken by the Gram Sabha

This section records if the formal voting process, noting presence of voters and elected members and if any decisions were taken within the Gram Sabha.

गावाच्या विकासात्मक प्रक्रिया पुढे घेऊन जाणारा प्रकल्प

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ग्रामपंचायत-अंबेधानोरा गाव विकास आराखडा अमलबजावणी कार्यक्रम तालुका-पोरुर्णा

TATA VDP नुसार ०९ मे २०१७ ला ग्रामसभेत प्राधान्यक्रमाने ठरविलेल्या २० कामांचे प्रगती अहवाल

क्र.	कामाचे नाव	प्रकार	अपूर्ण	पगळी पध्दत	शेज
१	अंगणवाडीची रंगरंगोटी करणे.				
२	अंगणवाडीला वाटर फिल्टर चा पुरवठा करणे.				
३	अंगणवाडीच्या शौचालयाची दुरुस्ती करणे.				
४	अंगणवाडीच्या विद्यार्थ्यांना जगावेश पुरवठा करणे.				
५	अंगणवाडीतील मुलांना खेळणी साहित्याचा पुरवठा करणे.				
६	अंगणवाडी प्रथे TV संच बसविणे.				
७	जि. प. शाळेला वाटर आरो उपलब्ध करून देणे.				
८	जि. प. शाळेला फर्निचर खरेदी करणे.				
९	जि. प. शाळेला संरक्षण प्रितीचे बांधकाम करणे. (२०० मी.)				निधी नाही
१०	जि. प. शाळेच्या शौचालयाची दुरुस्ती करणे व पाण्याची व्यवस्था करणे.				निधी नाही
११	जि. प. शाळेला वाश बेसिन चे बांधकाम करणे.				निधी नाही
१२	पिण्याच्या पाण्याच्या टाकीला वाटर आरो प्लॅट बसविणे.				निधी नाही
१३	पिण्याच्या पाण्याच्या टाकीची दुरुस्ती करणे.				
१४	पाईप लाईन व व्हाल ची दुरुस्ती करणे.				
१५	समाज प्रवनाचे अपूर्ण बांधकाम पूर्ण करणे.				निधी नाही
१६	ग्राम सचिवालय चे बांधकाम करणे.				निधी नाही
१७	तलावे कार्यलयाचे बांधकाम करणे.				निधी नाही
१८	४ हातपंपावर सोलर पंप बसविणे.				निधी नाही
१९	सी. डी. वर्क बांधकाम करणे. (२० मी.)				
२०	अंतर्गत कच्चा रस्त्याचे कोन्क्रीटकरण करणे. (४२० मी.)				
२१	नाली बांधकाम करणे. (९५० मी.)				

कार्यक्रम अंमलबजावणी संस्था- जनसेवा ग्रामीण विकास व शिक्षण प्रतिका, यवतमाक.

This column lists out the 20 top priority items in the VDP, as decided by the GP body and the Gram Sabha. This VDP is for Ambedhanora, Pombhurna. It includes items such as:

1. Painting of the Anganwadi building
2. Procure Water filter for Anganwadi
3. Maintenance of Toilet (Anganwadi)
4. Uniforms for children studying in the Anganwadi.
5. RO water purifier for the Zilla Parishad (ZP) School
6. Procure furniture for ZP School.
7. Repair/build Compound Wall for the School.
8. Repair toilet, washbasin in the school
9. Repair Water tank
10. Construction of drainage
11. Construction of concrete road

among others. The list has institutional, village level and individual level requirements.

Three columns stand for completed, in-progress and stalled/cancelled, respectively and mark the status of implementation of a project. The last column is for comments, where reasons for delay or cancellation are noted down.

Note, the status of implementation is decided collectively by the members of the community, before it is updated on the wall. This serves as a check and balance mechanism, allowing community members to question the status and also voice their opinion in case of discrepancy in information or disagreement. For instance, if one of the items is construction of cement road – 200 m long and say by majority, community decides the road is complete. However, if one member of the community is dissatisfied with the outcome since the patch close to her house has not been completely built, she can raise this issue in the informal meeting or the Gram Sabha and open discussion on revision of status of the road.

ENDNOTES

¹ Planning Commission. 2008. "Manual for Integrated District level Planning", Government of India.

² Planning Commission. Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-1974). Government of India

³ Planning Commission. 2008. "Manual for Integrated District level Planning", Government of India

⁴ Planning Commission. Ninth Five Year Plan Vol II (1997-2002). Government of India, URL: <http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/9th/vol2/v2c3-3.htm>

⁵ MoHFW.n.d. "Unit3 – Routine Immunization Microplanning". Last Accessed on 25th
URL: <https://mohfw.gov.in/sites/default/files/Unit3RoutineImmunizationMicroplanning.pdf>

⁶ Staff Reporter. 2005. "Micro planning process begins for UNICEF project in Krishnagiri". The Hindu. December 23, 2005. URL: <https://www.thehindu.com/2005/12/23/stories/2005122311650300.htm>

⁷ UNICEF. 2011. "Evaluation of UNICEF's Strategic Positioning in India". December 2011. URL: https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/Evaluation_of_UNICEFs_Strategic_Positioning_in_India.pdf

⁸ Planning Commission. nd. "Decentralized Planning Experience in Kerala". Government of India. URL: http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/peoreport/peoevalu/peo_kerla.pdf

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