

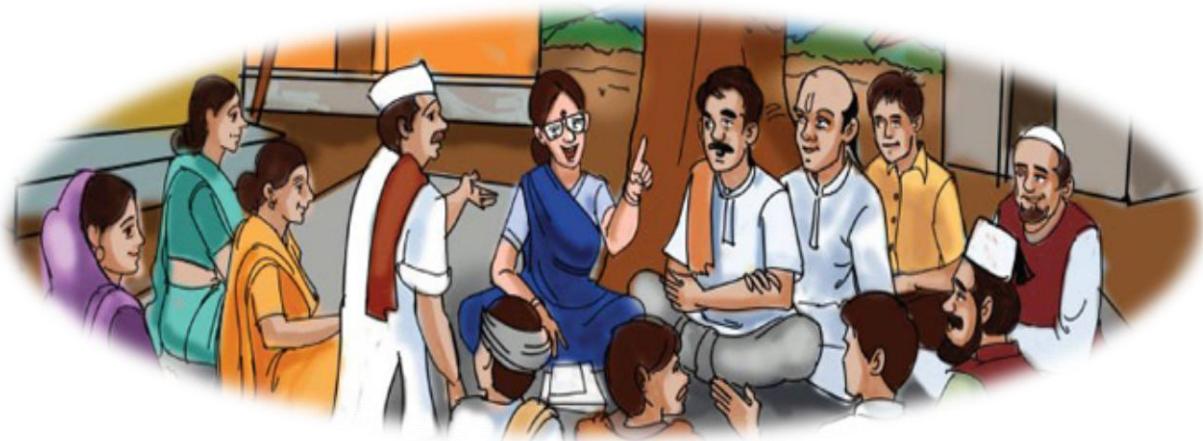
A Report

on

Community Development through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Himachal Pradesh: A Study of Kuther Panchayat

Submitted to

National Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (NIRD & PR)
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Executive Summary

Gram panchayat Kuther is located in Nagrota Surian block of district Kangra. The gram panchayat has been spread in the area of 5 to 6 square kilometers. It is one of the oldest panchayats of Himachal Pradesh and was established on 27-10-1945 under the British rule. As per Census 2011, the panchayat has a total population of 2,489 persons which consists of 1,397 males and 1,279 females. The sex ratio of panchayat is 915 females per thousand males. Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) comprise 29 percent, 27 percent and 19 percent of the population. Panchayat's literacy rate is 92 percent of which male and female literacy rate is 94 and 90 percent respectively. Most of the villagers are dependent upon agriculture and dairy farming to earn their living. Gram panchayat Kuther is headed by Pradhan, Up-pradhan and comprises seven ward members.

Someone has said that necessity is the mother of invention. It is rightly applicable to gram panchayat Kuther. During summers, the panchayat suffered from the problem of acute water shortage. Villagers had to travel 3 kilometers to fetch water for their day to day purpose. Most of the time was getting spent to fetch water. Overall, both children and adults had to spend a lot of time to fetch water which could have been utilised for something else. As the situation was getting difficult, the panchayat officials met and discussed the seriousness of the problem. After continues discussions, strategies such as building rainwater harvesting tanks, check dams and digging bore wells were incorporated to solve this problem. First of all, under the 'Swajal Dhara Scheme' panchayat dug extra bore wells to extract water. Then electric power sets were installed to lift water from the bore well. Now each bore well caters to the need of 15–20 households. The panchayat also took some important initiatives to increase the supply of water for irrigation. Construction of check dams is one such initiative. In addition, to check dams, rainwater harvesting tanks have also been constructed in the panchayat. This helps in accumulating rainwater which is being used for agriculture.

The gram panchayat Kuther had less area under tree coverage. Lack of tree cover was often causing the problem of soil erosion. Loss of productivity of the land enforced panchayat officials to devise a strategy to increase tree cover in the area. The panchayat officials took the help of Forest department and planted nearly one lakh trees in the panchayat. Now, the area under tree cover has increased tremendously and soil erosion due to heavy monsoon rains has reduced extensively.

These trees are extremely beneficial as the leaves of some of these trees can be used as fodder for the cattle.

Similar to other rural areas in the country, the main occupation of Kuther panchayat residents is agriculture and dairy. Majority of the land was used to grow food grains and cash crops. As a result, less area was available to grow fodder for the cattle. The scarcity of water during summers made it really difficult for the farmers to get fresh fodder for their cattle. As the panchayat had surplus land at its disposal, it was allocated for the purpose of cultivating fodder at the community level. Now, the farmers take their cattle for grazing and they also cut fodder for their cattle. With availability of green fodder throughout the year, the overall yield of the cattle has increased. Many local residents have increased the number of cattle.

Gram panchayat Kuther has a Government senior secondary school. However, due to old structure, most of the rooms were not ideal to be used as classrooms. Sometimes, two or three classes had to be accommodated in one classroom. During monsoon season it was difficult to sit inside the classrooms as the ceilings were often leaking due to rain. Because of this issue, the students were reluctant to go to the school and the presence of students was getting reduced. It was proving detrimental to the overall education of the students. Looking into the situation, the worried parents first went to the school administration and then discussed the matter with the panchayat officials. The panchayat officials took notice of the situation and constructed extra rooms in the school campus in Jan Sahayog scheme of the government. Now, students come to the school regularly and the absenteeism due to poor infrastructure has reduced enormously. This again is a very good step taken by the panchayat as children are the real wealth of the nation and their development is contingent to the education they get.

Along with agriculture, dairy farming is also an important occupation in the panchayat. Most of the people in Kuther had cow sheds but they lacked concrete fodder containers, which is used to give fodder to the cattle. Most of the times the fodder used to get mixed with the muddy surface and get wasted. It was already difficult to bring fodder for cattle and its wastage accentuated the problem. After proper deliberations with villagers the panchayat officials took notice of this problem and allocated funds to individual cow sheds for the construction of fodder containers. So far around 150 concrete fodder containers have been constructed in the entire panchayat.

Apart from these initiatives, the panchayat has done other important works that has transformed the entire area. For these initiatives the panchayat has won the Atal Adarsh Gram Award in 2012,

by the Govt. of Himachal Pradesh, good work in the implementation of MGNREGA for the year (2015-16), received in 2017 and Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Award for the year (2015-16), received in 2017.

Introduction

An overview of Panchayati Raj in Himachal Pradesh

In Himachal Pradesh, Panchayat Raj system was established in a statutory form under the provisions of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1952 in the year 1954. Before the enactment of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, 1952 only 280 Gram Panchayats existed. However, in the year 1954, 466 Gram Panchayats were established, and the number of Gram Panchayats increased to 638 during the year 1962. On 1st November 1966, the hilly areas of Punjab were merged in the State, and consequently, the number of Gram Panchayats rose to 1695. In the merged area, a three-tier Panchayati Raj system was in existence under the provisions of Punjab Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad Act, whereas two-tier system was prevalent in this State. To bring uniformity in the Panchayati Raj system of the old and the newly merged areas, the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1968 was enacted on 15th November 1970 in this State, and the two-tier Panchayati Raj system was established throughout the State. After the enactment of the said Act in the year 1970, the existing Gram Sabhas were reorganized or bifurcated from time to time and new Gram Sabhas/Gram Panchayats were established. At present, some Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIIs) working in the state of Himachal Pradesh in several domains are quite noticeable which include fields like regularity of panchayat meetings including those of gram sabha and standing committees, attendance in these meetings particularly the representation of SC and STs in the Gram Sabhas, discussions held and issues discussed, resolutions undertaken on various development works, identification of multiple beneficiaries, implementation of the State and Central Government schemes, efforts for achieving total sanitation, development of effective plans for raising own resources, systems for efficient tax collection, strengthening of local institutions, capacity building of the elected representatives and staff, having mechanism for transparency and accountability, development in the infrastructure in the panchayat, cleanliness,

women empowerment, save girl child, education, health, employment, awareness and so on. These gram panchayats in the state have set many examples in rural development, infrastructure development and implementation of all programmes launched by the Centre and state government. These panchayats have been selected among many gram panchayats from all over the country and state for the national and state level awards in different time periods and got an appraisal for their best performance in the country. Some of these panchayats took the lead in getting declared open defecation free (ODF) in the state and became eligible for different cash awards. Some of them have successfully launched Swachh Bharat Mission by keeping its panchayat neat and clean besides constructing separate toilets of boys and girls in all government schools in the panchayat and fulfilled all yardsticks laid down by the Centre under the Swachh Bharat programme. Some of them have installed solar streetlights in different wards of the panchayats. The panchayats have also built crematoriums under government's Vikas Mein Jan Sahyog scheme. Most of these panchayats have built their panchayat bhawans (buildings) with a well-furnished conference hall, veterinary dispensary, community hall, and a fair price shop are sometimes running under the same roof. Some of them have brought about a remarkable change in the magnitude of participation of women in PRIs. In fact, Himachal excels in working for women empowerment and has been awarded the 'Diamond State' award. Himachal Pradesh has become the first state in the nation in which 50 % reservation is given to women in Panchayati Raj institutions and other urban jobs. In this project, we have documented the successful practices of such 5panchayats from three districts named Kangra, Kullu, and Hamirpur of Himachal Pradesh. These panchayats are national award-winning panchayats in excelling in the overall development of the panchayat. This work is beneficial to motivate other panchayats especially those who have the similar type of problems, topography and climatic condition.

Methodology

Need for the study

Himachal Pradesh is different from rest of the country in many aspects. These include the topography of the region, climate, culture, dialects, agricultural cycles, and practices. In addition, there is a relative absence of industrial factories in the state that are the mainstay of urban employment in many other states of India. Himachal Pradesh is the most rural state in the country where 90% the population live in rural areas. Although 3316 panchayats (Zila Parishad 12, Panchayat Samitis 78 and Gram Panchayats 3226) are working in the state but some of them are doing very well and are ahead of many other panchayats in their work efficiency and management. These panchayats are considered good in meeting some of the core objectives of the Panchayati Raj including rural asset creation, micro-watershed development, reducing urban migration, empowering women, uplifting scheduled caste, scheduled tribes, economically and socially backward sections. For their outstanding contribution, they were awarded national awards many times. In this project, we have documented that in spite of hard topography and other barriers, how these panchayats have performed better than others. There was a great need of the documentation of successful practices of these panchayats and the mitigation strategies

Objectives

While many panchayats in Himachal Pradesh have been successful in achieving the desired objectives of the Panchayati raj but there is a lack of studies done on the factors behind the successful working of these panchayats. Our study has delineated the practices and processes responsible for the successful working of these panchayats. Given Himachal's mountainous terrain the study has also uncovered the practices which can become inspirations to other panchayats of the country especially to other hilly and difficult terrains.

Nature of data used

In order to analyze the objectives of this study, both primary, as well as secondary data, has been used. The secondary information has been collected from the District Rural Development Agencies, Block Development Offices, books, journals, and reports. The primary information has been collected from different stakeholders at the panchayat level.

Research approach

Our study aims to delineate the practices and processes responsible for the successful working of five panchayats namely; 1) Tandi Gram Panchayat, block Banjar, district Kullu; 2) Balagad Gram panchayat, block Banjar, district Kullu; 3) Kuther Gram panchayat, Nagrota Surian block, district Kangra; 4) Kasba Paprola Gram panchayat, district Kangra; 5) Pahlu Gram panchayat, district Hamirpur, in the diverse areas of Himachal Pradesh, India. These panchayats got different national and state awards for their exemplary works in the respective panchayats. This study has been conducted in three phases. The first two phases involved preparation of preliminary and preparatory tools to undertake the main survey in Himachal Pradesh. In the first phase, a review of the literature, internal group discussion and interviews with key stakeholders has been conducted, which provided the background information necessary to ensure a complete understanding of the successful Panchayati Raj institutions' working. With this background information, the study has proceeded to the next level wherein appropriate research tools have been identified, as also the indicators to measure the different dimensions of the study. This exercise has enabled the research team to secure greater control over and a better understanding of the issues under review. The research methodology and tools have been then taken to the field for pre-testing. The pre-testing has helped in establishing confidence in the methodology and to facilitate the firming up of indicators. From this phase, the study moved into the final level, which

has included field survey and monitoring, preparation of data entry programme, data entry, preparation of analysis plan, analysis of data, and final report writing.

Case Study of Kuther Panchayat

The milieu of the district in which Kuther panchayat is situated

Kangra district lies between 31-40 to 32-25 east longitudes and 70-35 to 77-5 north latitude. It is situated on the southern escarpment of the Himalayas. The district has a geographical area of 5,739 kilometers which constitutes 10.31 percentage of the total geographical area of the State. The district is bounded by Chamba to the north, Lahaul and Spiti to the northeast, Kullu to the east, Mandi to the southeast, and Hamirpur and Una to the south. The district shares a border with the states of Punjab on the southwest, and Jammu and Kashmir on the northwest. The elevation varies from 500 meters to 5500 meters from the sea level. The present Kangra district came into existence on the 1st September 1972 consequent upon the re-organization of districts by the Government of Himachal Pradesh.

Due to the hilly terrain, the lesser area is under cultivation in the district. The district is full of uniform patches of barren land, as well as small forests. This district is having a topography with some of the parts like Milawan at 400 m. altitudes, while the area of Bara Bhangal is at the altitude of 5500 m. winter lasts from mid-December to mid-February, during which the temperature ranges from 0 to 20 °C. District Kangra is named after Kangra town which was called Nagarkot in the ancient times. It was a part of ancient Trigarta which was named for territory drained by three rivers i.e. Satluj, Beas and Ravi. Region Trigarta had two provinces out of which one was in the hills with headquarters at Nagarkot (Kangra).

Demographic characteristics of district Kangra of Himachal Pradesh

Description	2011
Actual Population	1,510,075
Male	750,591
Female	759,484
Population Growth	12.77 %
Area Sq. Km	5,739
Density/km2	263
Proportion to Himachal Pradesh Population	22.00 %
Sex Ratio (Per 1000)	1012
Child Sex Ratio (0-6 Age)	876

Average Literacy	85.67
Male Literacy	91.49
Female Literacy	80.02
Rural Population	94.29 %
Urban Population	5.71 %

Source: <http://www.census2011.co.in/census/district/233-kangra.html>

According to the census 2011, the total population of the district is 15,10,075 with a population growth of 12.77 percent. Male population comprises 7,50,591 while female population is 7,59,484. It is one of the districts in Himachal Pradesh where the sex ratio is above 1000 with 1012 females per 1000 males. It constitutes 22 percent of the total population of the state and population wise it is the biggest district in the state. The average literacy rate is 85.67 percent in which male literacy is 91.49 percent and female literacy is 80.02 percent. Out of total population, 94.29 percent is living in rural areas and rest 5.71 percent in urban areas.

District Kangra has been divided into 12 subdivisions namely Kangra, Dharamshala, Nurpur, Dehra, Jaisinghpur, Palampur, Baijnath, Jawali, Jawalamukhi, Fatehpur, Shahpur and Nagrota Bagwan. These subdivisions consist of 21 tehsils. A total number of villages and towns comprise 748 and 9 respectively. There are 748 village panchayats comprising 4,682-gram panchayat members and 363 panchayat secretaries. There are 56 Zila Parishad members in the district.

Administrative and Panchayati Raj set up in District Kangra

Description	2017
Sub Divisions	12
Tehsils	21
Blocks	15
Towns	19
Total Villages	3,869
Total Panchayats	748
Zila Parishad Members	56
Gram Panchayat Members	4,682
Total Panchayat Secretaries	363

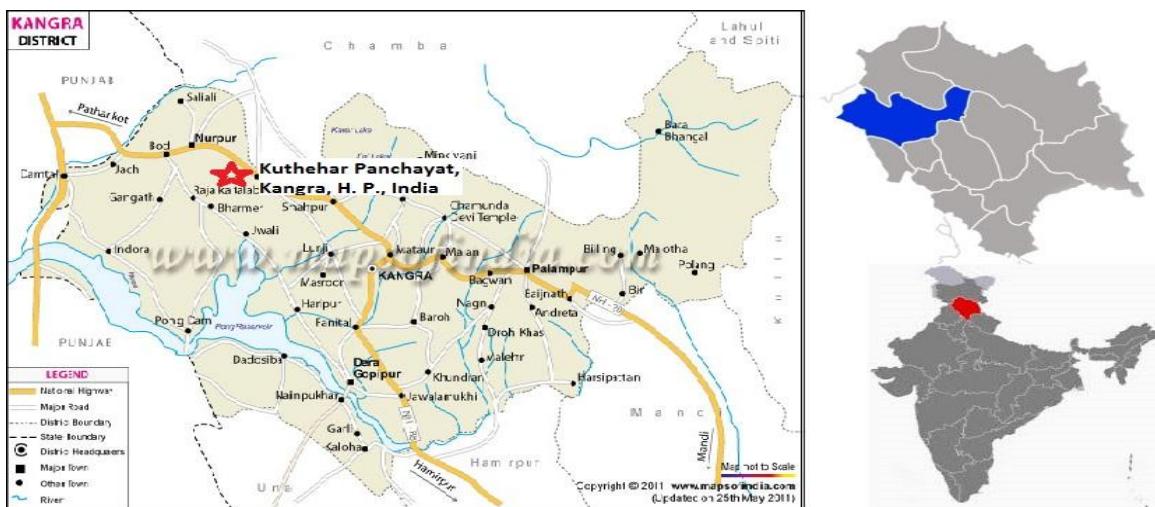
Source: District administration: Kangra retrieved from

http://himachal.nic.in/index1.php?lang=1&dpt_id=200&level=1&sublinkid=8236&lid=8472

Location and demographic characteristics of Kuther panchayat

The gram panchayat Kuther is located in Nagrota Surian block of district Kangra. The gram panchayat has been spread in the area of 5 to 6 square kilometers. It is one of the oldest panchayats of Himachal Pradesh and was established on October 27, 1945, under the British rule. This panchayat is located at a distance of 3.2 kilometers from the nearest state highway. As per Census 2011, the panchayat has a total population of 2,489 persons which consists of 1,397 males and 1,279 females. The sex ratio of panchayat is 915 females per thousand males. Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) comprise 29 percent, 27 percent and 19 percent of the population. Panchayat's literacy rate is 92 percent of which male and female literacy rate is 94 and 90 percent respectively. The native language of panchayat is Hindi and dialect is Pahari, where Hindi is the predominant language used by most of the villagers. Hinduism is the primary religion in the panchayat which includes the Brahmins, Rajputs, and Kolis. Most of the villagers are dependent upon agriculture and dairy farming to earn their living. Gram panchayat Kuther is headed by Pradhan, Uppradhan and comprises seven ward members.

Location of Kuther Panchayat in district Kangra of Himachal Pradesh



Source: <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/himachalpradesh/districts/kangra.html>

Case presentation of Kuther panchayat

In case of gram panchayat Kuther, the information at ground level was collected from panchayat members (Veena Sharma – Pradhan, Sushil Sharma – Uppradhan,, Vijay Guleria – panchayat secretary and Pritam Singh, Rajkumari, Ranjana Devi, Onkar Singh, Lajya Devi, Veena Devi and Ranjit Singh - ward members) and panchayat residents. Mrs. Veena Sharma was appointed as panchayat Pradhan on January 1, 2016. Her family has been serving the panchayat for last six decades. Her father-in-law, husband and other family members have remained on various posts in the panchayat. With such a long family history of serving the panchayat, Mrs. Veena Sharma also has the legacy and experience of running the panchayat. Before joining the office as Pradhan Pradhan in January 2016, her husband Mr. Sushil Kumar was the panchayat Pradhan. Local residents have enormous faith in the family. Term after term they have elected a member of this family for the post of Pradhan. Local residents say that sometimes when the funds are not enough to complete a development work in the panchayat, this family provided necessary funds to the panchayat. With such magnanimity, it is not surprising that local people continue to vote for this family in every term.

Over the years gram panchayat Kuther has completed various developmental works that have brought economic and social transformation in the area. These works include: (i) Works related to water supply for household and irrigation purpose, (ii) Plantation of trees, (iii) Utilisation of surplus public land for cultivating fodder, (iv) Allocation of funds for the construction of concrete fodder containers in cow sheds, (v) Construction of all-weather village paths, (vi) Construction of classrooms in Govt. school, (vii) Street lighting through installation of solar lights and (viii) Separate place for Anganwadi Kendras and Mahila mandals. Apart from these works panchayat has also done various other developmental works such as building houses under Pradhanmantri Awas Yojana, proper drainage of wastewater, allocation of dustbins under Swachh Bharat Mission

and providing Kisan credit cards to farmers. Due to the paucity of space and time, we cannot present a detailed explanation of all the developmental works. Among all the developmental works done by the panchayat, we have given a detailed account of some of the most important works done by the panchayat, problems faced by them during these works and how these initiatives brought a change in the lives of local residents. These works are as following:

Works related to water supply for household and irrigation purpose

Gram panchayat Kuther is situated on the slopes of Siwalik mountains. Although the area receives ample amount of rainfall during the year, but the water could not stay due to the sloppy terrain. Panchayat had few bore wells, but they used to get dry during summers. This resulted in major water shortage, especially during summers. Although the Irrigation and Public Health (IPH)



Water storage tank built by the panchayat

department had constructed a water tank but most of the times it remained dry due to the shortage of water. Villagers had to travel 3 kilometers to fetch water for their day to day purpose. Most of the time was getting spent to fetch water. In the absence of other family members, women and children had to fetch

water. An incident was also reported when a pregnant woman slipped while fetching water and she had to abort her baby. Also, every evening after school, children also accompanied their parents to fetch water. As a result, they had less time to study and play with other children. Overall, both children and adults had to spend a lot of time to fetch water which could have been utilized for something important. A sense of dissatisfaction was creeping among villagers against the local bodies. As the situation was getting difficult, the panchayat officials met and discussed the

seriousness of the problem. After that, an open house was organized, where the panchayat officials and local people met to devise a strategy to come out of this predicament. After continuous discussions, strategies such as building rainwater harvesting tanks, check dams and digging bore wells were incorporated to solve this problem. First of all, under the Swajal Dhara Scheme panchayat dug extra borewells to extract water. Then electric power sets were installed to lift water from the bore well. Now each borewell caters to the need of 15 – 20 households. Hence, residents of the panchayat do not go to nearby villages to fetch water. Children also have enough time



Water pumped from the bore well

to concentrate on their studies and overall productivity of people has increased. The panchayat also took some important initiatives to increase the supply of water for irrigation. Construction of check dams is one such initiative. Check dams have been beneficial in many ways. Firstly, there is an increase in the water supply for the purpose of irrigation secondly, it has restored the water table of the land, and last, many water bodies have been replenished due to increase in the water table. Water from check dams has been used up to a diameter of 1.5 kilometers. In addition, to check dams, rainwater harvesting tanks have also been constructed in the panchayat. This helps in accumulating rainwater which is being used for agriculture. The panchayat has so far constructed 200 such tanks in the entire which is being used by people to water the plants grown in the vicinity of their house. Some farmers have also benefitted by selling the surplus vegetables in the market.

Plantation of trees on barren land

The gram panchayat Kuther had less area under tree coverage. Lack of tree cover was often causing the problem of soil erosion. The topsoil used to get washed away due to heavy rains. As a result,



A view of the forest planted by the panchayat

there was a loss in the fertility and overall productivity of land in the panchayat. Lack of tree cover also made it difficult for the local people to stand the summer heat. Loss of productivity of the land enforced panchayat officials to devise a strategy to increase tree cover in the area. The panchayat officials took the help of Forest

department and planted nearly one lakh trees in the panchayat. However, it was not an easy task to get the support of local residents. In the beginning, the local residents were reluctant to participate in the plantation of trees. They thought it as a futile exercise to plant trees in their area. They were continuously counseled by the panchayat officials and other learned people in the panchayat. However, the credit goes to Late Mr. Sardar Ratan Singh, ward member of a panchayat who persuaded the local residents to participate in the tree plantation. He explained to the villagers the importance of planting trees and the benefits people would get in near future. With such persuasion, the local residents not only planted trees but also watered them till they were grown up. Now, the area under tree cover has increased tremendously and soil erosion due to heavy monsoon rains has reduced extensively. These trees are extremely beneficial as the leaves of some of these trees can be used as fodder for the cattle. In addition, some medicinal trees such as *amla*, *bheda*, *harad* etc are also planted; they are well known for their ayurvedic properties. This is a noble initiative which should be appreciated.

Utilization of surplus public land to cultivate fodder

Similar to some other rural areas of the country, the main occupation of Kuther panchayat residents is agriculture and dairy. Majority of the land was used to grow food grains and cash crops. As a



Woman cutting grass from the community land

result, less area was available to grow fodder for cattle. The scarcity of water during summers made it really difficult for the farmers to get fresh fodder for their cattle. They had to manage with dry fodder which affected the overall growth of the cattle. In the open house of the panchayat, this matter

was discussed with the panchayat officials. As the panchayat had surplus land at its disposal, it was allocated for the purpose of cultivating fodder at the community level. Now, the farmers take their cattle for grazing and they also cut fodder for their cattle. With the availability of green fodder throughout the year, the overall yield of the cattle has increased. Many local residents have increased the number of cattle. They are flourishing on dairy farming and their income has increased manifold. For example, take the case of Wali Mohammed of this panchayat. He was a poor farmer who used to be totally dependent on the agricultural produce. Due to the lack of water for irrigation, he could not get the desired return from the crops. With lesser agricultural output, the availability of fodder was also low. As a result, he could not increase the intake of cattle. Due to low income, his economic condition was bad. On account of panchayat's initiative, there was a

turnaround in his fortunes. Due to borewells and check dams, his agriculture land came under irrigation. This led to increased yield from the crops and the availability of fodder for cattle also increased. He also got green fodder from the community land. With the availability of sufficient fodder, he increased the intake of cattle. Now he has twenty buffalos and his earning from dairy farming has increased manifold. He thanks panchayat for the initiatives and overall upliftment of his economic condition.

Allocation of funds for the construction of concrete fodder containers in cow sheds

As is mentioned above along with agriculture, dairy farming is also an important occupation in the panchayat. Most of the people in Kuther had cow sheds but they lacked concrete fodder containers,



Concrete fodder container in the cow shed

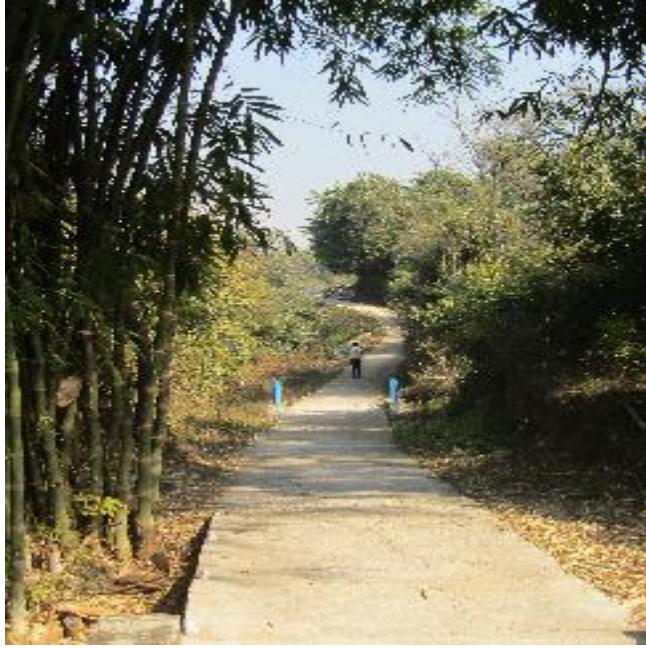
which could have been used to give fodder to the cattle. Most of the times fodder used to get mixed with the muddy surface and got wasted. It was already difficult to bring fodder for cattle and its wastage accentuated the problem. Some villagers discussed this problem and the matter conversed in the open

house of the panchayat. Panchayat officials took notice of this problem and allocated funds to individual cow sheds for the construction of fodder containers. The panchayat allocated around INR 4,000 each for this purpose. As a result, the wastage of fodder has reduced. So far around 150 concrete fodder containers have been constructed in the entire panchayat.

Construction of all-weather village paths

All weather village paths play a very important role in the connectivity from one place to another. On account of poor connectivity in the panchayat, it was difficult to transfer the agriculture produce

to the market. A few years back, the panchayat of Kuther had very few all-weather concrete paths.



Concrete village path constructed by the panchayat

The situation was even worse during monsoon as it was difficult to cross the overflowing streams and rivulets. It was also extremely difficult to take ailing persons and expecting women to the nearby healthcare facility and often people had to carry them on their back. Looking into the enormity of the problem, the panchayat gave priority to village paths and constructed concrete paths with the help of various government-funded schemes.

Though, the construction of village paths was not easy. Some local residents caused hindrance in the construction of paths and they even got court orders to put stay on the construction work. In the beginning, some persons were reluctant to give their land and the ongoing work had to be stopped. Then with proper counseling from village people, panchayat officials told them the positive impact of village paths. In this way, the concrete paths were constructed all over the panchayat. Now with better connectivity, it is easy to move from one place to another. It has become easier to transport vegetables and other farms produce to the markets which have resulted in the increased income of the farmers. Due to all-weather roads, patients and expecting women can reach the nearby healthcare facility on time.

Construction of classrooms in Government school

Gram panchayat Kuther has a Government senior secondary school. However, due to the old structure of school building, most of the rooms were not ideal to be used as classrooms. Sometimes, two or three classes had to be accommodated in one classroom. Students often studied under the fear that a wall might crumble down or something else could happen. During monsoon season it



Classrooms in the school constructed by the village panchayat

was difficult to sit inside the classrooms as the ceilings were often leaking due to rain. Because of this issue, the students were reluctant to go to the school and the presence of students was getting reduced especially in rainy season. It was proving detrimental to the overall education of the students. Looking into the

situation, the worried parents first went to the school administration and then discussed the matter with the panchayat officials. The panchayat officials took notice of the situation and constructed extra rooms in the school campus in Jan Sahayog scheme of the government. Now, students come to the school regularly and the absenteeism due to poor infrastructure has reduced enormously. This again is a very good step taken by the panchayat as children are the real wealth of the nation and their development is contingent upon the education they get.

Street lighting through installation of solar lights

In India, compared to cities and towns, most of the villages do not have the facilities of street lighting. A few years ago, Kuther panchayat also had no street lighting in the area. As a result, it was difficult for the local residents to reach their home during the night. As the panchayat had proximity to the forest, there were reports of the local residents being attacked by wild animals in

the night. Due to this reason, women and children were reluctant to go outside their homes after sunset. Looking into the matter, the panchayat members discussed this matter with the block officials. There panchayat members were told about the solar lighting schemes being run by Himurja (H.P State Govt. Department of energy). The gram panchayat used its funds to procure solar lights and installed these lights along the paths and roads. So far panchayat has installed 200 solar lights in the area and it intends to install lights more in the current financial year. These street lights provide safe passage to the commuters coming back to their homes in the later hours of the night. Women and children who were earlier afraid to move out at night are able to venture alone. As the solar lights are renewable in nature, there is no additional electricity bill to be paid by the panchayat. According to local residents, the initiative taken by the panchayat to install street lights is extremely helpful to them.

Separate place for Anganwadi Kendras and Mahila Mandal

Anganwadi Kendras play a very important role in the early childhood development of children. Anganwadi Kendras require adequate facilities such as hall, separate kitchen and playground for children. However, in Kuther panchayat the place where the Anganwadi Kendra used to run was not only small but also in a poor condition. Parents were also not very interested to send their children Anganwadi kendra. The overall participation of children was minimal and there were days when no one was visiting the anaganwadi kendra. Due to the lack of interest in the anganwadi, the staff went to the panchayat officials and requested for a proper place for anganwari Kendra. The panchayat officials immediately took notice of the problem and released funds for the construction of anganwadi kendra. The construction work was completed within six months. Now, there is ample space to accommodate children and there is a separate kitchen to cook food for them. With increased space and better facilities, more parents are sending their children to the Anganwadi

Kendra. In addition to Anganwadi Kendra, a separate hall was also constructed for Mahila Mandal. In rural areas, Mahila mandals play an important role in the empowerment of women. It is a platform through which the women get new ideas to be independent. The mahila mandals often organize meetings for their members. They need a proper space to organize these meetings. Gram panchayat Kuther has provided them a separate hall to conduct meetings and share their ideas.

Supportive agencies/ institutions/ individuals – Gram panchayat Kuther has been grateful to the officials at block and district level. Without the help of panchayat secretary, it wouldn't have been possible. Local residents of the panchayat have also helped by giving their inputs at the time when were needed.

Discussion

Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) are the pillar on which the entire progress of villages depends. The social and economic development of a village is dependent upon the efficiency of the PRIs. In the current study, we have discussed the important initiatives taken by gram panchayat Kuther that has significantly transformed the entire area. The most important initiative taken by the panchayat has been to get rid of the problem of water scarcity in the area. These initiatives include digging of borewells, construction of rainwater harvesting tanks and check dams. The problem of drinking water was solved by digging bore wells and electric power sets were installed to extract water from them. Now, each bore well caters to the need of 15 – 20 households. As a result, the residents of the panchayat do not go to nearby villages to fetch water. Children also have enough time to concentrate on their studies and overall efficiency of people has increased. Similarly, the panchayat also took some important initiatives to increase the supply of water for the purpose of irrigation. Construction of check dams is one such initiative. Through these check dams, there is not only an increase in the water supply for irrigation, but it has also restored the water table of the

land. In addition, to checking dams, rainwater harvesting tanks have also been constructed by the panchayat. This helps in accumulating rainwater which is being used for agriculture. There has been a manifold increase in the overall income of the farmers.

Plantation of trees is also an important initiative taken by the panchayat. With the help of Forest Department and local residents, about 1 lakh trees have been planted in the entire panchayat. This initiative has increased the area under tree cover and soil erosion due to heavy monsoon rains has reduced drastically. These trees are an important source of fodder for the cattle. Some medicinal plants have also been planted which are extremely useful to the people.

Normally, panchayats have surplus public lands at their disposal. Gram panchayat Kuther also had surplus land which was allocated for the purpose of growing fodder at the community level. This initiative by the panchayat has increased the availability of green fodder for the cattle. With the better availability of fodder, people have increased the number of cattle. It has led to the increased supply of milk and other dairy products such as curd, butter and ghee. Some local residents are thriving on dairy farming and their income has increased manifold.

Increase in agriculture production needs to be complemented with the proper connectivity to the market. Gram panchayat Kuther has done this by constructing all-weather village paths and roads. With the improvement in the overall connectivity, the agriculture produces and dairy products are easily taken to the nearby markets. People are getting benefits of the improved access to the market. Also, it has become easier to take expecting women and ailing people to the healthcare facility. The installation of solar lights on the streets has improved the overall visibility in the night. These street lights provide a safer passage to those coming back to their homes during late hours of the night. Earlier, women and children were reluctant to go out of their homes after sunset. But now due to street lights, they easily move outside their homes. Another advantage of solar lights is that

they are renewable in nature. As such, there is neither the wastage of electricity nor any additional burden to pay the electricity bill.

The construction of classrooms has been a noble initiative taken by the panchayat. Prior to the construction of classrooms, students have to study under poor infrastructure and they were unwilling to attend the school. Absenteeism was high among students which had a detrimental effect on their studies. Now, with the construction of classrooms, students come to the school regularly and the absenteeism due to poor infrastructure has reduced tremendously. Apart from the above initiatives, gram panchayat Kuther has some important achievements such as 100 percent enrolment in Kisan Credit Card Scheme, enrolment of BPL families under Rashtriya Pariwar Sahayta and Matri Shakti Bima Yojana etc.

Recognition for Her/ His activities

Gram panchayat Kuther has won following awards for its initiatives:

- Atal Adarsh Gram Award in 2012, by the Govt. of Himachal Pradesh.
- Good work in the implementation of MGNREGA for the year (2015-16), received in 2017.
- Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Award for the year (2015-16), received in 2017.



Winner of RGGS Award, 2017



Receiving RGGS award from the Hon' Minister



Award of best panchayat given by the H.P State Department of Panchayati Raj



Atal Adarsh Gram Panchayat Puraskar by the Govt. of Himachal Pradesh

Future plan and vision - Gram panchayat Kuther intend to continue the good work done in the past few years. Future plan includes the construction of remaining village paths, building water storage tank for every household, installing street lights in the uncovered areas and fulfilling the Swachh Bharat Mission by making panchayat clean and hygienic.

Acknowledgement – We acknowledge the panchayat Pradhan Mrs. Veena Sharma, panchayat Uppradhan Mr. Sushil Sharma and all the ward members. We also want to thank local residents for sharing their inputs about the developmental works undertaken by the panchayat and the changes brought about by these works.

Tables, figures and photographs





Some valuable assets created in Kuther Panchayat



Students inside the classroom constructed by panchayat



Street light installed by panchayat



Inside view of Anhanwari Kendra

Video version of the case study

Given separately.

Permission

Not needed