

15. Panchayat Jamabandi in Karnataka: An Evaluation Study

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In recent decades, the responsibilities of governments have increased manifold. The democratic framework in which most modern governments work also has placed upon them the additional social responsibility of being accountable to their clientele whom they serve. This social responsibility can be best understood and measured by what is popularly known as 'social auditing'. Social auditing is thus a way of measuring the social and ethical performance of an organisation, be it a non-profit organisation or a corporate body. Hence the process is inclusive, participatory, transparent and accountable. Seen against this backdrop, the government of Karnataka recently launched (**GO. NO. RLP1 182 RPA/2000**) an innovative administrative mechanism popularly called 'Jamabandhi', or 'social auditing,' to examine the working of grama panchayats in the State. The sole purpose of this policy move by the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (RDPR) Department has been to assess the performance of grama panchayats against their objectives and the expectations of the stakeholders. The broad objectives of the study are to

- ◆ review the Jamabandhi in the light of its philosophy and objectives.
- ◆ examine the process of its implementation.
- ◆ examine the extent of participation of citizens and panchayat members in the programme.
- ◆ assess the impact of Jamabandhi in ensuring transparency and accountability in panchayat governance.
- ◆ suggest measures to strengthen the mechanism and offer corrective steps if there are any gaps in its implementation.

The present study was conducted in sixteen selected grama panchayats. The method of study was both descriptive and analytical. The analysis was based on quantitative and qualitative information.

Findings and Suggestions

- As per the guidelines, the authorities were expected to keep the public informed through tom tom, pamphlets, notice board, and local newspapers. But there were lapses on the part of the authorities in putting them into practice. This resulted in poor participation of the citizens, particularly from the adjoining villages, in the meetings. Hence, there is a need to streamline the dissemination process by effectively using the services of local organisations such as youth clubs, mahila mandals, and the services of anganawadi and health workers.
- The prime motive behind the introduction of the Jamabandhi programme has been to bring transparency and accountability into the system. To meet this objective, the

public was given direct access to panchayat records and registers. In this connection, the officers present were expected to extend their help to citizens by clarifying their doubts or explaining omissions and commissions committed by the panchayat in the previous year. Further, in order to ensure quality in the implementation of rural development programmes, the officers in charge of the meeting had to make field visits along with the affected persons. Field visits and discussions with the local people reveal that this was a low-key affair. Wherever field inspections were conducted, the officers had made serious remarks, particularly about the quality of materials used for construction.

- As revealed by the case studies, successful implementation of promotional programmes like Jamabandhi depends on the flow of information to the public, resulting in the latter's active participation, adherence to guidelines and necessary arrangements made thereof.
- The two cases presented have some important lessons to be learnt. One such lesson would be to take care of disseminating the information and helping the public to understand better the purpose and implications of the programme. Since the Jamabandhi programme was specially meant to activate the public to participate in their panchayat activities, it is necessary that they be taken into confidence first, otherwise, this well-intended programme might lose its very purpose.
- Adherence to the prescribed guidelines is crucial to the successful implementation of any promotional programme. This is reflected in the results of Case-I where the panchayat had made almost all the arrangements to hold the meeting and mobilised the public in large numbers. The guidelines, in fact, are the guiding force behind the success of the event. Their absence in Case-II had led to negative implications.
- The foregoing analysis of the Jamabandhi programme reveals more of negative aspects than of positive ones. However, this should not be taken to imply that the programme, initiated as an administrative mechanism, has failed to achieve its objectives like ensuring transparency and accountability in grama panchayat administration. In fact, it did create a significant impact among the citizens, the representatives and the officials of the panchayats. The citizens, who participated in the programme by attending the meetings, endorsed its usefulness as it provided them with an opportunity to know in detail the activities of their panchayats; prior to this, they hardly had access to such details. While reiterating their positive views on the programme, the citizens strongly felt that the government should initiate measures to educate the people about the new programmes and mechanisms by arranging specially designed awareness camps.
- Discussions with the officials of the zilla panchayat, taluk panchayat and grama panchayat suggest that the programme ensured both vertical and horizontal accountability, particularly among the officials. Further, the process had made the secretaries of the grama panchayats more responsible and accountable to their scheduled tasks and responsibilities. This, indeed, testifies to the fact that Jamabandhi has to some extent ensured accountability of the functionaries of panchayats to the citizens.
- On the whole, although the Jamabandhi programme had many slips here and there which can be seen as initial jolts, in the final analysis, the programme has been giving positive signals by ensuring transparency and accountability in the working of the

grama panchayats. To make Jamabandhi more meaningful, accountable and sustainable, there is a need to legislate **guidelines as mandatory** for conducting Jamabandhi meetings. The success of this programme at the GP level may in due course lead to its replication at the higher-level panchayats too. In fact, there were queries from the non-officials and officials of the grama panchayats as to why only their panchayats were targeted for public scrutiny and not taluk panchayats and zilla panchayats also!