

## **Participation level of rural people in Gram Sabha of Dantiwada Taluka, Gujarat**

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### **Abstract**

*Deepening democracy and strengthening decentralized Governance from below is the key to bring change in the life of people. Gram Sabha<sup>1</sup> is introduced to have decentralized planning and evaluation with people's participation at the grassroot level, which is necessary for the success of the Panchayati Raj System<sup>2</sup>. The present study was undertaken to assess the participation level of rural people in the Gram Sabha. The study was conducted in three blocks of Dantiwada taluka of Banaskantha district in Gujarat. One village from each block was selected on random basis. A sample of 20 rural female and 20 rural male was randomly selected from each village. Thus the total sample of the study was 120 rural people, which included 60 rural female and 60 rural male. Personal interview technique was used for collecting data. Data was analysed by using frequency, percentage, mean and Z-test. Findings show that most of the respondents (77.5%) were in low participation categories; male (1.68) had higher participation than female (0.47). Thus it has been concluded that respondents had very low participation in the most important grassroot-level constitutional body.*

**Key words:** Democracy. Panchayati Raj System. Governance. Constraints

### **Introduction**

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Indian Constitution had carved out the third tier of the Indian political system. In the Indian federal democratic system, the institution of *Gram Sabha* is the very place for the direct participation of the people in managing their own affairs. It provides a platform for the people to hold accountability of the elected members and the government officials for their actions. Social auditing ensures transparency in administration and accountability of *Panchayati Raj* Institutions.

*Gram Sabha* guides the *Panchayati Raj* Institutions in their planning and execution of developmental functions. It has to play a role of an enabler for the citizen's participation in the affairs of their village. Democratic participation in the *Gram Sabha* is one necessary condition for effective local-self governance. *Gram Sabha* is the embodiment of the idea that people's participation alone can bring sustainable development through good governance at the grassroot level. The present study was undertaken with following objectives:

### **Objectives**

1. To assess the participation level of rural people in *Gram Sabha*
2. To find out the constraints faced by rural people in participating in *Gram Sabha*

### **Materials and Methods**

The present study was conducted in three blocks namely Nadotra Brahmanwas, Naddotra Tahkurwas and Dangiya of Dantiwada taluka. One village from each Block was selected on random basis. A sample of 20 rural female and 20 rural male was randomly selected from each village. Thus the total sample of the study was 120 rural people which included 60 rural female and 60 rural male. Personal interview technique was used for collecting data. Interview schedule was developed for collecting data keeping in mind the objectives of the study. Interview schedule consisted of three sections viz background information, participation schedule and constraints faced by rural people in participating in *Gram Sabha*. Data was analysed by using frequency, percentage,

mean and Z-test.

## Results and Discussion

### *Demographic Profile of the Respondents*

Majority of the respondents (58.3%) belonged to middle age group (31-45 years) and had education up to secondary level (26.7 per cent). Around 49 per cent respondents belonged to general caste and 45.8 per cent respondents belonged to backward caste having joint families (70.8 per cent). Agriculture is the main occupation of most of the respondents (72.5%). Almost all the respondents (98.3%) had exposure to one or more media i.e. mobile, TV, internet, newspaper and radio.

### Participation Profile of the Respondents

#### *Self-Participation*

People's participation is essential for the success of the *Panchayati Raj* System. Data in Table 1 regarding self participation in *Gram Sabha* show that only 30.8 per cent respondents attended recent *Gram Sabha* meeting, out of these 50 per cent were male respondents. Less than fifty per cent male respondents (41.7%) and only 8.3 per cent female respondents attended *Gram Sabha* meeting more than once. None of the female respondents regularly attended *Gram Sabha* meetings, whereas 28.3 per cent male respondents were regular participants. 20 per cent respondents revealed that they were forced to attend the *Gram Sabha*; they included 28.3 per cent male and 11.7 per cent female.

Findings of the study are similar to the findings reported by Singh, 2013 that out of 800 households only 23.88 per cent reported that they regularly participated in *Gram Sabha* meetings whereas 33.00 per cent responded that they seldom attended the meetings. Remaining 43.12 per cent households pointed out that they never participated in the meeting.

Basu, 2010 observed that representation of women and weaker sections was more than 30% in Tamil Nadu, whereas the representation of women of

Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan was less than 10% and weaker sections were not participating at all. The reason for low representation in the *Gram Sabha* meetings was lack of interest by the weaker sections and especially women.

### Participation Profile of the Respondents during *Gram Sabha* Meeting:

#### *Participation Profile of the Respondents as per Proposals Presented and their Acceptance*

The *Gram Sabha* is the consulting body for the needs, concerns and aspirations of the people of village. Therefore, it is essential for the *Gram Panchayat* to consult the *Gram Sabha* while preparing its annual plan and budget. Consulting *Gram Sabha* in prioritizing the needs of the people is one of the keys for the success of the *Panchayati Raj* System. With a view to understand the status of proposals, it was found that equal number of respondents (40% M, 6.7% F) gave same answer to the two questions regarding proposal given at individual level and incorporation of that proposal in reports. However, it was noticed that only 3.3 per cent of female respondents' proposals were approved and accepted. Overall 9.2 per cent respondents agreed that their proposals were timely approved and accepted in the *Gram Sabha* (Table 2).

#### *Participation Profile of the Respondents according to the Functioning of Gram Sabha*

Table 3 shows that only 17.5 per cent respondents got chance to speak and participated in discussions; out of these 30 per cent were male and 5 per cent were female. It has emerged from the views of the female respondent that none of them were part of any healthy discussion during *Gram Sabha* meeting. Similarly, none of them had active involvement in the proceedings. It means that the respondents were just being present in the meetings without much involvement in the discussions. Proper presentation of Action Taken Report of the last *Gram Sabha* meeting is mandatory, but only 10% male and 3.3% female

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents according to Self Participation in *Gram Sabha* Meetings (n=120)

S. No.	Aspects	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
		Male (n=60)	Female (n=60)	Total (n=120)
<b>Self Participation</b>				
1.	Participation in recent <i>Gram Sabha</i> meeting	30 (50.0)	7 (11.7)	37 (30.8)
2.	Attended many times	25 (41.7)	5 (8.3)	30 (25.0)
3.	Regular participation	17 (28.3)	0 (0.0)	17 (14.2)
4.	Forced participation	17 (28.3)	7 (11.7)	24 (20.0)

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents according to Proposals Given and their Acceptance (n=120)

S. No.	Aspects	f (%) Male (n=60)	f (%) Female (n=60)	f (%) Total(n=120)
Proposal				
1.	Individual Proposals	24 (40.0)	4(6.7)	28 (23.3)
2.	Incorporation of Proposal in Reports	24 (40.0)	4(6.7)	28 (23.3)
3.	Approval &Acceptance of proposal	11 (18.3)	2(3.3)	11 (9.2)

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents according to the Functioning of *Gram Sabha* (n=120)

S. No.	Aspects	f (%) Male (n=60)	f (%) Female (n=60)	f (%) Total(n=120)
Functioning				
1.	Get chance to speak (dialogues)	18 (30.0)	3 (5.0)	21 (17.5)
2.	Healthy discussion	5 (8.3)	0 (0.0)	5 (4.2)
3.	Active involvement of participants	5 (8.3)	0 (0.0)	5 (4.2)
4.	Proper presentation of action taken report of last <i>Gram Sabha</i> meeting	6 (10.0)	2 (3.3)	0 (0.0)
5.	Proper recording of minutes	25 (41.7)	9 (15.0)	34 (28.3)
6.	Videography of meetings	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
7.	Smooth conduct of meeting	29 (48.3)	15 (25.0)	44 (36.7)
8.	Accountability &Transparency	6 (10.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (5.0)
9.	Strengthening female participation	7 (11.7)	0 (0.0)	7 (5.8)

respondents could concur. They reported that presentation of Action Taken Report of last meeting was not a regular feature of *Gram Sabha* meetings.

Data further show that 28.3 per cent respondents mentioned proper recording of minutes of *Gram Sabha* meetings -but none of them reported that videography was done in the meetings. More than one fourth of the respondents (36.7%) reported that *Gram Sabha* meetings were smoothly conducted; these included 48.3 per cent male and 25 per cent female respondents. Proper selection of the beneficiaries for various developmental schemes is one of the major criteria to know the transparency and accountability of the Panchayat towards the community members. It was noticed that very few respondents (5 per cent) reported that accountability and transparency were followed in the functioning of *Gram Sabha*; none of the female agreed to accountability and transparency in the meetings, however 10 per cent male respondents found the meetings to be so. In informal discussions, some of the respondents said that beneficiaries were selected amongst those having proximity to the elected representatives. Moreover, none of the female respondents agreed to the

strengthening of their position and participation in the *Gram Sabha* meetings; however 11.7 per cent male respondents found it to be so. It is indeed surprising that female respondents did not show much interest in functioning of *Gram Sabha*. Considering the socio-political-economic reality, it is hardly surprising, though disheartening, to know that female members have little space and say in the *Gram Sabha* meetings.

#### *Overall Participation Level of the Respondents in Gram Sabha*

To get a picture of participation, the respondents were grouped under three categories namely low, medium and high on the basis of scores obtained by them. Data clearly indicate that only five per cent respondents had high participation in *Gram Sabha* meetings, whereas 77.5 percent respondents had low participation. Gender-wise data reveals that none of the female had categorised in high participation, whereas 10.0 per cent male categorised in high level of participation. Findings further show that most of the respondents (77.5%) were in low participation categories. Thus it is concluded that respondents had very low participation in the most important grassroot-level constitutional body (Table 4).

Table 4: Distribution of the Respondents in Various Participation Categories (n= 120)

S. No.	Category	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
		Male (n=60)	Female (n=60)	Total(n=120)
1.	Low (0 – 8)	37 (61.7)	56 (93.3)	93 (77.5)
2.	Medium (9 – 16)	17 (28.3)	4 (6.7)	21 (17.5)
3.	High (17-24)	6 (10.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (5.0)

Table 5: Significance of Difference regarding Participation Level of Male and Female in *Gram Sabha* (n=120)

S. No.	Aspects	Mean		Z value
		Male n=60	female n=60	
1.	Self Participation	2.93	0.83	9.581**
2.	Proposal Given and Acceptance	2.63	0.68	11.327**
3.	Functioning of <i>Gram Sabha</i>	1.47	0.32	4.991**
	Overall Participation level	1.68	0.47	3.826**

\*\* Value significant at 5% level of significance

#### *Difference in the Level of Participation of Male and Female in Gram Sabha Meetings*

The mean scores were computed for assessing participation level of male and female in three different aspects i.e. self participation, proposal given and acceptance, and functioning of *Gram Sabha*. As it is apparent from the data that mean difference between male and female was high for all the aspects of participation level. Participation of the women has an important role in the effective functioning of *Gram Sabha* as women are more aware of and have to cope up with the needs of the family in particular and the community in general. Overall findings show that male (1.68) had higher participation than female (0.47) in *Gram Sabha* meetings. Taken together, it can be concluded that significant difference was found in the participation level of male and female in the *Gram Sabha* meetings.

#### *Constraints Faced by Rural People in Participating in Gram Sabha*

The fact can't be denied that *Gram Sabha* operates in a complex social environment where the issues of caste, class and gender can be seen openly. At the society-level, dominance of anti social agents, upper castes, and economic status were major constraints reported by 32.5 per cent, 52.5 per cent and 63.3 per cent respondents respectively. More than 40 per cent female respondents agreed to the above mentioned constraints. Higher range of respondents (61.7% M and 65%F) faced the constraint of economic

status.

When asked about constraints at the level of the governing body i.e. the Gram Panchayat, a range of responses from 19.2 per cent to 95 per cent were received. More than 90 per cent respondents believed that lack of publicity was main constraint whereas only 13.3 per cent female and 25 per cent male respondents spoke of improper arrangements. Lack of interest was reported by 60.80 per cent respondents, which included 43.3 per cent male and 78.3 per cent female respondents. Unsuitable Time and date was also reported by male (66.7%) and female (71.7%) respondents.

Elected representatives serve as the link between the *Gram Sabha* and the Gram Panchayat. But the political culture promoted has been one of patronage and it has certainly not encouraged the participation of local poor people in institutional processes like the meetings of the *Gram Sabha*. 65 per cent male and 80 per cent female respondents agreed that dominance of political leaders and their selfishness were one of the major constraints.

It is noteworthy that 100 per cent respondents agreed that fake attendance is marked in meetings; 30.8 per cent spoke of fake meetings and 47.5 per cent reported about fake minutes. Fake minutes were reported by 63.3 per cent male respondents against 31.7% female respondents.

The real challenge now is to 'empower and connect' the *Gram Sabha*, by communicating clearly

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents according to Constraints faced by them in Participating in Gram Sabha (n=120)

S. No.	Aspects	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
		Male (n=60)	Female (n=60)	Total(n=120)
	Personal level			
1.	Lack of time	32 (53.3)	57 (95.0)	89 (74.2)
2.	Lack of timely information	43 (71.7)	51 (85.0)	94 (78.3)
3.	Lack of interest	26 (43.3)	47 (78.3)	73 (60.8)
4.	Lack of knowledge	16 (26.7)	38 (63.3)	54 (45.0)
5.	Lack of education	7 (11.7)	42 (70.0)	49 (40.8)
6.	No use of meeting	16 (26.7)	38 (63.3)	54 (45.0)
	Society level			
1.	Dominance of anti social agents	15 (25.0)	24 (40.0)	39 (32.5)
2.	Dominance of upper castes	23 (38.3)	40 (66.7)	63 (52.5)
3.	Dominance of rich people	37 (61.7)	39 (65.0)	76 (63.3)
	Governing body level			
1.	Lack of publicity	56 (93.3)	58 (96.7)	114 (95.0)
2.	Unsuitable time & day for meeting	40 (66.7)	43 (71.7)	83 (69.2)
3.	Lack of interest	48 (80.0)	52 (86.7)	100 (83.3)
4.	Improper arrangements	15 (25.0)	8 (13.3)	23 (19.2)
	Political level			
1.	Dominance of political leaders	39 (65.0)	48 (80.0)	87 (72.5)
	Others constraints			
1.	Fake <i>Gram Sabha</i> meetings	14 (23.3)	23 (38.3)	37 (30.8)
2.	Fake attendance	60 (100.0)	60 (100.0)	120 (100.0)
3.	Fake minutes	38 (63.3)	19 (31.7)	57 (47.5)

its functions and purpose at the individual and mass levels.

### Recommendations

1. Awareness needs to be created at village level about the rights and responsibilities of the *Gram Sabha* members.
2. Audio-visual aids like films, posters and charts, can be developed and distributed among *Gram Sabha* members to generate awareness about *Gram Sabha*, including its role and importance of their participation. These materials can also be used for giving information about the *Gram Sabha* meetings like date, time, agenda, venue etc.
3. Villagers should be oriented and motivated to practice better coordination among themselves for the development of their village.
4. Ward Sabha meetings should be organized before *Gram Sabha* meeting to effectively bring the grassroots level issues at the *Gram Sabha*. Ward-wise Sabhas would enable more voters to participate in the deliberations.
5. Videography of *Gram Sabha* meetings should be done to avoid any kind of manipulation at any level.

The video should be available at the Gram Panchayat office for anyone to see. This will help enhance the trust of people in the *Gram Sabha* meetings.

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