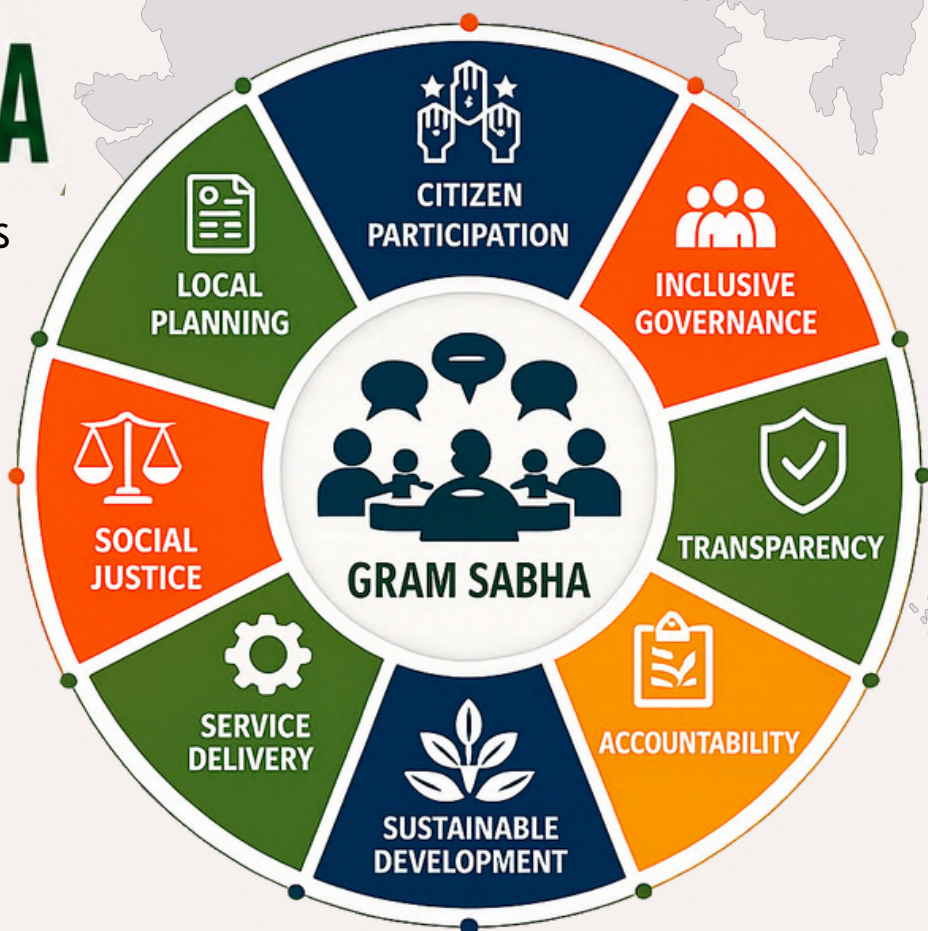


NATIONAL STUDY REPORT

LOW PARTICIPATION IN GRAM SABHA

ACROSS THE STATES & UTs

VOLUME - I



AWARENESS
GAPS



PARTICIPATION
BARRIERS



GOVERNANCE
CONCERNS



INCLUSION
MATTERS



WAY
FORWARD

A NATIONAL STUDY REPORT
on
LOW PARTICIPATION
IN GRAM SABHA
Across the States and UTs

Volume-I

June, 2026



**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT &
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Disclaimer

This National Report on the Assessment of Low Participation in Gram Sabha (LPGS) has been prepared by the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, for submission to the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), Government of India. The findings, observations and analyses presented in this report are based solely on the responses, perceptions and opinions expressed by respondents during the study period and do not represent independently verified facts, official positions or assessments of any Gram Panchayat, Panchayati Raj Institution, Department, State Government, Union Territory Administration or individual. The report is intended exclusively for policy analysis, programme planning, capacity building and institutional learning and shall not be construed as evidence of compliance, non-compliance, performance evaluation, audit findings or legal conclusions. Any interpretation or use of the report beyond its intended purpose shall be the sole responsibility of the user.

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This report represents a collective effort towards understanding and strengthening participatory local governance systems in the country. We hope the findings and recommendations emerging from this study will contribute meaningfully towards improving citizen participation, institutional responsiveness and the effectiveness of Gram Sabha processes across India.



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Executive SUMMARY



Background and Objectives

Gram Sabha constitutes the foundational institution of participatory democracy within the Panchayati Raj system and functions as the primary institution of self-governance at the village level. It comprises all registered voters aged 18 years and above within a Gram Panchayat jurisdiction and provides a statutory platform for citizen participation in local governance, development planning, beneficiary identification, welfare discussions and community-level decision-making.

The constitutional recognition accorded to Gram Sabha through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 strengthened the framework of democratic decentralization and participatory governance in rural India. Under Article 243A of the Constitution, Gram Sabha was envisaged as a mechanism for enabling direct citizen participation and strengthening accountability, transparency and collective involvement in local governance processes.

Despite its constitutional significance and institutional relevance, participation in Gram Sabha continues to remain uneven across several regions of rural India. Low attendance, limited public engagement, inadequate participation of vulnerable groups and declining interest in Gram Sabha proceedings continue to affect the quality and effectiveness of participatory governance at the grassroots level.

The present study was undertaken to examine the factors contributing to low participation in Gram Sabha and to assess the socio-economic, institutional, governance-related and behavioural dimensions influencing citizen participation across rural India.

Study Coverage and Methodology

The assessment adopted a decentralized field-based approach covering approximately 7,790 responses across 400 Gram Panchayats spanning 213 districts in 26 States and Union Territories. The coverage included 50 PESA Gram Panchayats and 130 women-friendly Gram Panchayats, thereby ensuring representation across diverse geographical, socio-economic and governance contexts.

The study combined quantitative and qualitative approaches including structured questionnaires, field observations, thematic analysis of open-ended responses and practitioner reflections. The assessment examined multiple dimensions relating to

participation patterns, awareness levels, governance processes, agenda discussions, inclusiveness, grievance systems, institutional responsiveness and citizen expectations from Gram Sabha.

The findings presented in this volume primarily focus on national-level trends, patterns and emerging policy implications. Detailed State-wise and Union Territory-wise findings, and region-specific observations, have been compiled separately in **Volume - II** of the Report on Low Participation in Gram Sabha.

Major Findings and Key Participation Challenges

Survey responses indicated that Gram Sabha continues to be widely recognized as an important platform for discussing local development priorities, welfare schemes, sanitation, beneficiary identification, village infrastructure and community concerns. In several regions, respondents acknowledged the importance of Gram Sabha in facilitating local participation and collective decision-making within the Panchayati Raj system.

However, the assessment identified multiple factors contributing to low and inconsistent participation across Gram Panchayats.

Livelihood and occupational constraints emerged as the most significant participation barrier at the national level. A substantial proportion of respondents reported that Gram Sabha meetings frequently coincide with agricultural activities, daily wage employment, market schedules and other livelihood-related engagements. Participation patterns were found to be closely linked with local occupational conditions and scheduling practices. The findings indicate that economically vulnerable households often face practical difficulties in attending meetings conducted during working hours or peak agricultural periods.

Weak awareness and inadequate communication systems emerged as another major concern across surveyed regions. Responses indicated that information regarding Gram Sabha meetings often does not adequately reach all households. Several respondents highlighted the absence of effective mobilisation systems, advance communication and citizen outreach mechanisms. The assessment suggests that procedural notice-based communication alone remains insufficient in ensuring broad-based participation, particularly in geographically dispersed and socially vulnerable communities.

The analysis further indicated that participation levels improve when citizens perceive Gram Sabha as a functional and outcome-oriented platform capable of influencing local development decisions, addressing grievances and ensuring visible implementation of decisions. Conversely, procedural meetings without follow-up action, grievance resolution or visible outcomes were found to contribute to declining public interest and reduced participation over time.

Responses across several States also reflected concerns relating to weak grievance responsiveness, absence of line department officials, limited transparency in governance processes and inadequate follow-up on issues raised during meetings. Institutional responsiveness and visible accountability were found to influence public confidence and sustained participation in Gram Sabha proceedings.

Women's participation emerged as another important dimension within the assessment. While several Gram Panchayats demonstrated encouraging participation of women, SHGs and elected women representatives, the findings also reflected continuing barriers relating to household responsibilities, social hesitation, male dominance during discussions and limited opportunities for effective participation.

The assessment further identified considerable variations across States and regions in relation to participation patterns, governance experiences and citizen expectations. Participation dynamics were found to be influenced by local socio-economic conditions, geographical realities, communication practices, governance culture and institutional responsiveness within different regions.

An important aspect of the study relates to the relationship between citizen-reported participation barriers and citizen-generated suggestions for improving Gram Sabha functioning. Responses across States consistently emphasized the need for improved awareness and communication systems, livelihood-sensitive scheduling, inclusive participation mechanisms, stronger grievance responsiveness, visible implementation of decisions, transparency and accountability, stronger departmental convergence and improved citizen engagement practices.

The study also examined agenda discussions and participation priorities across Gram Sabha meetings. The findings indicate that agenda items relating to local issues, beneficiary identification, welfare schemes, sanitation and development priorities receive relatively higher levels of discussion across States. In contrast, areas such as Own Source Revenue generation, social audit processes, participatory monitoring, annual budgeting and long-term economic planning receive comparatively lower attention within Gram Sabha proceedings.

The assessment also highlighted the importance of supportive physical and digital infrastructure in facilitating effective Gram Sabha participation. Availability of adequate meeting spaces, seating arrangements, public address systems, electricity, drinking water facilities and accessible venues were found to influence citizen comfort and attendance, particularly among women, elderly persons and vulnerable groups. Further, increasing use of digital communication platforms such as WhatsApp groups, mobile messaging and social media was observed in several Gram Panchayats for disseminating information regarding Gram Sabha meetings. While traditional communication methods continue to play a dominant role, the findings suggest that digital outreach mechanisms can significantly enhance awareness, improve timely dissemination of information and strengthen citizen engagement when combined with community-based mobilisation efforts.

The qualitative field reflections and practitioner observations reinforced several findings emerging from the quantitative assessment. Field investigators highlighted the importance of sustained community mobilisation, household-level outreach, participatory communication systems and citizen trust-building in improving participation quality. Investigators also observed that participation levels are generally higher in Gram Panchayats where local governance processes are perceived to be transparent, responsive and discussion-oriented.

Emerging Policy Directions and Way Forward

Gram Sabha continues to occupy a central position within India's framework of decentralized governance and participatory democracy. The findings of the study indicate that citizens across rural India continue to view Gram Sabha as an important platform for discussing local issues, identifying beneficiaries, reviewing development priorities and engaging with local governance processes.

At the same time, the study reveals that participation is influenced by a complex interaction of socio-economic, institutional, governance-related and behavioural factors. Livelihood constraints, inadequate awareness, weak communication systems, limited institutional responsiveness, governance inefficiencies and inclusion-related barriers continue to affect participation levels across many regions. The findings further indicate that participation tends to be higher where citizens perceive Gram Sabha as a responsive, discussion-oriented and outcome-oriented platform capable of influencing local development decisions and addressing community concerns.

The study highlights that improving participation requires moving beyond the procedural conduct of meetings towards strengthening Gram Sabha as a citizen-centric, inclusive and responsive institution of local self-governance. Strengthening awareness and mobilisation efforts, improving communication mechanisms, ensuring livelihood-sensitive scheduling, enhancing grievance responsiveness, promoting transparency and accountability, strengthening departmental convergence and expanding opportunities for meaningful citizen engagement emerge as important areas for policy attention.

The findings also emphasize the importance of adopting context-specific participation strategies responsive to local livelihood conditions, geographical realities and inclusion challenges. Particular attention is required for strengthening participation in tribal regions, remote habitations, women-friendly governance spaces and socially vulnerable communities. Further, improving physical infrastructure for conducting Gram Sabha meetings and leveraging digital communication systems for citizen outreach, information dissemination and participatory governance can contribute significantly towards improving participation and engagement.

The study further highlights that strengthening Gram Sabha participation requires a shift from viewing Gram Sabha merely as a statutory event towards nurturing it as a continuous process of citizen engagement and collective decision-making. Sustained community mobilisation, household-level outreach, greater involvement of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), youth, community-based organisations and elected representatives, along with regular feedback and follow-up mechanisms, can help strengthen public trust and improve the quality of participation. Strengthening the perception of Gram Sabha as a meaningful platform where citizen voices influence local governance decisions remains critical for ensuring sustained and active engagement.

Overall, the study reaffirms that meaningful citizen participation remains fundamental to strengthening local self-government and democratic decentralization in rural India. While India possesses a strong constitutional and institutional framework for participatory governance through the Panchayati Raj system, the effectiveness of Gram Sabha ultimately depends upon the extent to which citizens are informed, engaged and empowered to participate in local decision-making processes.

The findings provide an important evidence base for strengthening participatory governance practices and revitalizing Gram Sabha as a vibrant, inclusive and responsive institution capable of advancing grassroots democracy, improving governance outcomes and promoting community-led development across rural India.



Gram Sabha

The Foundation of Participatory Local Governance in India

Panchayati Raj Institutions constitute the framework of decentralized rural governance in India and function through a three-tier structure comprising District Panchayat, Intermediate Panchayat and Gram Panchayat. Among these, Gram Panchayat functions as the primary unit of local self-governance at the village level responsible for local administration, development planning and implementation of community-level programmes.

Within the jurisdiction of a Gram Panchayat, Gram Sabha constitutes the foundational institution of participatory democracy and functions as the primary platform for direct citizen participation in local governance processes. It comprises all registered voters aged 18 years and above within a Gram Panchayat jurisdiction and provides a statutory platform for citizen participation in local governance, development planning, beneficiary identification, welfare discussions and community-level decision-making.

Participatory local governance in India is based upon the principle that citizens should actively participate in governance processes affecting their communities rather than remain passive beneficiaries of public programmes and development initiatives. Within this framework, Gram Sabha serves as an important mechanism for ensuring transparency, accountability, inclusiveness and collective participation in governance processes at the grassroots level.

The evolution of Panchayati Raj and Gram Sabha in India reflects the gradual strengthening of democratic decentralization and participatory local governance within the rural governance framework. Over time, several constitutional, administrative and institutional reforms contributed towards strengthening local self-governance and expanding the role of Gram Sabha within the Panchayati Raj system.

The constitutional recognition accorded to Panchayati Raj Institutions through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 represented a major institutional milestone in strengthening decentralized governance and democratic participation in rural India. Under Article 243A of the Constitution, Gram Sabha was formally recognized as a constitutional body intended to facilitate direct participation of citizens in local governance processes.

Evolution of Panchayati Raj and Gram Sabha in India

Period/Year	Major Development
Pre-Independence Period	Traditional village assemblies and community-based governance systems existed across several rural regions of India and functioned as local platforms for collective discussions and dispute resolution
1882	The Ripon Resolution emphasized the importance of local self-governance and laid the foundation for strengthening local administrative institutions in British India
1957	The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee recommended a three-tier Panchayati Raj structure and emphasized democratic decentralization and public participation in local governance
1959	Panchayati Raj system was formally introduced in Rajasthan, marking the beginning of institutionalized decentralized rural governance in independent India
1978	The Ashok Mehta Committee highlighted the need for strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions and improving participatory local governance mechanisms
1992-93	The 73rd Constitutional Amendment accorded constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions and strengthened the framework of democratic decentralization
Article 243A of Part IX of the constitution	Gram Sabha was formally recognized as a constitutional body intended to facilitate direct citizen participation in local governance processes
Present Context	Gram Sabha functions as an important platform for participatory local governance, GPDP planning, community accountability, beneficiary identification and village-level decision-making within the Panchayati Raj system

Over the years, Gram Sabha has emerged as an important institutional mechanism for participatory planning, democratic accountability and citizen engagement at the grassroots level. Strengthening participation in Gram Sabha continues to remain important for improving inclusiveness, transparency, responsiveness and effectiveness within the Panchayati Raj framework.

The present study on low participation in Gram Sabha has been undertaken within this broader context of strengthening participatory local governance and democratic engagement across rural India.

Advisories issued by MoPR regarding Gram Sabha

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), through its advisory dated 16th August 2021, titled "Making Gram Sabha Vibrant", has outlined a set of structured guidelines to strengthen the functioning and participatory character of Gram Sabhas across India. The primary aim of this advisory is to address the persistent challenge of low community participation and to enhance the Gram Sabha's role as a platform for participatory democracy, transparency, and grassroots planning.

A core recommendation of this advisory is the preparation and implementation of an Annual Gram Sabha Calendar at the state level, to be further localized at the Gram Panchayat level. This calendar should include at least four Gram Sabha meetings in a year, each dedicated to specific themes such as local development priorities, implementation review of government schemes, preparation and approval of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP), social audits, and monitoring of welfare schemes. Publicizing these meetings well in advance ensures better preparation and mobilization, thereby increasing attendance and effectiveness.

The advisory strongly encourages the strengthening of community mobilization mechanisms to boost participation, especially of women, Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and other marginalized groups. It suggests a combination of strategies including public announcements, wall writings, posters, miking, and direct contact by ward members and local volunteers. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of conducting Mahila Sabhas (Women's Assemblies) and Ward Sabhas prior to the Gram Sabha. These preparatory platforms allow for more inclusive discussions and give women and ward-level stakeholders the opportunity to articulate their concerns and prepare proposals that can be brought before the larger Gram Sabha.

To ensure meaningful participation, the advisory insists that Gram Sabha meetings must go beyond ceremonial proceedings. They should function as forums for deliberation and accountability, where the Panchayat's performance, fund utilization, beneficiary selection, and development priorities are discussed openly. The involvement of district and block-level officials in these meetings is also encouraged, as their presence can help clarify schemes, respond to grievances, and promote confidence among villagers.

Another major component of the advisory is the institutional strengthening of Gram Panchayat Sub-Committees and Ward Members. It mandates that every elected ward member be associated with at least one of the functional committees of the Gram Panchayat. This ensures better representation, localized planning, and more consistent follow-up on issues discussed in Gram Sabhas. The advisory also recommends rotating responsibilities among ward members for managing community assets and facilitating public service delivery, thereby improving accountability and enhancing their visibility within the community.

To support transparency and monitoring, the advisory urges States and Union Territories to ensure that meeting minutes, attendance registers, and resolutions are properly recorded and published. Furthermore, States are advised to leverage the support available under the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) to train elected representatives, organize IEC (Information, Education & Communication) campaigns, and fund logistic arrangements for holding Gram Sabhas.

The MoPR also encourages conducting thematic Gram Sabhas aligned with significant national or state observances, such as Constitution Day, International Women’s Day, or Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas. These provide a focused platform to discuss relevant socio-political issues and ensure participation from target groups like women, youth, and tribal communities. Moreover, advisory emphasis is laid on convergence with Self Help Groups (SHGs), frontline service providers (ASHA, Anganwadi, etc.), and local CSOs to drive citizen awareness and deepen grassroots democracy.

In conclusion, the MoPR's 2021 advisory on “Making Gram Sabha Vibrant” represents a comprehensive effort to institutionalize participatory planning, community accountability, and inclusive governance at the Gram Panchayat level. It builds upon earlier policy efforts and learning from various states to institutionalize mechanisms that can revive citizen faith in local self-governance. Implementation of these recommendations by States, with tailored localization, can significantly enhance democratic participation and improve developmental outcomes at the village level.





CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND STUDY FRAMEWORK

1.1 Introduction

Gram Sabha (GS) serves as a vital platform for participatory democracy and grassroots governance in rural India. As a constitutional body comprising all registered electors within the jurisdiction of a Gram Panchayat, Gram Sabha enables citizens to participate directly in local decision-making, development planning, social accountability and monitoring of public services. It provides an institutional mechanism for ensuring transparency, inclusiveness and community participation in governance processes at the village level.

Over the years, Panchayati Raj Institutions have emerged as important instruments for decentralized governance and local development. Effective functioning of Gram Sabha plays a critical role in strengthening democratic participation, improving accountability and enhancing responsiveness of local institutions towards community needs and priorities. Active citizen participation contributes significantly towards better planning, implementation and monitoring of development programmes and welfare schemes.

However, despite conduct of Gram Sabha meetings across States and Union Territories, participation levels continue to remain uneven across regions and social groups. In many areas, attendance and participation are limited due to various socio-economic, institutional and communication-related factors. Women, marginalized communities, daily wage earners, youth and vulnerable groups often remain underrepresented in discussions and decision-making processes.

In this context, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj entrusted the present study to National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Hyderabad, to examine participation patterns, challenges and governance-related factors influencing citizen engagement in Gram Sabha processes across selected Gram Panchayats in India. The study seeks to generate evidence-based insights for strengthening participatory governance and enhancing the effectiveness of Gram Sabha as an institution of grassroots democracy.

1.2 Context of the Study

Strengthening participatory local governance has become increasingly important in the context of decentralized planning, implementation of welfare programmes and community-based development processes. Gram Sabha plays a central role in ensuring that citizens actively participate in identifying local needs, monitoring implementation and contributing to decision-making at the Gram Panchayat level.

Several initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and State Governments emphasize citizen participation, transparency and community ownership in local governance. However, variations continue to exist in terms of



attendance, inclusiveness, awareness and quality of participation across Gram Panchayats.

The present study was conducted to assess existing participation trends, identify barriers affecting community engagement and examine the governance and institutional factors influencing participation in Gram Sabha meetings. The study also documents field-level experiences, citizen perspectives and emerging practices that can support strengthening participatory governance systems and enhancing the effectiveness of Gram Sabha as an institution of grassroots democracy.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

Effective participation in Gram Sabha is essential for ensuring transparency, accountability and inclusive local governance. The quality of decentralized planning and implementation depends significantly on the extent to which citizens actively engage in local governance processes.

Low participation in Gram Sabha meetings affects the effectiveness of community-based planning, beneficiary identification, monitoring of development activities and social accountability mechanisms. In several cases, limited participation also reduces trust in local governance institutions and weakens community ownership of development programmes.

The study assumes significance in the present context of decentralized governance, where Gram Sabha serves as the foundational platform for democratic participation, local accountability and community-led development.

Despite constitutional provisions and institutional mechanisms established to strengthen grassroots governance, several Gram Panchayats continue to experience uneven citizen participation in Gram Sabha meetings. Variations in awareness levels, socio-economic conditions, accessibility, institutional practices and public trust often influence the extent and quality of participation across regions and social groups. Understanding these dynamics is therefore essential for improving participatory planning processes, strengthening transparency and accountability mechanisms, enhancing inclusion of marginalized sections and ensuring more effective implementation of local development programmes.

The study also seeks to generate evidence-based insights on existing participation patterns, governance challenges and communication practices in order to support policymakers, Panchayati Raj Institutions and other stakeholders in strengthening citizen engagement and improving the overall effectiveness of Gram Sabha functioning at the grassroots level.

The findings of the study are expected to support policymakers, Panchayati Raj Institutions and other stakeholders in strengthening participatory governance and improving community engagement mechanisms at the grassroots level.



1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To identify and analyse the factors responsible for low participation of citizens (The GS members) in Gram Sabha meetings.
2. To examine participation patterns among different social and demographic groups, including women, marginalized communities, youth and economically vulnerable sections.
3. To assess the operational, social and governance-related challenges affecting effective conduct of Gram Sabha meetings and citizen engagement processes.
4. To analyse the effectiveness of existing awareness mechanisms, communication practices and institutional systems in promoting participation in Gram Sabha meetings.
5. To identify field-level practices and local approaches adopted for improving community participation and strengthening Gram Sabha functioning.
6. To provide recommendations for enhancing inclusiveness, transparency, participation and effectiveness of Gram Sabha processes at the grassroots level.

1.5 Scope and Coverage of the Study

The study was conducted across selected Gram Panchayats covering multiple States and Union Territories representing diverse geographical, socio-economic and governance contexts. The assessment included interactions with Gram Sabha members, elected representatives, community stakeholders and field-level functionaries.

The study focused on:

- participation patterns and attendance trends;
- barriers affecting citizen participation;
- inclusiveness of Gram Sabha processes;
- awareness and communication practices;
- governance and accountability mechanisms;
- infrastructure and facilitation arrangements; and
- citizen perceptions regarding local governance and participation.

The study also documented field observations, operational challenges and emerging practices relating to participatory governance and community engagement.

1.6 Study Framework

The study adopted a field-based assessment approach for understanding participation trends and governance-related challenges associated with Gram Sabha meetings. Data collection was carried out through structured questionnaires, stakeholder interactions, field observations and discussions with community members.



The framework of the study focused on:

- demographic and social profile of respondents;
- participation behaviour and attendance patterns;
- governance and institutional mechanisms;
- awareness and information dissemination systems;
- barriers affecting participation;
- inclusiveness and representation of vulnerable groups; and
- community perceptions regarding effectiveness of Gram Sabha processes.

The study framework enabled analysis of both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of participation and governance practices across the selected Gram Panchayats.

1.7 Organization of the Report

The report has been organized into different chapters covering the background of the study, methodology, analysis of findings, governance insights, participation patterns, key observations and recommendations.

The subsequent chapters present:

- methodology and study coverage;
- demographic and governance profile of respondents and Gram Panchayats;
- participation trends and institutional observations;
- governance and service delivery insights;
- digital governance and communication practices;
- key findings and emerging patterns;
- good practices and field innovations; and
- recommendations for strengthening participatory local governance and Gram Sabha processes.





CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

2.1 Overview of the Study

The present study was undertaken to assess the factors influencing participation in Gram Sabha meetings and to understand the governance, institutional, social and operational dimensions associated with participatory local governance across rural areas. The study focused on identifying participation patterns, barriers affecting attendance and engagement, inclusiveness of Gram Sabha processes, awareness mechanisms and citizen perceptions relating to grassroots governance systems.

The assessment adopted a field-based and decentralized data collection approach in order to capture diverse regional experiences and ground-level realities from multiple States and Union Territories. The study aimed to generate evidence-based insights relating to participation behaviour, communication systems, governance practices, institutional support mechanisms, grievance handling systems and operational challenges associated with Gram Sabha functioning.

The study relied on structured questionnaires, field interactions and local consultations conducted across selected Gram Panchayats. The methodology was designed to facilitate broader geographical representation while capturing diverse socio-economic and governance contexts across the surveyed regions.

The study covered various dimensions relating to participation, governance, awareness, communication systems, institutional support mechanisms, grievance handling, service delivery concerns and financial aspects associated with Gram Sabha functioning.

2.2 Study Coverage

The study was conducted across multiple States and Union Territories covering diverse geographical, socio-economic and governance contexts. Data collection was undertaken through field-based surveys, stakeholder interactions and community-level consultations at the Gram Panchayat level.

A total of approximately 7,790 responses were collected during the course of the study. The survey covered 26 states, 400 Gram Panchayats, including 50 PESA Gram Panchayats, and 130 Women friendly Gram panchayats across 213 districts through a decentralized field-based data collection approach. The coverage attempted to represent diverse regional conditions, varying governance environments and different socio-cultural contexts associated with Gram Sabha functioning across rural areas.



The study sought to capture perspectives from respondents belonging to diverse demographic, social and institutional categories in order to ensure broader representation of community experiences, participation behaviour and governance-related perceptions relating to Gram Sabha processes.

The survey included participation from:

- elected representatives;
- Gram Sabha members;
- Panchayat officials;
- Self-Help Group members;
- NGO and civil society representatives;
- community stakeholders; and
- other local participants associated with Gram Sabha processes.

The respondents represented different social groups, occupational backgrounds and demographic categories, thereby enabling wider representation of grassroots perspectives across the surveyed regions. The study also included participation from respondents belonging to different social categories, gender groups, occupational backgrounds, educational levels and age categories.

The inclusion of respondents from varied social and institutional backgrounds enabled the study to capture diverse viewpoints relating to awareness, participation, inclusiveness, governance practices, communication systems, grievance handling mechanisms and institutional functioning associated with Gram Sabha meetings.

The study covered both PESA and Non-PESA areas in order to understand variations in participation patterns, governance practices, institutional processes and community engagement mechanisms across different administrative and socio-cultural settings. The inclusion of PESA areas also enabled the study to capture perspectives relating to Gram Sabha functioning in tribal and scheduled areas where community participation and local governance structures hold particular significance.

The broad geographical spread and diversity of respondents provided a comprehensive field-level perspective on the operational realities, participation challenges and governance concerns influencing Gram Sabha processes across the surveyed Gram Panchayats.

2.3 Sampling and Data Collection Framework

The study adopted a decentralized and field-responsive sampling approach for capturing diverse local governance experiences across States and Union Territories.

Data collection was carried out across selected districts and Gram Panchayats representing different socio-economic, geographical and administrative contexts. The study broadly attempted to ensure representation from multiple regions and diverse governance environments in order to capture varied field-level perspectives relating to participation in Gram Sabha meetings.



The sampling approach was designed to facilitate wider geographical coverage while maintaining flexibility in field-level implementation based on local conditions, accessibility and respondent availability.

The study relied on direct interaction with respondents at the grassroots level through structured questionnaires and field consultations. Responses were collected from different categories of stakeholders associated with Gram Sabha processes and local governance systems.

The questionnaire included both factual and perception-based questions relating to awareness, attendance, participation behaviour, governance systems, communication mechanisms, service delivery concerns and institutional functioning associated with Gram Sabha meetings.

The decentralized field-based methodology enabled collection of responses from diverse respondent groups and facilitated understanding of regional variations in participation patterns, communication practices, governance concerns and institutional processes across Gram Panchayats.

2.4 Structure of the Questionnaire

A comprehensive questionnaire was designed for the study to capture both quantitative and qualitative information relating to participation in Gram Sabha meetings and local governance processes. The questionnaire was structured to assess awareness levels, participation behaviour, governance systems, institutional support mechanisms, operational challenges and citizen perceptions regarding Gram Sabha functioning. The questionnaire broadly covered the following thematic areas in the table below.

Table 2.1 Key Dimensions covered in the study

Thematic Area	Key Dimensions Covered
Respondent Profile	Demographic profile, social category, occupation, educational status, respondent type and Panchayat characteristics
Awareness & Communication	Awareness regarding Gram Sabha meetings, communication channels, advance notice systems and dissemination mechanisms
Participation Behaviour	Attendance patterns, frequency of participation, active engagement and reasons for non-participation
Participation Patterns	Inclusiveness, comfort in speaking, participation of women and SC/ST communities, quorum awareness and participation levels
Barriers to Participation	Livelihood constraints, awareness gaps, social barriers, governance concerns, logistical issues and service delivery-related challenges
Solutions & Suggestions	Awareness campaigns, transparency measures, mobilization strategies, grievance redressal and measures for inclusive participation



Thematic Area	Key Dimensions Covered
Functioning of Gram Sabha	Agenda items, grievance handling systems, minutes recording practices and use of digital documentation mechanisms
Institutional Support	Participation of SHGs, youth groups, village committees and local institutional support mechanisms
Infrastructure & Digital Readiness	Availability of Gram Sabha halls, seating arrangements, accessibility, drinking water, sanitation facilities, sound systems, internet connectivity, digitized records, video conferencing facilities and audio-visual infrastructure
Financial Aspects	Source of funds, expenditure patterns and operational arrangements associated with conducting Gram Sabha meetings

The questionnaire included both factual and perception-based questions in order to capture field-level experiences, governance concerns and community perspectives relating to Gram Sabha participation.

The detailed questionnaire used for the study is enclosed as ***Annexure-1***.

2.5 Data Validation and Consolidation

Efforts were made to ensure consistency and reliability in the data collection process through regular coordination, review and validation mechanisms during field-level data collection activities.

The responses collected from the field were reviewed for completeness, consistency and duplication. Basic verification and data cleaning processes were undertaken prior to analysis in order to improve reliability of the findings and reduce inconsistencies in reporting.

Particular attention was given to location details, respondent categories, questionnaire completeness and consistency in reporting patterns during consolidation of the data. Basic normalization and cleaning processes were undertaken to address spelling variations, duplicate entries and inconsistencies in reporting formats.

Cross-verification of responses and field observations was also undertaken wherever required during the consolidation and analysis stages.

The study also relied on comparative review of field-level observations and response trends in order to identify recurring participation barriers, governance concerns and institutional issues emerging across different geographical regions.



STUDY METHODOLOGY AND COVERAGE

A National Assessment of Gram Sabha Participation and Local Governance



NATIONWIDE SURVEY

Primary survey conducted across rural India



26 STATES & UTs

Pan-India coverage ensuring diverse representation



400 GRAM PANCHAYATS

Across rural and tribal regions



~7,790 RESPONSES

Citizens from different social groups and demographic categories



50 PESA GPs

Special focus on PESA areas and self-governance provisions



130 WOMEN FRIENDLY GPs

Focus on women empowerment and inclusive governance



COVERAGE ACROSS 213 DISTRICTS

Through a decentralized field-based data collection approach

FIELD VISITS & INTERVIEWS



Extensive field visits and face-to-face interviews with citizens, community leaders, and local functionaries.

STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE



Well-structured questionnaire covering multiple dimensions of Gram Sabha participation, governance and service delivery.

COVERAGE ACROSS 26 STATES/UTs



DATA ENTRY & VALIDATION



Systematic data entry and multi-level validation for accuracy, reliability and consistency.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS



Thematic and qualitative analysis of open-ended responses and field observations.

METHODOLOGICAL COMPONENTS

SAMPLING APPROACH



Simple random sampling approach to ensure adequate and unbiased representation.

RESPONDENT CATEGORIES



Citizens including women, SC/ST, OBC, youth, farmers, Panchayat representatives and community leaders.

DATA ANALYSIS



Descriptive, comparative and thematic analysis with tables, charts and trend interpretation.

NLP & ML-ASSISTED ANALYSIS



NLP-assisted theme extraction, sentiment insights and ML-based categorization of open-ended responses.

PESA PERSPECTIVE



Assessment of Gram Sabha empowerment, resource governance, cultural identity and community decision-making under PESA provisions.

REPORT CONSOLIDATION



Findings curated and validated to provide evidence-based insights and recommendations.



2.6 Analytical Approach

The collected responses were consolidated and analysed using descriptive, comparative and thematic approaches in order to identify major participation trends, governance concerns and emerging patterns relating to Gram Sabha functioning across the surveyed regions.

The analysis focused on:

- participation behaviour and attendance patterns;
- awareness and communication systems;
- inclusiveness and representation of different social groups;
- governance and trust-related concerns;
- institutional participation and support mechanisms;
- grievance handling practices;
- operational and logistical barriers; and
- respondent suggestions for strengthening Gram Sabha participation.

Comparative interpretation of responses was undertaken across different thematic areas in order to understand recurring issues, regional variations and emerging governance patterns associated with participatory local governance processes.

Graphical representations, summary tables and trend-based analysis were also used for interpretation and presentation of key findings emerging from the study.

In addition to descriptive and thematic analysis, selected qualitative responses and field observations were reviewed using Natural Language Processing (NLP)-assisted analytical techniques for identification of recurring themes, participation concerns, governance issues and citizen suggestions emerging across the surveyed regions.

Basic machine learning-assisted categorization and pattern identification approaches were also used during consolidation of qualitative responses in order to support thematic interpretation of field-level observations and respondent perspectives.



“Reliable data and inclusive participation together strengthen the foundation of evidence-based grassroots governance.”





CHAPTER 3

SURVEY COVERAGE AND RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the demographic, social and institutional profile of respondents covered under the study along with broad participation characteristics relating to Gram Sabha meetings. The chapter provides contextual understanding of the respondent base and participation exposure before detailed thematic findings are discussed in subsequent chapters.

The analysis presented in this chapter is primarily descriptive in nature and focuses on understanding the composition of respondents, their participation exposure and the diversity of stakeholder groups represented during the assessment.

The study captured responses from diverse demographic categories, educational backgrounds and stakeholder groups across multiple States and Union Territories. The coverage included respondents from both PESA and Non-PESA Gram Panchayats across varied socio-economic and administrative settings.

The diversity of respondents strengthened the representativeness of the study and enabled broader understanding of participation experiences associated with Gram Sabha functioning across different governance and socio-cultural contexts.

3.2 Geographical Coverage of the Study

The study covered 26 States and Union Territories across different geographical, socio-economic and governance contexts. Data collection was carried out through decentralized field-based surveys and stakeholder interactions conducted across approximately 213 districts and nearly 400 Gram Panchayats.

The broad geographical spread of the study enabled representation from multiple governance environments including tribal and non-tribal regions, geographically remote areas and diverse socio-cultural settings. The coverage also included both PESA and Non-PESA Gram Panchayats in order to capture varied grassroots participation experiences.

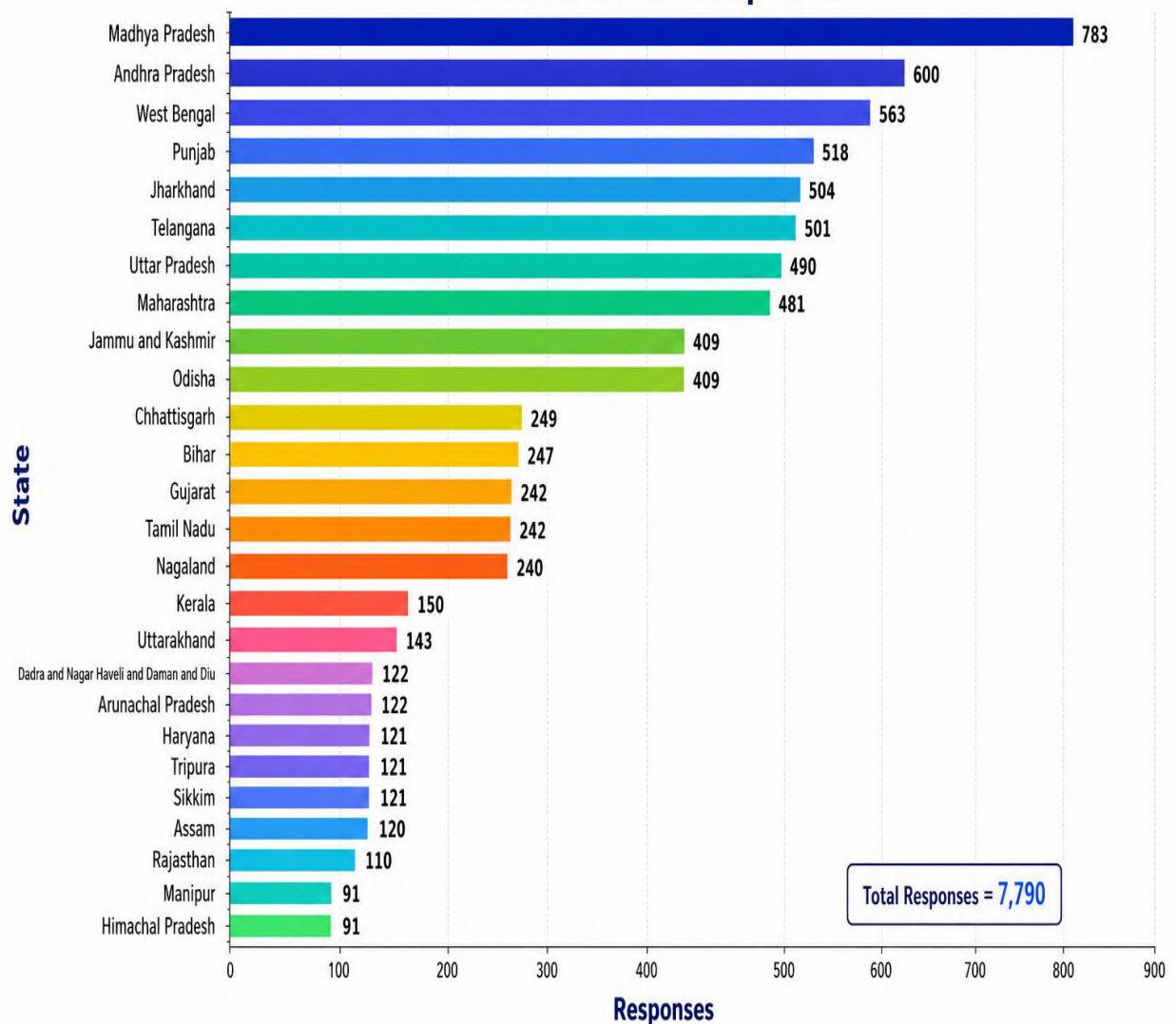
The decentralized nature of the study facilitated collection of responses from different regions and administrative contexts while ensuring wider representation of community perspectives relating to Gram Sabha participation.



Table 3.1 Overall Coverage of the Study

Coverage Indicator	Coverage
States & UTs Covered	26
Districts Covered	213
Gram Panchayats Covered	400
Total Responses	7790
PESA Gram Panchayats Included	50
Women Friendly Gram Panchayats Included	130

State-wise Total Responses



The broad coverage of the study strengthened the diversity of field-level perspectives captured during the assessment and enabled representation from varied governance and socio-cultural contexts across rural India.



3.3 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study attempted to ensure participation from respondents belonging to different demographic and social backgrounds in order to capture broader community perspectives relating to Gram Sabha participation.

The respondent profile reflected relatively balanced gender representation along with participation from multiple age groups, educational backgrounds and social categories. The diversity of respondents enabled broader understanding of participation experiences across varied socio-economic contexts.

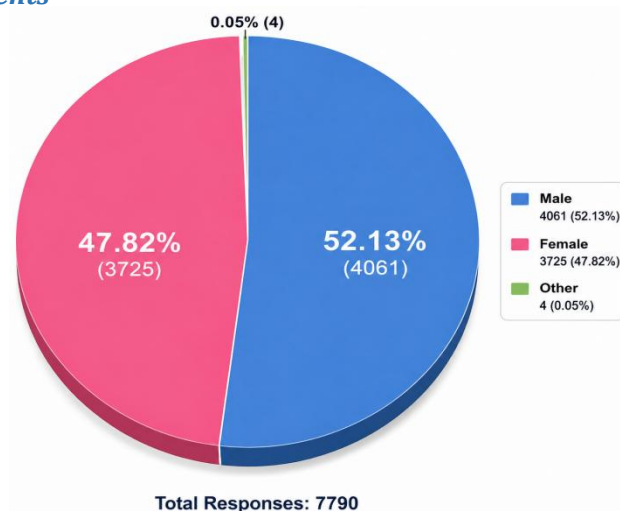
3.3.1 Gender-wise Distribution of Respondents

The gender-wise distribution of respondents reflects a relatively balanced participation pattern across the surveyed regions. Male respondents constituted a slight majority with 52.13% (4,061 respondents), while female respondents accounted for 47.82% (3,725 respondents) of the total responses. Significant participation of women respondents was observed across multiple States and Union Territories, thereby enabling wider representation of women's perspectives relating to participation and local governance.

A very small proportion of respondents identified under the "Other" category, accounting for 0.05% (4 respondents). The near-balanced gender representation strengthened the diversity of responses captured during the study and improved representation of community-level participation experiences across different gender categories.

Table 3.2 Gender-wise Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Responses	Percentage
Male	4061	52.13
Female	3725	47.82
Other	4	0.05



3.3.2 Age Group Distribution of Respondents

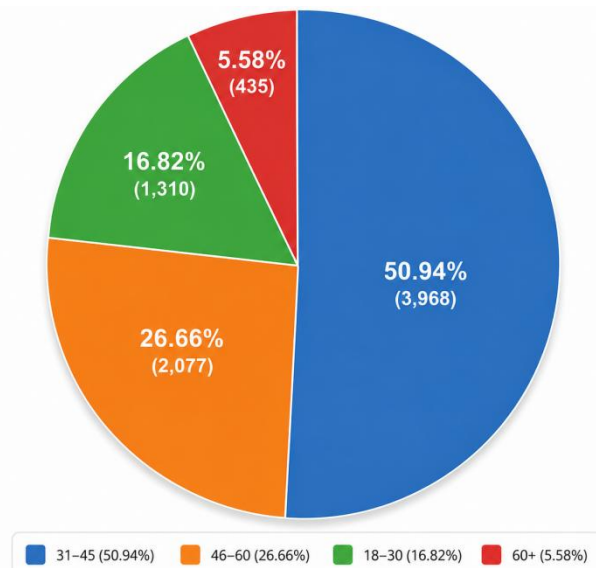
The age-wise distribution of respondents indicates that the survey largely captured the perspectives of the economically and socially active rural population. A majority of respondents belonged to the 31–45 years age group (50.94%), followed by the 46–60 years category (26.66%). This reflects substantial participation from middle-aged citizens who are generally more involved in livelihood activities, household decision-making, and community governance processes.



Young respondents aged 18–30 years constituted 16.82% of the total respondents, while senior citizens aged 60 years and above accounted for 5.58%. The findings suggest that participation in Gram Sabha-related processes is comparatively stronger among the working-age population, thereby providing meaningful insights into local governance participation and community engagement under the LPGS study.

Table 3.3 Age Group Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Responses	Percentage
31–45	3,968	50.94
46–60	2,077	26.66
18–30	1,310	16.82
60+	435	5.58



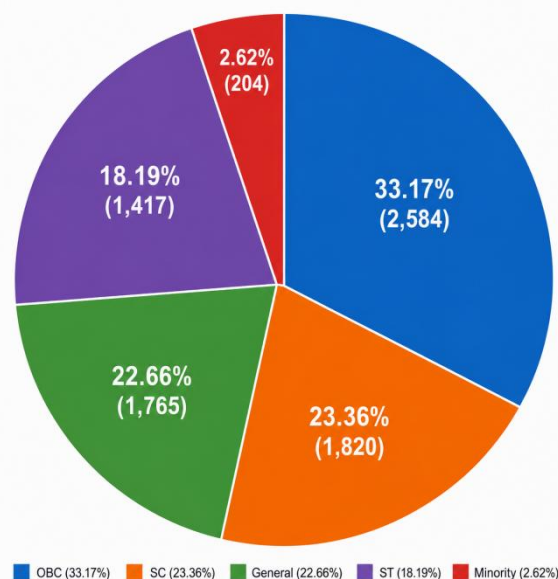
3.3.3 Social Category Distribution of Respondents

The study captured responses from diverse social groups including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBC communities, minority groups and respondents from general categories.

The representation of respondents from marginalized communities enabled broader understanding of participation experiences across different socio-cultural settings and strengthened the inclusiveness of the respondent profile.

Table 3.4 Social Category Distribution of Respondents

Social Category	Responses	Percentage
OBC	2584	33.17%
SC	1820	23.36%
General	1765	22.66%
ST	1417	18.19%
Minority	204	2.62%



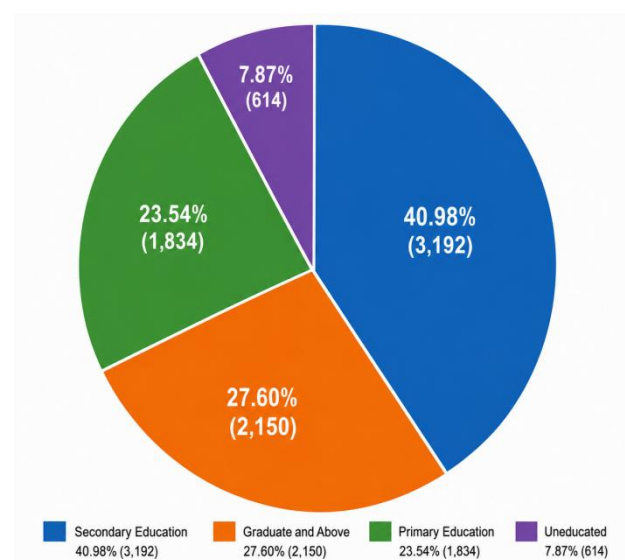
3.3.4 Educational Profile of Respondents

The educational profile of respondents indicates that a majority possessed at least secondary-level education. Respondents with Secondary Education constituted the largest category at 40.98%, followed by respondents who were Graduates and Above at 27.60%. Respondents with Primary Education accounted for 23.54% of the total sample, while 7.87% of respondents identified as uneducated.

The findings suggest that the study captured responses from individuals with varied educational backgrounds, enabling representation of both formally educated and less-educated sections of the rural population. The substantial participation of respondents with secondary and higher education levels also indicates relatively strong awareness and engagement relating to Gram Sabha processes and local governance participation.

Table 3.5 Educational Profile of Respondents

Educational Qualification	Responses	Percentage (%)
Secondary Education	3,192	40.98
Graduate and Above	2,150	27.60
Primary Education	1,834	23.54
Uneducated	614	7.87



3.4 Institutional Representation of Respondents

The study included participation from multiple stakeholder groups associated with Gram Sabha processes and local governance systems. The respondent base comprised Gram Sabha members, elected representatives, Panchayat officials, Self-Help Group (SHG) members, frontline workers, youth representatives, and other community stakeholders. The inclusion of diverse stakeholder groups enabled the study to capture broader field-level perspectives relating to community participation, local governance experiences, and Gram Sabha functioning across the surveyed regions.

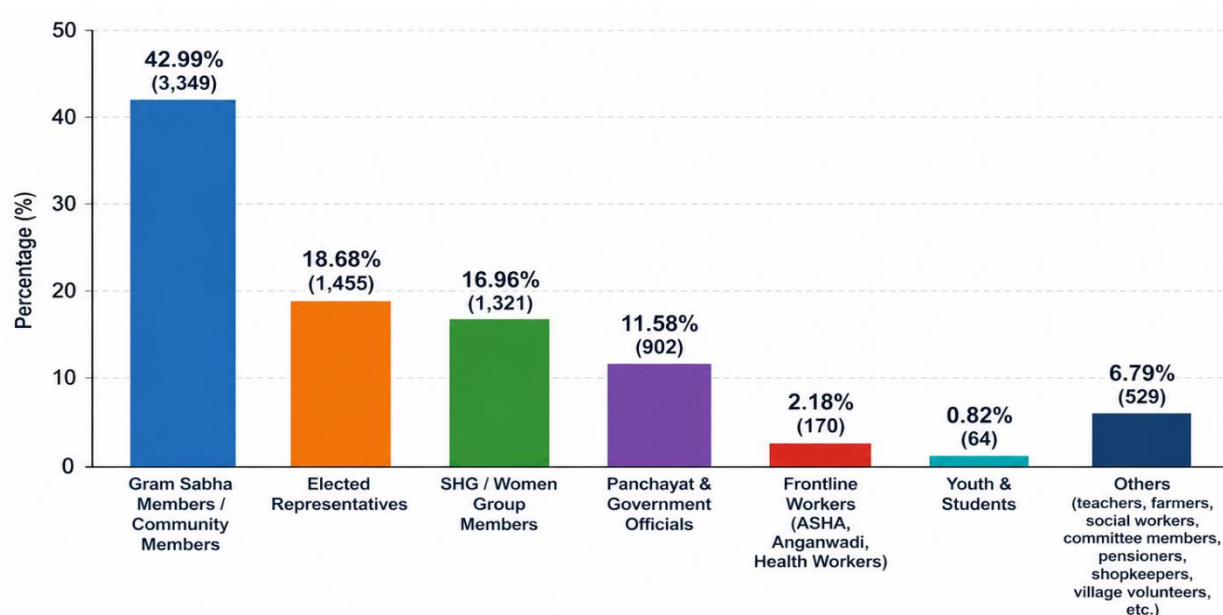
The respondent profile indicates particularly strong participation from Gram Sabha members and community-level citizens, who together constituted the largest share of respondents at 42.99%. Elected Representatives accounted for 18.68% of the responses, while SHG and women group members represented 16.96%, reflecting active involvement of grassroots institutions and community-based organizations in local governance processes. Panchayat and government officials constituted 11.58% of the respondents, while frontline workers such as ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers, and other health-related functionaries accounted for 2.18%. A smaller proportion of responses was received from youth and student groups. Several other occupational and social categories, including teachers, farmers, committee members, social workers, and local volunteers, were consolidated under the “Others” category.



to ensure analytical clarity and meaningful interpretation of the respondent composition.

Table 3.6 Stakeholder Categories Covered Under the Study

Category	Responses	Percentage (%)
Gram Sabha Members / Community Members	3,349	42.99
Elected Representatives	1,455	18.68
SHG / Women Group Members	1,321	16.96
Panchayat & Government Officials	902	11.58
Frontline Workers (ASHA, Anganwadi, Health Workers)	170	2.18
Youth & Students	64	0.82
Others (teachers, farmers, social workers, committee members, pensioners, shopkeepers, village volunteers, etc.)	529	6.79



The participation of respondents from multiple institutional backgrounds improved the diversity of field-level observations captured during the study and strengthened the representativeness of the assessment.



3.5 Respondents' Participation Characteristics in GS Meetings

The study examined respondents' participation characteristics in Gram Sabha meetings to understand the extent of recurring engagement with local governance processes. Since the survey focused on individuals who possessed knowledge of Gram Sabha functioning and community-level governance processes, the responses provide useful insights into citizen experiences and interactions with Gram Sabha institutions across the surveyed regions.

The findings indicate that respondents had varying levels of exposure to Gram Sabha proceedings during the previous year. While a majority reported attending one to four meetings annually, a notable proportion participated more frequently, reflecting continued engagement with Panchayat-level discussions and community decision-making processes. The participation frequency patterns suggest that the survey captured perspectives from individuals with differing levels of involvement in Gram Sabha activities, thereby providing a broad understanding of participation experiences across the surveyed regions.

Table 3.7 Frequency of Participation in Gram Sabha Meetings

Participation Frequency	Count	Percentage
1-2 Times	3667	47.07
3-4 Times	2,762	35.46
More Than 5 Times	1,361	17.47

The findings show that nearly half of the respondents attended Gram Sabha meetings one to two times during the previous year, while more than one-third reported participation in three to four meetings. A further 17.47 per cent indicated participation in more than five meetings. The distribution demonstrates that the survey captured responses from individuals with recurring engagement in Gram Sabha processes, enabling a more informed assessment of participation patterns, governance practices and challenges affecting grassroots democratic institutions

3.6 Chapter Summary

The chapter presented the demographic, social and institutional profile of respondents covered under the study along with broad participation characteristics relating to Gram Sabha meetings. The study achieved extensive geographical coverage across multiple States and Union Territories representing diverse governance, socio-economic and socio-cultural contexts, including both PESA and Non-PESA Gram Panchayats. The respondent profile reflected participation from varied age groups, gender categories, educational backgrounds, social categories and stakeholder groups, thereby strengthening the diversity and inclusiveness of perspectives captured during the assessment.



The findings presented in this chapter provide important contextual understanding relating to community participation, exposure and interaction with Gram Sabha processes across the surveyed regions. The participation characteristics relating to attendance, participation frequency and active involvement in Gram Sabha meetings indicate varying levels of engagement with local governance mechanisms and community-level discussions. The demographic and institutional diversity of respondents captured during the study establishes an important baseline for interpretation of the thematic findings and governance-related observations discussed in the subsequent chapters.





CHAPTER 4

GRAM SABHA PROCESSES AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

4.1 Introduction

Gram Sabha constitutes the core institutional mechanism of participatory local governance within the Panchayati Raj system. It provides a common democratic platform through which citizens collectively discuss local development issues, welfare implementation, public grievances and community priorities affecting village governance.

This chapter examines various dimensions of Gram Sabha functioning and citizen engagement across the surveyed regions. The analysis draws upon responses collected from multiple States and Union Territories representing diverse socio-economic, geographical and administrative contexts across rural India. The assessment also attempts to capture the evolving nature of community participation and grassroots governance interactions within local self-governance systems.

The chapter focuses on important aspects associated with Gram Sabha processes including awareness levels, communication and outreach systems, participation behaviour, inclusiveness, institutional participation, governance priorities, grievance handling mechanisms, digital governance practices and financial arrangements associated with conduct of Gram Sabha meetings. State-wise trends and regional variations have also been analysed in order to understand differences in participation practices, governance priorities and institutional functioning across different local governance contexts.

The analysis seeks to understand how institutional effectiveness, communication systems, livelihood realities, public trust and local participation environments collectively influence the quality and effectiveness of citizen engagement within Gram Sabha processes across different governance contexts.

4.2 Awareness Regarding Gram Sabha Meetings

Awareness regarding Gram Sabha meetings emerged as an important dimension of the study. Since Gram Sabha serves as the primary platform for direct citizen participation in local governance, awareness regarding its existence, participation rights and procedural functioning has significant implications for meaningful citizen engagement. The study therefore examined respondents' awareness regarding selected aspects of Gram Sabha functioning.

The findings indicate that awareness regarding the existence of Gram Sabha meetings is relatively widespread among the surveyed respondents. In many regions, respondents recognized Gram Sabha as a platform for discussing local development issues, welfare schemes, public services and community concerns. However,



awareness levels varied across different dimensions of Gram Sabha functioning, indicating that familiarity with Gram Sabha does not necessarily imply a comprehensive understanding of its institutional processes and participation requirements.

The table below presents respondents' awareness regarding Gram Sabha meetings, participation rights and procedural requirements. While 93.79 percent respondents reported awareness regarding Gram Sabha meetings, 82.93 percent indicated awareness that they possess rights within Gram Sabha processes. In contrast, awareness regarding quorum and procedural requirements was reported by only 58.70 percent respondents.

Table 4.1 Respondents' Awareness Regarding Gram Sabha Meetings

Indicator	Percentage
Awareness regarding Gram Sabha Meetings	93.79%
Aware that they have Rights in Gram Sabha	82.93%
Awareness regarding Quorum and Procedural Requirements	58.70 %

The findings indicate that awareness regarding the existence of Gram Sabha meetings is considerably higher than awareness regarding participation rights and procedural requirements. While most respondents reported familiarity with Gram Sabha meetings, awareness regarding quorum and procedural aspects was substantially lower. This suggests that awareness among respondents is often limited to the existence of Gram Sabha rather than extending to a deeper understanding of institutional procedures, participation mechanisms and decision-making processes.

The observed pattern has important implications for the functioning of Gram Sabha as a participatory institution. Effective participation requires not only awareness that Gram Sabha meetings are conducted but also understanding of how citizens can exercise their rights, raise issues and contribute to local decision-making processes. The comparatively lower awareness regarding quorum and procedural requirements indicates that a section of respondents may perceive Gram Sabha primarily as an event or administrative meeting rather than as a formal democratic institution governed by specific participation mechanisms. Such gaps may affect the quality of participation and informed engagement during meetings.

The findings further indicate that the awareness levels reported in the study reflect the perceptions of surveyed respondents and should not be interpreted as representing the awareness status of the entire population within a State, District or Gram Panchayat. Significant state-level variations were also observed, suggesting that although Gram Sabha has achieved substantial visibility as an institution of local governance, important gaps continue to exist in relation to procedural understanding and informed participation across different socio-economic and regional contexts. The study also examined the major sources through which respondents received



information relating to Gram Sabha meetings and activities, the findings of which are presented below.

Table 4.2 Major Sources of Awareness of the Respondents' Regarding Gram Sabha

Source of Information About Gram Sabha	Responses	Percentage (%)
Public Announcement	5,244	67.32
PRI Members / Elected Representatives	2,841	36.47
Word of Mouth / Neighbours / Friends	2,601	33.39
Media & Social Media (<i>Media, WhatsApp, Social Media, Mobile Groups, etc.</i>)	1,444	18.54
Panchayat Officials & Official Communication (<i>Secretary, GP Staff, Official Letters, Notices, etc.</i>)	393	5.04
Leaflets / Notices / Household Letters	37	0.47
Training & Educational Exposure (<i>Trainings, Schools, Colleges, PRI Trainings, etc.</i>)	31	0.40
Others (<i>SHG meetings, phone calls, NGOs, government instructions, office discussions, etc.</i>)	199	2.55

Public announcements emerged as the dominant source of information regarding Gram Sabha meetings, followed by PRI members, elected representatives and word-of-mouth communication through neighbours, friends and community networks. The findings indicate that interpersonal and community-based communication mechanisms continue to play a central role in disseminating Gram Sabha-related information across rural areas.

The predominance of traditional communication channels suggests that awareness regarding Gram Sabha is largely shaped through local social networks and direct community interactions rather than through formal institutional communication systems. At the same time, the relatively limited contribution of Panchayat officials, notices, household letters, training programmes and educational institutions indicates that formal communication mechanisms play a comparatively smaller role in disseminating Gram Sabha-related information.

Media and digital communication platforms were reported as information sources by a section of respondents, but their contribution remained considerably lower than traditional communication channels. The findings suggest that while existing communication mechanisms have been effective in creating basic awareness regarding Gram Sabha meetings, they appear less effective in promoting awareness regarding participation rights, quorum requirements and procedural aspects of Gram Sabha functioning. This highlights the need for strengthening citizen information and orientation efforts to support informed participation in Gram Sabha processes.



4.3 Communication Systems and Outreach Mechanisms

Communication and mobilisation systems emerged as one of the most influential operational components affecting participation in Gram Sabha meetings. The findings indicate that timely dissemination of information and direct community outreach significantly influence citizen participation and engagement across different social groups.

Gram Panchayats currently rely upon a combination of traditional and modern communication systems including public announcements, ward members, WhatsApp groups, SHG mobilisation, interpersonal communication networks, public notices and house-to-house outreach. Respondents repeatedly identified direct interpersonal communication as one of the most effective mechanisms for improving participation and mobilizing households for Gram Sabha meetings.

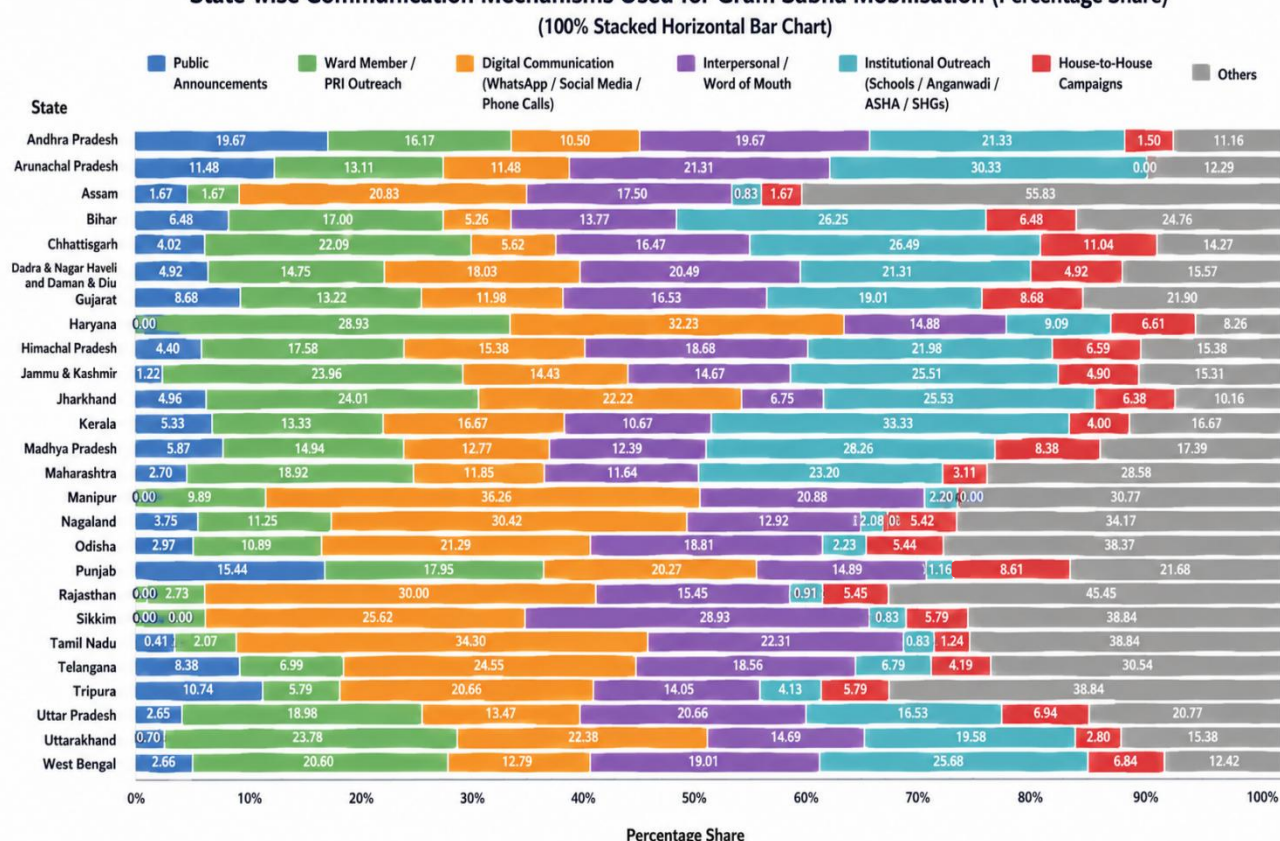
Table 4.3 Communication Mechanisms Used for Gram Sabha Meetings

Communication Mechanism	Count	Percentage
Public Announcements (Miking / Drum Beating)	5,267	23.55
Ward Members	3,691	16.5
WhatsApp Groups / Social Media	3,033	13.56
Notice Boards & Public Notices	4,855	21.71
SHGs	2,473	11.06
Schools / Anganwadi / ASHA Workers	1,124	5.03
House-to-House Campaigns	1,031	4.61
Religious / Community Places	548	2.45
Others (NGOs, office discussions, invitation letters, community organizations, etc.)	225	1.01

The findings indicate that Gram Panchayats continue to depend significantly upon traditional and community-based outreach systems for dissemination of information relating to Gram Sabha meetings. Public announcements, ward member outreach and interpersonal communication networks emerged as the most commonly reported communication mechanisms across the surveyed regions.



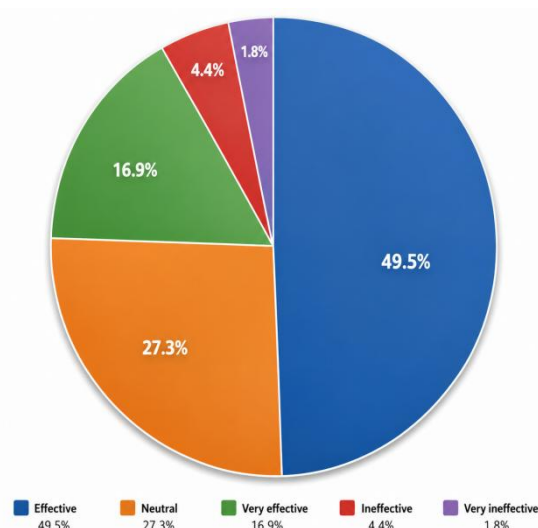
State-wise Communication Mechanisms Used for Gram Sabha Mobilisation (Percentage Share)



The study further examined citizens' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of existing communication systems used for Gram Sabha mobilisation and outreach activities.

Table 4.4 Effectiveness of Communication Systems

Response	Percentage
Effective	49.5%
Neutral	27.3%
Very effective	16.9%
Ineffective	4.4%
Very ineffective	1.8%



A majority of respondents perceived the existing communication systems as either effective or very effective in informing citizens regarding Gram Sabha meetings and related activities. However, a notable proportion of respondents also expressed neutral perceptions, indicating variation in communication effectiveness across different regions and local governance contexts.



The study also examined respondents' perceptions regarding the most effective communication mechanisms for improving participation in Gram Sabha meetings.

Table 4.5 Most Effective Communication Mechanisms for Participation

Communication Mechanism	Count	Percentage (%)
Public announcements (miking/drum beating)	3,337	42.85
House-to-house campaigns	1,331	17.09
WhatsApp groups / social media	1,230	15.80
Ward Members	666	8.55
SHGs	605	7.77
Notice Boards	171	2.20

The findings indicate that direct interpersonal communication systems were perceived as the most effective mechanisms for improving participation in Gram Sabha meetings. Public announcements through miking or drum beating emerged as the most preferred communication mechanism, followed by house-to-house campaigns and WhatsApp/social media-based outreach.

Community-level mobilisation through ward members and SHGs was also perceived as an important mechanism for improving participation and strengthening local outreach. Notice boards were additionally reported as a supporting communication mechanism in several regions. The findings suggest that repeated interpersonal communication and locally embedded mobilisation systems continue to play a critical role in improving public engagement with Gram Sabha processes.

The study further examined the actual notice period provided before Gram Sabha meetings in order to understand communication timelines and preparedness for participation. The findings indicate that a majority of respondents reported receiving information between one to five days before the meeting, while a notable proportion also reported receiving notice more than a week in advance.

A smaller proportion of respondents indicated that information was received only on the day of the meeting or that no fixed communication pattern existed. The findings suggest that advance notice periods remain an important operational factor influencing community participation, particularly for workers, women and vulnerable households requiring adequate preparation time for attending Gram Sabha meetings.

Table 4.6 Actual Notice Period Provided Before Gram Sabha Meetings

Notice Period Before Gram Sabha Meeting	Responses	Percentage (%)
3-5 Days	2,769	35.5
1-2 Days	2,340	30.0
More than a Week	1,745	22.4
On the Day	625	8.0
No Fixed Pattern	310	4.1



4.4 Comfort and Inclusiveness in Gram Sabha Participation

Meaningful participation in Gram Sabha meetings depends not only on citizens' attendance but also on their ability to express opinions freely and engage confidently in local decision-making processes. The study therefore examined respondents' comfort levels during Gram Sabha discussions and the factors that may discourage active participation.

The findings indicate that a large majority of respondents reported feeling comfortable speaking during Gram Sabha meetings, suggesting that Gram Sabha continues to serve as an accessible platform for community interaction and public deliberation across many surveyed regions. However, a section of respondents reported hesitation or discomfort while participating in discussions, highlighting the need for more inclusive and confidence-building participation environments.

Table 4.7 Reasons for Discomfort During Gram Sabha Participation

Reason	Percentage
Lack of Confidence	35.78%
Fear of Authority	17.39%
Dominance of Influential Individuals	17.16%
Gender Discrimination	9.05%
Caste Discrimination	6.63%

Among those reporting discomfort, lack of confidence emerged as the most frequently cited reason, accounting for 35.78 per cent of responses. This suggests that a significant section of citizens may require greater encouragement and facilitation to participate actively in public discussions. Fear of authority and the dominance of influential individuals were also reported by a considerable proportion of respondents, indicating that power dynamics within local governance spaces can affect the quality of participation.

Social factors such as gender discrimination and caste-based exclusion, although reported by a relatively smaller proportion of respondents, continue to influence participation experiences in certain regions. These findings highlight the importance of creating inclusive Gram Sabha environments where all sections of the community feel equally comfortable expressing their views and contributing to collective decision-making.

The analysis suggests that strengthening Gram Sabha participation requires not only improving attendance but also fostering confidence, inclusiveness and equitable opportunities for dialogue. Ensuring that discussions remain open, respectful and representative can significantly enhance the quality of citizen engagement and the effectiveness of Gram Sabha as a platform for participatory local governance.



4.5 Achievement of Quorum in Gram Sabha Meetings

The study examined perceptions regarding achievement of quorum during Gram Sabha meetings across surveyed regions. The findings indicate mixed trends relating to quorum achievement and procedural awareness associated with Gram Sabha functioning. While a considerable proportion of respondents reported that quorum is achieved during Gram Sabha meetings, a substantial percentage of respondents also reported lack of awareness regarding quorum requirements and achievement status.

Table 4.8 Achievement of Quorum in GS Meetings

Response	Percentage(%)
Yes	36.46
No	18.50
Not Aware	45.04

The findings indicate that awareness regarding quorum requirements and procedural compliance continues to vary significantly across States and regions. The comparatively high proportion of “Not Aware” responses suggests that a large section of respondents may not possess adequate understanding regarding formal procedural requirements associated with Gram Sabha functioning. Significantly, “Not Aware” responses were also reported among certain elected representatives and local stakeholders, indicating that procedural understanding relating to quorum norms and Gram Sabha operational requirements may not yet be uniformly institutionalized across all levels of local governance participation.

4.6 Institutional Participation and Community Governance Systems

The study also examined the participation of line departments, community institutions and local committees within Gram Sabha processes.

It is evident that Gram Sabha functions not only as a community discussion platform but also as an important convergence mechanism connecting multiple service delivery departments and grassroots governance institutions.

Respondents reported participation of officials and frontline functionaries from departments relating to health, agriculture, ICDS, education, drinking water, Panchayati Raj, MGNREGA and social welfare during Gram Sabha meetings.

Table 4.9 Participation of Line Departments in Gram Sabha Meetings

Department / Sector	Includes	Percentage (%)
Health Department	Health Dept., ANM, ASHA, Health Officials, Medical Staff	14.68
Agriculture Department	Agriculture Officer, Agriculture Dept., Agri Officials	5.57
ICDS / Women & Child Development	Anganwadi, ICDS, Women & Child Development	6.63
Education Department	School Teachers, Education Dept., Schools	6.06

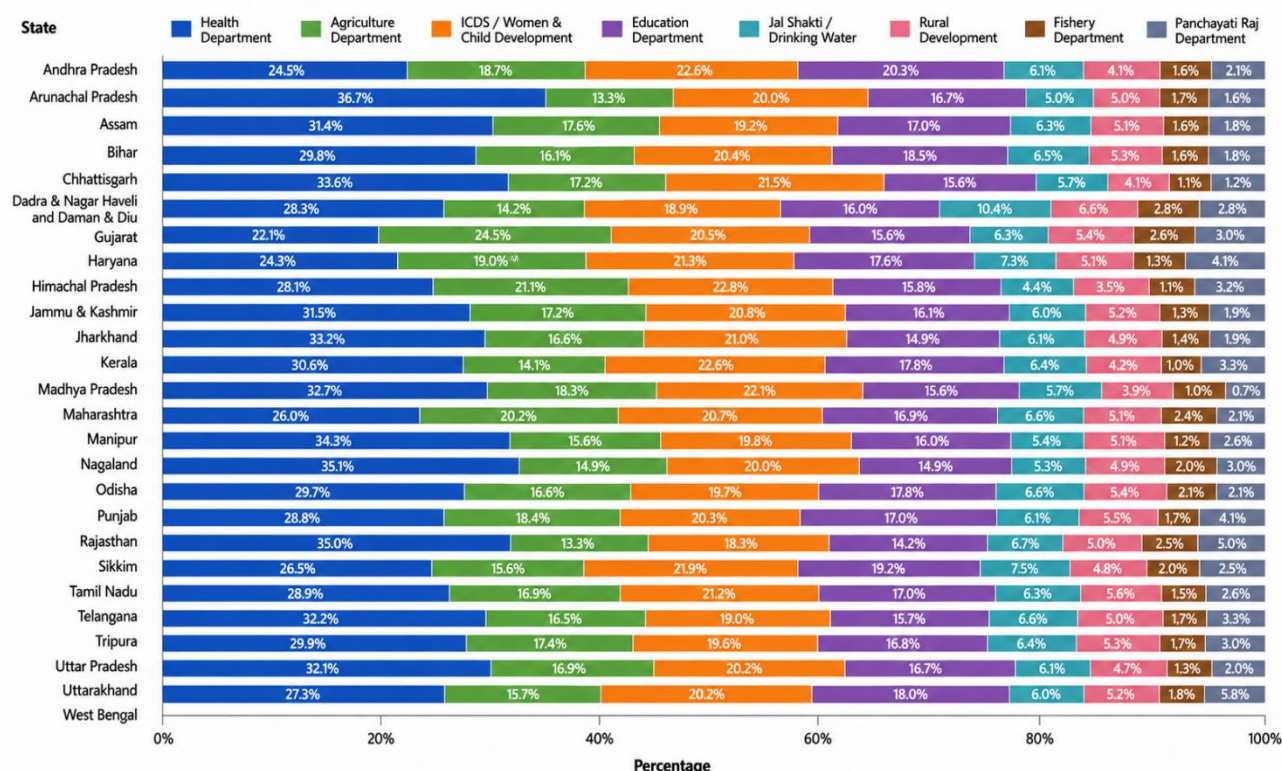


Department / Sector	Includes	Percentage (%)
Jal Shakti / Drinking Water	Drinking Water Committees, Water Supply, Jal Shakti	0.97
Rural Development	Rural Development Officials, MGNREGA Staff	0.81
Fishery Department	Fisheries-related Departments	0.77
Panchayati Raj Department	PRI Officials, Panchayat Officials	0.74

The above table indicate that departmental participation contributes significantly towards grievance handling, beneficiary identification, welfare awareness and coordination of local development activities.

State-wise Participation of Line Departments in Gram Sabha Meetings

(Percentage of Total Departmental Participation within Each State)



Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding off.

The state-wise analysis indicates noticeable variation in participation patterns of line departments across different regions. Health, Education and ICDS/Women & Child Development departments demonstrated comparatively higher participation levels in several States, reflecting stronger convergence between frontline service delivery systems and Gram Sabha processes.

The findings further suggest that States with relatively stronger institutional convergence mechanisms reported broader departmental participation within Gram Sabha meetings.



Participation of Agriculture, Rural Development and Panchayati Raj-related departments also varied across States depending upon local governance priorities, administrative coordination practices and community-level engagement systems.

The Participation of Community Institutions

The study further examined the role of community institutions and local committees within Gram Sabha functioning in order to understand their contribution toward participatory governance and community mobilisation processes. The findings indicate that institutions such as VHSNCs, School Management Committees, SHG Federations, ASHA/Anganwadi workers, Youth Clubs and Water & Sanitation Committees continue to play an important supportive role in strengthening community participation and local governance engagement across the surveyed regions.

Table 4.10 Participation of Community Institutions in Gram Sabha Processes

Institution / Committee	Percentage
VHSNC	20.41
School Management Committees	18.98
SHG Federations	18.18
ASHA / Anganwadi Workers	15.76
Youth Clubs / Local Groups	11.43
Water & Sanitation Committees	8.92

The analysis indicates that these institutions contribute significantly toward raising public issues, mobilizing citizens, monitoring development activities, generating awareness and facilitating community discussions within Gram Sabha meetings. Their participation was found to strengthen grassroots coordination, improve citizen outreach and support wider community involvement in local governance processes. The findings suggest that community institutions increasingly function as important intermediary mechanisms connecting citizens, Panchayats and frontline governance systems at the local level.

Table 4.11 Major Roles of Community Institutions in Gram Sabha Meetings

Major Role	Percentage
Raising Public Issues	29.33
Mobilizing Citizens	22.50
Monitoring Development Works	19.99
Awareness Generation	14.62
Supporting Welfare Identification	8.84
Facilitating Community Discussions	4.72



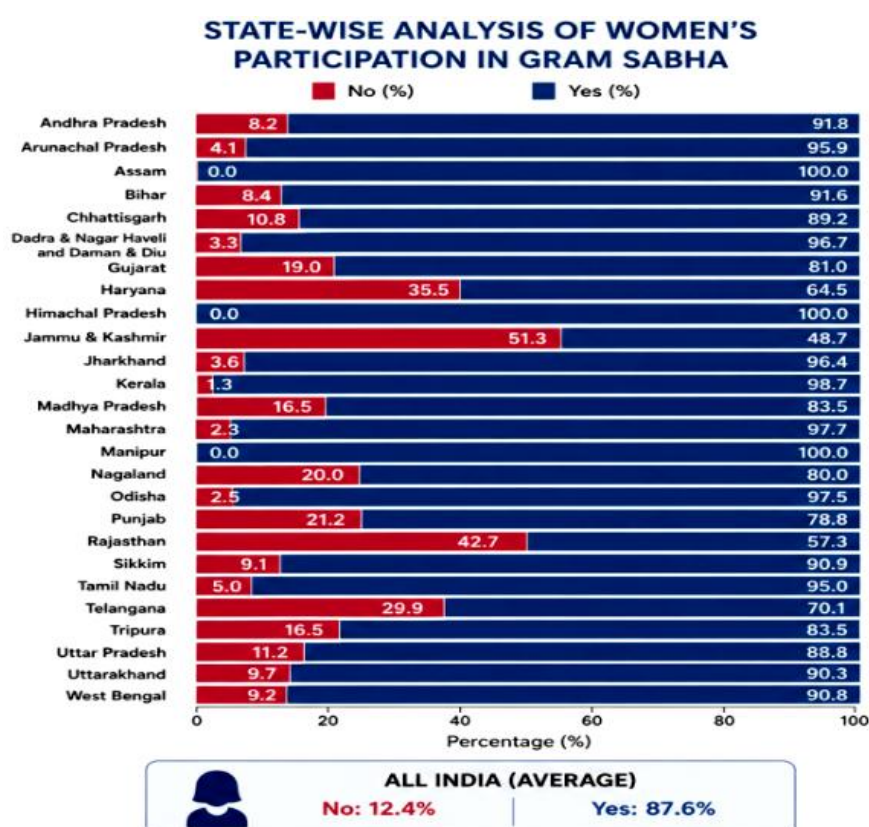
4.7 Participation of Women and SC/ST Communities in Gram Sabha

Inclusive participation remains one of the core objectives of Gram Sabha within the Panchayati Raj framework. The effectiveness of participatory local governance depends significantly upon the extent to which women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) actively engage in discussions, decision-making and community-level governance processes. In this context, the study examined citizen perceptions regarding participation of women and SC/ST communities in Gram Sabha meetings across different States and Union Territories.

Perception on Women's Participation in Gram Sabha

The responses collected during the survey indicate that respondents in several States and Union Territories generally felt that women actively participate in Gram Sabha meetings. States such as Assam, Himachal Pradesh and Manipur reported 100 percent positive responses regarding women's participation in Gram Sabha meetings. Similarly, high levels of positive responses were observed in Kerala (98.7%), Maharashtra (97.7%), Odisha (97.5%), Jharkhand (96.4%), Arunachal Pradesh (95.9%) and Tamil Nadu (95.0%).

These findings reflect respondents' views and community-level perceptions regarding women's participation and should not be interpreted as direct observational measurement of actual participation levels or quality of engagement within Gram Sabha proceedings. The responses nevertheless suggest that factors such as SHG mobilisation, reservation provisions for women within Panchayati Raj Institutions and increasing awareness regarding women's role in local governance may have positively influenced respondents' assessment of women's participation across several regions.

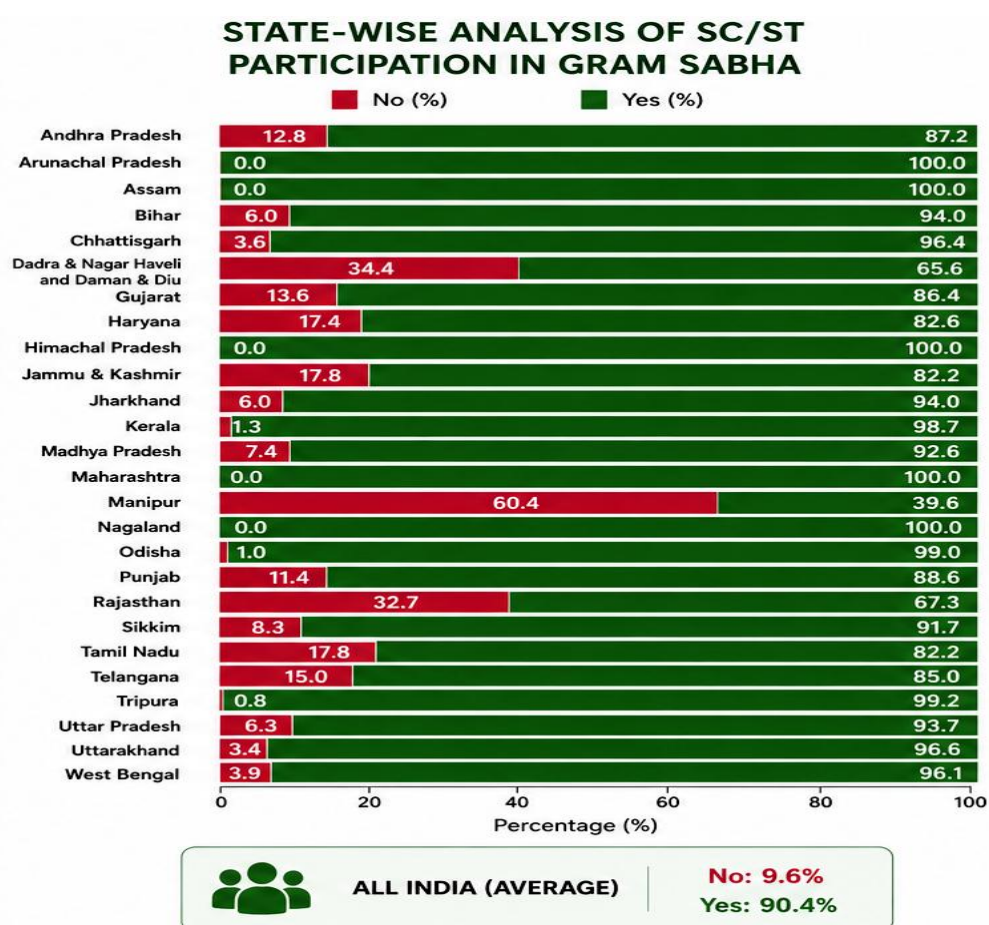


At the same time, considerable inter-state variations were observed in respondents' views regarding women's participation in Gram Sabha meetings. Comparatively lower positive responses relating to women's active participation were reported in Jammu and Kashmir (48.7%), Rajasthan (57.3%), Haryana (64.5%) and Telangana (70.1%). The responses suggest that socio-cultural factors, livelihood responsibilities, mobility constraints, local participation practices and differing governance conditions may continue to influence women's participation across regions.

States such as Punjab (78.8%), Nagaland (80.0%), Gujarat (81.0%), Madhya Pradesh (83.5%) and Tripura (83.5%) also reflected comparatively lower levels of positive responses when compared with several other States reporting stronger participation trends. The assessment further suggests that women's participation in Gram Sabha processes should not be understood solely in terms of attendance, but also in relation to opportunities for discussion, involvement in decision-making processes, confidence in expressing views and institutional responsiveness towards women's concerns within Gram Sabha proceedings.

Perception on Participation of SC/ST Communities in Gram Sabha

The participation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes within Gram Sabha processes constitutes an important dimension of inclusive governance and democratic representation at the grassroots level.



The responses collected during the survey reflect comparatively positive views regarding participation of SC/ST communities in Gram Sabha meetings across several States and Union Territories. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra and Nagaland reported 100 percent positive responses regarding participation of SC/ST communities in Gram Sabha meetings. Similarly, high levels of positive responses were reported in Tripura (99.2%), Odisha (99.0%), Kerala (98.7%), Uttarakhand (96.6%), West Bengal (96.1%) and Chhattisgarh (96.4%).

The responses suggest that constitutional safeguards, reservation provisions, community mobilisation efforts and social inclusion initiatives may have contributed towards strengthening respondents' perception regarding participation of SC/ST communities in Gram Sabha processes across several regions.

At the same time, considerable regional variations were observed in respondents' assessment of SC/ST participation. Manipur reported comparatively lower positive responses, with only 39.6 percent respondents indicating active participation of SC/ST communities in Gram Sabha meetings. Similarly, comparatively lower participation trends were reflected in Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu (65.6%) and Rajasthan (67.3%).

States such as Haryana (82.6%), Jammu and Kashmir (82.2%), Tamil Nadu (82.2%), Telangana (85.0%) and Gujarat (86.4%) also reflected comparatively moderate participation levels when compared with several other States reporting stronger engagement trends. The responses indicate that social inclusion within Gram Sabha processes continues to be influenced by regional socio-cultural dynamics, local participation practices, governance environments and the extent of institutional outreach and community mobilisation.

The assessment further highlights that meaningful participation of SC/ST communities should not be assessed solely in terms of attendance during Gram Sabha meetings. Equal importance must also be given to their role in discussions and local decision-making processes.

4.8 Local Governance Priorities and Agenda Discussions

The study examined the major categories of agenda items discussed during Gram Sabha meetings across the surveyed regions in order to understand local governance priorities and community-level concerns emerging within Gram Sabha functioning. The Gram Sabha meetings are actively functioning as platforms for discussing local development issues, welfare implementation, sanitation, infrastructure requirements, beneficiary selection, planning processes and other community-level governance matters affecting rural households.

The analysis reveals that identification of local issues emerged as the most frequently discussed agenda category nationally, followed by approval of Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs), sanitation-related discussions, welfare schemes and beneficiary identification. Discussions relating to development priorities, health and literacy, annual budgeting, infrastructure and livelihood issues were also reported across a significant proportion of Gram Sabha meetings. The findings suggest that Gram Sabha discussions continue to remain strongly oriented toward practical governance concerns, public service delivery and local development requirements across the surveyed regions.



Table 4.12 Major Governance Priorities Discussed in Gram Sabha Meetings

Agenda Item	Count	Percentage (%)
Identifying Local Issues	5,377	13.13
Approving GPDP	3,942	9.63
Drainage and Sanitation	3,611	8.82
Welfare Schemes	3,566	8.71
Identifying Beneficiaries	3,437	8.39
Development Priorities	3,224	7.87
Health & Literacy	2,988	7.30
Annual Budget	2,885	7.05
Social Issues	2,705	6.61
Infrastructure	2,689	6.57
Livelihood	2,496	6.10
Social Audit	2,318	5.66
OSR Generation	1,665	4.07

The analysis reveals that Gram Sabha meetings are increasingly being utilized as important platforms for participatory planning, public problem articulation and community-level governance engagement. The relatively strong presence of GPDP-related discussions across States reflects gradual strengthening of decentralized planning processes within Gram Sabha functioning. At the same time, the variations observed in agenda priorities across States suggest the influence of differing local governance contexts, socio-economic conditions and regional development requirements in shaping Gram Sabha discussions and decision-making processes.

State-wise Trends in Governance Priorities Discussed During Gram Sabha Meetings

The state-wise analysis indicates important regional variations in the agenda priorities discussed during Gram Sabha meetings across the surveyed States and Union Territories. Discussions relating to local issues, welfare schemes, sanitation, beneficiary identification and GPDP approval emerged prominently across most States, indicating the continued focus of Gram Sabha meetings on immediate governance concerns and local development requirements affecting rural communities.

Certain States demonstrated comparatively stronger emphasis on specific thematic priorities. Punjab and Madhya Pradesh reported relatively higher discussion levels relating to GPDP approval, while Kerala reflected comparatively stronger focus on health, literacy and sanitation-related issues. Haryana and Gujarat showed greater emphasis on development priorities and infrastructure-related discussions, whereas several States also reported recurring discussions relating to annual budgeting, social issues and livelihood concerns within Gram Sabha proceedings.



State-wise Agenda Priorities Discussed in Gram Sabha Meetings

(Percentage of responses)

State	Identifying Local Issues & Grievances	Approving GPDP	Drainage & Sanitation	Welfare Schemes	Identifying Beneficiaries	Development Priorities	Health & Literacy	Annual Budget	Social Issues	Infrastructure Development	Livelihoods & Employment	Social Audit	OSR Generation
Andhra Pradesh	9.33	9.33	13.33	9.50	5.67	6.17	5.67	5.00	4.83	6.50	4.33	3.17	4.83
Arunachal Pradesh	13.11	13.11	4.92	11.48	11.48	10.66	4.92	5.74	4.92	5.74	4.10	4.92	4.92
Assam	9.17	9.17	7.50	9.17	8.33	9.17	6.67	6.67	7.50	6.67	4.17	6.67	7.50
Bihar	10.93	10.93	10.53	10.12	9.72	8.50	5.26	4.45	8.50	6.05	3.81	4.05	3.24
Chhattisgarh	10.44	10.44	11.65	10.44	10.04	6.83	4.02	4.82	6.02	6.42	3.37	4.02	2.81
Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu	11.48	4.92	0.82	14.75	1.64	14.75	8.20	11.48	0.82	9.02	0.82	0.82	0.00
Gujarat	2.07	2.07	11.98	11.16	6.61	15.29	5.79	8.26	3.31	8.68	4.55	8.68	0.41
Haryana	0.83	0.83	11.57	9.09	4.96	18.18	4.96	9.92	0.83	9.09	4.13	9.92	0.00
Himachal Pradesh	1.10	1.10	6.59	12.09	4.40	9.89	8.79	8.79	14.29	8.79	4.40	3.30	0.00
Jammu & Kashmir	7.09	7.09	9.29	10.27	7.58	6.60	4.65	4.65	6.60	5.75	4.40	7.33	6.60
Jharkhand	7.34	7.34	10.32	7.94	11.90	6.94	5.95	5.95	3.37	4.88	4.18	5.36	5.75
Kerala	1.33	1.33	22.67	22.00	2.67	10.00	24.00	4.67	0.00	6.67	3.33	0.00	0.00
Madhya Pradesh	14.43	14.43	9.71	7.28	12.77	6.00	8.81	12.64	1.28	3.84	3.90	2.30	2.68
Maharashtra	10.40	10.40	5.41	8.32	11.02	7.07	8.32	6.44	6.24	6.53	4.12	5.61	4.57
Manipur	5.49	8.79	0.00	9.89	9.89	7.69	9.89	8.79	2.20	7.69	0.00	2.20	0.00
Nagaland	7.50	7.08	1.67	9.17	9.17	9.17	9.17	8.75	2.92	7.50	1.67	2.92	0.00
Odisha	8.17	8.17	8.42	9.16	7.92	8.66	9.90	8.17	8.17	6.96	4.29	4.21	1.98
Punjab	13.64	26.45	1.16	21.04	2.51	3.47	9.65	3.67	1.93	5.98	1.93	5.98	1.16
Rajasthan	13.64	13.64	6.36	15.45	9.09	4.55	6.36	10.00	3.64	7.73	3.92	4.55	6.36
Sikkim	7.44	8.26	7.44	7.44	7.44	8.26	8.26	7.44	7.44	7.44	7.44	7.44	7.44
Tamil Nadu	9.09	7.44	8.68	7.44	8.26	7.02	8.26	9.09	6.61	6.42	4.08	7.85	6.61
Telangana	7.58	7.19	6.39	7.58	7.39	6.39	7.58	10.38	6.79	6.79	4.00	6.79	7.58
Tripura	4.13	7.44	4.13	7.44	5.79	6.61	5.79	4.13	7.44	7.44	0.83	7.44	4.13
Uttar Pradesh	8.57	8.57	10.41	6.94	9.80	8.37	8.98	8.16	5.51	6.47	3.93	5.31	2.86
Uttarakhand	6.29	6.29	15.38	8.39	7.69	9.79	11.89	4.20	4.90	8.04	4.90	5.59	4.20
West Bengal	9.77	9.77	11.55	8.88	6.93	8.35	6.57	8.53	4.09	6.86	3.84	4.44	3.73

Highest percentage for each category

Lowest percentage for each category

Note: Only major agenda categories are shown.

The above table shows multiple states which are in on the higher and lower side of each item

The findings suggest that while Gram Sabha meetings across India continue to function primarily as platforms for local governance and welfare-related discussions, the agenda priorities discussed within meetings also reflect differing regional development contexts, administrative priorities and socio-economic conditions across States.

Also, Gram Sabha discussions across India remain predominantly focused on welfare delivery, local grievances, sanitation concerns and civic infrastructure-related issues affecting rural communities. In contrast, agenda items relating to fiscal decentralisation, participatory monitoring and Panchayat Own Source Revenue (OSR) generation continue to receive comparatively lower attention across several regions. This indicates that Gram Sabha institutions presently function more strongly as platforms for local governance response, welfare implementation and public issue articulation within rural governance systems.

The state-wise analysis further revealed important regional variations in governance priorities discussed during Gram Sabha meetings. States such as Bihar, Odisha,



Arunachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand demonstrated comparatively stronger focus on GPDP-related discussions, indicating relatively stronger integration of decentralized planning processes within Gram Sabha functioning. Rajasthan reported comparatively higher emphasis on development priorities and social issues, while Haryana demonstrated stronger focus on sanitation and infrastructure-related governance concerns. Gujarat reflected comparatively greater emphasis on health and literacy-related discussions, whereas Jammu & Kashmir demonstrated stronger orientation toward development priorities and local infrastructure concerns. The findings further indicate that welfare-oriented discussions continue to dominate Gram Sabha proceedings across several States, particularly in regions where dependence on welfare delivery systems and beneficiary-oriented governance remains comparatively high.

Table 4.13 Most Frequently and Comparatively Less Frequently Discussed Agenda Items in Gram Sabha Meetings

Sl. No.	Most Frequently Discussed Agenda Items	Discussion Level	Comparatively Less Frequently Discussed Agenda Items	Discussion Level
1	Identifying Local Issues	Very High	OSR Generation	Very Low
2	Approving GPDP	Very High	Social Audit	Low
3	Identifying Beneficiaries	Very High	Annual Budget Discussions	Low-Medium
4	Welfare Schemes	High	Infrastructure Planning	Medium
5	Sanitation	High	Health & Literacy Issues	Medium
6	Development Priorities	High	Livelihood Planning	Medium
7	Social Issues	Moderate	Revenue Mobilization	Very Low
8	Annual Budget	Moderate	Long-term Economic Planning	Very Low
9	Health & Literacy	Moderate	Participatory Monitoring	Very Low
10	Infrastructure	Moderate	Panchayat Own Source Revenue Planning	Very Low

4.9 Grievance Handling in Gram Sabha Meetings

The study also examined grievance handling systems associated with Gram Sabha meetings. Around 86.78 percent respondents reported that grievances are received during Gram Sabha meetings, indicating that Gram Sabha continues to function as an active platform for grievance articulation and public issue discussion across surveyed regions.

Issues relating to sanitation, drainage, drinking water, welfare access and civic infrastructure were frequently reported within broader local governance and public service categories.

The assessment further examined how grievances raised during Gram Sabha meetings are addressed by local governance institutions. A majority of respondents (63.29%) stated that grievances are recorded and followed up after the meeting. Around 13.96 percent respondents reported that grievances are immediately resolved, while 17.63 percent indicated that grievances are only rarely addressed. About 5.11 percent respondents stated that grievances are not addressed at all.



Table 4.14 Grievance Handling Mechanisms in Gram Sabha Meetings

Response	Count	Percentage
Recorded and followed up	4533	63.29%
Rarely addressed	1263	17.63%
Immediately resolved	1000	13.96%
Not addressed	366	5.11%

The findings suggest that Gram Sabha continues to serve as an important institutional platform for raising and documenting public grievances. However, the responses also indicate the need for strengthening grievance responsiveness, follow-up systems and visible resolution mechanisms in order to improve public trust and sustained participation within Gram Sabha processes.

4.10 Documentation and Digital Governance Practices

The study also examined documentation and record-keeping practices associated with Gram Sabha functioning, including maintenance of proceeding books, collection of signatures for approval of resolutions and usage of SABHASAAR for recording and preparation of Gram Sabha minutes. The findings indicate that conventional documentation practices remain relatively strong across the surveyed regions, reflecting adherence to basic procedural requirements associated with Gram Sabha functioning.

Table 4.15 Documentation Practices in Gram Sabha Meetings

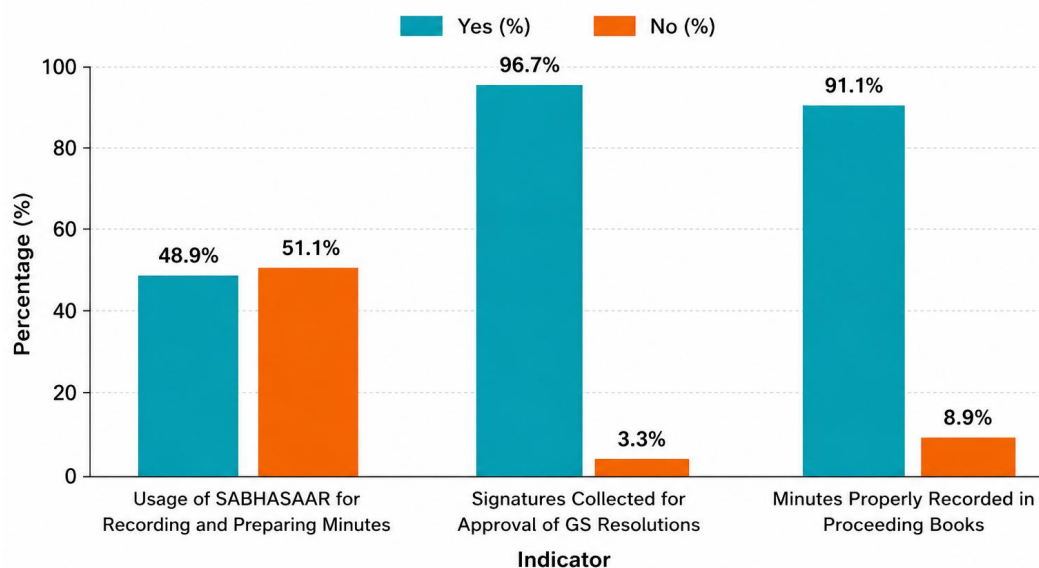
Indicator	Yes (%)	No (%)
Usage of SABHASAAR for Recording and Preparing Minutes	48.9	51.1
Signatures Collected for Approval of GS Resolutions	96.7	3.3
Minutes Properly Recorded in Proceeding Books	91.1	8.9

The findings indicate that procedural documentation systems relating to recording of proceedings and approval of resolutions remain relatively robust across surveyed regions. A substantial majority of respondents reported that Gram Sabha proceedings are properly recorded in proceeding books and that signatures of Gram Sabha members are collected during approval of resolutions. These findings suggest that key procedural requirements associated with documentation and validation of Gram Sabha decisions are being followed in a large proportion of the surveyed locations.

At the same time, the adoption of digital systems such as SABHASAAR for recording and preparation of Gram Sabha minutes appears comparatively lower. While nearly half of the respondents reported usage of the platform, a slightly larger proportion reported non-usage. The findings suggest that digital documentation practices have not yet achieved the same level of adoption as conventional documentation mechanisms such as proceeding books and resolution registers.



Documentation Practices in Gram Sabha Meetings



The findings indicate that Gram Sabha documentation continues to rely primarily on traditional record-keeping systems. While documentation of proceedings and resolutions remains relatively strong, adoption of digital documentation platforms such as SABHASAAR remains comparatively lower. Strengthening awareness and operational support for digital governance tools can further improve documentation, transparency and monitoring of Gram Sabha proceedings.

The study also examined the extent to which Gram Sabha proceedings are uploaded to the NIRNAY App as part of digital governance and documentation practices. The findings reveal varying levels of awareness and usage of the platform among respondents.

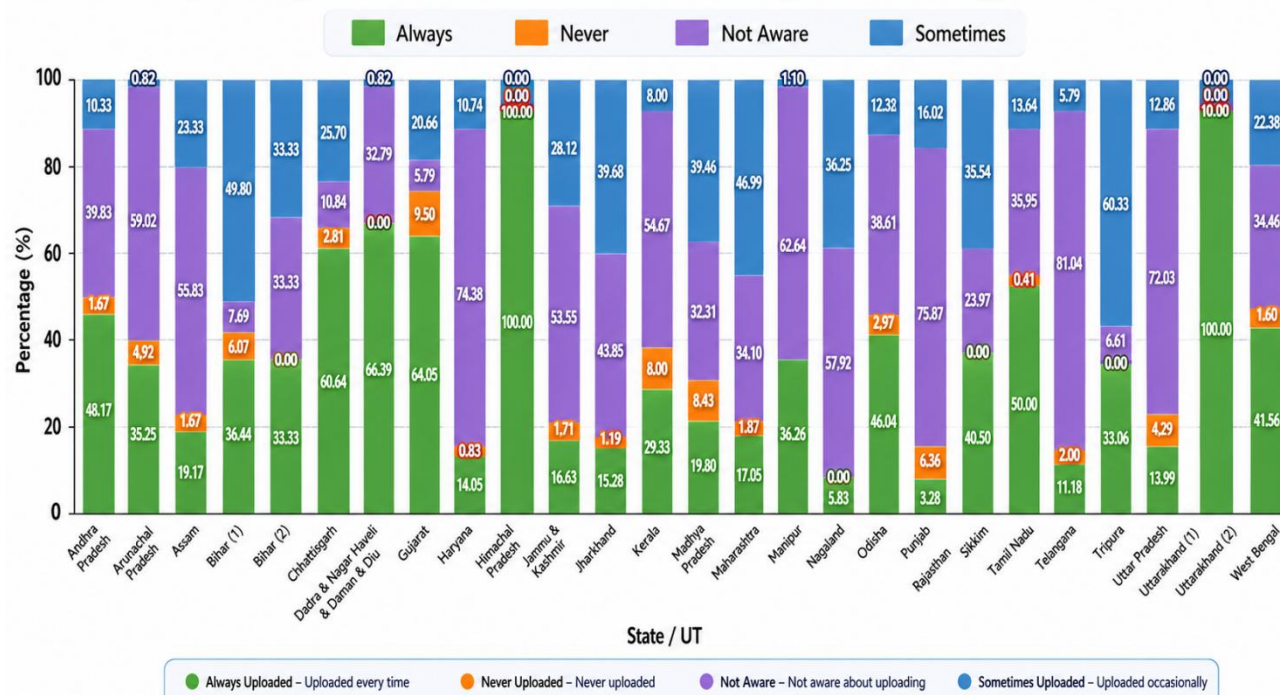
Table 4.16 Uploading of Gram Sabha Minutes to NIRNAY App

Are minutes uploaded to NIRNAY App?	Percentage (%)
Always Uploaded	28.7
Sometimes Uploaded	24.3
Never Uploaded	3.4
Not Aware	43.6

A substantial proportion of respondents reported that they were not aware whether Gram Sabha proceedings were uploaded to the NIRNAY App. Among those who were aware, some reported regular uploading of proceedings, while others indicated that uploading occurred only occasionally.



Uploading of Gram Sabha Minutes to Panchayat NIRNAY App – State-wise (%)



The findings suggest that awareness regarding digital documentation and reporting systems remains limited among a significant section of respondents. This may partly be because uploading of proceedings is primarily an administrative function undertaken by Panchayat functionaries and may not be directly visible to all Gram Sabha participants. Greater awareness and consistent utilization of platforms such as NIRNAY can strengthen transparency, accessibility and monitoring of Gram Sabha proceedings.

4.11 Gram Sabha Infrastructure and Digital Readiness Across States

The availability of adequate physical and digital infrastructure is an important prerequisite for the effective conduct of Gram Sabha meetings and meaningful citizen participation. Appropriate meeting venues, seating arrangements, sanitation facilities, communication systems and digital resources contribute significantly towards creating an enabling environment for deliberation, transparency and inclusive decision-making. To assess the preparedness of Gram Panchayats for conducting Gram Sabha meetings, an infrastructure assessment was undertaken across 400 GPs in the survey covering 26 States and Union Territories. The assessment examined both physical and digital infrastructure components supporting Gram Sabha functioning and citizen engagement.

Physical Infrastructure Availability

The assessment indicates considerable variation in the availability of physical infrastructure across the surveyed states. Among all physical infrastructure indicators, accessibility of the Gram Sabha venue emerged as the strongest component, with 77.5 percent of locations reporting that meeting venues were situated at central and easily accessible locations. Drinking water facilities were also widely available, being reported in 80.4 percent of surveyed locations. These findings suggest that most



Gram Panchayats provide basic amenities necessary for conducting public meetings and facilitating citizen participation.

Gram Sabha halls were available in 69.3 percent of surveyed locations, indicating that a majority of Gram Panchayats possess designated venues for conducting meetings. Hall availability was particularly high in Kerala, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, whereas comparatively lower availability was observed in Gujarat, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Tripura and Tamil Nadu. While the availability of meeting venues is encouraging, the adequacy of these facilities remains an important concern.

Table 4.17 Physical Infrastructure Availability Across States

Infrastructure Indicator	National Availability (%)	Top Performing States	States Requiring Strengthening
Gram Sabha Hall Available	69.3	Kerala, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra	Gujarat, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Tripura, Tamil Nadu
Hall Capacity Adequate	44.6	Kerala, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh	Assam, Gujarat, Odisha, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh
Sufficient Space	54.5	Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, Tripura, Chhattisgarh	Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh
Accessible/Central Location	77.5	Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Bihar	Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Punjab, Nagaland, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu
Seating Arrangements Adequate	58.3	Kerala, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh	Arunachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Assam, Punjab
Drinking Water Available	80.4	Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Manipur, Nagaland	Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Haryana
Separate Toilets Available	61.4	Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, Tripura	Jammu & Kashmir, Haryana, Punjab, Arunachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh
Sound System Available for Gram Sabha Meetings	49.1	Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Sikkim	Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Odisha, Punjab, Uttarakhand

Only 44.6 percent of locations reported that available halls possessed adequate capacity to comfortably accommodate participants. Similarly, sufficient meeting space was reported in 54.5 percent of locations, while adequate seating arrangements were available in 58.3 percent of locations. These findings indicate that although meeting venues may exist, they may not always be capable of supporting larger gatherings or ensuring participant comfort. States such as Kerala, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh performed particularly well with respect to hall



capacity and space availability, whereas weaker performance was observed in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir and Madhya Pradesh.

The availability of separate toilets was reported in 61.4 percent of surveyed locations. Strong availability was observed in Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand and Tripura, while relatively weaker availability was reported in Jammu & Kashmir, Haryana, Punjab, Arunachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Adequate sanitation facilities remain an important component of a conducive meeting environment and contribute to improving participant convenience during Gram Sabha proceedings.

Among all physical infrastructure indicators, sound systems emerged as one of the weaker components, being available in only 49.1 percent of surveyed locations. States such as Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Sikkim reported comparatively stronger availability, whereas Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Odisha, Punjab and Uttarakhand reported limited access to sound systems. Limited availability of public address systems may affect communication effectiveness, particularly during larger Gram Sabha meetings where participation levels are high.

Overall, the findings suggest that while basic infrastructure is available in many Gram Panchayats, important gaps remain in relation to hall capacity, seating arrangements, sanitation facilities and communication infrastructure. States such as Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Sikkim and Tamil Nadu demonstrated comparatively stronger infrastructure readiness across multiple indicators, while Arunachal Pradesh, Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh require focused attention in several areas.

Digital Infrastructure Availability

Digital infrastructure is increasingly becoming an integral component of local governance systems. It facilitates information dissemination, communication, record management, transparency and citizen engagement. The assessment reveals considerable variation across digital infrastructure indicators, reflecting differing levels of digital readiness among Gram Panchayats.

Among the digital infrastructure indicators assessed, social media and WhatsApp usage emerged as the most widely available component, being reported in 79.2 percent of surveyed locations. The widespread use of digital communication platforms indicates growing adoption of technology-enabled citizen outreach mechanisms at the Gram Panchayat level. States such as Assam, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and Tripura demonstrated particularly strong utilization of social media-based communication systems.

Internet connectivity was reported as satisfactory in 64.0 percent of surveyed locations, indicating that a majority of Gram Panchayats possess basic connectivity required for accessing online governance platforms and digital services. Strong connectivity levels were observed in Tripura, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Odisha, Kerala and Sikkim, while comparatively weaker connectivity was reported in Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana.



Table 4.18 Digital Infrastructure Availability Across States

Infrastructure Indicator	National Availability (%)	Top Performing States	States Requiring Strengthening
Internet Connectivity Satisfactory	64.0	Tripura, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Odisha, Kerala, Sikkim	Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana
Video Conferencing Facility	33.9	Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Odisha, Sikkim, Tripura	Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Nagaland
Digitized Records Available	34.6	Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh	Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, Nagaland, Rajasthan
Social Media/WhatsApp Usage	79.2	Assam, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura	Manipur, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh
Audio-Visual Presentation Facility	29.2	Odisha, Sikkim, Kerala, Tripura, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu	Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, Gujarat, Nagaland

The availability of digitized records was reported in only 34.6 percent of surveyed locations, indicating that many Gram Panchayats continue to rely on conventional record management systems. Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh emerged as stronger performers, whereas Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, Nagaland and Rajasthan reported comparatively lower availability.

Video conferencing facilities were available in 33.9 percent of surveyed locations, indicating limited adoption of advanced digital communication infrastructure. Strong availability was reported in Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Odisha, Sikkim and Tripura, while Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand and Nagaland reported limited access.

Similarly, audio-visual presentation facilities were available in only 29.2 percent of surveyed locations. Odisha, Sikkim, Kerala, Tripura and Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu performed relatively well, whereas Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, Gujarat and Nagaland reported comparatively lower availability.

Overall, the findings suggest that digital communication tools such as social media and internet connectivity have achieved wider penetration than advanced digital governance infrastructure. Significant gaps remain in relation to digitized records, video conferencing facilities and audio-visual infrastructure, highlighting the need for further strengthening of digital governance systems at the Gram Panchayat level.



State-wise Infrastructure Availability

The state-wise analysis highlights substantial variation in infrastructure availability across the surveyed States and Union Territories. The interpretation of these findings should consider local governance practices and the use of existing community infrastructure for conducting Gram Sabha meetings and related governance activities.

**Table 4.19 State-wise Physical and Digital Infrastructure Availability
(based on GPs in the study)**

State	Gram Sabha Hall Available	Hall Capacity Adequate	Sufficient Space	Accessible/Central Location	Seating Arrangements Adequate	Drinking Water Available	Separate Toilets Available	Sound System Available for Gram Sabha Meetings	Internet Connectivity Satisfactory	Video Conferencing Facility	Digitized Records Available	Social Media/WhatsApp Usage	Audio-Visual Presentation Facility
Andhra Pradesh	48.4	38.7	67.7	90.3	77.4	90.3	67.7	96.8	96.8	38.7	90.3	96.8	25.8
Arunachal Pradesh	16.7	16.7	0	16.7	0	0	16.7	0	55.2	0	0	95	0
Assam	90.2	0	0	83.3	16.7	83.3	83.3	33.3	89	0	0	100	0
Bihar	78.6	50	57.1	92.9	64.3	100	85.7	35.7	42.9	28.6	42.9	92.9	35.7
Chhattisgarh	83.3	41.7	83.3	100	83.3	100	100	58.3	95	92	100	100	8.3
DadraNagar Haveli Daman And Diu	83.3	33.3	50	66.7	100	100	50	83.3	90	83.3	0	100	83.3
Gujarat	8.3	0	0	41.7	91.7	100	50	25	95	25	75	100	0
Haryana	50	16.7	33.3	83.3	16.7	50	16.7	100	33.3	33.3	16.7	100	16.7
Himachal Pradesh	85	78	68	82	85	90	82.3	50	80	33.3	66.7	100	16.7
Jammu And Kashmir	76.9	46.2	23.1	69.2	30.8	23.1	7.7	0	15.4	0	0	100	0
Jharkhand	88	88	88	76	80	100	92	64	76	0	60	96	0
Kerala	95	95	100	100	100	100	100	92	94	90	100	100	92
Madhya Pradesh	82.9	36.6	29.3	75.6	12.2	80.5	22	14.6	24.4	19.5	17.1	36.6	2.4
Maharashtra	91.7	70.8	66.7	91.7	66.7	95.8	83.3	62.5	58.3	29.2	25	58.3	41.7
Manipur	80.4	55	55	68.1	58	100	78	79	0	0	0	0	0
Nagaland	85.4	40	40	66.5	40	100	40	20	80	0	0	100	0
Odisha	90.1	0	75	95	45	100	80	0	95	90	30	75	100
Punjab	44	28	36	48	20	24	16	0	28	0	4	16	0
Rajasthan	95	78.6	82.1	90.2	85.7	57.1	42.9	57.1	42.9	28.6	0	28.6	0
Sikkim	83.3	73.3	81.7	78.1	74	100	81	80.4	90	90	16.7	100	100
Tamil Nadu	41.7	41.7	90.6	92.6	91.7	100	92	91.7	90	58.3	50	100	66.7
Telangana	68	52	60	80	60	96	76	40	44	4	32	80	12
Tripura	33.3	0	83.3	79.1	83.3	100	86	78	98	83.3	50	100	83.3
Uttar Pradesh	91.7	79.2	54.2	91.7	50	75	45.8	41.7	70.8	41.7	37.5	33.3	33.3
Uttarakhand	92.3	76.9	30.8	82.3	23.1	38.5	30.8	7.7	23.1	0	23.1	92.3	23.1
West Bengal	19.4	22.6	61.3	74.2	61.3	87.1	71	64.5	58.1	12.9	61.3	58.1	19.4



The interpretation of state-level findings requires consideration of local governance practices and institutional arrangements. In Kerala, Gram Sabha meetings are generally conducted as Ward Sabhas and frequently utilize existing public infrastructure such as schools, anganwadi centres, community halls and other community facilities. Consequently, the high infrastructure availability observed in Kerala may reflect effective utilization of available community infrastructure rather than the existence of dedicated Gram Sabha infrastructure. Similar contextual factors may influence infrastructure availability patterns in other States and should be considered while interpreting interstate comparisons.

The state-wise analysis reveals considerable variation in both physical and digital infrastructure availability. Kerala emerged as the strongest overall performer, reporting consistently high availability across most physical and digital infrastructure indicators. Chhattisgarh also demonstrated strong performance, particularly in relation to accessibility, drinking water, sanitation facilities, internet connectivity, video conferencing facilities, digitized records and social media usage. Sikkim and Tamil Nadu similarly reported strong infrastructure availability across multiple dimensions.

Several States demonstrated strengths in specific infrastructure components while exhibiting weaknesses in others. Andhra Pradesh reported very high levels of internet connectivity, digitized records, social media usage and sound system availability, while Odisha demonstrated strong performance in relation to internet connectivity, video conferencing and audio-visual facilities. Jharkhand performed particularly well in terms of hall capacity, space availability and sanitation facilities. Conversely, comparatively weaker infrastructure availability across multiple indicators was observed in Arunachal Pradesh, Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir and Madhya Pradesh. Common challenges included inadequate meeting infrastructure, limited digital facilities and weaker connectivity.

The findings underscore the importance of strengthening both physical and digital infrastructure to support effective local governance. While several States have made notable progress, substantial opportunities remain for improving infrastructure quality, digital readiness and technology-enabled governance systems in order to enhance participation, transparency and the overall effectiveness of Gram Sabha meetings.

Infrastructure Availability in PESA Areas

The assessment of infrastructure availability in PESA areas provides important insights into the preparedness of Gram Sabhas operating within Scheduled Areas. Given the enhanced responsibilities assigned to Gram Sabhas under the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), the availability of adequate infrastructure assumes particular significance for facilitating participatory decision-making, natural resource governance and community engagement.

The findings indicate that PESA areas generally possess reasonably strong physical infrastructure for conducting Gram Sabha meetings. Gram Sabha halls were available in 74.8 percent of PESA locations, while adequate hall capacity and sufficient meeting space were reported in 57.5 percent and 62.0 percent of locations respectively. Accessibility of meeting venues emerged as a major strength, with 86.7 percent of



locations reporting that Gram Sabha venues were situated at central and easily accessible locations. Drinking water facilities and separate toilets were available in 91.0 percent and 69.2 percent of locations respectively, indicating relatively strong availability of basic amenities.

Table 4.20 Infrastructure Availability in PESA Areas

Infrastructure Indicator	Availability (%) in PESA GPs
Gram Sabha Hall Available	74.8
Hall Capacity Adequate	57.5
Sufficient Space	62.0
Accessible/Central Location	86.7
Seating Arrangements Adequate	70.6
Drinking Water Available	91.0
Separate Toilets Available	69.2
Sound System Available for Gram Sabha Meetings	59.4
Internet Connectivity Satisfactory	74.9
Video Conferencing Facility	45.7
Digitized Records Available	55.1
Social Media/WhatsApp Usage	77.1
Audio-Visual Presentation Facility	26.9

The assessment reveals encouraging levels of digital infrastructure availability in PESA areas. Social media and WhatsApp usage emerged as the most widely available digital component, being reported in 77.1 percent of locations. Internet connectivity was available in 74.9 percent of locations, while more than half of the surveyed locations reported availability of digitized records (55.1 percent). Video conferencing facilities were available in 45.7 percent of locations, indicating moderate adoption of digital governance infrastructure.

State-level patterns reveal considerable variation across PESA states. Chhattisgarh emerged as one of the strongest performers across both physical and digital infrastructure indicators, while Jharkhand demonstrated strong meeting infrastructure and sanitation facilities. Andhra Pradesh reported particularly high levels of internet connectivity, digitized records and social media usage, while Odisha performed strongly in accessibility, connectivity and audio-visual infrastructure. In contrast, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat reported relatively weaker availability across several infrastructure dimensions.

The Survey suggest that PESA areas possess relatively strong infrastructure foundations for conducting Gram Sabha meetings, particularly with respect to accessibility, basic amenities and digital connectivity. However, gaps remain in relation to audio-visual facilities and advanced technology-enabled governance systems. Strengthening these areas can further enhance the effectiveness of Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas and support participatory self-governance under PESA.



4.12 Financial and Logistical Arrangements for Gram Sabha Meetings

The study examined expenditure patterns, funding arrangements and major expenditure heads associated with conduct of Gram Sabha meetings across surveyed regions. The findings indicate substantial inter-state variation in expenditure levels depending upon administrative practices, scale of meetings, mobilisation activities, geographical conditions, infrastructure arrangements and institutional support systems.

Table 4.21 Expenditure per Gram Sabha Meeting

Expenditure Category	Count	Percentage (%)
₹2,501 – ₹5,000	1,815	23.3
₹1,001 – ₹2,500	1,734	22.3
Less than ₹1,000	1,708	21.9
₹5,001 – ₹10,000	1,391	17.9
₹10,001 – ₹25,000	723	9.3
₹25,001 and Above	176	2.3

At the national level, expenditure for Gram Sabha meetings largely remained concentrated within lower and moderate expenditure categories. The expenditure range of ₹2,501–₹5,000 emerged as the most frequently reported expenditure category, followed closely by ₹1,001–₹2,500 and expenditure below ₹1,000. Comparatively fewer respondents reported expenditure levels above ₹10,000, indicating that a majority of Gram Sabha meetings continue to be conducted through relatively modest financial arrangements.

The survey results indicate that expenditure patterns varied significantly across States and regions. States such as Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Tripura reported comparatively higher concentration within moderate expenditure categories, while several States such as Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh reflected comparatively lower expenditure ranges. The variations appear to be influenced by factors such as scale of meetings, mobilisation intensity, geographical spread, infrastructure arrangements, accessibility conditions and local logistical requirements.

The findings further indicate that expenditure alone does not necessarily determine participation quality or effectiveness of Gram Sabha meetings. Several States reporting comparatively moderate expenditure ranges also demonstrated relatively stronger participation outcomes where mobilisation systems, institutional responsiveness and citizen engagement practices were comparatively stronger.



Estimated Average Expenditure for Conduct of Gram Sabha Meetings

Based on weighted expenditure analysis using expenditure category ceilings reported during the survey, the approximate expenditure requirement for effective conduct of a Gram Sabha meeting may broadly be estimated at around **₹7,500** per meeting under normal operational conditions, subject to local geographical, logistical and participation-related variations.

The findings suggest that a flexible expenditure benchmark within this range may support more effective mobilisation, logistical arrangements, communication activities and participation facilitation during Gram Sabha meetings, particularly in geographically remote, hilly and difficult-access regions.

State-wise Expenditure Range for Conduct of Gram Sabha Meetings

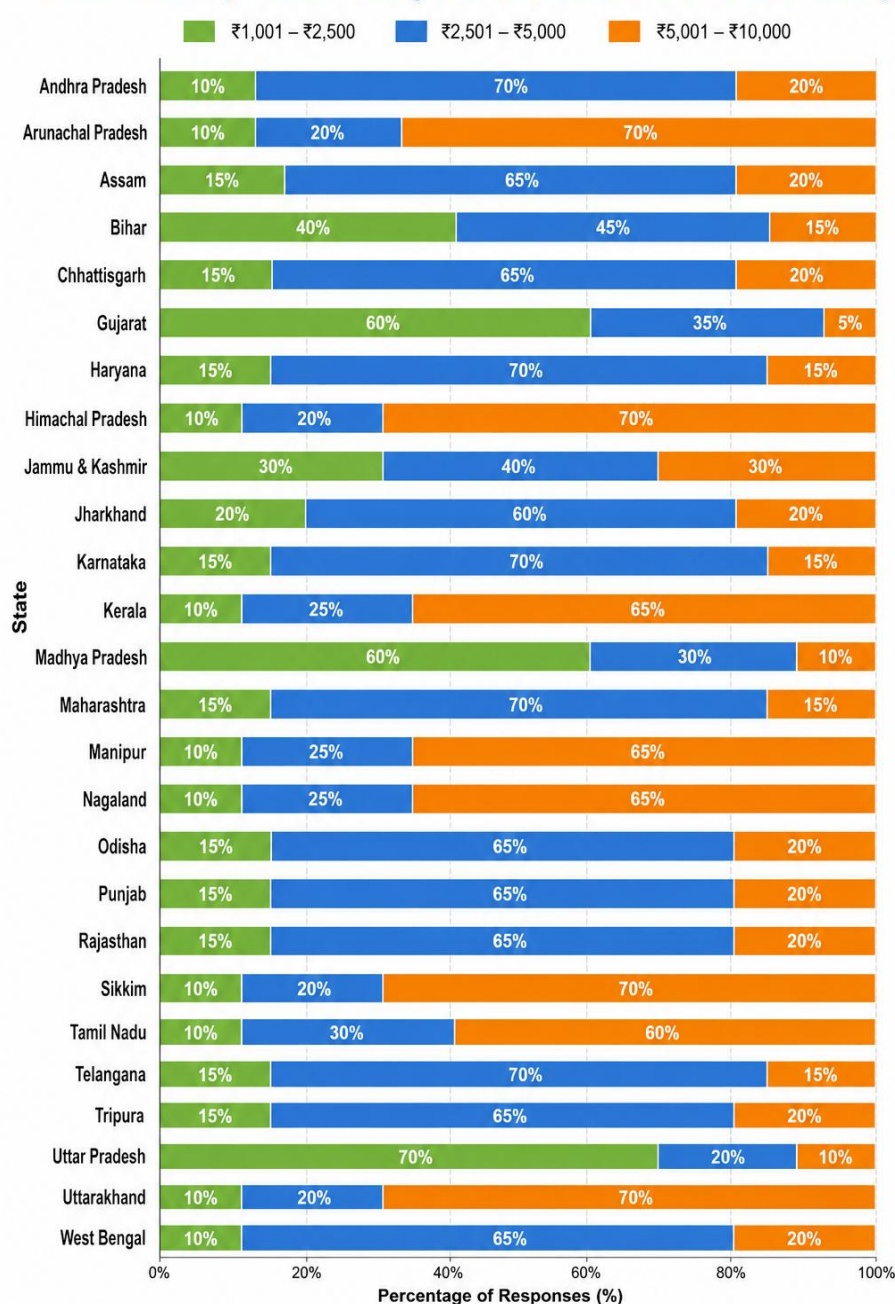


Table 4.22 Major Sources of Funds for Conducting Gram Sabha Meetings

Major Fund Source	Percentage (%)
GP Funds	43.5
Own Source Revenue (OSR)	10.2
GP Funds + OSR	4.1
Scheme Funds	3.7
GP Funds + Scheme Funds	3.5
GP Funds + SFC + CFC	2.8
SFC	2.7
Other Mixed Sources / CSR / Donations	13.2
Not Aware / No Information	16.3

The findings indicate that Gram Panchayat funds remain the primary financial source for conducting Gram Sabha meetings across surveyed regions. Own Source Revenue (OSR), Scheme Funds, State Finance Commission (SFC) and Central Finance Commission (CFC) grants were also reported as supplementary funding mechanisms in several States. In a smaller proportion of cases, respondents reported dependence upon CSR support, donations and personal contributions from Panchayat representatives or officials for meeting Gram Sabha-related expenditure requirements.

It can further be inferred that absence of dedicated earmarked funds for Gram Sabha conduct continues to remain a concern in several regions. A number of respondents also indicated lack of awareness regarding the exact funding source used for conducting Gram Sabha meetings.

Table 4.23 Major Expenditure Heads for Conducting Gram Sabha Meetings

Major Expenditure Head	Percentage (%)
Refreshments (food, water, tea)	17.2
Logistics (tent, chairs, mats, stage arrangements)	9.1
Logistics + Refreshments	10.4
Communication Activities (announcements, posters, miking, printing)	1.3
Stationery and Documentation	3.5
Cleaning and Sanitation Arrangements	1.5
Electricity / Sound System	0.9
Transport Arrangements	0.8
Combined Multi-purpose Expenditure Categories	52.2
Others/Miscellaneous	3.1

Refreshments and logistical arrangements constitute the largest expenditure components associated with conduct of Gram Sabha meetings across surveyed regions. Expenditure relating to tents, seating arrangements, mats, refreshments and basic meeting facilities emerged as the most commonly reported expenditure heads nationally. Communication-related expenditure, including public announcements, printing and mobilisation activities, was also reported across several States.



**Table 4.24 Indicative State-wise Financial Pattern
for Conduct of Gram Sabha Meetings**

State	Dominant Funding Source	Most Common Expenditure Range	Major Expenditure Components
Andhra Pradesh	GP Funds	₹2,501 – ₹5,000	Logistics, Refreshments, Communication
Arunachal Pradesh	GP Funds	₹5,001 – ₹10,000	Logistics, Transport, Communication
Assam	GP Funds / Scheme Funds	₹2,501 – ₹5,000	Refreshments, Communication
Bihar	GP Funds	₹1,001 – ₹5,000	Logistics, Public Announcements
Chhattisgarh	GP Funds / OSR	₹2,501 – ₹5,000	Logistics, Communication, Refreshments
Gujarat	GP Funds / SFC	₹1,001 – ₹2,500	Logistics, Documentation
Haryana	GP Funds / SFC	₹2,501 – ₹5,000	Logistics, Sound System
Himachal Pradesh	GP Funds	₹5,001 – ₹10,000	Transport, Logistics
Jammu & Kashmir	GP Funds / CFC	₹1,001 – ₹5,000	Logistics, Transport
Jharkhand	GP Funds	₹2,501 – ₹5,000	Communication, Logistics
Kerala	GP Funds / Plan Funds	₹5,001 – ₹10,000	Documentation, Communication
Madhya Pradesh	GP Funds	₹1,001 – ₹2,500	Logistics, Refreshments
Maharashtra	GP Funds / OSR	₹2,501 – ₹5,000	Logistics, Documentation
Manipur	GP Funds	₹5,001 – ₹10,000	Logistics, Transport
Nagaland	GP Funds	₹5,001 – ₹10,000	Communication, Transport
Odisha	GP Funds / Scheme Funds	₹2,501 – ₹5,000	Logistics, Refreshments
Punjab	GP Funds / SFC	₹2,501 – ₹5,000	Sound System, Logistics
Rajasthan	GP Funds	₹2,501 – ₹5,000	Public Announcements, Logistics
Sikkim	GP Funds	₹5,001 – ₹10,000	Logistics, Transport
Tamil Nadu	GP Funds / OSR	₹5,001 – ₹10,000	Communication, Documentation, Sound System
Telangana	GP Funds	₹2,501 – ₹5,000	Logistics, Refreshments
Tripura	GP Funds / Scheme Funds	₹2,501 – ₹5,000	Communication, Logistics
Uttar Pradesh	GP Funds	₹1,001 – ₹2,500	Logistics, Refreshments
Uttarakhand	GP Funds / CFC	₹5,001 – ₹10,000	Transport, Logistics
West Bengal	GP Funds / OSR	₹2,501 – ₹5,000	Communication, Logistics, Documentation



The analysis further suggests that expenditure patterns vary depending upon local participation levels, accessibility conditions, meeting scale and institutional arrangements. In geographically remote or difficult areas, additional expenditure relating to transport, mobilisation and logistical arrangements was reported comparatively more frequently. The findings overall indicate that Gram Sabha meetings across most regions are generally conducted through modest financial allocations focused primarily on basic meeting facilitation and community mobilisation requirements.

4.13 Key Emerging Observations

- Procedural awareness relating to quorum requirements and Gram Sabha processes remained uneven across regions.
- A substantial proportion of respondents reported limited awareness regarding digital governance platforms and uploading of Gram Sabha proceedings.
- Hall capacity, seating arrangements and communication facilities were found to be inadequate in a considerable number of Gram Panchayats despite the availability of meeting venues.
- Advanced digital infrastructure such as digitized records, video conferencing facilities and audio-visual systems remained limited across many surveyed locations.
- Significant interstate variations were observed in awareness levels, infrastructure availability, digital readiness and institutional participation.
- While grievance reporting mechanisms were widely available, variations persisted in follow-up action and grievance resolution practices across regions.
- PESA areas demonstrated relatively stronger basic infrastructure availability; however, gaps remained in advanced digital governance and communication infrastructure.





CHAPTER 5

UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN GRAM SABHA

5.1 Introduction

Gram Sabha continues to remain one of the most important institutions of grassroots democracy in rural India. Across surveyed States and Union Territories, citizens demonstrated substantial awareness regarding Gram Sabha meetings and acknowledged their importance in local governance, planning, beneficiary identification and community-level decision-making.

At the same time, awareness alone does not automatically translate into active and sustained participation. Participation in Gram Sabha meetings is shaped by a combination of livelihood realities, governance conditions, communication systems, social participation environments, institutional responsiveness and public confidence in local democratic processes.

Responses collected across regions demonstrate that barriers affecting participation are not isolated administrative issues. They are closely connected with occupational vulnerability, communication gaps, declining public relevance of meetings, unequal participation environments, weak grievance responsiveness and varying levels of trust in governance institutions.

The survey also highlights significant inter-state variations in participation patterns depending upon local governance practices, social dynamics, communication systems and socio-economic conditions prevailing across regions.

This chapter examines the major barriers affecting participation in Gram Sabha meetings and analyses how livelihood conditions, communication systems, participation environments, governance credibility and institutional responsiveness collectively shape citizen engagement across rural India.

5.2 Participation Realities in the National Context

Participation in Gram Sabha meetings across India is neither uniform nor equally meaningful across regions and social groups. While a substantial proportion of respondents reported awareness regarding Gram Sabha meetings and acknowledged their importance in local governance, the depth, consistency and quality of participation varied considerably across surveyed areas.

Across several regions, respondents associated participation not merely with attendance but with the perceived usefulness of meetings, seriousness of discussions, institutional responsiveness and confidence that public concerns would be addressed meaningfully.



In many Gram Panchayats, participation was reported to be comparatively stronger among elected representatives, politically active individuals, Self-Help Group members and citizens directly connected with welfare or development-related issues. At the same time, women, migrant workers, daily wage labourers, elderly citizens and socially vulnerable communities were repeatedly identified as groups facing comparatively greater participation constraints.

The survey also demonstrates that participation in Gram Sabha meetings is increasingly shaped by communication systems and mobilisation practices adopted at the local level. Household-level communication, community mobilisation and interpersonal outreach methods were repeatedly described as more effective than formal announcements alone.

Participation therefore reflects a broader interaction between governance systems, communication mechanisms, public trust, social inclusion and local socio-economic realities rather than attendance numbers alone.

The responses collected across States demonstrate that participation barriers cannot be understood through a single administrative lens. In several regions, respondents associated low participation with livelihood insecurity and occupational pressures, while in others the discussion centered around declining public trust, weak grievance responsiveness, procedural functioning and lack of visible governance outcomes.

The survey further demonstrates that participation barriers often overlap and reinforce one another. Weak communication systems reduce attendance, unresolved grievances weaken public trust, and procedural meetings without visible outcomes gradually reduce long-term public engagement with Gram Sabha processes.

Table 5.1 National Pattern of Participation Barriers in Gram Sabha Meetings

Major Barrier Category	Percentage
Livelihood & Time Constraints	55.50%
Awareness & Communication Issues	16.22%
Interest & Relevance Issues	9.93%
Participation & Inclusiveness Barriers	5.54%
Service Delivery Issues	4.92%
Governance & Trust Issues	3.97%
Logistics & Access Issues	2.92%

Livelihood-related pressures emerged as the single largest category affecting participation across surveyed regions. Communication gaps, declining public interest, weak participation environments, governance trust deficit and institutional responsiveness issues also emerged as major factors influencing citizen engagement.

The survey clearly demonstrates that barriers affecting participation are multidimensional and interconnected in nature.



5.3 Detailed Problem Statements Emerging from Survey Responses

The survey further examined detailed problem statements emerging from coded responses, field observations and qualitative inputs collected across surveyed regions. The responses provide important insight into the structural, behavioural and governance-related dimensions affecting participation in Gram Sabha meetings.

Table 5.2 Detailed Problem Statements Emerging from Responses

Major Problem Area	Detailed Problem Identified from Responses	Indicative Percentage Range
Livelihood & Daily Work Pressure	Respondents repeatedly stated that people are busy with daily wage labour, agricultural work, migration or household responsibilities, making it difficult to attend Gram Sabha meetings.	40-55%
Agricultural Activities & Seasonal Work	Agricultural activities and seasonal farming frequently clash with Gram Sabha schedules, particularly during sowing and harvesting periods.	30-40%
Poor Awareness & Communication	Information often does not reach all households and many villagers lack clarity regarding the purpose and importance of Gram Sabha meetings.	25-35%
Lack of Interest / Public Apathy	Many villagers reportedly do not consider Gram Sabha meetings important unless direct personal benefit is involved.	20-30%
Lack of Visible Outcomes	Previous meetings were repeatedly described as producing limited visible outcomes, reducing public confidence in participation.	18-28%
Meetings Seen as Formalities	Gram Sabha meetings were often described as procedural formalities without meaningful discussion or practical impact.	15-24%
Lack of Trust in Decision-Making	Villagers expressed concerns that public opinions and suggestions do not significantly influence final decisions.	14-22%
Lack of Transparency	Concerns relating to corruption, favouritism, political influence and non-transparent beneficiary selection were repeatedly highlighted.	12-20%
Poor Grievance Redressal	Complaints raised during meetings frequently remain unresolved for long periods.	10-18%
Delay in Implementation	Delays in implementation of schemes, works and decisions discussed during Gram Sabha meetings were repeatedly reported.	10-17%
Women Not Encouraged	Women were reported to face social barriers, household responsibilities and hesitation in speaking publicly during discussions.	8-15%
Dominance by Few Individuals	Discussions were often described as dominated by influential persons or politically powerful individuals.	8-14%
Social Barriers & Exclusion	Social exclusion based on caste, gender and unequal participation opportunities was frequently reported.	6-12%



Major Problem Area	Detailed Problem Identified from Responses	Indicative Percentage Range
Inconvenient Meeting Timing	Meeting timings were often considered unsuitable for labourers, workers and farmers.	6–12%
Information Not Reaching Households	Weak communication systems and ineffective notice dissemination were repeatedly mentioned.	5–10%
Lack of Presence of Officials	Absence of departmental officials during meetings was repeatedly linked with declining trust and seriousness of discussions.	5–10%
Venue Too Far / Transport Issues	Distance, lack of transport and accessibility problems were frequently mentioned, particularly in remote rural areas.	4–9%
No Seating / Poor Infrastructure	Respondents highlighted inadequate seating arrangements and weak meeting infrastructure.	4–8%
Political Interference	Political influence in discussions, decisions and beneficiary selection emerged as a recurring concern.	3–7%
Corruption Concerns	Citizens repeatedly expressed concerns regarding corruption and unfair implementation practices.	3–6%

The responses demonstrate that barriers affecting participation are not isolated administrative issues but are closely connected with livelihood conditions, governance credibility, institutional responsiveness, social participation environments and public confidence in local democratic systems.

Several respondents also emphasized that participation quality depends not only upon physical attendance but also upon whether citizens feel respected, heard and meaningfully involved in discussions.

Women, economically vulnerable households, migrant workers, elderly citizens and socially marginalized communities were repeatedly identified as groups facing comparatively greater participation barriers across surveyed regions.

5.4 Livelihood Pressures and Participation Constraints

Livelihood-related barriers emerged as the most significant category of participation constraints across surveyed regions.

Participation in Gram Sabha meetings is strongly shaped by occupational realities, income insecurity and livelihood responsibilities affecting rural households. A large proportion of respondents reported that attendance often becomes difficult due to daily wage labour, agricultural activities, migration-related factors and unsuitable meeting timings.

For many households, participation in Gram Sabha meetings is frequently associated with loss of wages, interruption of work schedules and livelihood insecurity.



In several regions, respondents emphasized that participation becomes particularly difficult during agricultural seasons, market days and periods of intensive labour demand. Seasonal migration patterns also affect continuity of participation, particularly among economically vulnerable and migrant households.

The responses indicate that livelihood-related barriers do not necessarily reflect lack of democratic interest but rather practical economic constraints affecting the ability of citizens to participate regularly in Gram Sabha meetings.

Table 5.3 Livelihood and Occupational Constraints Affecting Participation

Constraint	Percentage
Busy with Work / Daily Wage Labour	41.74%
Agricultural Activities	30.26%
Migration for Work	15.06%
Timing Not Suitable	12.26%

Daily wage labour across several States emphasized that attending meetings during working hours directly affects household income. Agricultural workers repeatedly highlighted that meetings are often conducted during farming periods, harvesting seasons or work-intensive agricultural cycles.

Migration for work also emerged as an important participation barrier in regions where seasonal migration significantly affects continuity of participation.

The survey therefore demonstrates that participation in Gram Sabha meetings is deeply connected with occupational vulnerability and local economic realities.

5.5 Weak Institutional Responsiveness and Declining Public Trust

Weak institutional responsiveness emerged as one of the most important governance-related barriers affecting sustained participation in Gram Sabha meetings.

Across several surveyed regions, respondents repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction regarding delays in implementation of decisions, unresolved grievances, weak follow-up mechanisms and lack of visible action after Gram Sabha discussions.

In many Gram Panchayats, citizens indicated that issues discussed repeatedly during meetings often remain unresolved for long periods, gradually reducing public confidence in the effectiveness of Gram Sabha proceedings.

Several respondents stated that participation tends to decline when Gram Sabha meetings are viewed as procedural exercises rather than effective platforms for local problem-solving and public accountability.

Repeated discussions without visible implementation were frequently associated with declining trust in local governance systems. Concerns relating to beneficiary selection, favoritism, delayed service delivery and weak responsiveness of officials also emerged as important factors discouraging participation in several regions.



Table 5.4 Governance and Institutional Constraints Affecting Participation

Governance Constraint	Major Responses Included	Percentage
Lack of Visible Outcomes	No visible action after meetings, repeated unresolved discussions, weak implementation follow-up	8.3%
Poor Grievance Redressal	Complaints unresolved, delayed response, weak grievance handling	4.9%
Governance & Transparency Issues	Corruption concerns, favouritism, lack of transparency, political influence	3.9%
Weak Service Delivery & Absence of Officials	Lack of departmental participation, weak institutional responsiveness	2.6%

The responses further indicate that citizens are more likely to participate consistently when Gram Sabha meetings are linked with visible action, responsive grievance systems, transparent decision-making and meaningful follow-up of issues raised during discussions.

The survey therefore highlights that public trust and institutional responsiveness remain central factors influencing the continuity and quality of participation in Gram Sabha meetings.

5.6 Public Apathy, Procedural Participation and Declining Relevance

Public apathy and declining participation interest emerged as important behavioural dimensions affecting Gram Sabha participation across surveyed regions.

Table 5.5 Participation Apathy and Declining Public Relevance

Participation Concern	Major Responses Included	Indicative Percentage Range
Lack of Interest in Gram Sabha Meetings	Low public interest, weak community engagement, attendance only when necessary	20–30%
Meetings Seen as Formalities	Procedural meetings without meaningful discussions or outcomes	15–24%
Lack of Relevance of Discussions	Discussions not linked with practical local issues or visible action	15–22%
Public Attends Mainly for Personal Benefit	Participation primarily linked with welfare or beneficiary-related matters	5–10%

Several respondents indicated that villagers often participate in Gram Sabha meetings mainly when discussions relate to welfare benefits, beneficiary selection or issues involving direct personal interest. In many regions, Gram Sabha meetings were also described as routine procedural exercises with limited visible impact on local governance outcomes.



The responses suggest that participation tends to decline when meetings are viewed as formal administrative processes rather than meaningful democratic platforms influencing local development decisions. At the same time, respondents emphasized that participation improves when Gram Sabha meetings are associated with visible service delivery, transparent beneficiary selection, grievance resolution and active departmental engagement.

The responses also indicate that sustained participation in Gram Sabha meetings depends significantly upon citizens' confidence that their concerns are heard and acted upon within local governance processes. In several regions, respondents associated regular participation with transparency in decision-making, responsiveness of Panchayat institutions and visibility of follow-up action on issues discussed during Gram Sabha meetings.

The survey further highlights that public trust in Gram Sabha processes remains closely linked with institutional responsiveness, accountability, fairness and visible governance outcomes.

5.7 Social Participation Barriers and Unequal Participation Environment

The survey identified several participation environment-related barriers affecting inclusive engagement during Gram Sabha meetings.

Participation quality across many regions was found to depend significantly upon whether citizens felt comfortable, respected and confident while participating in discussions. In several Gram Panchayats, respondents highlighted that unequal participation environments continue to affect meaningful democratic engagement during meetings.

Table 5.6 Social and Participation Environment Barriers

Participation Barrier	Major Responses Included	Percentage
Women Not Encouraged to Participate	Household responsibilities, social hesitation, unequal participation opportunities	29.19%
Dominance by Few Individuals	Elite dominance, political influence, control of discussions	21.86%
Social Barriers & Exclusion	Caste barriers, gender discrimination, unequal participation environments	20.32%
Lack of Safe Environment to Speak	Fear of authority, hesitation, lack of confidence during discussions	13.27%

Women respondents frequently referred to household responsibilities, hesitation in speaking publicly and social restrictions affecting participation confidence. Similarly, socially marginalized communities highlighted concerns relating to unequal participation opportunities, dominance within discussions and limited confidence in expressing grievances openly.



The survey captures situations where participation in Gram Sabha meetings becomes limited when discussions are dominated by a small group of influential individuals while broader community voices remain comparatively underrepresented within deliberations. Several participants described hesitation in speaking openly due to social pressure, fear of authority and unequal participation environments during meetings.

Women, youth and socially marginalized groups were repeatedly identified as categories facing comparatively greater constraints in participating actively and confidently during discussions. In several regions, participants emphasized that active engagement improves when meeting environments encourage open discussion, mutual respect and equal opportunity for citizens to express local concerns.

Meaningful democratic participation therefore depends not only upon attendance during meetings but also upon the extent to which Gram Sabha processes create inclusive, respectful and confidence-building environments for citizen engagement. Strengthening equality of voice, social inclusion and participatory confidence remains important for improving the overall quality and inclusiveness of grassroots democratic processes.

5.8 Least Represented Groups in Gram Sabha

The survey also examined perceptions regarding groups that remain least represented within Gram Sabha meetings.

The responses indicate that participation gaps continue to persist across several vulnerable and socially disadvantaged categories despite overall improvements in awareness and participation exposure across many regions.

Migration-related occupational patterns emerged as one of the major reasons affecting continuity of participation among rural households. Similarly, youth participation remained uneven in several regions despite increasing educational exposure and digital awareness.

Table 5.7 Least Represented Groups in Gram Sabha Meetings

Group	Percentage
Migrant Households	17.61%
Youth	16.73%
Elderly	15.80%
Women	13.40%
SC/ST Communities	9.05%
SHG Members	7.82%

Elderly citizens frequently highlighted mobility constraints, accessibility challenges and physical difficulties associated with participation in public meetings. Women and socially marginalized communities also continued to face varying levels of social and participation-related barriers across several surveyed regions.



Migrant households emerged as the least represented category across surveyed regions, primarily due to seasonal migration, occupational mobility and weak continuity of local participation.

The responses indicate that improving participation requires targeted mobilisation strategies focusing upon underrepresented and vulnerable groups within rural communities.

5.9 Institutional Participation and Service Delivery Linkages

The survey also examined the role of line departments and institutional participation within Gram Sabha processes.

Respondents repeatedly emphasized that the active participation of departmental officials improves the seriousness, credibility and usefulness of Gram Sabha meetings.

Health, Agriculture, ICDS and Education departments were among the most frequently identified line departments participating in Gram Sabha meetings.

Table 5.8 Major Line Departments Participating in Gram Sabha

Department	Percentage
Health	11.68%
Agriculture	5.57%
ICDS	5.20%
Education	4.43%
Women & Child Development	1.43%

Several respondents indicated that public participation improves when meetings are directly linked with welfare delivery, grievance response systems, public accountability and departmental responsiveness.

The survey therefore highlights that Gram Sabha is increasingly viewed not merely as a procedural democratic exercise but also as a platform connecting governance, accountability and local service delivery.

5.10 State-wise Distribution of Major Reasons for Low Participation in Gram Sabha

The analysis of state-wise responses indicates that livelihood and time-related constraints emerged as the most significant factor affecting participation in Gram Sabha meetings across a majority of states. In several regions, respondents reported that agricultural activities, wage labour, migration for work and household responsibilities limited their ability to attend meetings regularly.



Table 5.9 State Wise Barriers for Low Participation in Gram Sabha

State	a. Livelihood & Time Constraints (%)	b. Awareness Issues (%)	c. Participation & Inclusiveness (%)	d. Interest & Relevance Issues (%)	e. Governance & Trust Issues (%)	f. Service Delivery Issues (%)	g. Logistics & Access Issues (%)
Andhra Pradesh	65.33	23.5	1.17	1.33	0.67	3.17	4.83
Arunachal Pradesh	60.66	8.2	0	3.28	1.64	11.48	14.75
Assam	46.22	16.81	1.68	9.24	1.68	2.52	21.85
Bihar	59.59	22.28	2.59	1.55	6.22	5.18	2.59
Chhattisgarh	58.3	18.22	4.45	11.74	2.83	2.83	1.62
Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu	57.38	1.64	1.64	38.52	0.82	0	0
Gujarat	82.7	12.66	2.11	2.11	0	0.42	0
Haryana	29.75	17.36	24.79	1.65	0.83	0.83	24.8
Himachal Pradesh	64.84	19.78	0	4.4	0	0	10.99
Jammu & Kashmir	45.26	27.11	12.63	10.53	1.84	0.53	2.11
Jharkhand	49.21	16.27	6.35	14.88	4.76	5.95	2.58
Kerala	45.33	14	2.67	25.33	6.67	6	0
Madhya Pradesh	37.15	28.28	7.07	10.28	5.27	9.9	2.06
Maharashtra	55.02	5.44	5.86	23.85	7.11	2.51	0.21
Manipur	60.44	32.97	0	2.2	1.1	3.3	0
Nagaland	82.35	6.72	0.84	5.04	2.94	2.1	0
Odisha	48.76	13.68	5.97	8.46	3.98	13.93	5.22
Punjab	45.74	23.06	8.91	12.98	5.43	3.88	0
Rajasthan	45.45	33.64	20	0	0.91	0	0
Sikkim	49.59	12.4	2.48	14.88	4.13	13.22	3.31
Tamil Nadu	52.89	2.07	2.89	9.09	18.6	11.98	2.48
Telangana	77	4.6	0.8	10	4	3.4	0.2
Tripura	26.45	17.36	14.88	22.31	10.74	5.79	2.48
Uttar Pradesh	75.1	7.96	9.59	6.12	0.61	0.41	0.2
Uttarakhand	51.72	22.76	2.76	11.72	1.38	8.28	1.38
West Bengal	55.99	13.81	4.42	3.87	3.13	9.02	4.97

At the same time, important inter-state variations were observed with respect to awareness gaps, participation barriers, governance-related concerns and service



delivery issues. Certain states reported relatively higher concerns relating to inclusiveness, relevance of issues discussed, logistical accessibility and trust in institutional processes, reflecting diverse socio-economic and administrative conditions influencing Gram Sabha participation across the country.

5.11 Interconnected Nature of Participation Barriers

The findings emerging from the survey indicate that barriers affecting participation in Gram Sabha meetings are not isolated administrative constraints but are closely interconnected with broader socio-economic and governance realities prevailing across rural communities. Participation behaviour is influenced through the combined impact of livelihood pressures, communication systems, institutional responsiveness, participation environments and public trust in governance processes.

In many regions, daily wage labourers, agricultural workers and migrant households reported that participation in Gram Sabha meetings often involves loss of wages, disruption of work schedules and livelihood insecurity. These challenges become more severe when advance communication regarding meetings remains inadequate or irregular, thereby limiting the ability of working households to plan attendance effectively.

The survey further indicates that communication gaps frequently contribute towards declining public interest and participation consistency. Inadequate awareness regarding meeting schedules, limited dissemination of agenda-related information and weak community-level mobilisation often reduce public perception regarding the relevance and usefulness of Gram Sabha meetings.

Similarly, governance-related concerns such as political interference, favoritism, weak grievance response systems and limited visibility of tangible outcomes were found to influence institutional trust and participation willingness across several regions. In situations where citizens perceive that discussions do not lead to meaningful action or equitable decision-making, long-term participation motivation tends to weaken further.

The findings therefore demonstrate that improving Gram Sabha participation requires integrated and multi-dimensional interventions rather than isolated administrative measures. Strengthening participation requires simultaneous attention towards livelihood-sensitive planning, effective communication systems, inclusive participation environments, institutional transparency, responsive governance mechanisms and visible accountability practices capable of enhancing public confidence in grassroots democratic institutions. The study also demonstrates that participation barriers disproportionately affect women, elderly citizens, migrant households and socially vulnerable groups.

The findings therefore indicate that barriers affecting participation in Gram Sabha meetings are multidimensional, structural and mutually reinforcing in nature.



5.12 Beyond Participation Barriers: Emerging Challenges to Sustained Citizen Engagement

While the preceding sections examined the barriers affecting participation in Gram Sabha meetings, the survey findings also reveal a broader set of concerns that may influence the sustainability of citizen engagement over time. These concerns extend beyond immediate constraints such as livelihood pressures, awareness gaps or logistical difficulties and relate more closely to citizens' perceptions regarding the effectiveness, responsiveness and credibility of Gram Sabha institutions. The findings suggest that participation is not determined solely by awareness and attendance but is also shaped by the extent to which citizens perceive Gram Sabha meetings as meaningful, responsive and capable of addressing local concerns.

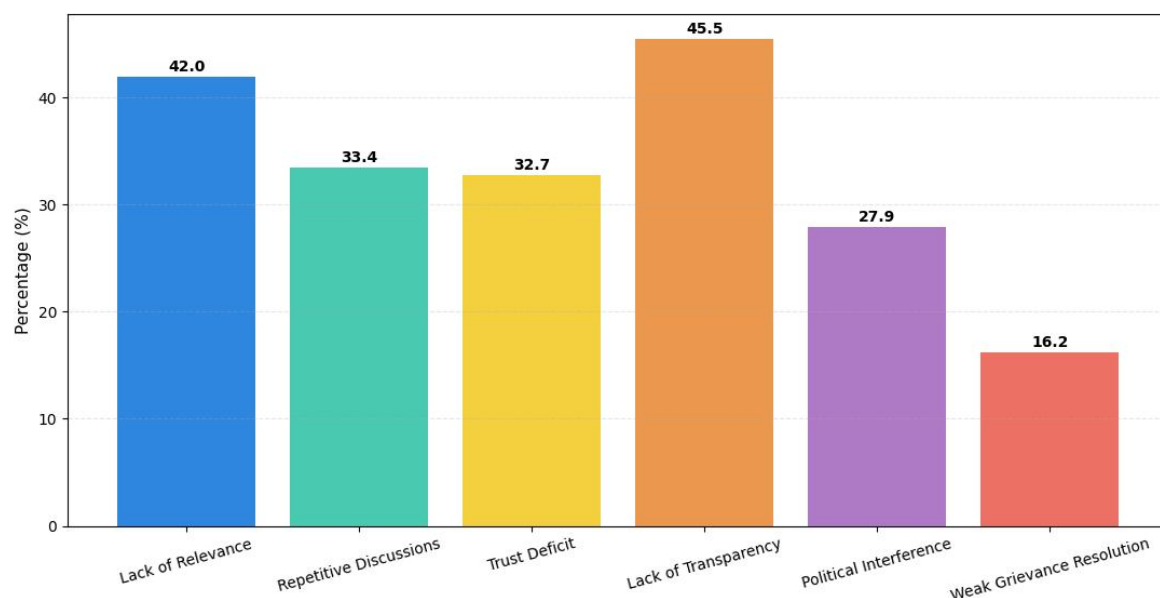
In several regions, respondents indicated that continued participation is closely linked to visible outcomes arising from Gram Sabha deliberations. Where issues discussed repeatedly remain unresolved or decisions are not followed by tangible action, public confidence in the usefulness of participation tends to weaken. Similarly, concerns relating to transparency, fairness of decision-making, responsiveness to grievances and political influence were found to affect citizens' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of Gram Sabha processes. These concerns do not necessarily prevent participation immediately; however, they may gradually influence citizens' willingness to engage consistently in Gram Sabha proceedings over the long term.

Table 5.10 Emerging Challenges to Sustained Citizen Engagement in Gram Sabha

Emerging Challenge	Percentage of Respondents Reporting Concern
Lack of Transparency	45.46
Lack of Relevance / Absence of Visible Outcomes	41.95
Repetitive Discussions / Meetings Perceived as Formalities	33.40
Trust-related Concerns	32.73
Political Interference	27.91
Weak Grievance Resolution	16.21

As evident from the table above, concerns relating to transparency emerged as the most frequently reported challenge, with 45.46 per cent of respondents highlighting issues associated with openness, fairness and accountability in Gram Sabha processes. Transparency remains one of the foundational principles of participatory governance, and the findings suggest that citizens attach considerable importance to transparent decision-making, disclosure of information and fairness in local governance processes. Perceptions of inadequate transparency can weaken confidence in institutions and reduce citizens' belief that their participation can meaningfully influence local decisions.





The findings further indicate that lack of relevance or absence of visible outcomes from previous meetings was reported by 41.95 per cent of respondents. This suggests that citizens increasingly evaluate Gram Sabha meetings not only on the basis of attendance or procedural conduct but also on their ability to generate tangible outcomes. When discussions repeatedly focus on issues that remain unresolved or when decisions are not followed by visible action, citizens may begin to question the practical value of participation. The findings therefore highlight the importance of demonstrating clear linkages between Gram Sabha deliberations, local planning processes and implementation outcomes.

Another important concern emerging from the survey relates to repetitive discussions and perceptions of meetings being conducted merely as formalities. Reported by 33.40 per cent of respondents, this finding indicates that the quality and effectiveness of deliberations matter as much as the frequency of meetings. Gram Sabhas are expected to function as platforms for collective problem-solving, planning and accountability. Where discussions become repetitive or fail to generate actionable outcomes, public enthusiasm and engagement may gradually diminish despite continued awareness of the institution.

Trust-related concerns were reported by 32.73 per cent of respondents, reflecting the critical role played by public confidence in sustaining participatory governance. Trust in institutions develops when citizens perceive governance processes to be fair, inclusive, transparent and responsive. Conversely, perceptions of unequal treatment, lack of responsiveness or limited influence over decision-making can adversely affect citizens' willingness to engage actively in local governance processes. The findings suggest that strengthening trust remains central to improving both the quality and sustainability of participation.

Political interference was identified by 27.91 per cent of respondents as a factor affecting participation and confidence in Gram Sabha proceedings. Although democratic processes inevitably involve political participation, respondents in several locations expressed concerns regarding the influence of political considerations on discussions, beneficiary selection and local decision-making. Such perceptions may



discourage active engagement, particularly where citizens feel that outcomes are predetermined or insufficiently reflective of community priorities.

Weak grievance resolution mechanisms emerged as another challenge, reported by 16.21 per cent of respondents. While comparatively lower than other concerns, this finding remains significant because grievance redressal represents one of the most visible indicators of institutional responsiveness. Citizens often judge the effectiveness of governance institutions by their ability to address local issues and respond to public concerns. Where grievances remain unresolved or are addressed with significant delay, confidence in the effectiveness of Gram Sabha processes may gradually weaken.

The findings carry important implications for the future of participatory local governance in India. Traditionally, efforts aimed at strengthening Gram Sabha participation have focused largely on increasing attendance through awareness campaigns, public announcements and community mobilisation. While such measures remain important, the survey findings suggest that sustained participation depends equally upon citizens' experiences after they attend Gram Sabha meetings. Citizens are more likely to participate repeatedly when they perceive that their presence, opinions and concerns influence local decision-making and lead to visible improvements in community life.

The survey therefore points towards a gradual shift in the nature of participation challenges. In many areas, the issue is no longer merely whether citizens are aware of Gram Sabha meetings, but whether they perceive these meetings as relevant, responsive and capable of producing meaningful outcomes. As rural communities become increasingly informed and connected, public expectations from local governance institutions are also evolving. Citizens increasingly expect transparency in decision-making, timely action on issues raised, fair beneficiary selection processes, effective grievance redressal and visible follow-up on resolutions adopted during Gram Sabha meetings.

The findings further suggest that participation and trust operate in a mutually reinforcing manner. When citizens observe that decisions taken in Gram Sabha meetings are implemented, grievances are addressed and community priorities are reflected in local development initiatives, confidence in the institution strengthens, leading to higher and more sustained participation. Conversely, where meetings are perceived as procedural exercises, where discussions do not translate into action, or where governance processes lack transparency, public confidence may gradually erode despite continued awareness of the institution.

Taken together, these findings indicate that strengthening participation in Gram Sabha meetings requires moving beyond attendance-focused approaches and addressing broader issues relating to transparency, responsiveness, relevance and accountability. While awareness generation and community mobilisation remain important, sustained citizen engagement ultimately depends upon the extent to which Gram Sabha institutions are perceived as meaningful, responsive and capable of translating public deliberations into tangible developmental outcomes. The findings therefore highlight the need for greater emphasis on visible follow-up actions, effective grievance redressal, transparent decision-making, social accountability mechanisms and citizen-centric governance practices to sustain public confidence in grassroots democratic institutions over the long term.



5.13 Key Inferences

The findings of the chapter demonstrate that participation in Gram Sabha meetings is influenced by a combination of livelihood realities, communication systems, participation environments, governance practices and institutional responsiveness. While livelihood and time-related constraints emerged as the most significant barriers across a majority of states, the analysis also highlights the important role of awareness, inclusiveness, governance credibility, service delivery experiences and logistical accessibility in shaping participation behaviour.

The chapter further indicates that strengthening participation requires moving beyond attendance-focused approaches towards improving the overall quality of citizen engagement. Visible outcomes from Gram Sabha deliberations, transparent decision-making, effective grievance redressal, inclusive participation environments and responsive governance systems emerged as important factors influencing public confidence in the institution. The findings therefore suggest that sustainable strengthening of Gram Sabha processes requires integrated interventions that simultaneously address participation barriers while enhancing relevance, responsiveness, accountability and trust in grassroots democratic institutions.



“
**Collective
 decisions
 in Gram Sabha
 create stronger
 rural
 communities.**
 ”





CHAPTER 6



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR STRENGTHENING GRAM SABHA PARTICIPATION

6.1 Re-imagining Gram Sabha as a Citizen-Centric Democratic Platform

The findings of the study demonstrate that Gram Sabha continues to remain one of the most significant institutions of grassroots democracy in rural India. Across surveyed regions, citizens continue to perceive Gram Sabha as an important platform for discussing local issues, welfare delivery, development priorities, sanitation concerns, beneficiary identification and community-level governance matters.

At the same time, the study also highlights several structural, socio-economic, communication-related and institutional barriers that continue to affect the quality and consistency of participation in Gram Sabha meetings.

The findings indicate that participation barriers are not merely procedural in nature but are closely linked with livelihood realities, communication gaps, weak institutional responsiveness, limited public trust, social exclusion and inadequate citizen engagement systems.

Importantly, the study reveals that citizens are not demanding additional institutional structures but are instead seeking more responsive, visible, inclusive and citizen-centric local governance processes.

The recommendations emerging from the study therefore emphasize the need to move beyond procedural conduct of Gram Sabha meetings towards building participatory, trusted and citizen-responsive democratic institutions capable of sustaining meaningful public engagement.

The recommendations presented in this chapter are derived directly from survey findings, state-level trends, open-ended citizen responses and governance challenges identified during the study.

6.2 Problem–Solution Mapping and Citizen Expectations

The findings of the study demonstrate a strong relationship between the participation barriers experienced by citizens and the solutions suggested by respondents for improving Gram Sabha functioning.

An important pattern emerging from the survey is that citizens are not merely identifying governance and participation problems but are simultaneously proposing practical, experience-based and locally implementable solutions for strengthening Gram Sabha participation.



The responses indicate that public expectations are strongly centred around:

- better communication systems,
- livelihood-sensitive participation arrangements,
- visible governance outcomes,
- grievance responsiveness,
- inclusive participation,
- transparency,
- accountability,
- and improved institutional responsiveness.

The findings further reveal that most citizen suggestions are institutionally achievable within the existing Panchayati Raj framework and largely focus upon improving participation quality rather than creating entirely new governance structures.

Table 6.1 Problem–Solution Mapping Emerging from Citizen Responses

Major Problem Area	% of Problem Responses	Detailed Citizen Expectations and Suggested Reform Measures	% of Suggestion Responses
Livelihood and Time Constraints	55.0%	Conduct Gram Sabha meetings during evenings, holidays and non-agricultural periods; avoid peak farming seasons and daily wage working hours; consult communities before finalizing meeting schedules; adopt flexible timing systems suitable for local occupational patterns and vulnerable households	10.6%
Poor Awareness and Communication	16.1%	Strengthen awareness campaigns through door-to-door mobilisation, public announcements, wall posters, WhatsApp groups, SMS alerts, social media outreach, SHG networks, mike announcements and advance notice systems; disseminate information at least 7–10 days prior to meetings	48.2%
Lack of Interest and Public Apathy	9.8%	Make Gram Sabha meetings more interactive, discussion-oriented and citizen-centric; encourage open participation, local problem solving and meaningful community engagement; involve youth groups, SHGs and community institutions in participation activities	7.0%
Lack of Visible Outcomes	8.3%	Ensure implementation of Gram Sabha decisions through Action Taken Reports (ATRs), public progress reporting, follow-up review mechanisms and visible action on issues raised during meetings; regularly communicate completed works and resolved grievances to citizens	5.0%
Poor Grievance Redressal	4.9%	Establish responsive grievance handling systems with time-bound issue resolution, complaint tracking registers, departmental follow-up mechanisms and regular review of unresolved grievances during subsequent Gram Sabha meetings	4.2%



Major Problem Area	% of Problem Responses	Detailed Citizen Expectations and Suggested Reform Measures	% of Suggestion Responses
Governance and Transparency Issues	3.9%	Improve transparency through open discussions on budgets, beneficiary selection, public expenditures and Panchayat decisions; publicly display resolutions, development works and expenditure details; strengthen accountability and citizen monitoring systems	5.3%
Women Participation Barriers	3.2%	Strengthen Mahila Sabha platforms, SHG mobilisation and women leadership initiatives; encourage women-friendly timings and safe participation spaces; provide equal opportunities for women to raise issues and participate in discussions	4.7%
Dominance by Limited Individuals	2.3%	Conduct Ward Sabha and smaller preparatory meetings to improve localized participation; encourage wider community representation; adopt participatory facilitation practices preventing concentration of discussions among a few influential individuals	3.4%
Weak Service Delivery and Absence of Officials	2.6%	Ensure regular participation of line department officials and frontline workers in Gram Sabha meetings; strengthen service delivery convergence, grievance response systems and departmental accountability towards issues raised by citizens	3.4%
Logistics and Accessibility Constraints	2.9%	Improve seating arrangements, drinking water facilities, public address systems, transport support and accessibility of venues; ensure suitable meeting spaces for elderly citizens, women, persons with disabilities and geographically remote communities	6.2%

The table above clearly demonstrate that citizens expect Gram Sabha processes to become more responsive, participatory, accessible and outcome-oriented.

Communication-related reforms emerged as the single largest area of public expectation nationally, followed by livelihood-sensitive participation systems, visible governance outcomes and improved institutional responsiveness.

Importantly, the findings indicate that strengthening Gram Sabha participation does not necessarily require creation of entirely new institutional systems but rather strengthening citizen engagement, communication and accountability mechanisms within the existing Panchayati Raj governance framework.

The study therefore highlights the need to move from procedural participation towards citizen-owned democratic engagement and responsive grassroots governance systems.



6.3 Rebuilding Public Awareness and Democratic Participation Culture

The study identified awareness-related factors as one of the major barriers affecting participation in Gram Sabha meetings across the surveyed regions. While Gram Sabha remains the most important platform for grassroots democratic participation, a significant proportion of respondents reported limited awareness regarding its purpose, powers, decision-making role and potential benefits for citizens. The findings suggest that participation levels are closely associated with the effectiveness of citizen awareness and mobilisation efforts.

Respondents highlighted several awareness-related challenges including:

- limited understanding of the role and importance of Gram Sabha,
- inadequate dissemination of meeting information,
- weak citizen awareness regarding rights and entitlements,
- limited understanding of decision-making processes,
- low awareness among youth and newly eligible participants,
- and insufficient community mobilisation prior to meetings.

The assessment further revealed that public announcements, ward members, SHGs, word-of-mouth communication and social media platforms continue to play an important role in informing citizens about Gram Sabha meetings. Open-ended responses repeatedly emphasized the need for:

- better awareness campaigns,
- door-to-door mobilisation,
- community outreach activities,
- greater involvement of SHGs and local institutions,
- and continuous citizen engagement efforts.

The findings indicate that participation improves when citizens clearly understand the relevance of Gram Sabha meetings to local development, beneficiary selection, public service delivery and community problem-solving. Strengthening awareness and democratic participation culture therefore remains fundamental to improving both attendance and the quality of citizen engagement in Gram Sabha processes.

Key Recommendations

1. States should undertake periodic Gram Sabha awareness campaigns focusing on citizens' rights, responsibilities and opportunities for participation.
2. Citizens should be provided simple and accessible information regarding Gram Sabha rights, quorum requirements, decision-making processes, resolution procedures and opportunities for participation through awareness campaigns and orientation activities.
3. Panchayats should adopt a combination of traditional and digital communication mechanisms including public announcements, ward-level outreach, SHGs, social media platforms and mobile-based communication systems.



4. Door-to-door mobilisation should be undertaken prior to every Gram Sabha meeting, particularly in areas reporting low participation levels.
5. Information regarding meeting date, time, venue and agenda should be disseminated sufficiently in advance through multiple communication channels.
6. Schools, colleges, SHGs, youth groups and community-based organizations should be actively involved in Gram Sabha awareness and mobilisation activities.
7. Panchayats should conduct pre-Gram Sabha orientation and awareness programmes to encourage informed citizen participation.
8. States should develop structured community mobilisation guidelines to strengthen democratic participation culture and citizen ownership of local governance processes.

The findings suggest that strengthening awareness and citizen engagement remains one of the most effective pathways for improving participation, inclusiveness and long-term sustainability of Gram Sabha institutions.

6.4 Aligning Gram Sabha Participation with Rural Livelihood Realities

The study identified livelihood and occupational constraints as the single largest participation barrier nationally.

A significant proportion of respondents reported that participation becomes difficult due to:

- agricultural work or seasonal livelihood pressures,
- daily wage labour,
- migration-related work patterns,
- business activities,
- and conflicts between meeting timings and working hours.

The findings demonstrate that participation barriers are structurally linked with rural livelihood systems and economic vulnerability rather than merely lack of public interest.

Open-ended citizen responses repeatedly emphasized the need for:

- evening meetings,
- holiday /sunday meetings,
- avoidance of agricultural seasons,
- and flexible scheduling arrangements.

The findings indicate that participation levels can improve substantially when Gram Sabha meetings are planned in accordance with local livelihood realities and occupational patterns.

Key Recommendations

1. Gram Sabha meetings must be scheduled after consultation with local communities regarding suitable timings and seasons.



2. Panchayats should avoid conducting meetings during:
 - peak agricultural seasons,
 - harvest periods,
 - market hours and
 - major livelihood activity timings.
3. Evening or holiday Gram Sabha meetings must be encouraged wherever feasible to improve participation of working households and youth.
4. Ward-level consultations must be conducted before finalization of Gram Sabha schedules.
5. States may issue livelihood-sensitive scheduling guidelines considering:
 - agricultural calendars,
 - regional occupational patterns,
 - tribal area conditions,
 - and seasonal migration realities.
6. Local participation planning must particularly focus upon enabling participation of:
 - daily wage labourers,
 - women with household responsibilities,
 - migrant households,
 - and economically vulnerable communities.

The findings suggest that improving participation requires recognition of the socio-economic realities affecting rural citizens rather than assuming universal scheduling convenience.

6.5 Strengthening Inclusive and Participatory Gram Sabha Processes

The study demonstrates that meaningful participation depends not only upon attendance levels but also upon the inclusiveness, accessibility and participatory environment prevailing within Gram Sabha meetings.

Several respondents highlighted concerns relating to:

- dominance by influential individuals,
- hesitation among women,
- lack of confidence in speaking publicly,
- unequal participation opportunities,
- caste and social barriers,
- and limited engagement of youth and marginalized communities.

The findings indicate that participation quality improves when Gram Sabha meetings create safe, inclusive and confidence-building democratic spaces.

Open-ended responses repeatedly emphasized:

- Mahila Sabha,
- Ward Sabha,
- SHG mobilisation,



- youth engagement,
- smaller preparatory meetings,
- and opportunities for wider community participation.

Key Recommendations

1. Mahila Sabha meetings should be strengthened as preparatory platforms for encouraging women's participation and issue articulation.
2. Ward Sabha meetings must be conducted prior to Gram Sabha meetings to improve localized discussion and wider citizen involvement.
3. SHGs, youth groups and community-based organizations must be systematically integrated into Gram Sabha mobilisation processes.
4. Panchayats should ensure adequate opportunities for participation of:
 - women,
 - SC/ST communities,
 - elderly citizens,
 - persons with disabilities,
 - and socially marginalized groups.
5. Special awareness campaigns must be conducted to improve youth participation in local democratic processes.
6. Panchayats should adopt inclusive facilitation practices encouraging wider public discussion and reducing dominance by a limited number of individuals.
7. States must develop inclusive participation guidelines emphasizing equitable speaking opportunities and community representation.

The findings indicate that strengthening democratic participation requires improving both participation quantity and participation quality.

6.6 Building Public Trust Through Visible Outcomes and Grievance Redressal

The study reveals that public trust and participation are strongly influenced by citizens' perceptions regarding the effectiveness and responsiveness of Gram Sabha processes.

A significant proportion of respondents reported:

- lack of visible outcomes,
- delays in implementation,
- weak grievance response systems,
- limited follow-up on decisions,
- and declining confidence regarding whether public issues would actually be resolved.

Open-ended citizen responses repeatedly emphasized:

- visible implementation,
- timely action,
- grievance resolution,



- accountability,
- transparency,
- and follow-up mechanisms.

The findings indicate that citizens are more likely to participate consistently when Gram Sabha meetings produce visible governance outcomes and responsive institutional action.

Key Recommendations

1. Panchayats must institutionalize Action Taken Reports (ATRs) for all major Gram Sabha resolutions and publicly present progress during subsequent meetings.
2. Gram Sabha resolutions should be assigned clear responsibilities, implementation timelines and periodic review mechanisms to improve accountability and follow-up.
3. Village-level grievance tracking systems must be established for monitoring complaints raised during Gram Sabha meetings.
4. Panchayats must publicly display:
 - approved resolutions,
 - implementation progress,
 - beneficiary lists,
 - development works,
 - and budget utilization details.
5. Time-bound grievance response systems should be developed at Panchayat level in coordination with line departments.
6. Follow-up review of unresolved issues should be included as a mandatory agenda item during subsequent Gram Sabha meetings.
7. Transparency measures such as open discussions on budgets, works and public expenditures must be encouraged to strengthen citizen confidence.
8. Panchayats must maintain simplified public records accessible to citizens regarding decisions taken and actions completed.

The findings demonstrate that visible governance responsiveness remains central to sustaining long-term public participation and democratic legitimacy.

6.7 Strengthening Institutional Responsiveness and Departmental Participation

The study indicates that citizens increasingly perceive Gram Sabha as a platform for addressing service delivery issues, departmental coordination and local governance grievances.

Respondents repeatedly emphasized the need for:

- participation of line department officials,
- presence of responsible officers,
- convergence of services,
- faster response systems,



- and improved coordination between Panchayats and government departments.

The findings indicate that weak institutional responsiveness reduces citizen confidence and weakens public participation in Gram Sabha meetings.

Key Recommendations

1. Participation of line department officials in Gram Sabha meetings must be strengthened through structured departmental attendance systems.
2. Block and district administrations must prepare rotational participation schedules for departmental representatives.
3. Gram Sabha meetings should function as local convergence platforms for discussing:
 - welfare implementation,
 - public service delivery,
 - infrastructure gaps,
 - health,
 - sanitation,
 - and local grievances.
4. Departments must present status updates relating to:
 - schemes,
 - service delivery,
 - infrastructure works,
 - and grievance redressal.
5. State Governments should develop accountability frameworks for ensuring timely follow-up on issues raised during Gram Sabha meetings.
6. Panchayats must maintain issue tracking registers for monitoring action taken by departments.
7. Periodic review mechanisms should be developed at Block and District levels for monitoring responsiveness towards Gram Sabha resolutions.

The findings indicate that citizens increasingly expect Gram Sabha to function as a responsive governance interface rather than merely a procedural democratic platform.

6.8 Strengthening Local Democratic Culture and Community Ownership

The findings of the study demonstrate that sustainable participation in Gram Sabha meetings ultimately depends upon strengthening democratic culture, public ownership and citizen confidence in local governance institutions.

Several responses indicate that participation weakens when citizens perceive Gram Sabha meetings as:

- formal procedures,
- politically dominated platforms,
- or spaces with limited public influence over outcomes.



At the same time, the study demonstrates that participation improves when citizens experience:

- meaningful engagement and visible outcomes,
- respectful participation environments,
- and collective ownership of local governance processes.

Key Recommendations

1. Panchayats must organize periodic democratic participation campaigns promoting citizen involvement in local governance processes.
2. Schools, colleges and youth organizations should be encouraged to support local democratic awareness activities.
3. Community participation campaigns must emphasize:
 - collective responsibility,
 - democratic participation,
 - local problem solving,
 - and citizen ownership of development processes.
4. Success stories relating to effective Gram Sabha practices should be documented and disseminated across regions.
5. Panchayats should encourage participatory discussion formats rather than one-way administrative proceedings.
6. Community-based monitoring and social participation practices should be promoted to strengthen democratic accountability.
7. Local leadership development initiatives should be encouraged for women, youth and marginalized communities.
8. States should annually document, recognize and disseminate exemplary Gram Panchayat practices demonstrating high levels of Gram Sabha participation, citizen engagement and participatory governance.

The findings indicate that strengthening Gram Sabha participation ultimately requires building long-term democratic culture and citizen confidence at the grassroots level.

6.9 Improving Infrastructure, Accessibility and Participation Facilities

The study identified several logistical and accessibility barriers affecting participation in Gram Sabha meetings, particularly in geographically remote, tribal and economically vulnerable regions.

Respondents highlighted concerns relating to:

- inadequate seating arrangements,
- unsuitable meeting venues,
- lack of transport support,
- overcrowding,
- inadequate public facilities,
- and poor accessibility.



The findings indicate that participation quality improves significantly when Gram Sabha meetings are conducted in accessible, organized and citizen-friendly environments.

Also, the effectiveness of Gram Sabha meetings is closely linked to the availability of adequate physical and digital infrastructure. Ensuring accessible, well-equipped and participant-friendly meeting environments can strengthen inclusiveness, improve the quality of deliberations and facilitate broader citizen participation.

Key Recommendations

1. Panchayats should ensure adequate seating, shade, drinking water and basic public facilities during Gram Sabha meetings.
2. Meeting venues should be selected based upon accessibility and convenience for all habitations.
3. Special logistical arrangements should be considered in:
 - remote regions,
 - hilly areas,
 - tribal habitations,
 - and geographically dispersed villages.
4. Transport support mechanisms should be explored for vulnerable and distant communities wherever feasible.
5. Panchayats must maintain minimum infrastructure standards for conducting Gram Sabha meetings.
6. States must allocate dedicated support funds for improving Gram Sabha infrastructure and participation arrangements.
7. Panchayats must ensure adequate sound systems for effective communication during Gram Sabha meetings.
8. States should strengthen internet and digital facilities to support transparency and citizen engagement.

The findings demonstrate that logistical improvements, along with strengthening physical and digital infrastructure, can contribute significantly to enhancing participation, inclusiveness and the overall effectiveness of Gram Sabha meetings.

6.10 Technology-Enabled Citizen Engagement and Digital Governance Systems

The study demonstrates growing public demand for technology-enabled communication and citizen engagement systems within Gram Sabha processes.

Respondents repeatedly suggested:

- SMS alerts,
- WhatsApp communication,
- digital notice systems,
- online information sharing,
- and technology-enabled awareness mechanisms.

The findings indicate that digital communication systems can significantly improve awareness dissemination, citizen outreach and participation planning.



Key Recommendations

1. Panchayats must establish digital communication systems including:
 - SMS alerts,
 - WhatsApp groups,
 - digital notice dissemination,
 - and social media outreach.
2. eGramSwaraj and related digital governance platforms should be integrated with Gram Sabha communication systems.
3. Panchayats must maintain updated citizen contact databases for dissemination of meeting information and public notices.
4. Digital display boards and village-level information systems must be developed wherever feasible.
5. State Governments should explore development of integrated Gram Sabha communication applications and citizen alert systems.
6. Digital governance initiatives should be designed carefully to complement rather than replace traditional community mobilisation mechanisms.
7. Hybrid participation mechanisms should also be adapted whereby citizens who are unable to attend Gram Sabha meetings physically due to livelihood, migration, health or distance-related constraints will be enabled to participate virtually through online platforms or digital interfaces wherever feasible.

The findings indicate that technology-enabled communication systems can significantly strengthen citizen engagement when combined with local mobilisation and interpersonal outreach.

6.11 State-specific Priorities for Strengthening Gram Sabha Participation

The state-wise distribution of suggested measures for strengthening Gram Sabha participation reveals notable variations in citizen preferences across States and UTs. While awareness generation emerged as the most widely preferred intervention across most states, the findings indicate that local socio-economic conditions, occupational structures and governance experiences influence the types of reforms considered most effective.

In several agriculturally dominant states such as Himachal Pradesh, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Uttarakhand, respondents placed greater emphasis on avoiding agricultural work periods and ensuring convenient meeting timings. These findings reflect the influence of agriculture, seasonal employment and daily wage occupations on participation patterns and highlight the importance of livelihood-sensitive scheduling.

States such as Bihar, Haryana, Rajasthan, Arunachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand reported particularly strong preference for awareness campaigns and community mobilisation, while Uttarakhand, Sikkim, West Bengal and Gujarat showed higher support for door-to-door outreach. These patterns suggest that communication and citizen engagement remain critical factors influencing participation.



The findings also indicate growing expectations regarding transparency, grievance redressal, participation of officials and visible governance outcomes. Overall, the state-level variations underscore the need for context-specific participation enhancement strategies that complement broader national efforts to strengthen Gram Sabha participation.

Table 6.2 State-wise Preferences for Measures to Enhance Gram Sabha Participation

State	Avoid Agricultural / Work Hours	Better Awareness Campaigns	Conduct Ward Sabha / Mahila Sabha	Door-to-door Mobilization	Ensure Participation of Officials	Ensure Transparency in Decisions	Ensure Visible Outcomes	Fix Convenient Timing	Improve Grievance Redressal	Provide Incentives / Recognition
Andhra Pradesh	75	93.67	23	78.5	30.5	39.5	32.5	69.5	41.83	52.67
Arunachal Pradesh	81.15	94.26	34.43	85.25	27.05	57.38	40.16	63.93	22.95	77.87
Assam	78.33	83.33	63.33	76.67	5.83	42.5	46.67	39.17	9.17	83.33
Bihar	2.23	90.89	7.09	30.63	2.02	20.92	6.07	6.68	21.12	42.04
Chhattisgarh	17.67	79.12	18.88	25.3	18.07	24.1	12.85	31.33	21.29	59.84
Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu	7.38	86.07	7.38	58.2	45.08	53.28	57.38	4.92	41.8	77.05
Gujarat	54.55	73.14	23.97	71.07	4.55	21.07	7.44	73.14	7.44	56.2
Haryana	26.45	95.87	12.4	17.36	34.71	42.98	45.45	8.26	14.05	52.07
Himachal Pradesh	97.8	96.7	97.8	84.62	41.76	13.19	47.25	81.32	2.2	74.73
Jammu & Kashmir	33.74	90.71	55.5	62.1	44.74	39.85	27.63	22.25	35.94	90.95
Jharkhand	8.93	79.76	8.33	50.6	8.73	24.4	36.51	16.07	21.23	54.76
Kerala	13.33	72.67	7.33	37.33	13.33	26.67	18.67	28.67	28.67	38.67
Madhya Pradesh	23.63	73.31	14.18	52.62	13.79	30.91	15.45	25.54	21.07	44.57
Maharashtra	32.85	79.21	53.85	75.68	2.29	32.64	23.08	21.83	20.79	44.28
Manipur	21.98	90.11	46.15	69.23	10.99	42.86	38.46	40.66	36.26	32.97
Nagaland	61.67	74.17	6.25	48.33	34.17	52.5	28.75	60	13.33	78.75
Odisha	21.78	68.07	23.02	52.72	14.85	36.63	25	32.18	25	71.04
Punjab	13.13	84.94	28.76	61.97	35.52	13.71	17.37	14.67	13.51	68.73
Rajasthan	0	99.09	74.55	2.73	0	83.64	2.73	0	77.27	24.55
Sikkim	42.98	42.98	20.66	93.39	57.02	37.19	50.41	9.92	30.58	96.69
Tamil Nadu	14.46	71.07	7.02	59.5	29.75	19.01	16.12	14.88	62.4	45.04
Telangana	37.92	83.43	27.35	47.5	23.95	23.55	31.74	40.72	31.74	37.13
Tripura	27.27	79.34	22.31	71.07	27.27	22.31	71.07	46.28	17.36	71.07
Uttar Pradesh	31.63	82.45	13.47	48.98	11.22	21.63	11.43	36.94	14.08	31.22
Uttarakhand	61.36	97.55	60.66	94.41	59.62	87.41	59.97	86.71	59.97	89.16
West Bengal	49.91	83.66	39.43	70.34	37.12	45.65	42.98	45.29	43.52	67.14



The above table presents the state-wise distribution of measures suggested by respondents for improving participation in Gram Sabha meetings. As respondents were allowed to select multiple measures, the findings reflect the relative prominence of different participation-enhancing interventions across States and UTs.

6.12 Consolidated National Policy Recommendations for Strengthening Gram Sabha Participation

The findings of the study indicate that low participation in Gram Sabha is influenced by a combination of awareness-related, socio-economic, institutional and governance factors. While Panchayati Raj governance systems and RGSA frameworks have established a strong institutional foundation for participatory local governance, important gaps continue to exist in translating these arrangements into informed, inclusive and active citizen participation. The findings further suggest that strengthening Gram Sabha participation requires a combination of citizen-centric, governance-focused and context-sensitive interventions.

Based on the overall findings of the study, the following policy recommendation groups are proposed for strengthening Gram Sabha participation, democratic engagement and local governance responsiveness across States.

Table 6.3 Integrated National Policy Recommendations Emerging from the Study

Sl. No.	Policy Recommendation Group	Suggested National-Level Intervention
1	National Gram Sabha Awareness, Procedural Literacy and Mobilisation Mission	Launch a sustained nationwide Gram Sabha awareness and mobilisation campaign focusing upon citizen participation, Gram Sabha rights, quorum requirements, meeting procedures, GPDP planning, grievance systems, social audit and local accountability through television, radio, SHGs, schools, WhatsApp, IEC campaigns, Panchayat outreach, short educational films and community storytelling videos, and community mobilisation systems.
2	Citizen Rights and Gram Sabha Awareness Handbook	Develop and distribute simplified Gram Sabha and Citizen Rights Handbooks in local languages explaining Gram Sabha powers, welfare rights, grievance systems, GPDP processes, social audit mechanisms, participation responsibilities and local democratic accountability
3	Mandatory Household Mobilisation Before Gram Sabha	Institutionalize structured pre-Gram Sabha mobilisation through Ward Members, SHGs, frontline workers, volunteers, youth groups, local institutions and community-level outreach systems
4	Livelihood-Sensitive Gram Sabha Scheduling Framework	Encourage flexible scheduling systems avoiding agricultural peak periods, market timings and working hours while promoting evening, holiday and community-consulted Gram Sabha schedules
5	Participatory and Inclusive Gram Sabha Model	Strengthen Mahila Sabha, Ward Sabha, Youth Sabha and community-based participation mechanisms for improving inclusion of women, SC/ST communities, vulnerable groups, youth and remote habitations



Sl. No.	Policy Recommendation Group	Suggested National-Level Intervention
6	Gram Sabha Accountability and Outcome Framework	Institutionalize Action Taken Reports (ATRs), public review of previous resolutions, grievance tracking systems, public disclosure of implementation status and visible follow-up mechanisms for improving public trust
7	Transparency and Public Information Systems	Standardize advance public disclosure of Gram Sabha agenda, budgets, beneficiary lists, GPDP priorities, development works and implementation progress through notice boards, digital displays and Panchayat-level public information systems
8	Strengthened Departmental Convergence and Service Delivery Systems	Ensure regular participation of line department officials in Gram Sabha meetings relating to welfare delivery, livelihoods, health, agriculture, education, sanitation and local grievance redressal
9	Community Participation Incentive and Democratic Accountability Framework	States should explore participation-linked democratic engagement systems encouraging regular Gram Sabha participation among eligible resident households while ensuring exemptions for students, migrants, elderly citizens, persons with disabilities and genuine hardship situations; travel support may also be considered for remote, tribal and hilly regions
10	Technology-Enabled Gram Sabha Communication and Participation Systems	Develop integrated digital communication systems including SMS alerts, WhatsApp groups, IVRS systems, Panchayat digital notice boards and eGramSwaraj-linked citizen notifications. Hybrid participation mechanisms should also be explored to enable citizens who are unable to attend Gram Sabha meetings physically due to livelihood, migration, health or distance-related constraints to participate virtually wherever feasible. Biometric and time-stamped attendance systems may additionally be explored for improving transparency and participation tracking.

6.13 Strategic Directions for Strengthening Gram Sabha Participation

The policy directions emerging from the study highlight the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach towards strengthening Gram Sabha participation and effectiveness. While the recommended interventions address specific participation barriers and governance challenges, their successful implementation requires coordinated action across multiple dimensions of Gram Sabha functioning.

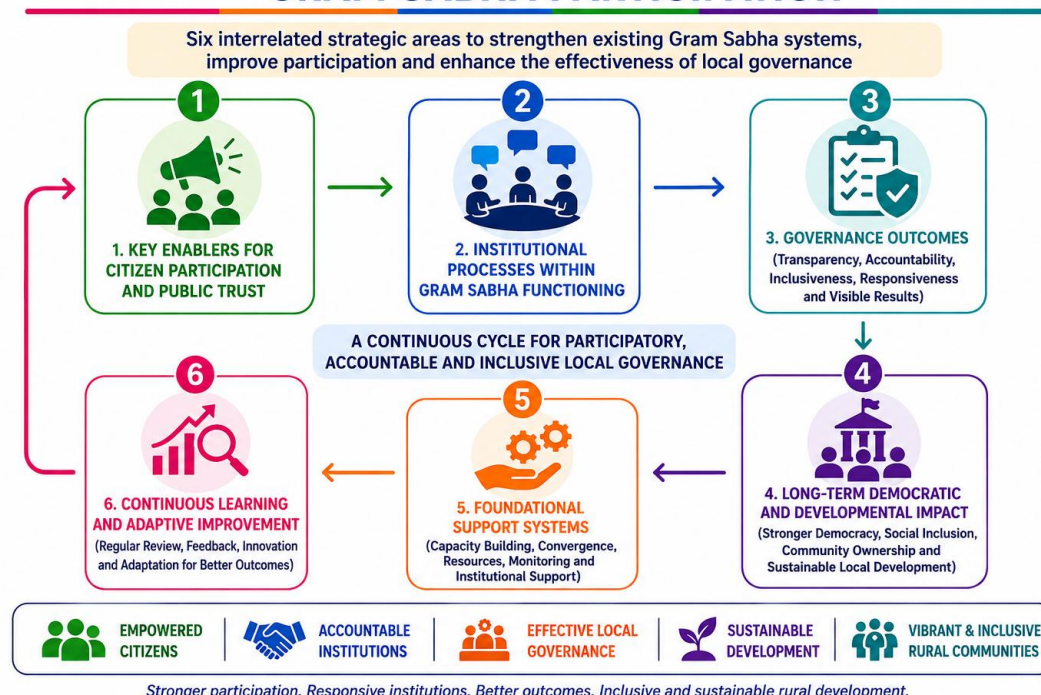
Accordingly, the strategic directions presented in this section bring together the major areas requiring attention for improving citizen participation, institutional responsiveness, transparency, accountability and public trust within existing Gram Sabha systems. The strategic directions build upon the institutional foundations already available within the Panchayati Raj system and focus on addressing the key gaps identified through the assessment.

The strategic directions are organized around six interrelated components. Together, they identify the key areas requiring attention for strengthening Gram Sabha



functioning and improving the effectiveness of participatory local governance systems. The relationship among these components is illustrated below.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR STRENGTHENING GRAM SABHA PARTICIPATION



The components presented above respond directly to the major participation barriers, citizen expectations and governance challenges identified through the study. Together, they provide a comprehensive approach for strengthening Gram Sabha functioning and improving the effectiveness of participatory local governance systems. The major elements under each strategic direction are described below.

1. Key Enablers for Citizen Participation and Public Trust

A major reason for low turnout is the widespread perception among villagers that Gram Sabha meetings rarely translate into concrete benefits, timely entitlements or resolution of their problems. Addressing these concerns requires focused attention towards a set of key enabling factors that can strengthen public trust, improve participation, enhance accountability and increase institutional responsiveness.

The key enabling factors include:

- 1. Transparency and Social Accountability** — Ensure public disclosure of budgets, expenditures, scheme implementation status and beneficiary selection criteria in every meeting. Conduct regular social audits and present findings transparently to foster openness and reduce perceptions of favouritism or corruption.
- 2. Timely Delivery of Rights and Entitlements** — Position Gram Sabha as an important platform for verifying beneficiary lists, expediting scheme approvals and ensuring eligible citizens receive entitled benefits without undue delay. Establish clear timelines for processing and delivery of key services, with mandatory progress updates in subsequent meetings.



3. **Follow-up and Action on Decisions** — Ensure all resolutions are systematically recorded, assigned clear ownership and timelines, and rigorously monitored. Share concise Action Taken Reports (ATRs) at the beginning of every meeting to visibly link participation with outcomes.
4. **Inclusive and Participatory Processes** — Actively encourage participation of women, SC/ST communities, youth and vulnerable groups. Schedule meetings at convenient times and locations and conduct preparatory Ward Sabhas and Mahila Sabhas for broader input.
5. **Strengthened Accountability of Service Providers** — Ensure regular interaction with frontline officials and periodic review of public services, development works and welfare delivery systems.
6. **Use of Digital and Community-Based Monitoring Systems** — Maintain transparent records and leverage the NIRNAY App, mobile platforms, notice boards and traditional outreach mechanisms for information sharing and citizen engagement.

These enabling factors are closely interconnected and mutually reinforcing. By prioritizing visible outcomes, timely service delivery, accountability and transparency, Gram Sabha can become a more trusted and citizen-responsive platform for local governance. Collectively, these enabling factors can strengthen public confidence, improve citizen participation and enhance trust in Gram Sabha as an effective institution of local self-governance.

2. Institutional Processes within Gram Sabha Functioning

Gram Sabha frequently faces organizational constraints such as poorly structured meetings, low citizen participation, inadequate recording and escalation of grievances, opaque beneficiary selection, limited public disclosure and weak social accountability practices. These shortcomings reduce its effectiveness as a participatory governance platform.

Addressing these challenges requires greater attention to the following core institutional processes within Gram Sabha functioning:

- **Non-Threatening Discussion and Deliberation** — Facilitate structured and inclusive forums where citizens can freely discuss local development priorities, public grievances, welfare scheme issues and other community concerns in an open and respectful environment.
- **Participatory Planning and Prioritisation** — Enable communities to identify local needs, contribute to preparation of Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDs) and participate in their approval.
- **Public Review of Beneficiary Selection and Development Works** — Strengthen transparent processes for public scrutiny of beneficiary lists, development works and utilization of public funds.
- **Effective Grievance Recording and Redressal** — Institutionalize systematic documentation of citizen grievances, demands and concerns. Establish tracking mechanisms and ensure status updates are shared during subsequent Gram Sabha meetings.



- **Social Accountability and Transparency Mechanisms** — Strengthen public disclosure systems, social audits and performance reviews to improve institutional credibility and public confidence.

Strengthening these institutional processes can significantly improve participation quality, institutional responsiveness, transparency and accountability while enhancing the overall credibility and effectiveness of Gram Sabha functioning.

3. Governance Outcomes

Effective participation and responsive institutional processes can generate important governance outcomes at the grassroots level. Visible follow-up action, responsive grievance systems and inclusive decision-making mechanisms strengthen transparency, institutional accountability and public trust while encouraging sustained citizen engagement in local governance processes.

The major governance outcomes associated with strengthened Gram Sabha functioning include:

- **Inclusive Local Decision-Making** — Ensure that diverse community voices, particularly those of women, SC/ST communities, youth and other vulnerable groups, are reflected in local decision-making processes.
- **Transparent Governance Processes** — Promote openness through regular disclosure of financial information, implementation status and governance decisions.
- **Accountable Institutional Functioning** — Establish clear responsibilities and performance expectations for elected representatives and officials.
- **Improved Grievance Redressal Systems** — Strengthen mechanisms for recording, tracking and resolving citizen grievances in a timely and transparent manner.
- **Visible Implementation Outcomes and Public Trust** — Strengthen the connection between citizen participation and tangible development outcomes, thereby improving confidence in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

These outcomes play an important role in sustaining participation and improving the effectiveness of local governance systems.

4. Long-Term Democratic and Developmental Impact

Strengthened Gram Sabha systems can generate significant democratic and developmental benefits over time. By addressing participation barriers and improving institutional responsiveness, Gram Sabha can promote collective decision-making, deeper civic engagement and stronger community ownership of local development processes. Greater inclusion of marginalized communities can further strengthen democratic equity and social inclusion within rural governance systems.

Over time, improvements in participation and institutional responsiveness can contribute towards the following broader democratic and developmental outcomes:

- **Stronger Participatory Democracy** — Promote active citizen involvement in local governance and strengthen democratic decentralization.



- **Sustainable Local Development** — Support community-driven development planning and implementation aligned with local priorities.
- **Improved Social Inclusion and Democratic Equity** — Ensure meaningful participation of women, SC/ST communities and other vulnerable groups.
- **Enhanced Public Confidence in Governance Institutions** — Build trust through visible outcomes, accountability and responsive governance.
- **Stronger Community Ownership and Civic Engagement** — Encourage citizens to actively contribute towards village development and collective welfare.

These broader impacts reinforce the long-term relevance of Gram Sabha as an institution of participatory democracy and local self-governance.

5. Foundational Support Systems

Effective Gram Sabha functioning depends upon strong institutional support systems capable of sustaining participation and governance improvements over time. Citizen awareness, capacity building, monitoring systems, departmental convergence, adequate resources and institutional leadership constitute the foundational support required for sustaining participatory governance processes.

The major areas requiring continued institutional support and strengthening include:

- **Awareness and Capacity Building** — Conduct sustained awareness campaigns and orientation programmes relating to citizen rights, Gram Sabha procedures and participatory governance.
- **Monitoring and Evidence-Based Governance Systems** — Strengthen systems for tracking participation levels, governance outcomes and implementation performance.
- **Departmental Convergence Mechanisms** — Improve coordination between Panchayats and line departments for integrated service delivery and local development planning.
- **Financial Support and Operational Flexibility** — Ensure adequate resources and operational flexibility for conducting Gram Sabha meetings and related participation activities.
- **Institutional Leadership and Political Commitment** — Strengthen leadership support and policy commitment for promoting participatory local governance reforms.

These support systems provide the institutional foundation necessary for sustaining improvements in participation and governance effectiveness.

6. Continuous Learning and Adaptive Improvement

Strengthening Gram Sabha participation requires continuous learning, periodic review and adaptive improvement. Participation patterns, citizen expectations and governance challenges evolve over time and therefore require regular assessment and responsive institutional action.



Key areas requiring regular review and adaptive improvement include:

- **Regular Review of Participation Patterns** — Periodically assess attendance trends, participation barriers and citizen engagement levels.
- **Citizen Feedback and Grievance Assessment** — Systematically collect and review citizen feedback to improve responsiveness.
- **Adoption of Innovative Communication Systems** — Utilize emerging digital and community-based communication mechanisms to improve outreach.
- **Strengthening Accountability and Responsiveness** — Continuously improve systems relating to follow-up action, grievance resolution and public disclosure.
- **Continuous Institutional Learning and Adaptation** — Document good practices, encourage peer learning and adapt strategies based on local experiences and emerging requirements.

Continuous review and adaptive improvement can help ensure that Gram Sabha remains responsive to changing governance needs and evolving citizen expectations while sustaining long-term improvements in participation and democratic effectiveness.

Collectively, the strategic directions presented in this section highlight the major areas requiring attention for strengthening Gram Sabha participation and effectiveness. The priority lies not in creating new institutions but in strengthening the functioning of existing mechanisms through improved citizen engagement, institutional responsiveness, transparency, accountability and public trust. The six components are closely interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Improvements in participation enablers strengthen institutional processes, effective institutional processes generate stronger governance outcomes, and stronger governance outcomes contribute towards greater democratic participation, community ownership and long-term developmental benefits. These gains are further supported by strong foundational systems and continuous learning processes.

Taken together, these strategic directions complement the policy recommendations presented in the preceding section and highlight how different dimensions of Gram Sabha functioning interact to influence participation outcomes. Strengthening these areas can improve both citizen engagement and institutional responsiveness while enhancing the effectiveness of Gram Sabha as a platform for participatory local governance. Sustained attention to these interconnected dimensions should therefore remain important for advancing democratic decentralization, improving governance responsiveness, empowering citizens and promoting sustainable rural development across India.



6.14 Conclusion and Way Forward

The strongest message emerging from the study therefore is:

“Effective Gram Sabhas are built not merely through attendance, but through informed, inclusive and meaningful citizen participation”

The study reaffirms that Gram Sabha continues to remain the cornerstone of participatory democracy within the Panchayati Raj system and the most important institutional platform for direct citizen engagement in local governance. Across the surveyed regions, citizens continue to associate Gram Sabha with local development planning, welfare implementation, grievance articulation, community participation and democratic decision-making. The findings demonstrate that Gram Sabha retains considerable relevance and public legitimacy as an institution of grassroots governance. However, the quality, inclusiveness and effectiveness of participation continue to vary across regions and communities.

The assessment reveals that low participation in Gram Sabha is influenced by a combination of socio-economic, institutional, governance and behavioural factors. Livelihood pressures, communication gaps, limited procedural awareness, inadequate mobilisation, weak grievance responsiveness, lack of visible outcomes and unequal participation environments continue to affect citizen engagement across many regions. At the same time, the findings clearly demonstrate that citizens are willing to participate when Gram Sabha processes are perceived as relevant, responsive, inclusive and capable of producing tangible outcomes.

A key finding emerging from the study is that the challenge is no longer the absence of institutional mechanisms. Constitutional provisions, Panchayati Raj institutions, Gram Sabha processes and RGSA interventions have already established a strong institutional foundation for participatory local governance. The challenge now lies in transforming these institutional arrangements into vibrant citizen-centred democratic processes characterized by informed participation, active engagement, transparency, accountability and public trust.

The study further demonstrates that strengthening Gram Sabha participation requires a comprehensive and integrated approach. Citizen mobilisation and awareness efforts should be complemented by livelihood-sensitive scheduling, inclusive participation mechanisms, stronger grievance redressal systems, enhanced transparency, improved departmental responsiveness, adequate infrastructure and technology-enabled communication systems. Equally important is the need to strengthen procedural awareness relating to citizen rights, quorum requirements, decision-making processes and accountability mechanisms so that participation becomes informed, confident and effective.

The findings also highlight the importance of recognizing regional diversity in participation patterns. While several participation barriers emerged consistently across States and Union Territories, citizen expectations and reform priorities varied according to livelihood conditions, geographical realities, governance experiences, social structures and institutional performance. National policy interventions should



therefore be complemented by flexible and context-sensitive implementation approaches that respond to local realities while upholding common principles of participation, inclusion and democratic accountability.

The analysis presented in this study demonstrates that strengthening Gram Sabha requires simultaneous attention to citizen mobilisation, procedural awareness, inclusive participation, grievance responsiveness, transparency, accountability and institutional responsiveness. Stronger citizen mobilisation systems, improved awareness and procedural literacy, inclusive participation platforms, visible governance outcomes, responsive grievance mechanisms, effective departmental convergence, community ownership, improved infrastructure and technology-enabled engagement systems should be pursued as mutually reinforcing interventions. Sustainable improvements in participation require simultaneous attention to both citizen demand for participation and institutional responsiveness to citizen needs.

The study therefore emphasizes the need to move beyond Panchayat-centric administrative functioning towards citizen-centric democratic participation rooted in transparency, accountability, inclusion, responsiveness and local ownership. States, Panchayats and implementing institutions should prioritize citizen mobilisation, procedural awareness, inclusive participation, grievance responsiveness, institutional accountability and community ownership as central components of Gram Sabha strengthening efforts. Effective Gram Sabhas are built not merely through attendance, but through informed, inclusive and meaningful citizen participation supported by responsive governance systems and visible public outcomes.

Strengthening Gram Sabha participation should remain a continuing priority within the broader agenda of democratic decentralization and local governance reforms. The recommendations emerging from this study should be translated into sustained action through coordinated efforts at the National, State and Panchayat levels. Ultimately, the effectiveness of Gram Sabha will be determined not by the number of meetings conducted, but by its ability to function as a trusted platform where citizens participate meaningfully, local issues are discussed openly, grievances are addressed, decisions are acted upon and development priorities are collectively shaped. Strengthening Gram Sabha is therefore not merely an administrative requirement but a democratic imperative for deepening citizen engagement, improving governance responsiveness and advancing the constitutional vision of participatory local self-government across rural India.





FIELD REFLECTIONS AND PRACTITIONER INSIGHTS

Perspectives on Gram Sabha Participation

The field observations, reflections and practical suggestions shared by survey investigators across multiple States provide important qualitative insights into the functioning of Gram Sabha beyond quantitative survey findings. These reflections help explain the underlying social, behavioural, institutional and governance realities influencing participation patterns at the grassroots level.

The field narratives reveal that low participation in Gram Sabha is not caused by a single factor but emerges from a combination of livelihood pressures, weak communication systems, institutional trust deficits, social barriers, limited grievance responsiveness and procedural approaches to participation.

Importantly, the reflections demonstrate that investigators across States repeatedly emphasized the need for citizen-centred participation systems rather than purely administrative conduct of Gram Sabha meetings.

1. Livelihood Pressures and Occupational Constraints

A recurring observation across several States was that participation in Gram Sabha is strongly influenced by livelihood realities and occupational engagement patterns within rural communities. Investigators frequently observed that daily wage labourers, agricultural workers, migrant households and economically vulnerable groups often prioritize immediate livelihood concerns over attendance in Gram Sabha meetings.

Field investigators noted that meetings conducted during peak agricultural seasons, harvesting periods, market timings and daytime working hours significantly affect public attendance. In many villages, respondents indicated that attending Gram Sabha often results in loss of wages, reduced agricultural productivity or disruption of livelihood activities.

Investigators further observed that in certain regions, particularly agrarian and labour-intensive communities, Gram Sabha timings are frequently finalized without adequate consultation with local residents regarding occupational schedules and seasonal workload patterns.

Field Suggestions from Investigators

- Conduct Gram Sabha meetings during evenings, holidays and non-agricultural periods.
- Avoid scheduling meetings during peak farming seasons and local market timings.



- Develop annual Gram Sabha calendars in consultation with local communities.
- Encourage flexible and context-sensitive scheduling systems based on local livelihood realities.
- Ensure that participation planning takes into consideration women's work burden, agricultural labour patterns and migration trends.

2. Weak Awareness and Inadequate Communication Systems

Another major observation emerging from field investigations relates to weak communication and inadequate public awareness regarding Gram Sabha meetings and their importance. Investigators repeatedly observed that information regarding meeting schedules, agenda items and participation opportunities often does not adequately reach all households.

Several field teams reported that notice-based communication systems alone remain insufficient, particularly in geographically dispersed villages, tribal habitations and remote hamlets. In many locations, citizens reported receiving information too late or not receiving information at all.

Investigators also observed that a large section of rural citizens lacks clear understanding regarding:

- the role and powers of Gram Sabha,
- GPDP processes,
- welfare-related discussions,
- grievance mechanisms,
- social audit functions,
- and the significance of participation in local governance.

Field teams repeatedly noted that awareness levels are generally higher in villages where local mobilisation efforts involve SHGs, frontline workers, teachers, Ward Members and community organizations.

Field Suggestions from Investigators

- Conduct sustained awareness campaigns at village level instead of one-time announcements.
- Use WhatsApp groups, SMS alerts, mike announcements and local public communication systems for advance mobilisation.
- Ensure door-to-door mobilisation before Gram Sabha meetings.
- Involve SHGs, youth groups, schools, Anganwadi workers and frontline workers in awareness generation.
- Publicly display Gram Sabha calendars and agenda details at common public locations.
- Develop simple citizen handbooks explaining Gram Sabha roles, rights and participation processes.



3. Perception of Procedural Meetings and Lack of Public Trust

A significant qualitative insight emerging from field observations is the growing perception among several communities that Gram Sabha meetings often function as procedural formalities rather than meaningful democratic platforms.

Investigators reported that many respondents believe:

- decisions are already predetermined,
- public opinions are not adequately considered,
- discussions do not influence implementation,
- and grievances raised repeatedly remain unresolved.

Such perceptions gradually reduce public trust and weaken long-term participation culture.

Field investigators also observed that participation levels are comparatively higher in Gram Panchayats where citizens witness visible implementation of decisions, transparent discussions and regular follow-up action on public concerns.

Field Suggestions from Investigators

- Institutionalize Action Taken Reports (ATRs) during every Gram Sabha.
- Publicly review previous Gram Sabha resolutions and implementation status.
- Ensure visible follow-up action on grievances and citizen demands.
- Promote transparent discussions relating to budgets, beneficiary selection and development works.
- Encourage open and participatory discussion environments rather than one-way administrative proceedings.
- Display implementation progress publicly within Panchayat offices and common public spaces.

4. Women's Participation and Inclusive Participation Challenges

Field investigators across several States highlighted that women's participation continues to remain uneven despite increasing institutional emphasis on inclusive governance.

While certain Gram Panchayats demonstrated encouraging participation of women, SHG members and elected women representatives, investigators also observed several social and behavioural barriers affecting meaningful participation of women in public discussions.

Investigators noted that women often face:

- household workload pressures,
- social hesitation,
- male dominance during discussions,
- lack of confidence in speaking publicly,
- and limited opportunities for meaningful participation.



Field observations further indicated that women's participation improves significantly when Gram Sabha environments become more inclusive, discussion-oriented and supportive.

Field Suggestions from Investigators

- Strengthen Mahila Sabha and SHG-based mobilisation systems.
- Conduct women-friendly and inclusive Gram Sabha sessions.
- Encourage women leadership and active speaking opportunities.
- Ensure safe and respectful participation environments.
- Promote participation of women frontline workers, SHGs and community institutions.
- Avoid timings that conflict with women's household responsibilities.

5. Weak Institutional Responsiveness and Departmental Participation

Several investigators pointed towards weak institutional responsiveness and limited participation of line department officials during Gram Sabha meetings.

Respondents across multiple States frequently expressed dissatisfaction regarding:

- absence of departmental officials,
- delayed grievance response,
- weak follow-up mechanisms,
- and poor convergence between departments and Panchayats.

Investigators observed that the presence of line department officials significantly improves public confidence and makes Gram Sabha discussions more solution-oriented and meaningful.

In many locations, respondents specifically emphasized the need for participation of officials from departments such as:

- agriculture,
- health,
- welfare,
- rural development,
- education,
- sanitation,
- and social welfare.

Field Suggestions from Investigators

- Ensure mandatory participation of relevant line department officials in Gram Sabha meetings.
- Establish structured grievance tracking and follow-up systems.
- Improve inter-departmental convergence at Gram Panchayat level.
- Integrate welfare service delivery reviews within Gram Sabha proceedings.
- Encourage departmental responsiveness towards issues raised during meetings.



- Strengthen local-level accountability mechanisms for unresolved grievances.

6. Infrastructure, Accessibility and Remote Area Challenges

Field investigators also highlighted several logistical and accessibility-related challenges affecting participation in geographically difficult regions.

In tribal, hilly, island and remote habitations, respondents frequently reported:

- long travel distances,
- poor transportation connectivity,
- inadequate seating arrangements,
- lack of proper meeting infrastructure,
- and unsuitable meeting venues.

Investigators observed that participation from elderly citizens, women and remote communities is significantly affected when Gram Sabha venues remain physically inaccessible or poorly organized.

Field Suggestions from Investigators

- Improve seating, lighting, drinking water and public address facilities at Gram Sabha venues.
- Consider transport support mechanisms in geographically remote regions.
- Ensure decentralized meeting arrangements for remote habitations where required.
- Develop citizen-friendly and accessible participation spaces.
- Strengthen infrastructure support for large and inclusive Gram Sabha gatherings.

7. Participation Fatigue and Need for Meaningful Engagement

Another important insight emerging from field reflections relates to participation fatigue resulting from excessive frequency of meetings and repetitive procedural discussions.

Investigators in several States observed that repeated meetings conducted without visible outcomes often reduce public interest and dilute the significance of Gram Sabha processes.

Respondents repeatedly emphasized that citizens are more willing to participate when meetings focus upon:

- meaningful discussions,
- local problem-solving,
- visible governance outcomes,
- grievance resolution,
- and actionable developmental priorities.



Field investigators also observed that citizens generally respond positively when Gram Sabha meetings encourage open discussion, collective decision-making and visible community participation.

Field Suggestions from Investigators

- Make Gram Sabha meetings more discussion-oriented and citizen-centric.
- Focus upon local development priorities and actionable community issues.
- Reduce excessive procedural formalities.
- Ensure visible implementation of Gram Sabha decisions.
- Promote participatory discussion culture instead of one-way administrative communication.
- Encourage involvement of youth groups, SHGs and community organizations.

Concluding Observations from Field Investigators

The field reflections collectively suggest that strengthening Gram Sabha participation requires more than procedural compliance with statutory meeting requirements. The findings indicate that sustainable participation depends upon building citizen trust, improving governance responsiveness, strengthening communication systems, ensuring visible outcomes and promoting inclusive democratic culture at the grassroots level.

Importantly, the field observations reveal that citizens are not inherently unwilling to participate in Gram Sabha processes. Rather, participation improves significantly when people perceive Gram Sabha as a meaningful platform capable of influencing local development decisions, addressing public grievances and ensuring visible improvements within the community.

The practitioner reflections therefore reinforce the broader findings of the study that the future effectiveness of Gram Sabha depends not merely upon institutional existence, but upon its transformation into a trusted, participatory and citizen-oriented platform for democratic local governance.



Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Conduct of Vibrant Gram Sabha

1. Introduction

As provided in Article 243G of Part IX of the Constitution of India, Gram Panchayats (GP) are envisioned to create opportunity for the rural population to participate in rural governance and planning for their own development. To strengthen the democratic process at grassroots level, a Gram Sabha, comprising of persons registered in the current electoral rolls pertaining to the GP area, is the Constitutional forum for rural citizens to meet and deliberate upon governance and development related issues. If Gram Sabhas can perform in a vibrant manner, the GPs, and the upper tier Panchayats too, can move towards achievement of the twin goals of economic development and social justice. But it is widely admitted that participation of the members of Gram Sabhas is generally low across the country.

Hence, with support from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), Government of India, National Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR) conducted a Study on Low Participation in Gram Sabha (LPGS) in 400 GPs across the States and UTs of India in 2024-26. The Report on the Study presented an analytical review of the reasons for low participation in Gram Sabha and offered recommendations to enhance participation in Gram Sabha and to make Gram Sabhas vibrant. Based on the findings of the Study, the advisories released by the MoPR from time to time and the Action Research based experience of NIRDPR, this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has been developed.

The SOP further seeks to strengthen Gram Sabha as a citizen-centric democratic platform promoting transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, governance responsiveness and community ownership within grassroots local governance systems.

2. Steps of Actions for States & Union Territories (UTs)

2.1 Legal Reforms in State Panchayat Acts/Rules

1. Review Panchayat Act/Rules on number of meetings, quorum, frequency, fixed dates (e.g., 26 January, 24 April, 15 August, 2 October), and Ward/Mahila/Bal Sabha provisions; amend to ensure $\geq$ six Gram Sabhas annually.
2. Provide for staggered scheduling (cluster/block-wise) so that oversight officials can actively participate across GPs.

2.2 State-Specific Strategies Based on LPGS Findings

Analyze State LPGS findings, identify drivers of low participation, and adopt tailored mitigation strategies.

2.3 Mandatory Institutional & Administrative Actions

1. Issue a Government Order (GO) / Resolution mandating every GP to publish an Annual Gram Sabha Calendar with tentative/specific dates and major agenda [Budget, People's Plan Campaign (PPC), Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP), Social Audit].
2. Compile calendars at State/UT level, communicate to districts/blocks/GPs, and stagger dates across clusters.
3. Mandate attendance of Group A & B officers and line-department staff to explain schemes and entitlements.
4. Ensure optimal GP staffing; obtain line-department support and deploy facilitator- cum-cluster coordinators.
5. Deploy trainers for Capacity Building & Training (CB&T) of Elected Representatives (ERs), staff, and facilitators on Gram Sabha operations.
6. Direct grassroots IEC using print/electronic media, folk art, and local influencers.
7. Publish State-level advertisements on popular TV/Radio at intervals.
8. Require a helpdesk at every GP for Gram Sabha information/services.
9. Mandate a dedicated budget line for Gram Sabha (logistics/IEC/digital infra) with indicative support of ~₹10,000 per GP (scaled by population).
10. Disseminate inclusive participation guidelines (marginalized groups, women, youth).
11. Facilitate pilot innovations to boost participation and evaluate results.
12. Document and disseminate Good Practices.
13. Display "Gram Sabha hamari shaan, Gaon ki yeh pehchaan" (or regional variants) on all notices/backdrops and IEC materials.
14. Direct use of the Panchayat NIRNAY App for scheduling/attendance/proceedings and MoPR's real-time portal (as notified) for dashboard monitoring and uploads (photos/ videos/records).
15. Encourage use of digital communication systems including SMS alerts, WhatsApp groups, digital notice dissemination and social media outreach for improving awareness and participation.
16. Promote integration of Gram Sabha communication and participation systems with eGramSwaraj and other digital governance platforms wherever feasible.

3. Steps of Actions for District Level for Conduct of Vibrant Gram Sabhas

(Responsibility: District Collector/CEO ZP and District PRI Officer)

1. Direct all GPs to publish Gram Sabha Calendars (at least six meetings) with major agenda.
2. Issue orders requiring Group A & B officers of district/line departments to attend and explain schemes in Gram Sabhas.
3. Ensure attendance through rostered duty orders covering all Gram Sabha dates.
4. Depute senior officers to priority/backward/PESA areas.
5. Optimize GP staffing; secure line-department support; deploy facilitator-cum-cluster coordinators.
6. Organize CB&T (with block support) for ERs/staff/facilitators.
7. Direct GP-level IEC (print/electronic, folk art, influencers).
8. Publish local newspaper ads via Information & Publicity offices at intervals.
9. Ensure helpdesks are established in all GPs (monitor via blocks).
10. Support resource-poor GPs to mobilize logistics/IEC/digital resources where State earmarking is absent.
11. Disseminate inclusion guidelines (marginalized, women, youth).
12. Encourage innovations, especially in PESA areas.
13. Use Information & Publicity to document/disseminate Good Practices.
14. Monitor GP performance using locally developed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
15. Incentivize the best-performing GPs in conduct of vibrant Gram Sabha.
16. Stagger Gram Sabha dates cluster-wise to enable active participation of oversight officials.
17. Review monthly performance on the MoPR portal [attendance, quorum, inclusion, Action Taken Reports (ATRs)] and issue corrective advisories.
18. Issue specific orders defining roles of elected members and officials for year-round organization of Gram Sabhas and ATR compliance.
19. Promote context-specific mobilisation strategies for remote habitations, tribal areas, women, elderly citizens and vulnerable communities to improve inclusive participation.

4. Steps of Actions for Block Level for Conduct of Vibrant Gram Sabhas

(Responsibility: BDO/BPRO)

1. Engage block/line department officers as facilitator-cum-cluster coordinators (on the sector-officer model).
2. Hold monthly meetings with GP Presidents/Secretaries and facilitators, addressing PESA/backward-area needs.
3. Guide GPs to prepare/publish Calendars (at least six meetings) with major agenda.
4. Request Group A & B officers of block/line departments to attend and clarify schemes.
5. Ensure ERs/staff/facilitators attend CB&T on Gram Sabha operations.
6. Support grassroots IEC (media, folk art, influencers).
7. Support establishment of help desks in all GPs.
8. Help resource-poor GPs mobilize logistics/IEC/digital infrastructure.
9. Take special measures for inclusion (marginalized, women, youth); deploy innovations, especially in PESA areas.
10. Monitor GPs using locally applicable KPIs.
11. Encourage best performers (certificates/appreciation).
12. Prepare and circulate a block-wise staggered plan and align facilitator rosters.
13. Issue standing orders defining roles of President/Vice-President, Ward Members, Standing Committee Convenors, Panchayat Secretary and facilitators for preparation, conduct and ATR compliance.
14. Facilitate focused mobilisation campaigns through SHGs, youth groups, volunteers and community-based organizations for improving participation in Gram Sabha meetings.

5. Steps of Actions for Gram Panchayats for Conduct of Vibrant Gram Sabhas

5.1 Before the Gram Sabha

1. Ensure clarity among ERs/staff on effective Gram Sabha operations.
2. Hold Mahila Sabha, Bal-Balika Sabha, Youth Gram Sabha etc. before Gram Sabha.
3. Prepare a Gram Sabha Calendar (greater than or equal to six meetings/year) with tentative dates/themes (Foundation Day, Budget, PPC, GPDP, Social Audit).
4. Follow district/block guidance to stagger Gram Sabha and facilitate official participation.
5. Publish the Calendar at block office, GP office (Information Board), and wards.
6. Undertake intensive preparation for ordinary/special/emergency meetings.
7. Preparation, approval and circulation of agenda, preferably two weeks prior to the date of the Gram Sabha, through print and electronic media for Gram Sabha meeting with the standing items first, followed by national/state priority themes and local priorities (reports on progress, challenges, ATRs, receipts & expenditures, audit & social audit, Citizen's Charter/ service delivery, works/OSR, beneficiary selection).

Standing items may include review of previous resolutions, Action Taken Reports (ATRs), grievance status, receipts & expenditure, audit observations and service delivery review.

8. Select accessible venue and arrange full logistics; in PESA GPs, hold the meeting in a tribal village.
9. Issue notices/invitations to Ward Members, officials, SHGs/CSOs; encourage household invitations via Ward Members & SHGs.
10. Use traditional and digital publicity (drums, banners, folk art, social media, community radio, influencers).
11. Encourage use of multilingual IEC materials and digital communication systems for wider dissemination of Gram Sabha information and agenda.
12. Distribute responsibilities among ERs/staff (including line departments).
13. Arrange logistics (seating, drinking water, Persons with Disabilities (PwD) access, baby-care, lighting/generator, refreshment).
14. Arrange attendance capture and recording of proceedings.
15. Prepare agenda notes with departmental support.

16. Mobilize funds/resources.
17. Drive participation via resolution of prior issues, leaflets on ATR highlights/upcoming plans, house-to-house mobilization, and influencer/SHG/youth engagement.
18. Undertake dedicated mobilisation for women, elderly citizens and vulnerable groups through SHGs, frontline workers and community outreach mechanisms.
19. Prepare volunteers and facilitation teams to support smooth entry, seating arrangements, help-desks, documentation and citizen assistance during Gram Sabha meetings.
20. Ensure quorum & inclusion: attendance of a minimum of 10% members, with at least 30% women; apply same quorum to reconvened meetings unless State rules are stricter.
21. Set up a Grievance Desk with timelines (acknowledgment within 3 days; resolution/ speaking order within 30 days).
22. Display taglines like “Gram Sabha hamari shaan, Gaon ki yeh pehchaan” on dais/ backdrop and notices; use multilingual IEC.
23. Host special camps (health screening/tests, Aadhaar, banks/post offices, telecom, insurance) alongside the meeting.
24. Create/schedule the meeting on the Panchayat NIRNAY App; publish on State/UT/ MoPR portal/GP website; ready devices for photo/video and e-proceedings upload.
25. Ensure availability of Sabha Saar or similar digital systems for recording deliberations, attendance and proceedings wherever applicable.
26. Use social media (official GP/block/district handles, WhatsApp channels) to share dates, agenda, entitlements, and live updates/recaps (with consent).

5.2 During the Gram Sabha

1. Provide culturally appropriate seating (e.g., gender-wise if locally practiced).
2. Open with announcement and member consent.
3. The President (or, in absence, Vice-President) presides – only the President or Vice- President shall preside; spouses cannot serve as proxy.
4. At the outset, announce the quorum achieved and percentage of women attendees; record both in the proceedings.
5. Place resolutions of Mahila Sabha, Bal-Balika Sabha, Youth Gram Sabha etc. which were held before the Gram Sabha, in the beginning of the Gram Sabha.

6. Present agenda; confirm previous minutes.
7. Conduct agenda-wise discussions; invite representative voices.
8. Give special attention to SC/ST, women, and marginalized groups.
9. Invite GP/line-department officials to clarify matters.
10. The Secretary (or designated staff) to record proceedings.
11. The meeting proceedings may also be digitally recorded through Sabha Saar or similar systems for improving transparency and documentation.
12. Summarize deliberations and finalize decisions by consensus or vote.
13. Conclude on a positive, democratic note.
14. Take standing items first, then national/state priority themes; invite Group A/B officers for scheme clarifications.
15. Discussions may be conducted in a participatory, transparent and respectful manner encouraging wider citizen engagement.

5.3 After the Gram Sabha

1. The Presiding Officer shall review the proceedings for accuracy/completeness/impartiality.
2. Circulate proceedings among Ward Members, BDO/BPRO, relevant officials/facilitators; display a copy publicly.
3. Share the proceedings of the Gram Sabha with the district administration, block administration and the line departments so that they can pick up the relevant points for planning and action at their respective levels.
4. Secretary preserves signed proceedings and attendance as per rules.
5. Place GS outcomes in the next GP meeting to identify actionable items and timelines.
6. Using the Panchayat NIRNAY App and MoPR portal, upload attendance, photos/videos, and signed proceedings; open ATR items with timelines and display an ATR tracker at the GP office/website.
7. Action Taken Report (ATR) tracker relating to decisions and grievances may be displayed publicly at the Gram Panchayat office and digital platforms wherever feasible.
8. Sabha Saar-generated proceedings may be reviewed for accuracy, neutrality and completeness before circulation.
9. Upload proceedings on the Vibrant Gram Sabha Portal (meetingonline.gov.in) and the GP website (if available).

5.4 Duties of the Gram Panchayat Secretary

1. Before Gram Sabha: issue notices; finalize venue/logistics; verify quorum plan & women's mobilization; compile agenda notes & ATRs; set up the Grievance Desk; create/schedule the meeting on NIRNAY; ready attendance sheets/recording devices.
2. During Gram Sabha: record attendance (with women count); minute standing items/ decisions; capture photos/video; support agenda flow.
3. After GS: finalize/circulate proceedings; upload to NIRNAY/MoPR portal; open/ monitor ATRs; maintain Grievance Register and closure reports; preserve all records.
4. Support Sabha Saar recording, digital documentation and grievance monitoring wherever applicable.
5. Facilitate mobilisation support systems relating to women participation, vulnerable groups and citizen assistance mechanisms.

5.5 Standing Sub-Committees of the Gram Panchayat

1. Operationalize six standing sub-committees and subsume scheme/project committees within them:
 - General Standing Committee
 - Village Health, Sanitation & Nutrition Committee (VHSNC)
 - Planning & Development Committee
 - Education Committee (School Management Committee)
 - Social Justice Standing Committee
 - Water Supply, Water & Environmental Conservation Committee
2. Membership: All Ward Members/elected representatives; no member on more than two committees; sector-enabler Ward Members on the matching sector committee.
3. Remuneration (as per State orders/OSR): up to ₹1,000 per sub-committee meeting for Ward Members and up to ₹5,000 per month for Sarpanch may be provided.

5.6 Day Officer

Nominate, by monthly rotation, one Ward Member as "Day Officer" responsible for opening the GP office, supervising cleanliness, organizing meetings, and frontline citizen interface.

6. Actions for Communities & Community-Level Organizations

1. SHGs/Federations: deliver household invitations; mobilize women/youth; support logistics; maintain peace/harmony.
2. Other CBOs/NGOs/ Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) /frontline workers (AWW, ASHA, health workers, volunteers): mobilization and on-ground support.
3. Community leaders/representatives: direct connect and motivation to attend.
4. Cooperative societies may support shared resource management, community participation and local coordination activities relating to Gram Sabha conduct.
5. Frontline workers such as AWWs, ASHAs, health workers and volunteers may support last-mile mobilisation and citizen facilitation.
6. Youth groups and volunteers may support outreach, awareness campaigns and digital participation systems.
7. Where applicable, conduct Mahila Sabha and Bal-Balika Sabha before the main Gram Sabha so that their resolutions feed into the agenda and GPDP.

7. Monitoring & Evaluation Mechanism for Vibrant Gram Sabha

1. Every State/UT is to develop a robust framework for Monitoring & Evaluation Mechanism along with a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to be developed by the State/UT for the purpose under guidance of NIRDPR and MoPR.
2. The State/UT is to deploy independent third-party evaluation every two years to assess effectiveness, vibrancy and quality of Gram Sabhas deliberations. The independent third-party evaluation is also to include social audit for community feedback on issues related to effectiveness, vibrancy and quality of Gram Sabha operations, based on the KPIs and community scorecards.
3. Monitoring systems may also include indicators relating to inclusion, grievance responsiveness, women participation, Action Taken Reports and quality of citizen engagement.

8. Capacity Building for Vibrant Gram Sabhas

1. A separate Capacity Building & Training (CB&T) component is to be developed by each State/UT and incorporated in the overall Capacity Building Action Plan mentioning, inter alia, the clientele category-wise training objectives, frequency of training and application of IEC tools for vibrant Gram Sabha.
2. The Capacity Building Action Plan of the State/UT is to include a structured Training Calendar for training on Gram Sabha operations.

Training Modules are to be developed by each State/UT focusing on agenda setting, overall management of Gram Sabha including IEC campaign, recording and dissemination of proceedings, facilitation, inclusivity, gender sensitivity, application of digital tools etc.

3. A separate Capacity Building Action Plan is to be developed by the PESA States for vibrant Gram Sabha in PESA areas.
4. Capacity Building modules may additionally cover facilitation skills, inclusiveness, gender sensitivity, grievance handling, digital governance systems and technology-enabled participation mechanisms.

9. Grievance Redressal regarding Gram Sabha Operations

1. A strong Grievance Redressal Mechanism is to be developed by each State/UT for GP, block and district levels to accommodate grievances of the aggrieved persons on Gram Sabha operations.
2. A Complaint Box is to be maintained in each GP office. A web-based system is to be developed, widely notified and put into operation to enable the public to register their grievances on Gram Sabha operations.
3. The Grievance Redressal system is to incorporate the responsibilities of the district administration, block administration and the GP to address the grievances.
4. An ATR on the number and nature of the grievances addressed is to be placed in each Gram Sabha.
5. Grievance Registers and closure reports may be maintained at Gram Panchayat level for periodic public review during Gram Sabha meetings.

10. Conclusion

This SOP has been developed, based on the ideal conditions of opportunity to practice democracy in the conduct of Gram Sabha. This SOP offers a framework and a common guideline to the practitioners at all the levels of Panchayat governance with a scope for need-based modifications and adaptability depending on the ground realities.

Sustained citizen awareness, inclusive participation environments, institutional responsiveness and democratic accountability remain essential for transforming Gram Sabha into an active and trusted platform for participatory local governance. The procedural steps, as suggested in the SOP, may be followed to 'some extent' or to a 'great extent' in the GPs depending on the generosity and political will of the GP leadership, faith in practice of transparency and expression of accountability to the people, support from district and block administration and line department offices, pro-Panchayat mindset of the members of the Gram Sabha and the level of their awareness.

ANNEXURE – 1

LPGS STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE_NIRDPR

Purpose of the Study

This questionnaire is designed to assess participation patterns, governance processes, awareness levels, institutional support systems, and citizen engagement relating to Gram Sabha functioning across selected Gram Panchayats.

The information collected through this survey will be used purely for research and policy analysis purposes to strengthen participatory local governance systems.

Section 1: Respondent Details

Q1. Name of Respondent

Q2. Mobile Number (Optional)

Q3. State

Q4. District

Q5. Block

Q6. Gram Panchayat

Q7(a). Area Category

- PESA
- Non-PESA

Q7(b). Is it a Women-Friendly Panchayat?

- Yes
- No

Q7(c). Is the Sarpanch / Mukhiya / Pradhan a Woman?

- Yes
- No

Q8. Type of Respondent

- Elected Representative
- Panchayat Official
- SHG Member

- GS Member
- NGO
- Other

Q9. Gender

- Male
- Female
- Other

Q10. Age Group

- 18–30
- 31–45
- 46–60
- 60+

Q11. Social Category

- SC
- ST
- OBC
- General
- Minority
- Other

Q12. Education

- Uneducated
- Primary Education
- Secondary Education
- Graduate and Above

Q13. Occupation

- Farmer
- Daily Wages
- Self-employed
- Government Sector
- Private Sector
- Unemployed
- Other

Section 2: Awareness & Communication

Q14. Are you aware of Gram Sabha meetings?

- Yes
- No

Q15. If yes, how did you know? (Multiple Options)

- Public Announcement

- Word of Mouth
- PRI Members
- Media
- Other

Q16. Do you know about your rights in Gram Sabha?

- Yes
- No

Q17. Are you aware of how many times Gram Sabha meetings are held annually?

- Yes
- No

Q18. If yes, how many meetings annually?

- Zero
- Once
- Twice
- Three Times
- Four Times
- More than Four Times

Q19. Mediums used to inform GS meetings (Multiple Options)

- Ward Members
- SHGs
- Public Announcements
- Notice Boards
- Public Notice
- WhatsApp / Social Media
- House-to-House Campaigns
- Schools / Anganwadi / ASHA Workers
- Religious / Community Places
- NGOs / Cooperatives
- Other

Q20. Effectiveness of Current Communication System

- Very Effective
- Effective
- Neutral
- Ineffective
- Very Ineffective

Q21. Most Effective Medium for Participation

- Ward Members
- SHGs
- Public Announcements

- Notice Boards
- Public Notice
- WhatsApp / Social Media
- House-to-House Campaigns
- Schools / Anganwadi / ASHA Workers
- Religious / Community Places
- Other

Q22. Usual Advance Notice for GS Meeting

- On the Day
- 1–2 Days
- 3–5 Days
- More than a Week
- No Fixed Pattern

Q23. Ideal Notice Period

- Less than 3 Days
- 3–7 Days
- 8–15 Days
- More than 15 Days

Section 3: Participation Behavior

Q24. Attended GS in the Last 1 Year?

- Yes
- No

Q25. If yes, how many times?

- 1–2
- 3–4
- More than 5

Q26. Do you actively participate in GS?

- Yes
- No

Q27. If no, why not? (Multiple Options)

- Communication and Awareness Issue
- Lack of Interest
- Unmet Needs
- Occupational Engagement
- Inconvenient Timing
- Lack of Inclusiveness
- Dissatisfaction with Services
- Transparency Issues

- Concern about Corruption
- Political Discontent

Section 4: Participation Patterns

Q28. Do you feel comfortable speaking in meetings?

- Yes
- No

Q29. If no, reasons for discomfort (Multiple Options)

- Dominance of Elites
- Gender Discrimination
- Caste Discrimination
- Fear of Authority
- Lack of Confidence
- Other

Q30. Do women participate actively?

- Yes
- No

Q31. Do SC/ST communities participate actively?

- Yes
- No

Q32. Do line department officials participate?

- Yes
- No

Q33. If yes, name departments

Q34. Do you know about quorum in GS?

- Yes
- No

Q35. Is quorum achieved?

- Yes
- No
- Not Aware

Q36. Usual Participation Level

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Low

- Very Low

Q37. Groups actively participating (Multiple Options)

- Men
- Women
- Youth
- SC/ST Communities
- OBC Communities
- Other Communities
- SHG Members
- Elderly
- Migrant Households
- Other

Q38. Least represented groups (Multiple Options)

- Men
- Women
- Youth
- SC/ST Communities
- OBC Communities
- Other Communities
- SHG Members
- Elderly
- Migrant Households
- Other

Section 5: Reasons for Low Participation

Q39. Livelihood / Time-related reasons (Multiple Options)

- Busy with Work / Daily Wage Labour
- Agricultural Activities
- Migration for Work
- Timing not Suitable
- Other

Q40. Awareness-related issues (Multiple Options)

- Not Informed in Advance
- Information not Reaching all Households
- Lack of Clarity about Purpose
- Other

Q41. Barriers to Inclusiveness (Multiple Options)

- Women not Encouraged
- Social Barriers (Caste / Gender)
- Dominance by Few Individuals

- Lack of Safe Environment
- Other

Q42. Factors reducing importance of GS (Multiple Options)

- Issues not Relevant
- No Visible Outcomes
- Lack of Trust in Decisions
- Meetings Seen as Formalities
- Other

Q43. Governance / Trust concerns (Multiple Options)

- Lack of Transparency
- Corruption Concerns
- Political Interference
- Favoritism in Beneficiary Selection
- Other

Q44. Service Delivery Issues (Multiple Options)

- Poor Grievance Response
- Delay in Implementation
- Lack of Officials' Presence
- Other

Q45. Practical Difficulties (Multiple Options)

- Venue too Far
- No Seating / Facilities
- No Transport
- Other

Q46. Most Important Reason for Low Participation

- A. Livelihood & Time Constraints
- B. Awareness Issues
- C. Participation & Inclusiveness
- D. Interest & Relevance
- E. Governance & Trust Issues
- F. Service Delivery Issues
- G. Logistics & Access
- Other

Section 6: Solutions & Suggestions

Q47. Measures to improve participation (Multiple Options)

- Better Awareness Campaigns
- Door-to-Door Mobilization
- Fix Convenient Timing (Morning / Evening)

- Avoid Agricultural / Work Hours
- Provide Transport Support
- Improve Meeting Facilities (Shade, Seating, Water)
- Ensure Transparency in Decisions
- Share Budgets and Plans Openly
- Improve Grievance Redressal
- Ensure Visible Outcomes
- Include Women / SC / ST / OBC / Youth Actively
- Conduct Ward Sabha / Mahila Sabha
- Make Meetings Interactive
- Provide Refreshments
- Provide Incentives / Recognition
- Ensure Participation of Officials
- Other

Q48. In your opinion, which is the most effective measure?

- Better Awareness Campaigns
- Door-to-Door Mobilization
- Fix Convenient Timing (Morning / Evening)
- Avoid Agricultural / Work Hours
- Provide Transport Support
- Improve Meeting Facilities (Shade, Seating, Water)
- Ensure Transparency in Decisions
- Share Budgets and Plans Openly
- Improve Grievance Redressal
- Ensure Visible Outcomes
- Include Women / SC / ST / OBC / Youth Actively
- Conduct Ward Sabha / Mahila Sabha
- Make Meetings Interactive
- Provide Refreshments
- Provide Incentives / Recognition
- Ensure Participation of Officials
- Other

Section 7: Functioning of Gram Sabha

Q49. Agenda items discussed in a Gram Sabha (Multiple Options)

- Identifying Local Issues
- Approving GPDP
- Identifying Beneficiaries
- Annual Budget
- Social Audit
- OSR Generation

- Health / Literacy
- Development Priorities
- Welfare Schemes
- Infrastructure
- Sanitation
- Livelihood
- Social Issues
- Other

Q50. Are grievances received in the Gram Sabha?

- Yes
- No

Q51. If yes, how are grievances addressed?

- Immediately Resolved
- Recorded and Followed Up
- Rarely Addressed
- Not Addressed

Q52. Minutes recorded properly in proceeding books?

- Yes
- No

Q53. Minutes uploaded to Panchayat NIRNAY App?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never
- Not Aware

Q54. Are signatures of GS Members collected for approval of GS resolutions?

- Yes
- No

Q55. Whether SABHASAAR is being used for recording and preparing Gram Sabha minutes?

- Yes
- No

Section 8: Institutional Support to GS

Q56. Village committees exist? (Multiple Options)

- Vana Samrakshana
- Village Health Sanitation Committee
- School Management Committee
- Watershed Committee
- Mothers Committee

- Drinking Water Committee
- SHG Federation
- Youth Groups
- Other

Q57. Do they participate?

- Yes, Regularly
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never

Q58. What roles do they play? (Multiple Options)

- Raising Public Issues
- Monitoring Development Works
- Mobilizing People
- Supporting Implementation
- Sharing Feedback

Section 9: Financials Related to GS

Q59. Source of funds for conducting Gram Sabha (Multiple Options)

- GP Funds
- SFC
- CFC
- Scheme Funds
- Own Source Revenue
- CSR / Donations
- Other

Q60. Expenditure per GS Meeting

- Less than ₹1,000
- ₹1,001 – ₹2,500
- ₹2,501 – ₹5,000
- ₹5,001 – ₹10,000
- ₹10,001 – ₹25,000
- ₹25,001 – ₹50,000
- ₹50,001 – ₹1,00,000
- ₹1,00,000 and Above

Q61. Major Expenditure Heads (Multiple Options)

- Logistics (Tent, Chairs, Mats, Stage Arrangements)
- Refreshments (Food, Water, Tea)
- Communication (Announcements, Posters, Printing, Miking)
- Stationery and Documentation (Registers, Forms, Reports)
- Transport Arrangements (Officials or Materials)

- Cleaning and Sanitation Arrangement
- Electricity / Sound System
- Other

Q62. Which of the following infrastructure facilities are available for conducting Gram Sabha meetings in your Gram Panchayat?

- A. Gram Sabha Hall Available
- B. Hall Capacity Adequate
- C. Sufficient Space Available
- D. Accessible / Centrally Located Venue
- E. Adequate Seating Arrangements
- F. Drinking Water Facility Available
- G. Separate Toilet Facilities Available
- H. Sound System Available for Gram Sabha Meetings
- I. Internet Connectivity Satisfactory
- J. Video Conferencing Facility Available
- K. Digitized Records Available
- L. Social Media / WhatsApp Communication Facility Available
- M. Audio-Visual Presentation Facility Available

Final Remarks

Q63. Suggestions to Improve Gram Sabha Participation



**STRONGER GRAM SABHA.
STRONGER PARTICIPATION.
STRONGER DEMOCRACY.**



LISTEN



ENGAGE



DECIDE



DEVELOP



A JOINT INITIATIVE OF



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