



MINISTRY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

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for every child

Guidelines for Institutionalization of

# MAHILA SABHAS IN GRAM PANCHAYAT



Ministry of Panchayati Raj  
Government of India  
February 2023

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# MAHILA SABHAS IN GRAM PANCHAYAT

**Ministry of Panchayati Raj**  
Government of India  
February 2023



सुनील कुमार, आई.ए.एस.  
सचिव  
**Sunil Kumar, IAS**  
Secretary



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**Sunil Kumar**

## MESSAGE

### SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ

India is striving to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through committed, planned action and monitoring at the National, State and local levels. Vital to this agenda is the work of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to localize action on the SDGs through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

The Flagship Scheme of the Ministry – Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) – has been revamped to build the capacities of PRIs for good governance through participatory local planning at the Gram Panchayat level, with a focus on the attainment of the SDGs. This will help Gram Panchayats to initiate, mainstream and institutionalize women's voices and youth empowerment, especially of adolescent girls, in village-level decision-making.

The Expert Group, constituted by the Ministry for Localizing SDGs, focussed on the actionable agenda for 2030 under nine themes for PRIs. Theme 9 is vital for women participation and aims to create Women-friendly Gram Panchayats for promoting gender transformative outcomes in rural India. This lays emphasis on empowering women and adolescent girls as a prerequisite to achieving all the SDGs.

It is a welcome initiative of UNICEF to collaborate with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to develop these Advisory and Guidelines for conducting Mahila Sabhas as a prelude to the Gram Sabhas, to help facilitate capacity building at the local level and ensure voices of women are integrated into Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs). My best compliments to the UNICEF Team led by Ms. Cynthia McCaffrey, Representative, UNICEF India Country Office, for providing strategic advice to the team of experts for developing these guidelines.

I am sure this will act as a step-by-step manual for all the Gram Panchayats when they organize the Mahila Sabhas, and will enable the goal of decentralized and participatory planning at the village level where the voices of women, children and adolescent girls are heard.

  
14.2.23  
**Sunil Kumar**

MESSAGE





**Cynthia McCaffrey**

## MESSAGE

### REPRESENTATIVE, UNICEF INDIA COUNTRY OFFICE

UNICEF is committed to the causes of children and women in India, and reiterates its full support to the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, in its commitment to achieve the SDGs by localizing action on them through Gram Panchayats.

Participatory decision-making is crucial for strengthening grassroots governance and inclusive service delivery and goes a long way to ensure that policies, schemes and programmes are inclusive and relevant to the needs and aspirations of women, children and adolescents. Governments across the globe are taking various initiatives to ensure that decision-makers actively listen to and collectively work towards enacting the inputs provided by women, children and adolescent girls on their priority areas.

**Being part of village-level planning makes girls more aware of their rights to education and dignity, and against harmful social practices. Children with disabilities, whose voices are often unheard, are able to advocate for themselves. Adolescent girls see their critical health and nutrition needs as part of policy dialogues. And the most vulnerable young people start seeing themselves as community and nation builders.**

UNICEF is pleased to extend all possible support to make grassroots governance more women- and child-friendly in terms of participation prioritization and suitable budget allocation for women on issues important to them. Therefore, forums like Mahila Sabhas become crucial for creating an enabling environment where women can meaningfully participate in local planning and decision-making to make local governance more gender-transformative.

I am pleased to note the very strong partnership developed by UNICEF India Country Office and the Ministry of Panchayati Raj. UNICEF is committed to ensure that the voices of women and children are heard through grassroots-level interventions, and are mainstreamed as a part of grassroots governance.



Cynthia McCaffrey

MESSAGE



डॉ. चन्द्र शेखर कुमार, आई.ए.एस.  
अपर सचिव

**Dr. Chandra Shekhar Kumar, IAS**  
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**Dr. Chandra Shekhar Kumar**

## MESSAGE


**ADDITIONAL SECRETARY,  
MINISTRY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ**

It is noteworthy that the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, under its Flagship Scheme of Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA), has embarked upon its campaign for Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

The theme on 'Women-friendly village' for making all development efforts gender-transformative and targeted towards equal rights for women is one of the most critical, and must be universally integrated into other themes for optimal and timely achievement of all the SDGs.

I am happy to note UNICEF India's contribution in developing these Advisory and Guidelines for conducting Mahila Sabhas as a prelude to the Gram Sabhas to help facilitate capacity building at the local level where the voices of women and children are integrated into village planning. This draws on a judicious mix of different aspects for conducting Mahila Sabhas including good governance and representation, and administrative, institutional and financial functions in the Panchayats, for attaining all the objectives of engendered development in villages as a part of Theme 9.

I hope that these guidelines will be optimally adopted and adapted to the various state contexts and adequately utilized for the purposes of capacity building in the Gram Panchayats. This will integrate and mainstream women's issues in village-level planning and programme implementation, and help attain gender-transformative outcomes in rural areas as a ripple effect, and prove a catalyst to the campaign of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj on localization of the SDGs.

  
Dr. Chandra Shekhar Kumar

MESSAGE





**Yasumasa Kimura**

## MESSAGE

### DEPUTY REPRESENTATIVE, PROGRAMMES, UNICEF INDIA COUNTRY OFFICE

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) has taken significant steps to improve the implementation of Gram Sabhas across India, making these gatherings more participatory, equitable, representative and accountable for all residents across communities. I am pleased to note that UNICEF has been an integral part of the initiative undertaken by MoPR towards mainstreaming the voices of women and children in village-level planning.

The role of Mahila Sabha is to raise women's issues and priorities on nutrition, health, education, livelihoods and protection of women and adolescent girls from violence and discrimination, which will then input into village-level development plans.

The importance of Mahila Sabhas is recognized in Volume 2 of the Report of the Expert Group on Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which underlines the need for engendered development in villages as a cross-cutting theme. Mahila Sabhas require creation of an enabling environment where women can collectivize without fear and raise critical questions around the adherence to the priorities of women and adolescent girls.

I compliment the Ministry of Panchayati Raj for leading the causes of women and children at the local level through a participatory process, which included strengthening of Gram Sabhas.

I thank MoPR for giving UNICEF the opportunity to work with the Ministry and the State Departments of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj towards institutionalizing the Mahila Sabhas and providing all support in rolling them out across all the Gram Panchayats across India.



**Yasumasa Kimura**

MESSAGE





**Alok Prem Nagar**

## MESSAGE

Dated: 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2023

### JOINT SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ

It gives me immense pleasure to present the Advisory and Guidelines for Institutionalization of Mahila Sabhas in Gram Panchayats with the hope that they will provide a detailed step-by-step guidance to States and Gram Panchayats to initiate, mainstream and institutionalize the system of village-level decision-making for gender-sensitive local governance.

This agenda of engendering development in villages and gender-transformative governance is well exemplified by the impressive strides made by the Panchayats as learnt from various work done by the Ministry in partnership with UNICEF. The mainstreaming of Mahila Sabhas will also support Theme 9, being championed by the Ministry for Localizing SDGs through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), to be an achievable agenda for action under Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Yojana (RGSA) – our Flagship Scheme. Further, gender is a common thread that helps attain all relevant SDGs subsumed under the nine themes for local action by the Gram Panchayats – the local self-government institutions.

Our heartfelt appreciation to our partner UN agency, UNICEF, for helping us to develop these guidelines and advisory for mainstreaming the voices of women, to achieve the objectives of gender-transformative outcomes through a decentralized and participatory approach.

May this endeavour of making villages women-responsive and child-friendly gather momentum and strength, and empower all women and adolescent girls in rural India!

A.P. Nagar





**Hyun Hee Ban**

## MESSAGE

### CHIEF SOCIAL POLICY & SOCIAL PROTECTION, UNICEF INDIA COUNTRY OFFICE

As a signatory to the international Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), India has made notable progress towards ensuring women's right to political representation and their participation in democratic decision-making processes. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj has been promoting a mechanism where women's voices are adequately heard in local development planning through Mahila Sabhas, and their priorities are identified and integrated into the village-level planning and decision-making. I thank the Ministry of Panchayati Raj for this and for involving UNICEF in this journey.

I congratulate the Ministry of Panchayati Raj for leading the cause of women and children at the local level through participatory processes, and strengthening accountability mechanisms such as Gram Sabhas. In sync with this, Mahila Sabha could become a platform that can generate interest among women, strengthen the process of women's participation, and facilitate women to raise their voices and priorities for incorporation in Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDs). As gender cuts across all the interlinked SDGs, the effective operation of Mahila Sabhas would be critical for realizing not only Theme 9: 'Women-friendly village' but also to create a multiplier effect on achievements under other eight themes.

I am sure that these Advisory and Guidelines developed jointly by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and UNICEF will ensure women's engagement in planning, promoting their participation and leadership, addressing local priorities linked to women and adolescent girls, creating platforms for women to be part of local governance processes, and integrating women's priorities into the village development plans. They will further support adequate resource allocation for these priorities, and assess whether the schemes and programmes are effectively and efficiently delivered to achieve the SDGs through a monitoring mechanism led by women.



**Hyun Hee Ban**

MESSAGE



# Table of Contents



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## 01

### Introduction

2



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## 02

### Guidelines for Institutionalization of Mahila Sabhas in Gram Panchayats

3



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## Annexure 1

### Roll-out Plan for Institutionalization of Mahila Sabha in Gram Panchayats

13

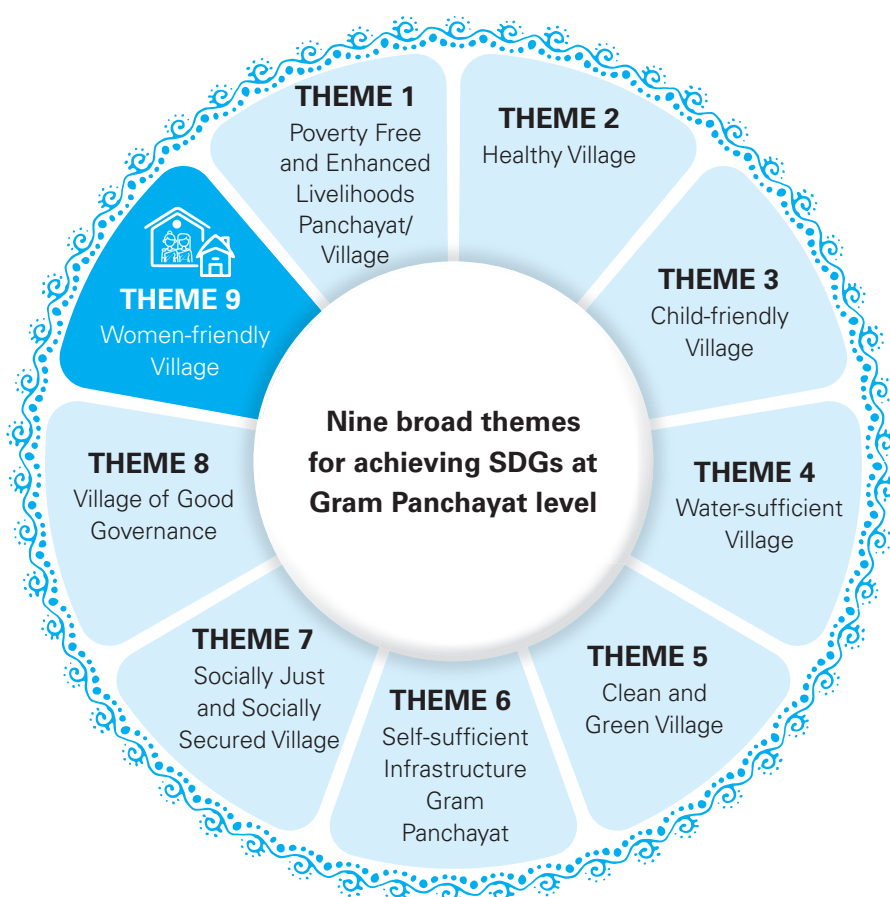
# 01 Introduction



The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are pleased to present these Guidelines for Institutionalization of Mahila Sabhas in Gram Panchayats.

MoPR has adopted a thematic approach to Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to make them relevant to Gram Panchayats as they seek to obtain the goals and their targets.

The 17 SDGs have been combined into nine broad themes to initiate local action and attainment of these goals through Panchayats.



These guidelines support local action under Theme 9-Women Friendly Village. It is expected that these guidelines will be adapted by the States as per local context and will help Gram Panchayats to ensure that marginalized and underrepresented groups like women, adolescent girls and elderly women are included in the decision-making process, and their specific needs and perspectives are taken into account to transform village into women friendly village and making local development more inclusive and sustainable.

## 02

## Guidelines for Institutionalization of Mahila Sabhas in Gram Panchayats



The Human Development Report 1995 had put across a critical message to the world: “Human development, if not engendered, is endangered.” Women participation and leadership are the key aspects of good governance which thrives on participatory decision-making and considers needs of the most vulnerable sections of the society while ensuring an efficient, transparent and accountable implementation process. Forty-eight per cent of Indian population is women (586.4 million; Census 2011). Government of India’s commitment towards achieving a gender-equitable society and ensuring women participation in governance and decision-making have been embedded in various Constitutional provisions. The Draft National Policy for Women (2016) also highlights the importance of women participation at all levels of decision-making to ensure more responsive, equitable and participatory development.

As a signatory to the international ‘Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)’, India has made notable progress towards ensuring women’s right to political representation and their participation in democratic decision-making process. The Eleventh Schedule of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment of the Constitution of India outlines clearly that women



**48%** of Indian population are women  
**(586.4 million)**



**46%** of PRI Elected Representatives are women  
**(1.45 million)**

### Provisions for Women in India



- 01 Draft National Policy for Women 2016
- 02 Signatory to ‘Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)’
- 03 Reservation of one-third of total seats in Panchayats for women
- 04 Inclusion of ‘women and child development’ as one of the 29 devolved subjects for PRIs
- 05 Devolution of funds to Panchayats through 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> FC
- 06 People’s Plan Campaign’ or GPDP
- 07 Panchayat-Women SHG convergence
- 08 Localization of SDGs through Panchayats

and child development are among the 29 subjects transferred to Panchayats. Not less than one-third of seats and Sarpanch (President) in the Panchayats are reserved for women. Twenty-one States and two Union Territories so far have gone beyond such provisions and made 50 per cent reservation to women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) through State Panchayati Raj Acts. India currently has around 1.45 million PRI Women Elected Representatives (46 per cent). The large-scale devolution of funds to Panchayats through 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Central Finance Commission, the ongoing nationwide 'People's Plan Campaign' or preparation of Gram Panchayat Development Plan through participatory process, integration of Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP) into GPDP, the emphasis on formation of Women Self-Help Groups to address livelihood and poverty through PRI-SHG convergence models, Women Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), social security, equitable access to resources and related agenda for attainment of localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through Panchayats have created an opportune moment for women at the grassroots to raise their voices, participate in planning process and monitor implementation of programmes through Panchayats to ensure more engendered development in villages.

### **Rationale for Organizing Mahila Sabhas**

In spite of the significant progress made in terms of expanding representation of women in PRIs, there is ample scope for further strengthening systems and processes at the Gram Panchayat (GP) level to make rural governance more women-friendly in terms of effective participation in planning process and Gram Sabhas for decision making, prioritizing issues related to women development and suitable budget allocation for activities pertaining to women development and incorporation of focused activities in GPDP for holistic development focused on women and child development. Therefore, it becomes crucial for GPs to create an enabling environment where women actively participate in rural governance and GPDP process to make local governance more gender transformative.

**Mahila Sabha** is one such democratic platform for raising concern of women development. It also acts as forum for generating awareness among women, strengthen the process of women participation, initiate discussion, and facilitate women to raise their voices, so that women priorities are reflected in GPDs and suitably acted upon. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) has adopted a thematic approach of aggregating 17 SDGs into nine broad themes in order to initiate local actions and attainment of SDGs at grassroots level through Panchayats. As gender is interlinked with all the SDGs, effective organizing of Mahila Sabhas regularly would be critical for realizing the **Theme 9: 'Women Friendly Village'** to create multiplier effect on achievements under other eight themes.

### **The revised Guidelines of GPDP issued by MoPR in 2018 (Section 5.12, 5.3.13, 8.4.1.1)**

clearly highlight the importance of organizing Mahila Sabhas for gender transformation, social accountability and provision of a space for women to raise their issues for incorporation in GPDP. In the advisory issued to all the states on '**Making Gram Sabhas Vibrant**' (D.O. No. **M-11015/98/2021-FD; dated 16 August 2021**) MoPR again highlighted the importance of conduct of Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas on a regular basis. Reiterating the Government of India's commitment in this regard, **a joint letter from 13 Ministries** of Government of India was also issued to all the states calling for convergent action at various levels for realizing the **Theme 9: Women Friendly Village** (D.O. No. **M-11015/124/2021-CB; dated 31 March 2022**). Recently,

MoPR issued another advisory focusing on the importance of regular conduct of special Mahila Sabhas and Bal-Balika Sabhas (**D.O. No. M-11015/205/2022-CB; dated 1 September 2022**).

To ensure meaningful women participation in GPDP process along with facilitating engendered development in GPs, it is advised to organize Mahila Sabhas prior to Gram Sabhas on a regular basis at the GP level. Following guidelines may be followed for effective rolling out of Mahila Sabhas in GPs.

## 1. Mahila Sabha

**Mahila Sabha** is envisaged to be a GP/village-level forum for all women Gram Sabha members of the GP. Mahila Sabhas shall be organized by the GPs prior to formal Gram Sabha meetings (2–3 times in a year or as decided by the States) to facilitate discussions among women members of the Gram Sabha on issues concerning them, their priorities and potentials, and share those with the GP and Gram Sabha in an organized manner so that planned initiatives could be taken up by the GP in coordination with various line departments and institutions to ensure quality health, education, livelihood opportunities and living conditions, including keeping women protected from all forms of discriminations, violence or abuses. Adolescent girls (10–19 years) may also be invited in Mahila Sabhas as invitees to share their perspective and concerns so that those could also be forwarded to the GP and Gram Sabha for redressal. At least 15 days gap should be given between Mahila Sabha and Gram Sabha so that issues/resolution taken in the Mahila Sabha could be incorporated in the agenda of the Gram Sabha and subsequently into GPDPs.



Ward-level Mahila Sabhas may also be organized by States where Ward Sabhas/Pally Sabhas are the key forums to discuss and take decisions on GPDPs and Panchayat governance.

## 2. Objectives of Organizing Mahila Sabhas

Following are the main objectives of organizing Mahila Sabhas.



### 3. Capacity Building of panchayats in organizing Mahila Sabha

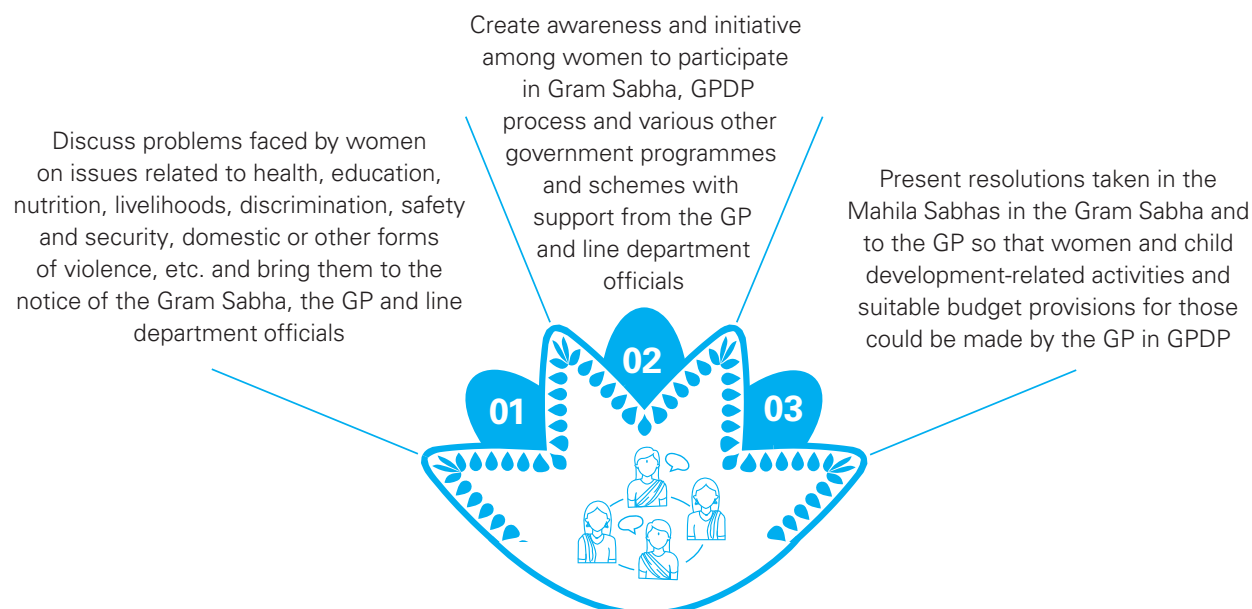
Special Capacity Building & Training initiatives should be planned in the Annual Action Plan of States /UTs for building institutional capacity of panchayats to organise effective Mahila Sabhas. Specialised Training Program for Elected Representatives, Members of Standing Committee, Frontline Workers of Line Departments (Anganwadi Worker, ASHA, ANM) & other stakeholders should be planned for creation of common understanding & significance of Mahila Sabha for strengthening & empowering women to participate in decision making process and planning process for development of Women Friendly Village. Training Modules and IEC materials should be prepared with emphasis on visual aid /movie, based on adult learning principles.

### 4. Provision of Funds for Women

GP's own fund, administrative expenses under 15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission or any other available funds may be utilised for conduct of Mahila Sabhas. Recently, an advisory has been issued by MoPR vide DO letter dated 7th February, 2023 that resource persons may be invited in the Bal/Balika and Mahila Sabhas to provide orientation on various aspects of Women and Children. Accordingly, suitable provision may be made by the States/UTs in their Annual Action Plans of Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) under any other training component of CB&T.

### 5. Functions of Mahila Sabhas

Key functions of Mahila Sabhas shall be as follows.



### 6. Pre-Mahila Sabha initiatives

Effectiveness of Mahila Sabhas will depend upon the ownership and quality of participation of women in the entire process. Therefore, the following pre-Mahila Sabha activities would be crucial for successful organization and institutionalization of Mahila Sabhas.

## 6.1 Gram Panchayat–Women SHG Convergence

The Constitution of India has mandated Panchayats to have twin functions of promoting economic development as well as ensuring social justice. In order to meaningfully perform these two functions, GPs need to function in close partnership with community-based organizations (CBOs), especially the organizations of the poor. In the context of Mahila Sabhas, GPs need to develop close partnership with the SHGs to convert the passive participation of the poor women in the Gram Sabha and planning process into an active churning of opinions, feedbacks and expression of need. Partnership with over 70 million women organized into SHGs and federations under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) provides the right platform for GPs to ensure community participation in Mahila Sabha, Gram Sabha and preparation of GPDP.

Following the earlier national advisories issued by MoPR and Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) during the previous years (MoPR-K11022/31/2015-CB dated 4 February 2016 and MoRD-DO/Secy (RD)/Misc/2018-GSA dated 22 May 2018), GPs need to build a strong partnership with the SHG networks in order to make participation in Mahila Sabhas, Gram Sabhas and GPDP process effective and, in the process, support SHGs to become true and effective institutions for the poor.

### Role of Gram Panchayats to Strengthen GP-SHG Convergence

- ❖ Mobilize the poor households under SHGs and Village Organizations (VOs).
- ❖ Mobilize SHGs for ensuring participation in the Mahila Sabhas preceding Gram Sabha.
- ❖ Use the SHGs and their federations to strengthen participation in Gram Sabha.
- ❖ Conduct regular meetings with SHGs to discuss their problems and relevant other issues
- ❖ Use the SHGs and their federations actively in GPDP process:



For social mobilization



As members of participatory planning teams



For conduct of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercises



For integrating Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP) prepared by SHGs into GPDP

- ❖ Provide space to SHGs for their operation and access to community assets like ponds, common lands and markets to enhance livelihood opportunities.
- ❖ Use the SHGs for outreach, particularly in behaviour change communication, dissemination of information on developmental programmes and schemes to the target groups.
- ❖ Utilize the SHGs for community-based monitoring, delivery of services against appropriate fees.

### Role of SHGs and Their Federations in Strengthening GP-SHG Convergence

- ❖ Work with GPs for conducting Participatory Identification of Poor (PIP) and get the process endorsed in Gram Sabha.

- ❖ Participate actively in Mahila Sabhas prior to Gram Sabha with consolidated demands, especially in accessing work and assets under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and benefits from GPDP.
- ❖ Involve actively in GPDP process to get the demands of SHGs included.
- ❖ Help GPs to conduct the Gram Sabha by helping them in publicity, facilitating discussions and documentation.
- ❖ Perform the tasks suggested by GPs which are beneficial and acceptable.
- ❖ Participate in all functional committees of GPs.
- ❖ Take up the service delivery responsibilities entrusted by GPs such as midday meals, house-to-house collection of taxes, solid waste management, operation and maintenance of piped drinking water supply, e-services, etc. by claiming appropriate fees.
- ❖ Participate in community-based monitoring mechanisms.
- ❖ Work with GPs for accessing the common resources of GPs (like fish ponds, vested land, common properties, market yards, etc.) as livelihood base for SHGs.
- ❖ Access information from GPs and disseminate among SHG members on issues related to available government services and schemes.
- ❖ Take the lead for preparing VPRP.
- ❖ Coordinate the joint meeting with GPs on fixed dates.

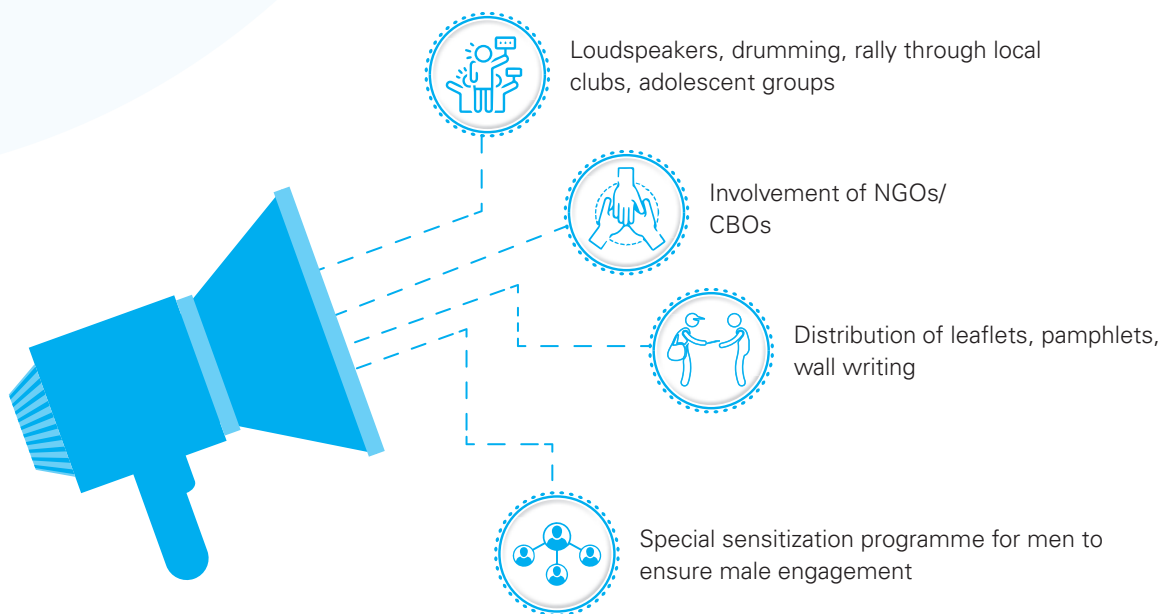
## 6.2 Integration of Village Poverty Reduction Plans (VPRPs) of SHGs into GPDP

Ministry of Panchayati Raj has issued a detailed advisory on Panchayats-SHG convergence for participatory planning at the Gram Panchayat level. The advisory provides detailed inputs on convergence of SHGs with Panchayats and possible roles both parties can play to engage in a mutually beneficial relationship. The advisory also enlightened that all SHGs under the DAY-NRLM and their federations are mandated to prepare a VPRP and present it in Gram Sabha for integration into GPDP. This initiative also focuses on promoting organizational capabilities of the VOs and turning them into a 'critical mass' for local change and transformation. GPs should take proactive role to integrate these VPRPs into GPDP to reflect aspiration of women into GPDP and ensure women participation in the planning process.

## 6.3 Mobilization of Women

Mobilizing all sections of women to attend the Mahila Sabha would be crucial for the success of Mahila Sabha. During mobilization efforts, GPs should make women aware of the relevance of Mahila Sabha, the date, venue and timings of the meeting, issues to be discussed and how is it important for women to attend the Mahila Sabha. Mobilization of women could be done through Women SHG networks, house visits, through frontline workers [Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), Auxiliary Nurse Midwifery (ANM), Anganwadi workers, Resource Persons (RPs) of SHGs, etc.]. The Elected Representatives of the GP may be asked to encourage women from their respective constituencies/wards to actively participate in the Mahila Sabha. Special emphasis may be given to ensure participation of differently-abled women, women from SC, ST, minority, migrant families, etc.

## Modes of Wide Dissemination of Information on Mahila Sabha






## 7. Organizing Mahila Sabha

**7.1 Venue:** The GP may identify a suitable venue to organize the Mahila Sabha. The venue could be the GP office premises, community centre/hall, local school premises or any other suitable venue that is easily accessible to women and adolescent girls where they would be able to discuss their issues freely, without hesitation and fear. Proper arrangement for safe drinking water and toilet should also be ensured.

**7.2 Notice:** Information about the date of Mahila Sabha should be notified/publicly announced at least 15 days prior to the stipulated date by the GP. As described above, proper mass awareness may be done across villages to make women aware of the event. The GP should intimate and request the concerned line department officials well in advance to remain present during the Mahila Sabha.

### 7.2.1 Participants

-  All women from Gram Sabha members of the GP
-  Invitees – Adolescent girls (10–18 years) may be invited to raise their issues, line department officials, police personnel, members of local NGOs/Civil Society Organization, etc.
-  GP President/Pradhan/Sarpanch, GP Elected Representatives, especially Chairman and members of the GP Standing Committee that deals with women's issues, and GP Secretary



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- 7.2.2 **Inclusive participation:** Special emphasis should be given to ensure participation of differently abled women, women from SC, ST, minority, migrant communities, etc. in the Mahila Sabha. Participation of Tribal women, especially in Fifth Schedule Areas should be ensured.

Participants other than women should not interfere in the proceedings of meeting. Mahila Sabha should be conducted by women only and they should be able to raise issues like safety, discrimination, domestic violence, atrocities against women, etc. without any hesitations and fear.

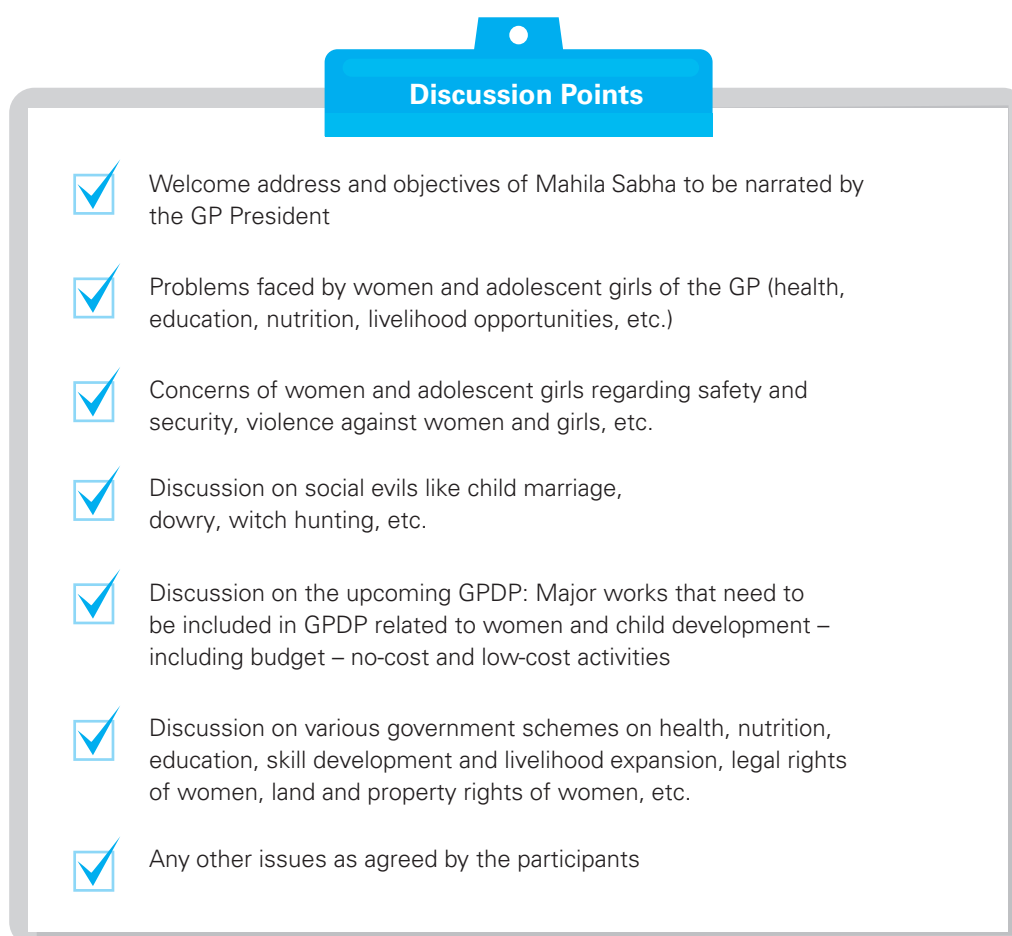
- 7.2.3 **Facilitation and seating arrangements:** The Mahila Sabha may be presided over by the Women Chairman of the Standing Committee that deals with women's issues/ President or senior member of the Village SHG Federation with support from the GP President. Proper seating arrangements in a circle shall be preferred and an enabling environment for open discussion should be ensured. Facilitation of discussion may be done by the GP president with support from SHG members, ASHA or Anganwadi workers. As it is a forum exclusively created for women, they should be able to voice their opinions freely and the meeting should not be dominated/taken over by GP President or GP members, line department officials, or only SHG members. All sections of the community should be able to voice their opinion during the Mahila Sabha.

- 7.2.4 **Management of Mahila Sabha proceedings:** The Mahila Sabha proceedings may be managed and facilitated as follows:

- i. Welcome address and objectives of Mahila Sabha to be narrated by the GP President
- ii. Discussion on each agenda one by one
- iii. Issues raised by women to be discussed/resolved by the line department officials and the GP

- iv. Discussion on the upcoming GPDP: Major works need to be included in the GPDP related to women and child development – including budget – no-cost and low-cost activities
- v. Closing remarks by the GP President

7.2.5 **Agenda of Mahila Sabha discussion:** The agenda of the Mahila Sabha may be prepared well in advance by the GP with support from the Women and Child Development Standing Committee and women SHG/VOs. The discussion points may include the following.



The agenda items of Mahila Sabha shall be well disseminated, displayed in public places and GP office by the GP at least 15 days prior to the Mahila Sabha.

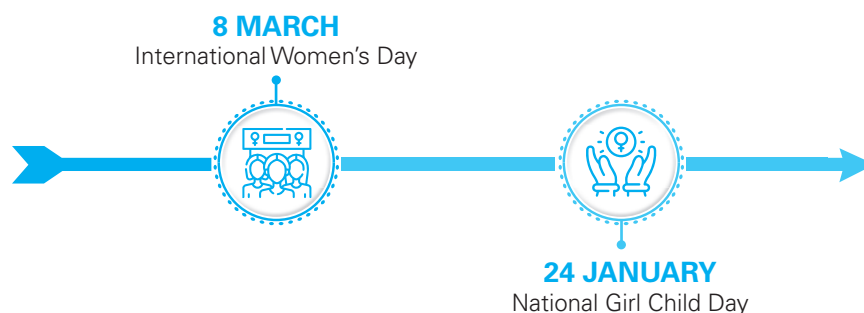
7.2.6 **Quorum of the meeting:** Rules applicable as per State Panchayati Raj Act for maintaining quorum in Gram Sabha may also be adopted for Mahila Sabha.

7.2.7 **Proceedings of the Mahila Sabha:** The GP Secretary should ensure that the proceedings of the Mahila Sabha are recorded properly, and the decisions are placed in GP meeting and Gram Sabha so that appropriate actions may be taken by the GP and

suggested activities may be included in the GPDP. Standard Gram Sabha Attendance Register may be used for recording the attendance and proceedings of the Mahila Sabha also.

- 7.2.8 **Frequency of Mahila Sabha:** The frequency of organizing Mahila Sabha (meeting) may be decided by the States based on local conditions. However, it is desirable that 2–3 Mahila Sabhas (meetings) are organized in a year prior to Gram Sabha meetings and aligned with GPDP cycle so that the decisions of Mahila Sabha could be placed in Gram Sabha and incorporated into GPDP. It is also suggested that Mahila Sabhas may take place on the following dates.

#### Suggested special dates for conduct of Mahila Sabhas



## 8. Post-Mahila Sabha Initiatives

Only conduct of a few Mahila Sabhas may not result in achieving its purpose. It would be crucial to roll-out follow-up activities so that decisions taken in Mahila Sabhas get incorporated in the GPDP and subsequent implementation takes place. The GP may ensure the following activities to ensure this:

- ❖ Discussion points and decisions taken in Mahila Sabha shall be recorded as formal proceedings and shall be placed in the next General Body Meeting of the GP for suitable actions.
- ❖ The GP shall also place these proceedings in Gram Sabha for discussion and approval.
- ❖ The decisions taken in the Mahila Sabha shall be forwarded to related Standing Committees of the GP and concerned line departments for taking suitable actions.
- ❖ The GP shall prioritize activities suggested by Mahila Sabha, make suitable budgetary provisions, and incorporate those activities into the GPDP being prepared.
- ❖ Members of the Mahila Sabha, especially women SHG members should collectively raise the issues and decisions taken during Mahila Sabhas in the Gram Sabha also to ensure follow-up measures.
- ❖ The GP should take proactive role to ensure effectiveness of the Mahila Sabhas. Women SHGs, women frontline workers and members of the Women and Child Development Standing Committees should also play their parts to get Mahila Sabha institutionalized into the GP governance system.

## Annexure 1

# Roll-out Plan for Institutionalization of Mahila Sabha in Gram Panchayats



### STATE LEVEL

1. **Issuance of Government order/circular** for conduct of Mahila Sabhas prior to Gram Sabhas and in sync with the GPDP cycle
2. **Legal provision** to be made for required legal framework and amendment in the State Panchayati Raj Act for institutionalization of Mahila Sabhas
3. **Coordination:** State Panchayati Raj Department to coordinate with other key departments like Women and Child Development, Rural Development, Health and Family Welfare, Education, Drinking Water and Sanitation, Social Welfare and Social Justice, etc. for creating an enabling environment for institutionalization of Mahila Sabha and participation of line department officials in Mahila Sabhas through joint circulars/Government orders and special drive for conduct of Mahila Sabha across the State
4. **Issuance of supplementary GPDP guidelines** to instruct and encourage GPs to incorporate issues discussed in Mahila Sabhas into GPDP and to make suitable budget provision for women under GPDP from untied component of 15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission, State Finance Commission Grants and any other fund source/scheme.
5. **Orientation and capacity building:**
  - ✓ Inclusion of the Theme 9: 'Women-friendly Village' as an integral part of the State PRI Capacity Building Plan by the State Institute of Rural Department and Panchayati Raj (SIRDPR)
  - ✓ Preparation of training and Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) materials on gender-transformative development and Mahila Sabhas
  - ✓ Special training for male GP Presidents and male Panchayat Elected Representatives on gender issues to facilitate gender-transformative local governance
  - ✓ Training of Panchayat Elected Representatives and functionaries on:
    - Child-friendly Panchayat, conduct of Bal-Balika Sabhas and formation of Bal-Balika Panchayat
    - Key legal provisions and various Government schemes on children
    - Importance of no-cost and low-cost activities
6. **Overall guidance and oversight** with the district authorities and GPs to ensure that Mahila Sabhas continue to take place on a regular basis and mainstreamed within an acceptable timeframe.
7. **Sharing of evidence/learnings/good cases/beacons** for demonstration to other Panchayats within and outside the state



## DISTRICT LEVEL

- 1.. District-level Orientation Programme with line department officials concerned and GPs on organizing Mahila Sabhas
2. Overall guidance and support to GPs for conduct of Mahila Sabha
3. Monitoring and periodic review of progress



## GRAM PANCHAYAT LEVEL

1. **Taking pledge (Sankalp) in Gram Sabha and GP meeting** at the earliest to prioritize Theme 9: 'Women-friendly Village' as a key priority area of intervention
2. **GP-level Mobilization Programme** on organizing Mahila Sabhas with all the GP members, concerned Standing Committees, women SHGs/village SHG cluster, adolescent groups/clubs, frontline workers (teachers, ASHA, Anganwadi workers, ANM, etc.), SHG facilitator/RPs, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other CBOs
3. **Selection/nomination** of a suitable person, preferably a proactive woman (Chairman of the Standing Committee responsible for women and child development, or any other elected members, or President of women SHG/ Village-level Federation members) by the GP to act as the link/coordinator between GP and women's groups for facilitating Mahila Sabha activities
4. **Conduct of 'entry point activities'** like awareness events (cultural programmes, health awareness and legal awareness programme to mobilize women and adolescent girls and explain the concept of Mahila Sabha
5. **Mobilization of women SHGs** to ensure that they and other women of their localities participate in Mahila Sabha
6. **Intensive campaign** (such as miking, pamphlet distribution, house visits, etc.) in the GP area well in advance on date, venue, agenda, etc. for Mahila Sabhas to ensure inclusive participation during the meeting; informing the line departments and requesting them to remain present during the meeting
7. **Conduct of Mahila Sabhas** as per guidelines, including support for facilitation and documentation of the proceedings/decisions taken
8. **Discussion of the decisions taken in Mahila Sabhas** in GP meeting and Gram Sabha; incorporation of prioritized women-centric activities in the GPDP and allocation of suitable budget for the same
9. **Progress updates of district and block authorities** on implementation, and requests for addressing bottlenecks, if any





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