

**IMPROVING THE KNOWLEDGE ON
THE FUNCTIONING OF
DECENTRALIZED GOVERNANCE:**

A Study of Grama Panchayat Past Presidents in Dharwad District

Karnataka

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**Centre for Multi-disciplinary
Development Research (CMDR)**

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1. Introduction

The arguments favouring decentralization for people-centred development have influenced the Indian government to pass 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992. Subsequently, each state government has passed Acts complying with the constitutional amendments and this has paved the way for the introduction of three-tier Panchayat Raj System in India. Important features of this landmark legislation are (i) mandatory elections, (ii) provision of grama sabha as an accountability enhancing mechanism (iii) reservation of seats and executive posts for women and those belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities and Backward Castes, (iv) transfer of functions relating 29 matters and (v) constitution of Finance Commissions to ascertain the funding position in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) at all levels and make recommendations aimed at providing funds sufficient to undertake functions assigned to them.

In 2009, there were 28.18 lakh elected representatives to all rural local bodies; of them, 94 per cent were elected to grama panchayats. Nearly 37 per cent of the elected representatives to Grama Panchayats (GPs) were women; their representation was much more than the number of seats reserved for women in this year. Over 30 per cent the GP elected members belonged to Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) categories. Reservation of seats and executive positions implies that a large number of persons who are first timers or who

hitherto did not have an experience in the local governance will come to power. Over two-thirds of these persons were women and belonged to economically and socially disadvantaged groups. Reservations will only ensure representation of people belonging to disadvantaged groups but not their participation in PRIs. In order to improve their participation in the local governance, there is a need to provide awareness on constitutional provisions relating to PRIs, functions assigned and roles and responsibilities, and also develop their leadership capacity.

An important feature of the constitutional amendment is the transfer of functions relating to social justice and economic development at the local level. These functions are listed in the Eleventh and Twelfth Schedules. A reading of these functions shows that these functions are related to planning and implementation of activities for social justice and economic development. In order to enable the elected representatives to effectively participate in the planning and implementation of activities, they need to be provided with training on various functions transferred to PRIs and how to undertake tasks relating to planning, implementation and monitoring. There is also a need to provide awareness and training on mobilization of own revenue (tax and non-tax revenues), and proper utilization of resources at their command (own revenue, inter-governmental transfers and schematic funds).

Passing a legislation transferring powers to decentralized bodies is easy; but, making these bodies to work is entirely different matter. Although the legislation relating to decentralized local bodies has been passed about 25 years ago, the performance of these bodies is unsatisfactory because of limited devolution of powers (relating to functions, functionaries and finances), less capacity of the elected representatives to discharge their functions in professional manner. In this study, we focus on the issue of capacity.

The need for providing training to elected representatives to PRIs has been

long realized by the state and central governments. Accordingly, various policies and programmes have been implemented. Efforts have been made to set up new training institutions or strengthening existing ones, preparation of training manuals and provide training to elected representatives through state and non-state agencies with the help of different training modes (class room, electronic media and so on).

A large number of elected representatives at all the levels have been trained in the last two decades or so. Notwithstanding these developments, there is considerable academic interest on the subject of capacity building of elected representatives to PRIs for the following reasons. First, due to the type of reservations, persons obtaining training in their first term are not the same people who contest and win the elections in the next round. Second, frequent changes in the rules relevant for decentralized governments and schemes assigned to PRIs for implementation make continuous training and research on the same as an imperative need. Third, there are not many studies that assess the knowledge of elected leaders on the functioning of panchayat raj system. Fourth, training programmes tend to be inadequate, non-sequential and inappropriate in their duration. As a result, outcomes of capacity building programmes often fall short of expectations leading to questions such as whether elected leaders are able to undertake their constitutional functions. Fifth, one also witnesses delay in elected leaders assuming power after elections due to reservation quota leading to researchable questions on the efficacy of training programmes.

Objectives and Methodology

Against this background, this monograph aims to assess the training obtained by the presidents of grama panchayats and its impact on knowledge levels among them.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Discuss policies and programmes of Karnataka government relating to training for Grama Panchayat elected members and outcomes of these training programmes;
- Describe the content and mode of training adopted to provide training to GP members;
- Assess the knowledge of GP members on the functioning of decentralized governance at the grassroots level, and factors contributing to variations in the knowledge levels, and;
- Explore the relationship between knowledge levels and undertaking of development works in the jurisdiction of GP.

The present study is undertaken in Dharwad, a moderately developed district in Karnataka in terms of literacy, per capita income and women empowerment. The primary data on knowledge levels were collected from those who were GP presidents during the period 2005-2010. Such a methodology, it is hoped that, will help to examine the extent to which the knowledge obtained during their tenure is retained even after relinquishing their power and its potential contribution to the transformation in the society.

In all 359 persons were elected as presidents to 127 GPs in Dharwad district during the period 2005-10. We have screened those who have completed 30 months of tenure. All the female and male past presidents who have completed 30 months of tenure have been selected for the study. By adopting this sample procedure, we have selected 140 GP presidents for eliciting information on their socio-economic background, knowledge on the powers and functioning of grama panchayats and so on through a structured questionnaire. In addition, we have also collected qualitative information from GP presidents on socio-cultural factors that constrained them to attend the training and beneficial impact of training.

This monograph is presented in eight sections. After the introductory and methodology section, the importance of capacity building to elected representatives of decentralized government in terms of theory and policy is provided in the second section. In the third Section, we have undertaken a critical review of the policies and programmes of Karnataka government with reference to provision of training to GP members with the help of available literature. In the fourth Section, a discussion on the content and mode of training provided to GP members in Dharwad is undertaken with the help of information collected from the Zilla Panchayat (ZP) as well as from the sample GP members. In the fifth section, we present an assessment of the knowledge of the past GP presidents on the functioning of decentralized governance at the grassroots level with the help of an index on knowledge score. The impact of capacity building on functioning of GPs with reference to development works is presented in the sixth section. Seventh section presents the factors determining the training outcomes based on qualitative data. In the final section, conclusions are provided.

2. Theoretical and Policy Context

There has been considerable interest in capacity development in the last three decades as response to address the shortcomings in development process and inadequate attention to 'capacity' issues. The term 'Capacity Development' is also widely interpreted and has assumed a variety of meaning and understandings.

According to UNDP (2009; 5) capacity development is “the process through which individuals, organizations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time. Simply put, if capacity is the means to plan and achieve, then capacity development describes the ways to those means... [Capacity development] must bring about transformation that is generated and sustained over time from within. Transformation of this kind goes beyond performing

tasks; instead, it is more a matter of changing mindsets and attitudes”. The above explanation makes it clear that the main purpose of capacity development is to bring transformation in the society.

It needs to be noted that we use the term 'capacity development' rather than 'capacity building' because the approach that is implicit in these two terms. The approach in the later implies that there is no capacity whatsoever at the beginning and it needs to be built from the scratch by external actors. Capacity development, on the other hand, focuses on the need to support and facilitate processes that are already underway. Thus, the approach followed in capacity development is more accommodative and inclusive.

As far as decentralized government is concerned, Fiszbein (1997; 1031) defines capacity as “an enabling factor; it is the effective existence, at the local level, of the tools that make possible for the local government to function effectively”. Three dimensions of local capacity, namely, labour, capital and technology, are viewed as important. Labour is the human dimension of the capacity; this is the quality of personnel in the local government which is determined not only by skills and knowledge but also how these skills are utilized in the local political and administrative context. Capital is the physical dimension of capacity, which includes building and transport (Fiszbein 1997). Leighton (1996) and Smoke and Lewis (1996) include adequate finances. The third dimension is technology which includes government's internal organization and management style. This dimension also includes aspects relating to: i) structure and distribution of functions and responsibilities within the organization; ii) management, planning, decision making and control and evaluation functions; and iii) information gathering, processing and dissemination (Fiszbein 1997: 1032).

One can say that there is capacity when an organization is more open to the outside world rather than inward looking. When preferences at the local level are heterogeneous and conflicting demands for the resources are common, local government needs to have capacity to mediate such conflicts and generate social consensus for an efficient and fair allocation of resources (ibid).

There is considerable emphasis in the literature that the decentralized local government should have sufficient internal capacity for discharging its functions effectively. The local government needs to have qualified personnel, adequate finances and some ability to organize internal affairs. Whenever such capacity is lacking in the local government, the success of the government in achieving the development outcomes is limited (Fiszbein 1997; Gow and Morss 1988; Larson 2002; Leighton 1996; Lewis 2003; Smoke and Lewis 1996).

Nevertheless, the sequencing of capacity development is contested in the literature. Some argue for the devolution of powers to precede the capacity development efforts, while others take up the position that capacity development efforts to precede the devolution of powers. Arguing for the devolution of powers to local government to precede capacity development efforts, Ribot (2003: 61) writes: "Implementing decentralisation may require coordination, civic education campaigns, orientation and training programmes for local parties. But, without powers people are less likely to learn or to even engage in capacity development efforts. Risks must be taken to transfer powers ahead of capacity so that capacity building can have an empowering, rather than a controlling or punitive, meaning". Others highlight the need for gradual implementation of decentralization over time in parallel with strong capacity development efforts (Loayza et al 2011).

What is the impact of capacity development on the performance of decentralized government? Steiner (2010) examines the role of local government capacity for household consumption and enrolment in schools with the help of household data collected in Uganda. She found positive association between the level of capacity of district governments and household consumption and school enrolment. Loayza et al (2011) also look at the relationship between performance in the fiscal management and local capacity. They find that the four factors, namely, i) budget size and allocation process; ii) local capacity; iii) local needs; and iv) political economy constraints affect decentralization; but, the largest determinant of spending ability is the adequacy of the budget with respect to local capacity.

With regard to what constitutes capacity development, there is considerable discussion. Manor (1999) and Reddy (2003) note that the following are required for the success of the democratic decentralisation: i) Sufficient powers to exercise substantial influence within the political system and over significant development activities; ii) Sufficient financial resources to accomplish important tasks; iii) Adequate administrative capacity to accomplish those tasks; and iv) Reliable accountability mechanisms to ensure both the accountability of elected representatives to citizens and the accountability of bureaucracy to elected representatives. Narayana (2005), after reviewing the experience of decentralization in the three states of Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, concludes that devolution of powers and responsibilities as well as knowledge and awareness of elected representatives are crucial to empower government at the local level. Kumar and Singh (2005) also argue that although some sort of handholding, training, guidance and supervision to officials of decentralized government is required, excessive State control on local bodies renders these bodies ineffective and force them to become subordinate to the State. They conclude that financial devolution, reduced institutional and administrative control together with quality training are needed to build sustained capacity of elected representatives to PRIs.

The above suggests that the capacity development is not mere training; but, includes many other aspects. After looking into the empirical evidence and its own experience, UNDP (2009; 12-15) has also identified the following four areas where capacity development changes take place; i) “***Institutional arrangements*** include the policies, practices and systems that allow for effective functioning of an organization or group. These may include 'hard' rules such as laws or the terms of a contract, or 'soft' rules like codes of conduct or generally accepted values”; ii) “***Leadership*** is the ability to influence, inspire and motivate others to achieve or even go beyond their goals. It is also the ability to anticipate and respond to

change. Leadership is not necessarily synonymous with a position of authority; it can also be informal and be held at many levels”; iii) “**Knowledge**, or 'literally' what people know, underpins their capacities and hence capacity development”. In the past, knowledge has been imparted to individuals mostly through education. It is, however, possible to acquire the same through a number of means such as on-the-job training; and, iv) **Accountability** is present in an organization when duty bearers are made or held responsible to deliver and fulfil their obligations to the people. Accountability implies the willingness, ability and capacity on the part of an organization to introduce systems and mechanisms of engagement with people to capture their interests and secure them in the planning and implementation of development activities.

The foregoing makes it clear that capacity development is much broader than providing training. In this paper, while making an attempt to assess the impact of training programmes on knowledge levels among the elected members, larger issues pertaining to capacity development will be taken for a discussion.

3. Training to GP Members in Karnataka

Training to the officials and elected representatives of PRIs has been for long considered as an important initiative to strengthen decentralization. National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) has been organizing training programmes for various stakeholders including elected representatives of PRIs at the national level. Likewise, State Institute of Rural Developments (SIRD), set up in 28 Indian states, are actively involved in conducting training to PRI representatives. In Karnataka, the Administrative Training Institute (ATI) was established in 1967 by the government of Karnataka and since its inception it provided training to the officials and non officials (elected representatives) until the establishment of Abdul Nazir Sab State Institute of Rural Development in 1989. Currently, the

institute is known as Abdul Nazir Sab State Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (henceforth Nazir Sab institute).

The Government of Karnataka realized the need for capacity building after seeing the problems faced by elected representatives, particularly the weaker sections in Mandal Panchayats (After 1987 PRI election). ATI, which had provided training for representatives of PRIs through district training institutions (DTI) across the state was keen to continue training programme for officials rather than elected representatives¹. Against this background, the need for SIRD was felt in the state. The main objective of Nazir Sab institute is to conduct training programme for the elected representatives, officers and the staff of PRIs. It has conducted several training programmes for elected representatives and officials of PRIs since 1989. Apart from Nazir Sab Institute, some NGOs and private institutes are organizing training programmes for elected representatives of PRIs.

In this section, we discuss the training programmes conducted for GP members and their impact with the help of the available literature, discussions with the officials and resource persons and, observation made by elected members and past presidents of GPs in the study district of Dharwad.

Before 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1993, was passed, ATI was providing residential training programme for ZP and Taluk Panchayat (TP) representatives at the institute during Mandal Panchayat system. ATI was also responsible for providing training programme to GP members and this training was conducted in coordination with the executive officer of TP until 1989. Due to shortage of space in the Taluk Panchayat office, training programmes for GP members were conducted in District Training Institute (DTI), marriage halls, community halls or in NGOs centres. ATI also utilised services from NGOs such

¹ Discussion with the officials of Nazir Sab institute

as SEARCH, Mahila Samakhya Karnataka, and Rangayana in some districts. However, according to key informants this system failed because there was no systematic training. In addition, there was no coordination between TP and ATI. Aziz (2000) concluded that Nazir Sab institute should provide capacity building programme for GP members on a continuous basis. Because of these deficiencies, Nazir Sab institute has taken initiative to provide training to elected representatives of PRIs after 1990.

3.1 Training Arrangement after 73rd Amendment Act, 1993

As per the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 five successive elections have taken place (i.e., in 1993, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015) for rural local bodies. Many training programmes were conducted for leaders elected in these five rounds of election. In Karnataka, there are 94,344 grama panchayats representatives in Karnataka and conducting capacity building programmes covering all of them is not an easy task. Even then, Nazir Sab institute is providing capacity building programme for all the elected representatives of grama panchayats with the help of TPs in each district of the state from 1993 onwards.

Initially the programmes were organized with the help of Department of Women and Child Welfare (GoK) and SEARCH², Bangalore. Though Nazir Sab institute gives instruction to TP, the Taluk Executive Officer is the key person to take decision regarding training programme in each taluk. The training methods used were lectures and discussions during 1993 to 2001. This system failed because the training provided was not continuous, communication between representatives and training coordinators was not proper, and there was lack of coordination between TP and Nazir Sab institute³.

² This is support NGO located in Bangalore.

³ As revealed by resource persons of Nazir Sab institute

Nazir Sab institute established SATCOM centre in the year 2002-03 and introduced satellite based interactive training and communication programme to the elected representatives of GP. The institute initially launched a satellite based programme and residential accommodation for GP members in 44 taluks. In the first phase of training programme, it conducted similar type of residential training programme in all taluks of the state. The residential training programme was unsuccessful particularly for female members because they did not get permission from their male relatives to attend residential programme and also due to responsibilities such as preparing food and other household chores, and general reluctance to stay away from the family. The taluk panchayat officers also did not take any additional responsibilities to encourage residential programmes. Nazir Sab institute was therefore compelled to stop residential programme for GP members after the first phase in 2003 but, it continued capacity building programme through satellite till 2010.

Initially, Nazir Sab institute was taking 4 to 5 years to provide different phases of training programme. The elected representatives were losing their interest to participate in capacity building programmes after the third year of their term. During the period 2010-15, Nazir Sab institute tried hard to complete all phases of training programme within 3 to 4 years. Nazir Sab institute has also reduced satellite based programme due to lack of time for interaction with participants as many of the elected representatives wanted face to face interaction during the training programme. Recently, Nazir Sab institute tried to utilize services of experienced PDOs as resource persons in the first phase of capacity building programme for GP members elected in May 2015 elections. But, the institute found that some of the PDOs were not transparent in passing on important information related to GP finances and Panchayat Raj Act to

participants⁴. There was also lack of coordination between PDOs and Decentralisation Training Coordinators (DTCs) who have been conducting training programme in each taluk in the recent past. Because of these reasons, Nazir Sab institute has arranged separate lecture sessions for PDOs and DTCs. Training or capacity building programme for GP representatives are conducted in four Phases or stages and usually, the duration of each stage is of two to three days. Two to three grama panchayat members are called for training programme based on total number of GP members to be covered in each programme.

In general, the topics covered in four phases of training⁵ are as follows. During the first phase, the topics included are: i) Role and responsibility of elected representatives; ii) knowledge about various central and state schemes/programmes; iii) own sources of revenue and their mobilization; and, iv) importance of ward sabha, grama sabha and general body meeting, and standing committees. In the second phase, issues related to health, education, drinking water, sanitation and role of members in the provision of these services were covered. In the third phase, the focus was on preparation of action plan, Jama Bandi, objectives and guidelines of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), National Rural Livelihood Programme (Sanjeevani) and other programmes. The fourth phase focused on Human Resource Development and gender budget.

The following are challenges faced by Nazir Sab Institute in conducting training programmes.

⁴ As revealed by resource persons of Nazir Sab institute

⁵ Apart from these regular training programmes, Nazir Sab institute also conducts special training programme for grama panchayat presidents and panchayat officials based on emergency issues like drought, flood situation, implementation of new schemes on receiving special orders from the government

Absence of timely Intimation to Members: Nazir Sab institute always depends on TPs to conduct training programmes and gives instructions to TP as and when required. TPs in turn have to intimate elected representatives about these training programmes. Training programmes are conducted in batches covering on an average 30 to 40 members in each batch. Taluk Executive Officer is expected to recheck whether proper intimation is received by the GP members through TP or GP officials since the lack of early intimation and, improper communication results in poor attendance. However, early intimation was not often provided leading to low levels of participation. It was however maintained by the officials (DTCs) of Nazir Sab institute that poor attendance was due to preoccupation of the elected representatives in agricultural work and women in their domestic chores. It was also maintained that only a few attended all classes and were sometimes found whiling away their time chatting with TP officials.

Travel Allowance and Participation Fee: Many grama panchayat members are poor and largely depend on wage work to meet their livelihood. Because of this, the Government of Karnataka (GoK) has suggested to Nazir Sab institute to provide travel allowance and participation fee to members to encourage them to attend the training programme. According to GoK notification, GP has to provide travel allowance and participation fee from panchayat's own resources for GP members attending training programme. Many GPs were not able to provide travel allowance and participation fee to GP members due to lesser collection of revenue from own sources. Due to this reason only few members could participate in training programme. The recent notification of Nazir Sab institute (GPMT/TOT/36/2015-16) says that it directly provides participation fee of Rs 100 per day to every member through TP and, every GP is required to arrange travel facility to GP member to attend training programmes. According to DTCs of Nazir Sab institute only 40% of GPs arranged vehicle facilities to GP members to attend training programme.

Other problems cited were the following: i) Many GPs are located 15 km to 40 kms far away from the TP headquarters, and hence elected members found it difficult to attend the training programmes; ii) Travel arrangements, timings of buses and the capacity building programmes were inconvenient to the members; and iii) Most of the capacity building programmes are arranged through satellite programme. But, lack of knowledge to handle satellite programme and power cuts were the main problems in some taluk places.

3.2 Training Programmes of Nazir Sab Institute and Their Impact

The capacity building/training programme is considered to be important for elected representatives in order to understand their role and responsibilities, mobilization of own sources of revenue, preparation of plans, budget, and sharing of their experiences (Mahi Pal; 2003 and Vyasulu; 2004). Karnataka government has been making efforts to provide training to the GP members to develop their skills and inculcate work efficiency in them (Anitha and Gayathri; 1995). Subha et.al (2008) note that the training programmes conducted through satellite and innovative approach of Karnataka government were models for other states.

Although SIRDs were conducting phase-wise training programme for GP members, it is observed that women members did not take serious part on account of lack of experience and lack of knowledge (Anitha and Gayathri; 1995). Majority of reserved women representatives were found to be dependent on their male relatives to understand rules and procedures of PRIs. Women had relatively low levels of awareness: hence, their participation in development planning and the implementation of government schemes was found to be lower than men at the local level (Narayan; 2005).

An important objective of the capacity development programme is enabling the elected representatives to prepare micro plans. It should focus on how to

prepare a plan at the grassroots level, how they have to be obtained, and how to mobilize resources (Hooja; 2008). Anitha and Gayathri (1995) also examined several issues relating to training programme of GP members such as, whether training programmes for GP members should be residential or non residential, exclusive versus mixed group, one time versus continuous, information dissemination versus skill building, centralised versus decentralized, adult pedagogy versus child pedagogy. They felt that SIRDs need to keep the above issues and develop effective evaluation methods to see whether training programmes are achieving intended objectives or not.

3.3 Training Arrangements for GP Members in Dharwad District

In all the five taluks of Dharwad district (Kundagol, Navalgund, Kalaghatagi, Dharwad and Hubballi), Nazir Sab institute conducts training regularly with the help of TP. Taluk panchayat Executive Officer (TEO) is expected to make arrangements for smooth conduct of training programmes. There is a case worker to handle and coordinate with Nazir Sab institute and panchayat representatives in each taluk. Navalgund, Hubballi and Dharwad taluks have a separate building (namely Samarthya Soudha) to provide the training programme for elected GP representatives, while Kundagol and Kalaghatagi taluks conduct training programme in a separate room within TP building. There are about six resource persons or DTCs in Dharwad district. They coordinate with TP, Nazir Sab institute and GP in the conduct of training for GP members. Apart from DTCs, selected PDOs and resource persons deliver lecture and discuss actual problems faced while implementing various programmes. In addition to interactive lectures in a class room, the method of showing films or video and playing games were used for providing a better understanding on grama panchayat functions and activities.

Even then, according to resource persons, GP members were not punctual because of lack of travel facility and interest in the training programmes. Other reported problems are, lack of communication, inability to provide sufficient time for interaction with the members and holding programme at a time that is inconvenient to most of the members.

To conclude, Nazir Sab institute has been carrying out training programme to elected representatives of GPs with help of SATCOM. It has developed different training modules, films and posters in its attempt to make the training programmes effective. Key informants felt that the capacity building programmes helped to build self confidence among members, enhance their knowledge and awareness about their role, rights and responsibilities in the village development activities. They have also stated that the training programmes helped members to gain knowledge about the developmental and welfare programmes of GPs. However, key informants have also noted that, in many cases, there was no direct link between the Nazir Sab institute and elected representatives of GP. Nazir Sab institute has also been not successful in imparting training to its full capacity. It has also not fully succeeded in fulfilling the demands of GP members due to lack of coordination between officials of RDPR, Nazir Sab institute, TPs and GPs. The problems such as inadequate infrastructure facility, insufficient resources and shortage of professional staff have resulted in limited impact of training programmes on members.

4. Content and Mode of Training Provided to GP Members

Decentralisation process has gained impetus from both state and central governments, which have been allocating resources for capacity development programmes for GP presidents and members. Since most of the GP presidents and elected members are first-time entrants, they are less likely to be aware of the

matters related to constitution of GP, membership and election to GP, functions, finances and powers of GP and responsibilities of presidents and members. It is mandatory for every panchayat member to undergo such training programme as this would help representatives to understand and exercise their powers properly. In the ensuing paragraphs, we discuss the nature of training programmes, contents, duration and usefulness of the programmes to the past presidents as perceived and reported by them in sample GPs covered under the present study. In all, the information was collected from 140 past presidents. Additional information was gathered from Dharwad Zilla Panchayat.

4.1 Nature/Types of Training Programme

The focus of the training programmes at taluk, district and state levels has been on creating awareness about the panchayati raj system, objectives of the decentralised structure and the role of elected representatives in realising the objectives. As discussed earlier, the modules of the training programme in Karnataka are prepared by Nazir Sab Institute, which guides and monitors the training activities designed for GP, TP and ZP members.

Resource persons include those drawn from different government training institutes, private organisations and those trained by Nazir Sab institute specifically for the purpose. The themes covered include principles of democracy, 73rd amendment to the constitution, formation and structure of PRIs, the constitution of GP, gram sabha, election, reservation, duties and responsibilities of members, programmes of GP, its functions and finances, central and state schemes implemented by GPs, entrepreneurship development, enhancement of leadership skills, self help groups (SHGs), preparation of five year plans, special schemes for SCs/STs, income generation, conflict resolution, etc.

4.2 Methods Followed to Conduct Training Programmes

The past presidents have recalled that they have received residential and day-long training programmes. So, most of the GP presidents have attended training programmes several times during their tenure as president and as members of GP. The training methods followed were oral and power-point presentations, demonstrations and satellite communications. Resource persons explained the modules with the help of pictures and charts. The programmes were given in different phases. The resource persons tried to make the presentations as humorous as possible to make the members feel at ease and alert. GP presidents reported that they received sitting fees from TP for attending these training programmes and travel cost from their respective GPs. The training programmes lasted generally for three days. For residential programmes (which were rare), accommodation and boarding were arranged by the organisers. The satellite training programme was imparted to GP presidents and members by Nazir Sab institute. Some of the issues covered under satellite training programme included role of health in village development, primary health care, health schemes, benefits in cash and kind to poor, welfare of physically challenged and services available to them, formation of standing committees for overseeing health and sanitation, drinking water supply, National HIV/AIDS Control Programme, National Vector Diseases Control Programme, National Cancer Control Programmes, women and child health, etc. The satellite programmes also included phone-in programmes wherein the presidents were encouraged to ask questions to resource persons (of Nazir Sab institute) if they had any specific queries or problems related to the working of GP or in undertaking of functions, and get responses from them.

4.3 Training Content

When the past presidents were requested to recall the training content, it was reported that, in general, the training modules overlapped between those prepared for GP members and presidents. The focus of training for GP presidents and vice-presidents was mainly on staffing pattern of GP, duties of staff members, procedure to be followed in the appointment of staff, resource mobilization, tax collection and duties of tax collector, powers and properties of GPs, development works, budgeting, income and expenditure of GPs, Karnataka Transparency Act, Right to Information Act, auditing, etc. GP members, on the other hand, were provided with awareness on 73rd amendment, objectives of PRIs, their structure, formation and functions of standing committees, importance of ward and gram sabhas, organization of ward and gram sabha meetings, mandatory functions of GP, their role and responsibilities as members, social auditing and importance of information in their functioning and well being of villagers. The training modules were common on informing about functions of GP, development works, resource mobilization, etc.

Members stated that they were guided by resource persons to prepare an action plan for the GP for a period of 5 years. They were informed about panchayat administration, their membership term and duties, reservation system and rotation, schemes of central and state governments for the welfare of SCs and STs, central and state sponsored schemes (housing, sanitation, employment) and how to implement them, utilisation of government grants, identification of beneficiaries for these schemes, construction of roads/drainage, importance of community and individual toilets, provision of drinking water, literacy campaign, educational schemes, subsidies available to general poor, women and SCs and STs under various schemes, etc.

In addition, presidents were provided with crucial information on the conduct of social audit, awards and incentives available from the government for

better performing GPs, Right to Information (RTI) and its implications, mobilisation of resources for their GP and elections to GP. Some of the best practices in tax collection, village sanitation, implementation of MGNREGA and drinking water supply were presented before the participants with narration of the process, photographs and actual demonstration of work/site by organizing visits to selected panchayats.

We tried to find out whether the training programmes were of any use to past presidents in their work and performance. Almost all of them felt that training was very useful to them. The benefits narrated by them ranged right from creating their specimen signature to bringing schemes and funds to GP. They stated that they were happy that they could respond to queries of villagers on developmental issues and programmes due to the information they gathered from training sessions. The repeat training programmes helped them build their confidence and socialize.

It needs to be however noted that most of the responses from the past presidents were monotonous and several of them stated that the programmes helped them in performing their duties. In-depth discussions revealed that they could only get partial benefit of the programme because of their inability to attend all the training sessions as they either arrived late (after completing household chores) or returned home early. Attending programmes for 3-4 days continuously had been difficult for many presidents, particularly women from poor households.

Some of the female presidents, particularly those belonging to the reserved category, reported that they attended training accompanied by their male relatives. Reasons provided for this are that women in general are not permitted to travel alone and the perception that illiteracy and lack of awareness will come in the way of their participation in training. This is only to be understood given the proxy leadership in the sample Gps.

According to some of the respondents, educated and active members were vocal and asked questions related to their panchayats. However, a few (mostly proxy candidates) sat in the last row and were eager to return to their villages after marking their attendance and collecting sitting fees. Part of the reason for this is that overlapping content in the training programmes organized for GP members and presidents.

4.4 The Impact of Training Programmes on Knowledge Level among Elected Members

Over 98 per cent of the sample respondents reported that they had attended training programme either as members or as presidents of GPs during their tenure (Table 1). Of them, 47 per cent obtained training as presidents and 51 per cent as members of GP. The proportion of the sample obtaining training as members is higher among past female presidents, and those belonging to SC/ST and OBC categories. The proportion attending the training for presidents was higher among those belonging to the dominant caste of Lingayat. The qualitative evidence shows that the number of training programmes organized during the first two-and-half years was much higher as compared to the second two-and-half year period. As a result, those getting elected as presidents during the later could not obtain the training.

Table 1: Training programmes attended by GP Presidents (%)

Sex	Attended training as member as well as president	Attended training only as member	Not attended	Total
Sex of sample past presidents				
Male	55.1	43.6	1.3	100.0 (78)
Female	37.1	61.3	1.6	100.0 (62)
Social category of sample past presidents				
SC/ST	48.4	51.6	0.0	100.0 (31)
OBC	43.9	54.4	1.7	100.0 (57)
Lingayat	52.2	45.7	2.1	100.0 (46)
Others	33.3	66.7	0.0	100.0 (6)
Total	47.1	51.4	1.5	100.0 (140)

Source: Primary data

Note : Figures in parenthesis are row total in numbers

Table 2 provides information on another important dimension of training, that is, at what stage of their tenure the training was provided. If the training is imparted at the beginning of the tenure, the utility is likely to be much higher as compared to that provided at the end of their tenure. The government and other agencies are therefore expected to organise training programmes soon after the constitution of GPs to help the members understand the concepts and functioning of GPs. The data shows that, of those attending training as GP members, nearly 75 per cent attended the training at the beginning of their term, implying that the training was timely in the case of a majority of the members. A disturbing fact is that the proportion of the sample attending the training at the beginning was comparatively higher among men. When it comes to the training to presidents, only 60 per cent of the sample stated that they attended at the beginning. Here, however, the proportion of the women attending training in the beginning was marginally higher implying that once women become presidents they give relatively more importance to attending the training.

Table 2: At which state of the tenure was the training obtained ? %

When was the training conducted?	As GP members (%)			As GP presidents (%)		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
At the beginning	73.3	77.8	75.8	61.5	59.2	60.0
In the middle	21.3	21.1	21.2	30.8	28.6	29.3
Towards the end	5.3	1.1	3.0	7.7	12.2	10.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Primary data

The third dimension is the distance travelled to obtain the training. Given that over 33 per cent of the elected members consisted of women and that many were involved in the domestic chores, it is important that training venue is close to their residence. The training for GP members is usually held at a distance less than 20 kms, while that for GP presidents is usually held at a distance of more than 20 kms (Table 3). This may be a reason why less proportion of women attended the training as presidents. Around 36 per cent of the past presidents stated that they had to travel for more than 100 kms to attend training programmes organized in the state capital (Bangalore) and at Nazir Sab Institute, Mysore.

Table 3: Distance travelled to obtain the training

Distance (in km)	As GP members (%)			As GP presidents (%)		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
5 - 20	65.6	81.8	74.6	26.1	36.4	32.8
21 - 40	24.6	15.6	19.6	30.4	9.1	16.4
41 - 100	9.8	2.6	5.8	17.4	13.6	14.9
101 - 500	0.0	0.0	0.0	26.1	40.9	35.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Primary Data

As GP members and presidents, most of the past presidents attended the training organized by the taluk and Zilla Panchayat within the district. It needs to be however noted that all the training programmes organised by TP and ZP are formal programmes of Nazir Sab Institute, and thus, it appears to be the sole official agency sponsoring these programmes. Almost one-fourth of the sample who attended as GP presidents, obtained training on energy conservation and rural development organized by Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Energy and Rural Development (MGIERD) at Bangalore, which is affiliated to the government. Other organisations are NGOs such as Mukti Mandir, Laxmeshwar (Table 4). But, a significant percentage of past presidents, both female and male, did not know the organization that imparted training.

Table 4: Facilitator of the training programmes as reported by past presidents (%)

Organiser of training and location	Attended as GP members %			Attended as GP members %		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Taluk or Zilla Panchayat	60.7	68.8	65.2	43.5	40.9	41.8
Nazir Sab Institute, Mysore	3.3	14.3	9.4	8.7	15.9	13.4
Muktimandir, Laxmeshwar	11.5	1.3	5.8	-	-	-
MGIERD, Bangalore	-	-	-	26.1	25.0	25.4
NGO	3.3	1.3	2.2	4.3	6.8	6.0
	21.3	14.3	17.4	17.4	11.4	13.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Primary Data

5. Knowledge on the Functioning of Decentralized Governance at the Grassroots Level

The knowledge of the past GP presidents is assessed with the help of responses to ten questions on the functioning of decentralized governance at the grassroots level. These questions are related to the minimum eligibility required to contest the elections to GP, quality of governance, implementation of development programmes, administrative decentralization, social audit and capacity building opportunities (Table 5 and Figure 1).

On the whole, 55 per cent of the respondents provided correct answers to these questions (Table 5). However, the proportion of correct answers varied by different questions and gender groups. The GP presidents are more likely to know answers to questions such as 'cheque signing authority in GP', 'who presides over

grama sabha', 'number of grama sabha meetings', 'power to suspend GP staff' and so on. It may be noted that these are executive functions. However, the proportion of GP past presidents providing correct responses is low to questions pertaining to 'quorum for grama sabha meetings', 'executive head of GP', 'statutory committees of GP', 'number of jamabandhi meetings' and 'Nazir Sab Institute'. These questions pertain to quality of governance, social audit and capacity development. Interestingly, despite the fact that the sample respondents were GP presidents for at least 30 months, a majority did not know the executive head of GP. This shows that the GP presidents assigned more importance to executive functions rather than those relating to improvement of governance and accountability.

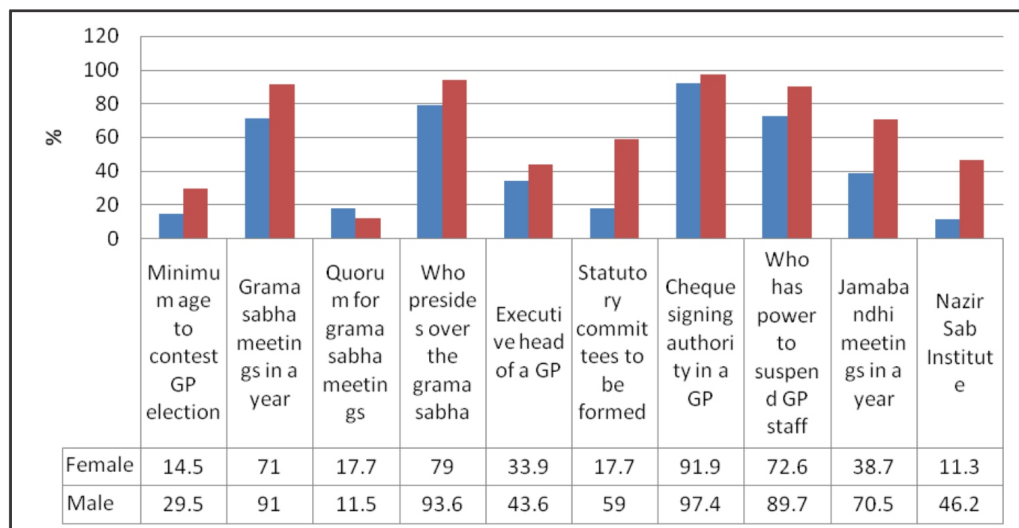
Table 5: Responses to questions on knowledge related to decentralized governance by gender

Particulars	Percentage		
	Female	Male	Total
Minimum age to contest GP election	14.5	29.5	22.9
Number of grama sabha meetings in a year	71.0	91.0	82.1
Quorum for grama sabha meetings	17.7	11.5	14.3
Who presides over the grama sabha	79.0	93.6	87.1
Executive head of a GP	33.9	43.6	39.3
Statutory committees of GP	17.7	59.0	40.7
Cheque signing authority in GP	91.9	97.4	95.0
Power to suspend GP staff	72.6	89.7	82.1
Number of Jamabandhi meetings in a year	38.7	70.5	56.4
Nazir Sab Institute	11.3	46.2	30.7

Source: Primary Data

Table 5 and Figure 1 show gender differences in the proportion of correct answers to questions relating to knowledge on the functioning of decentralized governance. The proportion of male past presidents providing correct responses was higher than that of female past presidents in the case of all the questions except the one relating to 'quorum for grama sabha meetings'. This could be because of the following. First, the proportion of female past presidents attending the training as member as well as president was lower than that of male past presidents. Second, even those female past presidents attending the training may not have benefited from training sessions as much as male past presidents. Third, this could also be due to limited opportunity to put the acquired knowledge on the functioning of decentralized governance to day-to-day operations of grama panchayats.

Figure 1: Gender differences in correct responses to questions on decentralized governance



Caste-wise differences in responses to questions on decentralized governance (Figure 2) show some form of social hierarchy in the acquisition of knowledge. In general, the proportion of members providing correct responses is the lowest among SC/ST past presidents, while it is the highest among Lingayat past presidents with those belonging to OBCs falling in between. The past presidents belonging to Lingayat caste are more knowledgeable in: (i) eligibility to contest in elections; (ii) which elected official is more powerful in the GP; (iii) number of statutory committees; (iv) awareness on administrative decentralization; (v) awareness on accountability; and (vi) awareness on capacity building institutions. This implies that Lingayat past presidents not only succeeded in getting full benefit of the training programmes but also in retaining the knowledge even after they have relinquished their power.

Figure 2: Caste-wise differences in correct responses to questions on decentralized governance

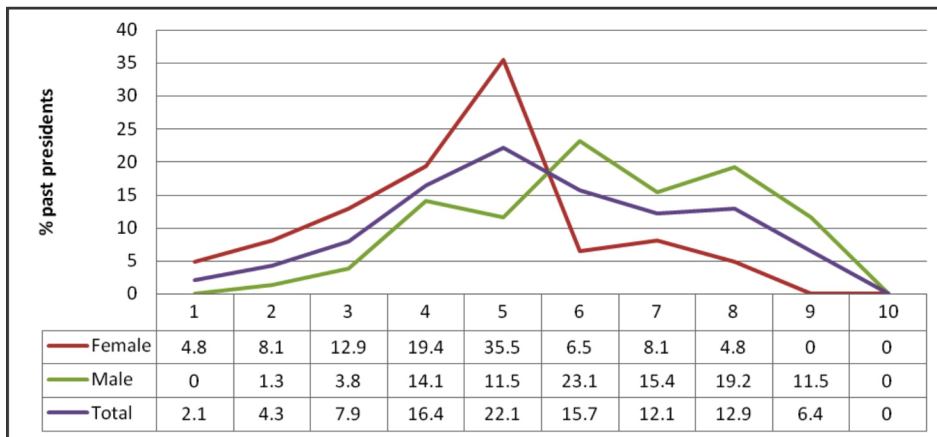


Knowledge score

Responses to the 10 questions are used to arrive at the knowledge level of past presidents. Each question was assigned score between 0 and 1. The total score that a past president can obtain will range from a low of 'zero' to high of 10. Higher the score, we assume that, greater is the level of awareness.

In Figure 3, we present evidence on the proportion of past presidents by knowledge level. The expectation here is that past presidents should have provided right answers to most of the questions. It can be seen that none of them correctly answered all the 10 questions. It can be seen that only about half of the past presidents could provide right answers to less than five questions and another half got right answers for six or more questions. Thus, the distribution appears to be normal for all the past presidents. However, if one looks at the distribution of male and female past presidents, clear gender differences in the knowledge level can be seen (Figure 3). Over 80 per cent of the female past presidents got only five or less questions right. In contrast, about 70 per cent of the male past presidents got right answers for six or more questions. The scores indicate higher awareness on GP activities among male presidents as compared to female presidents.

Figure 3: Distribution of past presidents by gender and knowledge level



The level of awareness appears to be higher among presidents belonging to Lingayat community as compared to those belonging to SC/ST community and OBC as indicated by higher percentage of responses from the former category for majority of the questions (Table 6).

Table 6: Knowledge level among caste categories

Number of correct answers	% of presidents belonging to		
	SC/ST	OBC	Lingayat
1	0.0	3.5	0.0
2	6.5	5.3	2.2
3	19.4	7.0	2.2
4	19.4	15.8	13.0
5	25.8	21.1	23.9
6	12.9	22.8	10.9
7	9.7	7.0	23.9
8	6.5	10.5	15.2
9	0.0	7.0	8.7
10	0.0	0.0	0.0
	100	100	100

Source : Primary data

6. Impact of Capacity Building on Functioning of GPs

The training programmes have helped the past presidents in several ways. Some of them noted that they could learn the signature, while others felt that the training programmes helped them to bring schemes and funds to the village. They also felt that training programmes helped them to function truly as representatives

of the people. They could participate in village sanitation programmes as well as were motivated to construct toilets for their own houses. As can be seen from the following case study, they were happy that they could respond to villagers' queries on developmental issues and programmes due to the information that they have gathered from training programmes.

42-year old Lingayat past president studied up to 10th standard. She was running a general store in the village with the help of her husband. She did not have any knowledge about panchayat function before getting elected to GP. She has regularly attended various training programmes related to panchayat activities and received considerable knowledge. She gained self confidence through training programmes. This knowledge helped her to smoothly handle GP presidentship, actively get involved in political activities and to take decisions on her own. All this contributed to her receiving presidentship in panchayat mahila shakti abhiyana (UN Women). She contested for ZP Membership in 2010 and got elected as a ZP member. She stated that knowledge and awareness that women elected leaders gain can strengthen their voice in the society, improve their situation and village development.

Another leader could undertake development activities with the help of training programmes.

65-year old female past president belongs to the OBC community. She is literate but has not attended school. She contested GP election because of reservation. She initially took the support of her son in panchayat activities. But, she has attended all training programmes and meetings of GP without others' support. She gained good knowledge and awareness about panchayat activities and functions. Training programmes helped her to raise the issues related to women and local development in grama sabha and panchayat. She stated that the knowledge received from training programmes helped her to become effective

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than nine development works. It can be thus concluded that the success of capacity development programme for male past presidents resulted in them undertaking more development works.

Table 7: Development works undertaken by the past presidents (2005-10)

Works	Total (%)		
	Yes; completed	Yes; incomplete	Not undertaken
Construction of pucca road	72.9	2.9	24.3
Construction of kachcha road	79.3	2.9	17.9
Construction of overhead tank	59.3	2.9	37.9
Provision of piped water supply to households	75.7	2.9	21.4
Construction of mini water supply (MWS)	45.0	0.7	54.3
Bore well with hand pump	61.4	3.6	35.0
Provision of drinking water facility to the school	82.9	1.4	15.7
Construction of pucca drainage	75.0	0.7	24.3
Construction of katcha drainage	62.1	0.0	37.9
Construction of public latrine	12.1	0.0	87.9
Construction of community latrine/ women latrine	10.7	0.0	89.3
Provision of toilet facility for the school	80.0	0.0	20.0
Provision of street light facility	80.7	2.9	16.4

We have earlier observed that the capacity development in the case of SC/ST past presidents has been somewhat unsuccessful. Did this contribute to them to

perform poorly in undertaking development works. The answer seems to be 'No'. It can be seen from Table 8 that although the proportion of presidents undertaking 'Zero' number of development works is marginally high among SC/ST past presidents, there is not much difference between them and other caste groups in undertaking 'five to eight' and 'nine and above' development works.

Table 8: Performance of the past presidents in the completion of development works (%)

Number of works undertaken	Female	Male	SC/ST	OBC	Lingayat	All
Zero	1.6	1.3	3.2	1.8	0.0	1.4
One to four	8.1	6.4	3.2	12.3	2.2	7.1
Five to eight	58.1	38.5	48.4	42.1	50.0	47.1
Nine & above	32.3	53.8	45.2	43.9	47.8	44.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

A limitation of the above analysis is that it does not give a complete and comparable picture of the performance of the past presidents in development works as we do not have the details of volume of work, the quality and value of the works undertaken. We also cannot differentiate the beneficiaries across the works except in the case of school sanitation and drinking water works. Despite these limitations, it can be concluded that the success of capacity development programmes in the case of male past presidents has resulted in their better performance in undertaking development works. Secondly, the better provision of training programmes to Lingayat past presidents as compared to SC/ST past presidents did not however result in uneven outcomes.

7. Factors Determining the Training Outcomes

The above shows that the training programmes did not help female and SC/ST past presidents in gaining knowledge and confidence required for development and service delivery through the decentralised government. This could be attributed to a number of factors. With the help of qualitative data that we have collected from the past presidents, we have identified the following factors.

Untimely training programme is one of the factors as the following case study suggests.

74-year old male past president from Dharwad Taluk, belonging to OBC category, is a cultivator. He is always busy with the cultivation of 35 acres of non-irrigated land. According to him, since Nazir Sab institute often conducted training programme in the agriculture season and at times of village festivals/fairs, many members could not regularly attend the training programmes. He also noted that members had to change two buses to reach the training venue of Samartya Soudha located 2-3 kms away from TP headquarters in Dharwad. This was difficult for members coming from remote villages. He suggested that change in the timing of the training and transport arrangement would help in making training programmes successful.

The above not only makes a case for some care in the timing of training programmes and provision for transport allowance but, this also in a way suggests that the members are unwilling to make some adjustment in their otherwise busy life to attend the training programmes conducted for the capacity development.

Some respondents noted that the training programmes organized did not address the specific needs of the participants as the following case suggests.

36-year old Hindu Maratha women member opined that women members require training programme exclusively for women. Such training programmes will help women getting elected to reserved seats at the behest of their male

relatives having a little political experience and awareness. Women members, being not outspoken and shy, hesitate to ask questions on panchayat programmes, schemes and activities in the training programme organized for both men and women. Women therefore need special capacity development programme to cover issues such as improving women's confidence, communication skills, interaction with government officials and other elected members.

Preoccupation with livelihood concerns, inability to meet expenses in connection with training programmes and lack of communication were also important reasons why some female past presidents could not benefit from the training programmes as the following case study reveals.

60 year old dalit and illiterate woman belongs to poor and large household, which was dependent on agricultural wage labour. She did not have any interest in contesting the election; but, she was forced by caste leaders and her husband to contest the GP election. She got elected as GP president unopposed due to reservation. She could attend only one training programme for a day as GP member as she was busy with household chores and wage labour work. She said that she had not received travel or daily allowance for attending training programme, which was conducted by Nazir Sab institute at TP level. She also stated that she did not receive any information about training programme from GP/TP officials, which reveals about communication gap between representatives and organizers.

Some women members admitted that they did not function like GP presidents as they could not completely benefit from the training programmes and due to their status as dummy candidates.

One dalit past president stated that when she was the president she would go to wage work in the morning and come back late in the evening. In such a situation

going to panchayat was difficult and attending training programmes regularly was even more difficult. She expressed dissatisfaction over her functioning as GP member. Due to lack of education and dependence on wage work, she could not actively take part in panchayat works and depended on her husband and PDO to deal with matters related to panchayat. According to her, it was these two actors who took majority of the decisions concerning the development works in the jurisdiction of GP.

There was also a view that the training provided through Nazir Sab institute was inadequate to enable presidents to function effectively because of insufficient training inputs and various other issues that plague the decentralised government. In general, the views expressed were that the training did not help them to undertake the practical work in the grama panchayat.

A 50-year old male past president belonged to cultivator household and is a graduate. He entered into politics as a GP member in 1993. He has obtained good knowledge about panchayat functions, schemes, activities and responsibilities of a member from various training programmes. But he is not satisfied with the training programmes. He felt that there is a gap between training content and what development works that GP president is required to undertake at the ground level. Another reason why GP presidents could not effectively discharge their functions was lack of coordination between officials (TP & GP) and elected representatives. He said that GP cannot implement many government programmes or schemes based on information given during training period. He felt that it is necessary to understand villagers' problems and the schemes should be re-modified according to the requirements of the villages. He stated that, Nazir Sab institute needs to focus on these issues, and discuss with members the problems that they face while implementing of government scheme/programme at grassroots level. He felt that it can also arrange or expose members to best

practices in gram panchayat administration, management, provision of services and community participation through field visits and tours.

The above suggest that the limited devolution of political, administrative and fiscal powers together with the training content that is not quite useful to them is the main factor that constrains the elected leaders to function effectively.

8. Conclusion

The main aim of this paper is to assess the training obtained by the past presidents of grama panchayats and its impact on knowledge levels and their functioning as representatives of decentralised government. With the help of literature review, a distinction between training programmes and capacity development is made in the paper, the latter being a broader goal.

A discussion on outcomes of policies and programmes of Karnataka government relating to training for GP elected members revealed gaps in the planning and organisation of training programmes in the state. In so far as organisation of training programmes is concerned, Nazir Sab Institute faced the challenges such as inability to provide timely intimation, travel allowance and participation fees to members. The elected leaders also faced the difficulties such as long distance, holding of training programmes at a time not convenient to members and so on. The satellite training programme was not particularly successful.

There is also a detailed discussion on the content and mode of training adopted to provide training to GP members based on information collected from 140 past presidents of GP in Dharwad district. Most of the sample presidents were happy with the training programme. Past presidents feel that training programmes had helped them understand their functions, powers and cope up with the new

responsibilities that they were showered upon. But, they also felt that programmes should have been more demonstrative and inclusive. The GP presidents could not get maximum benefits due to resource crunch of GPs, which were unable to fund travel and pay sitting fees out of own sources. Training provided to gram panchayat members and presidents fell short of requirements in terms of frequency, content, timing and, place of training. There seems to be scope for improvement in organizing the training programmes, coordination, methods and ways to reach out to GP members and presidents.

The knowledge on the functioning of decentralised governance was better among male past presidents as compared to their female counterparts. Likewise, the knowledge level among Lingayat past presidents was better as compared to those belonging to SC/ST community. The limited knowledge among female past presidents seem to have adversely affected them in undertaking development works relating to road development, water supply, drainage and streetlights. We have identified factors that have influenced variation in the knowledge level among past presidents. An important factor is limited devolution of powers. This implies that training programmes will make some difference in the knowledge levels; but, does not significantly contribute to decentralised governance in the absence of true capacity development. This has policy implication on the nature and content of training programmes conducted in Karnataka as well as other states.



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About CMDR

The Centre for Multi-disciplinary Development Research (CMDR) has been functioning since 1976 at Dharwad as an autonomous non profit research organisation. It has been registered in 1980 under the Society's Registration Act. The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi, an all India apex body created by Govt. of India to promote social science research in the country, recognized CMDR in 1990 as a national level research institute for social science research. The intellectual base of research and development activities of the Centre is found in its distinguished Governing Council. The aims and objectives of the Centre include, among others, conducting research on issues of socio-economic development, and decentralised planning at the sub-regional, regional and national levels in a multi-disciplinary framework, covering economic, social, political and cultural dimensions of human behaviour. CMDR has been organising capacity building programmes, research methodology workshops and Ph.D. programmes in Social Sciences.

Setting up of CMDR was inspired by the advice of a band of dedicated and eminent social scientists. Being located in Dharwad, which combines both urban and semi-rural features, the Centre has the unique advantage of providing a suitable environment for the analysis of the socio-economic problems of the rural people and regional economy at the grass root level. Hitherto, there has been an unusual concentration of research institutions in urban and metropolitan areas in the country. Further, there is no adequate effort made to induct multi-disciplinary approach in the analysis of the socio-economic problems of the people. In North Karnataka, there is a significant scope for strengthening the institutional infrastructure for conducting socio-economic analysis of regional problems. Dr. D. M. Nanjundappa Committee of Government of Karnataka for Redressal of Regional Disparities in Karnataka had also visualized such a role for a research institution from north Karnataka and CMDR eminently fulfils this vision. The Government of Karnataka has instituted a Chair in respectful memory of Dr. D. M. Nanjundappa and has accorded a grant for establishing Shri Abdul Nazirsab Chair for Panchayat Raj at the centre. CMDR also has Canara Bank Endowment under which the Centre carries out studies on decentralization, Banking, etc. It may not be wrong to state that CMDR has been one of the pioneering institutes among ICSSR institutes in highlighting the importance of action research in social science research by actually conducting such action research. CMDR has now emerged as an active Think Tank of North Karnataka.

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