

Ministry of Panchayati Raj

Proceedings of National Webinar /Virtual Interaction with Beacon Panchayats selected for Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav and other well-performing Panchayats on 25th October, 2021 under Panchayati Raj Webinar Series to commemorate Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav.

Inaugural Session

A National Webinar to interact with Panchayati Raj Institutions in virtual mode was organised by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj as part of Panchayati Raj Webinar Series in commemoration of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav on 25th October 2021. The day-long National Webinar was inaugurated by Shri Sunil Kumar, Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

Welcome Address

At the outset, Shri (Dr.) Bijaya Kumar Behera, Economic Adviser, Ministry of Panchayati Raj extended warm welcome to all the participants of the National Webinar and thanked Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj for constant support and guidance which have been invaluable in all innovative and important initiatives.

Opening Remarks

Shri (Dr.) Chandra Shekhar Kumar, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj made opening remarks and welcomed all the participants from different locations across the country. Shri (Dr.) Chandra Shekhar Kumar, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj emphasised upon a central role to be played by Beacon Panchayats in celebration of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav in rural areas across the country. He also highlighted that Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav also provides an opportunity to showcase good practices/success stories of Beacon Panchayats and its replication in other parts of the country with proper documentation of all activities. He requested all the participants to upload details of activities and events on India@75 Portal.



Release of Special Issue of YOJANA – monthly journal

During the inaugural session, Panchayati Raj Special Issue of YOJANA – leading monthly Government Journal on issues relating to planning and development brought out by Publications Division, Ministry of information and Broadcasting was released by Shri Sunil Kumar, Secretary, MoPR, Smt. Monideepa Mukerjee, Director General, Publications Division, Shri (Dr.) Chandra Shekhar Kumar, Additional Secretary, MoPR and Shri (Dr.) Bijaya Kumar Behera, Economic Adviser, MoPR.



Speaking on the occasion, Smt. Monideepa Mukerjee, Director General, Publications Division stated that it is a matter of great pride for the Publications Division to bring out this special edition of Yojana on Panchayati Raj, through which we will be disseminating the success stories of several Panchayats across the country.



Shri Sunil Kumar, Secretary, MoPR opined that this special edition of Yojana would prove to be extremely beneficial, not only for the Panchayati Raj functionaries, but also for the general public at large, and academicians, policy planners, students and administrators can also assess valuable information concerning key issues relating to Panchayati Raj.

Keynote Address

The keynote address delivered by Shri Sunil Kumar, Secretary, MoPR set the tone for the National Webinar. Secretary, MoPR said on this occasion that the November 2021 issue of Yojana – dedicated to Panchayati Raj will be very useful and informative particularly for elected representatives and functionaries of Panchayati Raj Institutions and for the general public.

Shri Sunil Kumar, Secretary, MoPR expressed satisfaction that the State of Karnataka has taken novel initiative to set up public libraries in Panchayat buildings; Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and other States are also working in this direction. The public library set up in the Panchayat Bhawan will prove to be very beneficial and meaningful for the rural youth.



Shri Sunil Kumar, Secretary, MoPR said that Panchayats now have to work continuously towards achieving the aims of ODF Plus and Jal Jeevan Mission. Work should also be done in villages by making a solid strategy for solid waste management and complete ban on single-use plastic in the villages. While appreciating the role of Panchayats in the vaccination campaign, Secretary, MoPR called for playing an active role in COVID-19 vaccination for kids in future and expressed hope that availability of COVID-19 vaccine for children will pave way for school reopening and related activities. He said that a sum of Rs.44,000 crore has been allocated as grants as per recommendations of the Fifteenth Finance Commission for strengthening of health infrastructure in rural areas. He appealed Panchayats to assume the leadership role in respect of issues of national priority and local concerns.

Shri Sunil Kumar, Secretary, MoPR said that Hon'ble Prime Minister had written a letter during the month of September 2020 to all Sarpanch(es) appealing them to work towards achieving the goal of "Har Ghar Jal (water for every household)", and appealed to people and Gram Panchayats to make Jal Jeevan Mission a people's movement. Panchayats can measure the importance of their role from the fact that Hon'ble Prime Minister's letter dated 24 March 2021 on water conservation movement "Jal Shakti Abhiyan : Catch the Rain" was also addressed to all Sarpanch(es).

Technical Sessions

During the 4 technical sessions, experience sharing and deliberations were done on the following themes: (i) Role of Panchayats in Jal Jeevan Mission and Swachhta; (ii) Role of Panchayats in Health and COVID-19 Management & Vaccination; (iii) Increase in Own Source Revenue (OSR) by Panchayats; and (iv) eGovernance and Infrastructure in Panchayats. **Session-wise details of proceedings/ interactions are annexed.**

Themes were selected in view of critical role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in planning, implementation and monitoring of Centrally Sponsored Schemes, including the flagship schemes, and also income generation and thereby contributing to nation building and also ensuring ease of living in villages.

PowerPoint Presentations and Interactions

Steps taken by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the Ministry's views were presented through PowerPoint Presentations by Joint Secretaries and Economic Adviser, MoPR. Shri Manoj Kumar Sahoo, Director (JJM), Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti made a presentation on Role of Panchayats in Jal Jeevan Mission. Shri Vinay Thakur, Chief Operating Officer, National e-Governance Division (NeGD), Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY) also shared his views with the participants. Shri Abid Hussain Sadiq, Deputy Commissioner, Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh, Dr. Ravi Mittal, Chief Executive Officer, Zilla Parishad Raigarh, Chhattisgarh and Dr. Rajendra M. Patel, District Development Officer, Vadodara, Gujarat also shared their experiences with regard to thematic areas. Elected representatives and functionaries from different parts of the country shared their experiences and views during the four Technical Sessions of the National Webinar which was well attended and well received.

Concluding Remarks

In his concluding remarks, Shri (Dr.) Chandra Shekhar Kumar, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj thanked all the participants for their active participation during the day-long interactive sessions and expressed hope that this webinar served as an opportune occasion to listen to the views, success stories and best practices in respect of different thematic areas directly from the ground zero, and we will continue interacting with Panchayats and other stakeholders quite regularly utilising each and every such opportunity. He underlined the need for collective efforts by all stakeholders to ensure all-round development in rural areas.



Vote of Thanks

Smt. Malti Rawat, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj proposed a vote of thanks on this occasion.

Session-I on Role of Panchayats in Jal Jeevan Mission and Swachhta

Towards the endeavor for providing a platform for Panchayats acting as 'Agents of Change' or Beacon Panchayats owing to their outstanding interventions under water conservation and sanitation, inter-alia, the inaugural session/Session-I on 'Jal Jeevan Mission and Swachhta' was effected from around 10:50 AM and Chaired/Moderated by Shri Manoj Kumar Sahoo, Director (Jal Jeevan Mission), Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India. Objective of the session was to provide a National level platform to put forth the essentiality of water for human life especially through provision safe drinking water to all households in rural India while ensuring Sanitation across the country for which Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) and Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) schemes of Government of India are acting as prime catalysts. This session, and webinar as a whole, saw a wide participation across the country from Panchayats'/States' representatives.

2. Subsequent to placing a note of warm welcome to the participants of the webinar and Session and prior to opening up the platform for selected Panchayats/Village and States/UTs representatives for dialogue, Smt. Rekha Yadav, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India gave a brief presentation on Role of Panchayats in JJM Swachhta. The presentation highlighted the following main points:

- Panchayats have a central role to play in planning, implementation and monitoring of various schemes supplemented by community participation with focus on 3Cs i.e. Community Managed, Community Driven and Community Owned.
- Fifteenth Finance Commission Grants has provision of Tied Grants to Panchayats for safe drinking water and sanitation.
- Prime role of JJM, inter-alia, includes universal safe & adequate drinking water coverage, put focus on improvement in the living standards by strengthening and convergence of the institutions and resources. The support towards this from Panchayats is drawn through awareness creation from jan andolan for water and convergence of funds. As an impact of JJM across the country, 6.23 crore (32.49%) households have been provided with tap water connections and 41.53 % habitations have been provided with piped water supply scheme in the total ODF certified villages (*Source: Annual Report 2020-21- D/o DW&S*) and 24.4 % habitations in the 112 aspirational districts have piped water supply (*Source: Finance Commission in Covid Times-Report for 2021-23*).
- Prime role of SBM, inter-alia, includes universal sanitation coverage and to put focus on sanitation, improvement in the general quality of life in the rural areas, by promoting cleanliness, hygiene and eliminating open

defecation. The support towards this from Panchayats is drawn through awareness creation through Gram Sabhas, community management of sanitation system and convergence of funds. As an impact of SBM across the country, sanitation coverage stands at 100% (*Source: Annual Report 2020-21 - D/o DW&S*), 93% of women no longer afraid of being hurt by someone or harmed by animals while defecating (*study by UNICEF on February, 2020*) and over 5.6 Lakh villages and 616 districts have been declared as ODF under SBM (Grameen) [*Source: Finance Commission in Covid Times (Report for 2021-23)*].

- Planning through inclusion of component such as Swachhta, Solid Waste & Liquid Management, grey water management etc.; Monitoring of Water & Sanitation services at Public Infrastructures through Involvement of Community, ERs & Standing Committees and Mobilizing resources/ Convergence with line department, local partners, CSR are the key roles which Panchayats are playing and need to play.
- Gram Panchayats have planned activities in the Drinking Water Sector through convergence of Funds / Schemes in the Gram Panchayat Development Plans.
- Ministry of Panchayati Raj has made interventions towards these sectors by virtue of issuance of advisories to various States/UTs.
- Various Panchayats have shown exemplary cases of practices adopted for sanitation (*as in pink community toilet specifically meant for children and women inaugurated in Karma Village of Kaundhiyara Block of Prayagraj District in Uttar Pradesh*) and Sharamadhaan and Awareness camps on sanitation (*as in the case of Radder-Naganur Gram Panchayat (Block Naragund, District Gadag, Karnataka : Awardee -National Panchayat Awards 2018)*).
- Participation, Convergence of Resources, use of Innovations and setting Panchayat-level measurable targets are the key take aways towards way forward in terms of sanitation and water conservation.

3. Subsequent to the presentation by Smt. Rekha Yadav, Joint Secretary, MoPR, the selected Panchayats were invited for sharing their experiences for valuable guidance to other Panchayats/States/UTs. Following Panchayats put forth their valuable contributions in these sectors as narrated below:

Panchayat	Speakers	Narrative of achievements / best practices shared by the speakers
YSR Kadapa District Panchayat, (Andhra Pradesh)	1. Shri M. Ravi Kumar Reddy (Elected Representative Zilla Parishad Territorial Constituency, Vempalli,	To encourage the States and Districts to focus on Jal Shakti Abhiyan, Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation launched District rankings

	<p>YSR Kadapa District, Andhra Pradesh)</p> <p>2. Shri M.C. Veeranna (Superintendent Engineer, Rural Water Supply & Sanitation, YSR Kadapa District, Andhra Pradesh)</p>	<p>based on the progress achieved during the campaign. District Kadapa was the top ranking District under this campaign for the year 2019 with total relative score of 84.84. This District Panchayat has achieved 84.85% of coverage under JJM.</p>
<p>Chauntra Block Panchayat (District Mandi, Himachal Pradesh)</p>	<p>1. Shri Vivek Chauhan (Block Development Officer)</p>	<p>Chauntra BP has been awarded the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar, 2018 (under National Panchayat Awards) by MoPR for its various intervention inter-alia sanitation related activities. BDO, Chauntra shared various interventions made such as conduct of swachta rallies with the help of mahila mandals and yuvak mandals, segregation of waste, cleaning of water tanks etc.</p>
<p>Gangardoo Gram Panchayat (Block Dudu, District Jaipur, Rajasthan)</p>	<p>1. Shri Bannaram Jaat (Sarpanch)</p> <p>2. Shri Laxman Singh (founder Gram Vikas Navyuvak Mandal Laporiya)</p>	<p>Village Lapodiya under this GP is a nationally & internationally recognized village for water conservation and rainwater harvesting with resonating effects of performance on surrounding villages. The frontrunner person of this mission, Shri Laxman Singh (founder Gram Vikas Navyuvak Mandal Laporiya). Conservation movement that started in Laporiya has now spread to around 58 villages and, in each case, is run by the villagers themselves. The people build the 'chaukas'/ small embankments, carry out maintenance and desilt channels. Thus, the village stands out because even at the end of a long summer its lakes hold enough water for the community's needs.</p>
<p>Bedadukka Gram</p>	<p>1. Shri Dhanya M.</p>	<p>Many interventions have been</p>

Panchayat (Kazargod District, Kerala)	(President, GP)	taken by the GP towards sanitation such as levy of fines for littering, constitution of Green Task Force, conducting Hygiene Walks and awareness activities, street plays, provision of dustbins for garbage collection/segregation etc.
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4. Taking an opportunity to commend the efforts/interventions of the participating Panchayats/representatives in Session-I, Shri Manoj Kumar Sahoo, Director (Jal Jeevan Mission) gave a brief presentation on the status of the JJM and interventions made under this. Main points put forth during his presentation are as under:

- Jal Jeevan Mission – Har Ghar Jal announced on 15th August, 2019 by Hon’ble Prime Minister aims to provide Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) to every rural household and public institution in villages by 2024. The expected outcome of this includes, reduction in drudgery of women, improvement in ‘quality of life’ & enhancement of ‘ease of living’, bridging the rural-urban divide.
- JJM is implemented as a decentralized, demand-driven, community-managed programme with Gram Panchayat and/ or its sub-committee, i.e. Village Water & Sanitation Committee (VWSC)/ Pani Samiti, etc. playing a key role in managing their in-village water supply systems. VWSC undertakes mobilization of community for planning, designing and scheme implementation with assistance by NGOs.
- Soul of JJM is People’s participation wherein Village Action Plans (VAP) are to be prepared & approved in the Gram Sabha and so far, VAPs of 2.91 lakh villages prepared it.
- Village is the unit of implementation of JJM.
- 15th Finance Commission tied grants for water & sanitation to RLBs/ PRIs are to be utilized for supply of drinking water, rainwater harvesting and water recycling; and sanitation and maintenance of open-defecation free (ODF) status. This is to be dovetailed at GP level in the Village Action Plan (VAP) with focus on ‘service delivery’.
- 7.63 lakh women have been trained on water quality testing.
- Hon’ble Prime Minister gave a call to make JJM, a ‘Jan Andolan’ – water to become everyone’s business.

5. The Session-I concluded with a vote of thanks to the chair.

Session-II on Increase in Own Source Revenue by Panchayats

After the initial introduction about the session by Shri G. S. Krishnan, Consultant, a presentation was made by Shri Khushwant Singh Sethi, Joint Secretary, MoPR. In his session, he highlighted the following issues on the subject of Own Source Revenues (OSR) of Panchayats:

- Various provisions of the Constitution provides for fiscal powers of Panchayats through raising OSR by means of taxes, levies, fees etc.
- Improvement of OSR levels helps the Panchayats in financial autonomy, credit worthiness as well as delivery of quality services to the citizens
- As State Finance Commissions (SFCs) are mandated to suggest various means of augmentation of Panchayat finances, including OSR, their due constitution and acting upon their recommendations has been emphasized. XV FC also has made it as an eligibility condition for drawal of its grants from FY 2024-25.
- The case studies of Patoda Gram Panchayat in Maharashtra and Khowai Nagar Gram Panchayat in Tripura were highlighted as examples of innovative ways of OSR generation by Panchayats.
- The States should strive towards the vision of achieving at least 25% of the annual expenditure of Panchayats as OSR in the next five years. They may strategize the action plans of Panchayats accordingly to reach this target.

He subsequently, invited the speakers in the session to make their presentations.

- Dr. Rajendra Kumar, District Development Officer, Vadodara, Gujarat made the first presentation on behalf of the Vadodara Zilla Panchayat. In his presentation, he highlighted the various legal provisions of Gujarat Panchayati Raj Act and Rules for OSR generation by Panchayats. The Panchayats in Gujarat can levy building and land tax, water tax, light tax, drainage tax, cleanliness tax and professions tax. They also have many avenues of non-tax revenues like Grant received in lieu of Taxes (Royalty, Stamp duty, etc.), Income from Rents. (Own land/Properties), People's contributions, auctions, rentals from water tanks / ponds/ markets / fairs, commissions on purchase of seeds etc. State has incentivized OSR generation through Introduction of "Swachchh Gam Swasth Gam" Yojna by which cleanliness Grant has been given to Gram Panchayat on the basis of Certain Criteria of cleanliness. State has also doubled these incentive grants by improving the criteria for incentive grant.
- The measures taken by the Vadodara Zilla Panchayat to improve OSR are reassessment of properties, special campaign for professional tax collection, auction of certain properties, linking performance reports of Talati cum Mantri to increase in overall tax collections, regular audits of Panchayats' records and increase in rental incomes.

- Two case studies of best practices of OSR by Jarod and Goraj Gram Panchayats were been explained. Jarod Gram Panchayat improved its OSR through innovative means of charges for water ATMs and reassessment of RC and EC holders of nearby industrial units for Professions tax. Goraj Gram Panchayat has auctioned the lake located in its premises for fishing through which substantial OSR income were generated.
- The suggestions for increasing of OSR made in the presentation were, revision of tax rates, merger of various taxes into a single tax towards easy administration, incentives to Panchayats towards OSR improvement and digitization of the tax process.
- The second presentation was made by Shri Jayant Dutta, Joint Block Development Officer, Rajganj Block, Jalpaiguri District, West Bengal. He narrated the efforts of Rajganj Block Panchayats in improvement of their OSR. He described that apart from tax revenues, the Panchayat Samiti also raises OSR through non-tax revenues like development fees, land utilization charges and house rents.
- The Panchayat Samiti was able to utilize the increased income through OSR in creation of various infrastructure works for roads/culverts, water supply enhancement in health centres, sinking hand tube wells for drinking water supply in the villages etc.
- The third presentation in the session was made by Shri Thangavelu, President of Odanthurai Village Panchayat, Mettupalayam, Block, Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu. In his presentation, he explained that the Village Panchayat has been able to collect OSR tax revenues almost without any arrears to the demands from its citizens. The Panchayat has also set up a wind mill for production of renewable electric energy from which OSR to the extent of Rs. 4 Lakhs per annum are generated. Due to higher levels of OSR income, the Village Panchayat has been making surplus in their annual budget and are able to serve their citizens well.
- Future plans for improvement in OSR are revision of tax rates, increase in electricity production from wind mills, setting up a water purifying unit, development of rural tourism in the village and rental income from coconut groves.

The fourth presentation which was scheduled to be made by the Budhanoor Gram Panchayat, Chengannur Block, Alappuzha District, Kerala could not be done due to technical issues at their place.

The session ended with vote of thanks to all the presenters and the participants.

Session-III on Role of Panchayats in Health and COVID-19 Management & Vaccination

Session-III of the webinar was chaired & moderated by Dr. Bijaya Kumar Behera, Economic Advisor, and MoPR. Discussing the role of Panchayats in mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 in rural areas, Dr. Behera shared that MoPR has launched a COVID Dashboard for highlighting the grassroots initiatives taken by the Panchayats at different levels. Thereafter he invited first speaker from Himachal Pradesh for sharing his experiences.

Shri Abid Hussain Sadiq, Deputy Commissioner, Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh shared with immense gratitude that District Kinnaur is the first district of the country to achieve the target of 100 percent vaccination against COVID-19. He appreciated the major role played by the Panchayats in COVID – 19 surveillance and containment. He further reflected that Panchayats with the support of District authorities have taken various initiatives to ensure COVID appropriate behavior & minimize the spread of the disease. Training on COVID 19 protocol is given to all Pradhan, Councilors, Zila Parishad members and other social organizations at village level. The entire process worked in phased manner.

In phase-1 Panchayats were strategized by sealing / barricading the boundaries of villages to minimize people / tourist approaching the villages. Panchayats in different villages take up the initiative of setting up of local quarantine centers with facilities of food, drinking water and toilets. Identification, quarantine and supervision of people coming from outside the District are being done at village level. Use of social media / WhatsApp group was done to create awareness among the masses in villages. IEC at grass root level is being given to the people by putting posters everywhere. Orientation is being provided to villagers and migrants on social distancing and precautions they must take for those who returned to village from outside district. Face masks are being distributed to the villagers free of cost. Regular cleaning operations are being carried out and sodium hypochlorite is being sprayed in villages. Sanitization of houses of COVID 19 positive person and their surroundings. Ration distribution to COVID 19 positive villagers. Migrant labors who have been found positive in various villages of District Kinnaur have been provided shelter and been given food free of cost.

Panchayat took preventive actions against second wave of COVID 19 proactively before the lockdown in District Kinnaur in phase II. Health checkup are being arranged by Pradhans at regular intervals for vulnerable population in villages. Active decisions taken on COVID 19 related management such as implementing the lockdown, disinfection, providing food and medicines to the needy persons. The supply of other essential services was being ensured by the village level task forces. Donation of Oxygen concentrators and Ambulances to their concerned PHC's, during second phase were being done at village level. Panchayat representatives took extra step in providing utmost health care to the old, comorbid and vulnerable COVID 19 positive patients.

The next presenter **Dr. Ravi Mittal, CEO, Zilla Parishad Raigarh, Chhattisgarh** told about the strategies & initiatives undertaken for mitigating COVID-19 infections in the rural areas. He briefed that the panchayats were the real grassroot warriors during first & second wave of COVID-19 pandemic. The district administration Raigarh followed a four step strategy for coping up with the COVID infection.

During lockdown, the district administration facilitated the panchayats by providing local leadership for bottom up disaster relief & response. The Panchayats supported the stay of migrant labourers, arranged transport and prepared the quarantine centres like Anganwadi buildings, schools etc. operated community kitchens.



Panchayats also has set-up containment zones, drove disinfection and sanitisation of villages distributed masks & sanitizers. Panchayats also used local media such as loudspeakers on cycles, utilised social media, e.g. WhatsApp groups and wall paintings to spread COVID related awareness among rural communities.

Panchayats have also passed resolutions through Gram Sabhas for adhering to COVID norms, and utilising the reserve funds for the poor. Village level committees such as VHSNC, VWSC were also allowed to regular engagement between the community and the officials.

Panchayats acted as local influencers for mobilizing the rural people for COVID vaccination. Local level officials such as ASHA worker, Anganwari worker, Panchayat Secretary, Gram Rojgar Sahyak, SHGs and women citizen leaders were also motivated and mobilised the rural community for vaccination.



Community Based Surveillance Systems were established by involving village elders, youth and Self-Help Groups to prevent violations in the quarantine centres & entry of outsiders.

During this period, a record employment generation is done under MGNREGA throughout the country. Livelihood support has also been provided to the SHGs through NRLM. Other schemes such as PDS, pensions, Bank Sakhis etc. have also ensured food security by maintenance of food supply chain. Special assistance to the vulnerable sections such as disabled, aged, and children was provided.

Lastly, he shared that the Zilla Panchayat is strengthening grassroots initiatives by proactively engaging the village level committees, identifying local vulnerabilities, and defining roles to individuals Map and Maintain Local Resources. Contributions based Community Disaster Fund will also be set up at Panchayat level

Smt. Babita Sandhu, Chairperson, Panchayat Samiti Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, highlighted the efforts made by Panchayat Samiti Kangra for controlling the spread of COVID -19 infections & risks in the rural areas. She shared that PS Kangra organized awareness generation camps for using COVID appropriate behavior, i.e. follow social distancing, distributed face masks, sanitizers, food items and medicines in the panchayats. Involved SHGs for awareness generation among rural masses. Organized panchayat level meetings with elected representatives for identifying COVID cases and send them to quarantine centers.



Shri Kulwant Singh, Sarpanch, Gram Panchayat Saffuwala, District Moga, Punjab shared that only 4 corona positive cases during first wave & 2 cases in second wave were identified in GP Saffuwala. This becomes possible with the rigorous efforts of the panchayat. The boundaries of all the villages of the panchayat were sealed and restricted the people's movement by Thikri/Peharas. The GP sensitized the community through awareness generation camps to follow COVID appropriate behavior and use of masks, sanitizer etc. The GP also established COVID care & isolation centers for quarantine the COVID positive & suspected persons. Food items have been distributed to the needy during lockdown situations. GP Saffuwala run a vaccine drive for motivating people to achieve the target of 100 percent vaccination.

The Secretary, Gram Panchayat Mukat Ram Wala, District Kapurthala, Punjab also shared about the efforts made by the panchayat for minimizing the spread of the COVID-19 infection. The GP strictly banned the entry of the outsiders, sensitized the community for using face masks, regular hand washing and sanitizers. He further shared that panchayat helped the needy persons by providing food/ration items & medicines.

Concluding the session Dr. B. K. Behera said that Ministry has started compiling best practices on COVID-19 management by the Panchayats across the country. The experiences shared today the panchayats are realistic and may also be incorporated for effective learnings.

Session-IV on eGovernance and Infrastructure in Panchayats

The next session was on “**e-Governance and Infrastructure in Panchayats**” which was chaired by Shri Vinay Thakur, Chief Operating Officer, NeGD, MeitY. Setting the tone of the discussion; the chair submitted that for Rural Local Bodies viz. Panchayats, to be able to deliver services efficient and effectively, it is absolutely essential to ensure all the necessary requisites are in place i.e. proper infrastructure setup with sufficient places for housing office of other line departments; adequate internet setup by means etc. The chair further submitted that the session included presentations from several speakers starting from the Joint Secretary (e-Governance), MoPR Shri Alok Prem Nagar followed by four speakers from identified Zila Panchayat (Mandi, Himachal Pradesh), Block

Panchayat (Hinjlicut, Odisha) and two Gram Panchayats (Herur, Karnataka & Parsandhan, Uttar Pradesh).

The Joint Secretary (e-Governance), Shri Alok Prem Nagar gave an overview as to what constitutes a Beacon Panchayat. It was submitted that the Panchayats, as a part of the 73rd Amendment, are constitutionally bound to deliver services as per the 29 subjects enlisted in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. Panchayats depending on their competency may provide various services pertaining to Regulatory services (trade licenses, building construction permit), Statutory services (issuance of birth/death certificates), Developmental Services (providing services under Government welfare schemes) and Consumer Utilities services (bill payment, rail ticket booking). In order for a Panchayat to be able to attain this objective; it was averred that Panchayats need to adhere to certain modalities these modalities, to position itself as a Beacon Panchayats, which were described during the presentation viz. (i) presence of Panchayat Bhawans, (ii) availability of internet connectivity and (iii) provisioning of online Government services in the Panchayats. As a part of the MoPR Vision document; it is envisaged that the Panchayat Bhawans need to be positioned as Hubs of activities for governance, service delivery knowledge and training or Mini-Secretariats (Sachivalayas) wherein the offices of field functionaries of other line department are also housed. As per the available data with MoPR; there are 1.98 lac GPs that have their own Panchayat Bhawans. The Joint Secretary emphasized that the remaining around 60,000 GPs need to expedite the process of having Panchayat Bhawans.

At the same time; he also expressed the need for co-locating Common Service Centres (CSCs) in the Panchayat Bhawans which would be beneficial in ensuring efficient delivery of services to the Panchayat citizens. He highlighted the various aspects that would be covered by the presence of CSCs in the Panchayat Bhawans such as (i) upkeep of hardware & Network equipment, (ii) Provision of G2C Services online through CSCs, (iii) Training of ERs and PFs – basic orientation, thematic areas etc.

Further, the Joint Secretary submitted that there is a strong need to build a "**digital inclusive society**" where large sections of rural population are able to benefit from new technologies; can access and share information and services freely and can participate in the development process more effectively. It is essential to ensure that requisite ICT infrastructure viz. Computer/ laptop, UPS, printer etc. along with internet connectivity is available in the Panchayats. This would ensure that the Panchayat staff members are able to effectively deliver their day-to-day operations and/ or inhabitants of the villages are able to access services; and to contact line department officials easily, getting redressal to their day-to-day problems under one roof (Panchayat Bhawan).

BharatNet FTTH Connection

- 76% of the Gram Panchayats have computers to operate daily
- 62% GPs have active FTTP installed, and 17% GPs have active internet connections
- 1.04 lac GPs wherein Wi-Fi are installed of which Wi-Fi is active in 64,905 GPs.

Source: BBNL

Another point he put forward, was ensuring availability of power supply factors for running all IT initiatives in Panchayats. To achieve uninterrupted power supply and make GPs self-reliant, he suggested that the renewable source of the energy could be explored. Citing best practices from the States of Karnataka and Haryana, he opined that the other Panchayats across the country could take cues from these States and follow suit. Summarizing the presentation; the Joint Secretary reiterated the key take away points:

- i) To have Panchayat Bhawans & the requisite ICT infrastructure.*
- ii) Adoption of BBNL or any other means of internet connectivity for service delivery.*
- iii) Co-location of CSCs in Panchayat Bhawans.*
- iv) Possibility of utilizing renewable sources of power for uninterrupted power supply.*

His presentation was followed by experience sharing by identified speakers from the well performing Zila Panchayat, Block Panchayat and Gram Panchayats whereby the best practices/salient features of their respective Panchayats were highlighted.

- The Chairman of Mandi Zila Parishad from Himachal Pradesh Shri Pal Verma gave a brief account of all the interventions being carried out by Mandi ZP in terms of preparing plans, accounting, carrying online payment through eGramSwaraj-PFMS Interface. He also submitted that trainings to the Elected Representatives, including newly elected, are provided on timely basis. In addition, he also highlighted that initiatives under the ambit of other Ministries/Line Departments were also carried out/being implemented effectively and efficiently. He also submitted that 66 GPs in the Mandi ZP have received sanctions for Common Service Centres (CSCs). Moreover, the ZP has its own Panchayat Building with solar panels fitted to it; and also have an office building which houses offices of other line departments. They have also started a pilot for Tele-Medicine in one of the Panchayats and based on the findings from it; the same would be implemented in the remaining Panchayats.
- The next speaker was from the Block Chairperson, Shri Raghunath Naidu, Hinjlicut Block Panchayat from Odisha. He gave an overview of the various interventions carried out in line with the directive of MoPR such as implementation of eGSPI. Almost all the Panchayats in the BP are onboard on eGramSwaraj and have also prepared development plans for 2020-21. The Panchayats have been carrying out real time payments through eGSPI for the expenditure incurred under XV FC. He submitted that CSCs are available in the Panchayats and also Panchayat Bhawans are in place and equipped with solar panels for uninterrupted power supply. Utilizing the funds in convergence; they have also taken measures to equip the Panchayats– library, village-park/garden, ponds, marriage-pandal, market complex, provision for drinking water, health centres etc.

- Next the GP Sarpanch from Parsandhan, Uttar Pradesh Smt. Sulekha gave a brief account on the various initiatives/interventions carried out in the GP. The GP has couple of infrastructures - Panchayat Bhawan, Aanganwadi, Public Information Centre, ; however, the Panchayat Secretary, Shri. Devendra Yadav, of the GP mentioned that they are taking measures to implement the internet connectivity in the GP and also have an e-library in the Panchayat for the purpose of readily available information. Both of them were asked to expedite the procedure for implementing internet connectivity in their GP.
- The GP Sarpanch from Herur GP, Karnataka provided the salient features of his Panchayat. The Herur GP has its own Panchayat Bhawan with a staff strength of 15 and with computer systems in place. He informed the chair that they are connected to the Optical Fibre Network (OFN) for internet connectivity whereby the Panchayat is able to deliver services to its citizens. The Panchayat has been using both eGSPI for carrying out real time payments for expenditure incurred under the XV FC and is also using the State-run application – Panchatantra for other aspects of Panchayat functioning. The Panchayat Bhawan is also equipped with Solar Roof Top for uninterrupted power supply. He also submitted that they are more than 100 services through Babu ji Seva Kendra at the GP level. They also have provision wherein the Panchayat citizen can pay their taxes online. Ayushman Bharat Cards have also been issued for all citizens of Gram Panchayats. Moreover, a CSC centre is also co-located in the GP for providing Aadhaar services.
