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ASSAR
Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions

Inclusion of Local Aspirations in the Village Development Plans: A Case Study of the Semi-Arids in Maharashtra

CARIIAA-ASSAR Working Paper

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About ASSAR

All authors of this working paper are team members in the ASSAR (Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions) project, one of four hotspot research projects in CARIAA. The international and interdisciplinary ASSAR team comprises a mix of research and practitioner organisations, and includes groups with global reach as well as those deeply embedded in their communities. The ASSAR consortium is a partnership between five lead managing institutions - the University of Cape Town (South Africa), the University of East Anglia (United Kingdom), START (United States of America), Oxfam GB (United Kingdom) and the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (India) - and 12 partners - the University of Botswana, University of Namibia, Desert Research Foundation of Namibia, Reos Partners, the Red Cross/Crescent Climate Centre, University of Ghana, ICRISAT, University of Nairobi, University of Addis Ababa, Watershed Organisation Trust, Indian Institute for Tropical Meteorology, and the Ashoka Trust for Ecology and the Environment.

Working in seven countries in semi-arid regions, ASSAR seeks to understand the factors that have prevented climate change adaptation from being more widespread and successful. At the same time, ASSAR is investigating the processes - particularly in governance - that can facilitate a shift from ad-hoc adaptation to large-scale adaptation. ASSAR is especially interested in understanding people's vulnerability, both in relation to climatic impacts that are becoming more severe, and to general development challenges. Through participatory work from 2014-2018, ASSAR aims to meet the needs of government and practitioner stakeholders, to help shape more effective policy frameworks, and to develop more lasting adaptation responses.

Why focus on semi-arid regions?

Semi-arid regions (SARs) are highly dynamic systems that experience extreme climates, adverse environmental change, and a relative paucity of natural resources. People here are further marginalised by high levels of poverty, inequality and rapidly changing socio-economic, governance and development contexts. Climate change intersects with these existing structural vulnerabilities and can potentially accentuate or shift the balance between winners and losers. Although many people in these regions already display remarkable resilience, these multiple and often interlocking pressures are expected to amplify in the coming decades. Therefore, it is essential to understand what facilitates the empowerment of people, local organisations and governments to adapt to climate change in a way that minimises vulnerability and promotes long-term resilience.

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Abstract

Participatory governance at the village level allows for active deliberations by all sections of a village community. Such dialogues, regarding their needs and the requirements in turn lead to an efficient bottom-up approach of planning. This is something that is missed out in the larger narrative of national and state policies. Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP) are village development plans introduced by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, in 2015 to further the process of inclusivity of differential local needs in village development plans. The paper analyses the village development plans of four villages from the Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, India. The overall objective is to examine whether the local governance mechanisms sufficiently address the needs and priorities of the local communities, especially in the context of village development plans and to identify constraints in functioning of village level institutions.

Areas identified as priority of the community, such as health, sanitation, education and employment, were addressed in varying measures in the plans of all the villages. However, whether the financial allocations for developmental activities were adequate and whether these were implemented efficiently can be gauged through 'how satisfied the community was'. The need to maintain the spirit of gram sabhas was ascertained as the basic parameter to strengthen inclusivity of planning process and hence of the resultant plans. The issue of proxy women sarpanch was a recurrent one and so were the shortcomings such as fund limitations and lack of accountability by external agencies functioning within the realm of gram panchayat.

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1. Introduction

Public participation has become an inextricable part of a functioning democracy. A government formed by the experts but where the needs of the masses fail to inform the decisions of the experts, is oligarchic (Dewey, 1927). In the light of the fact that government decisions affect most crucial aspects of the public's life, (Creighton, 2005) posits a valid question; *"when major decisions are delegated to unelected bureaucrats, how do we ensure that the will of the people is expressed in those decisions?"*

A deliberative model of democracy, gives space and voice to all its stakeholders (including the previously marginalized ones like women and religious, ethnic and sexual minorities in most societies) to interact, discourse upon and negotiate inclusive policies and their effective implementation. According to Pimbert and Wakeford (2001), these features embody Deliberative and Inclusionary processes (DIPs), which in an era of increasing technological and environmental uncertainties, and concomitant complexities make it imperative to supplement the view of experts and bureaucrats by how the affected citizens perceive the problem and their solutions. A local perspective to the problem allows for context specific understanding of the issue and often provides cost effective and creative solutions. Corburn (2003) opines that such inclusions in the planning process also allow equal footing to the previously marginalized sections and highlight issues of inequity. Creighton (2005) aptly captures public participation as which "increases their influence on matters that affect their life". Relative to plans that are a result of top-down planning, such plans often have the support of the concerned community due to people's involvement right from the inception, identifying constraints and creating solutions (Kinzer, 2016; Brabham, 2009; Creighton, 2005)

The 73rd amendment (1992) to the Indian Constitution institutionalizes participatory approach of planning through devolution of administrative powers and functions, pronged up by simultaneous devolutions of financial powers to the basic units of administration within a state (Oommen, Wallace, & Muwonge, 2017; Planning Commission, 2001). The amendment allows the election of a body of people's representative who would work alongside the government machinery at the level of the village (the gram panchayat), the block/ tehsil (the panchayat samiti) and the district (zilla parishad), collectively known as the Panchayati Raj Institutions. At all the three levels and especially at the village level, this process of deliberation has historically been the foundation of rural Indian democracy (Rao & Sanyal, 2009; UNDP, 2000). The paper discusses the functioning of the lowest rung of the Panchayati Raj Institution i.e. the gram panchayat in the Indian state of Maharashtra by focusing on the village development plans¹, called the Gram Panchayat Development Plans. It delves into the question of whether the development plans are a result of rigorous public participation and therefore its effectiveness in taking into account public aspirations.

The guidelines given by the 14th Finance Commission (FC) stipulates the formulation of village development plan or GPDP to be prepared by every gram panchayat in the country for the expedient utilization of the available funds for development activities. Framing of such a plan with

¹ Village development plans and Gram Panchayat Development Plans, will be used interchangeably throughout the paper.

active participation by all sections of the village community allows for an efficient bottom-up approach of planning. There is an intrinsic awareness about the availability of local resources and other funds thus infusing a sense of practicality in terms of scope of activities (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2016). The gram panchayats are instrumental in channelizing resources from the centre and the state for local level requirements and therefore plan effective implementation of the functions enlisted in the 11th schedule (functions falling within the purview of the Panchayats) of the Indian Constitution (UNDP, 2000). A gram panchayat development plan, in its true essence caters to the ideals of poverty reduction, social-economic-ecological development, delivery of public services and good governance (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2015), while contributing to attaining Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at grass root level.

While there is theoretical backing to the positives of public participation in the planning process, the empirical evidence regarding the success of such plans is surprisingly few (Kinzer, 2016). Creighton (2005) compares public participation as “safety programs... measure of success is accidents prevented.” While higher representation of stakeholders theoretically translates to more inclusive planning, it depends on whether the planners adhere to the same in spirit and allow and encourage true participation (Brody, 2003; Burby, 2007). Factors like how rooted are the expectation of transparency in a particular culture and hence the government (Brabham, 2009) adds to the complexity and decides whether the resultant plans reap the intended benefits.

The overall objective of the paper is to examine whether the local governance mechanisms sufficiently address the needs and priorities of the local communities, especially in the context of village development plans and to identify constraints in functioning of village level institutions. Therefore, at first the needs and satisfaction levels of the community members are identified across various domains of life in selected case villages. Then, the village level development plans are examined for inclusiveness of these needs and aspirations of respective communities.

2. Study Area

The study was conducted between December 2016 and November 2017 in two blocks of Ahmednagar district, Sangamner and Parner. The focus was on 4 villages in the aforementioned blocks; Kauthe Khurd, Jawale Baleshwar, Sutarwadi and Hivare Korda. The villages appertain to the semi-arid tracts of the district and are part of the Mula-Pravara basin. The villages represent different socio-economic and biophysical scenarios;

Jawale Baleshwar is situated on the upper-middle catchment of the Mula-Pravara basin and on the western edges of the *Pathar* (plateau) region. The terrain is characterized by low soil thickness and moderate to steep slopes with majority of the area having a rocky outcrop. Agriculture, mainly rainfed, is largely unviable in the rocky area due to little to no soil profile and hard rocks. Thomas and Duraiswamy (2016) characterize the village as facing high as well as moderate vulnerability (in terms of ground water) owing to the rock types prevalent.

The geographical spread of the Gram Panchayat is 2695 Ha with a population of 1,027 (*Census 2011*) across 12 hamlets. The area has substantial presence of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes

comprising nearly 56% of the overall population of the Gram Panchayat. The village is nearly 7-8 km away from the major highway but the connectivity to the main urban centers is efficient in terms of good condition road owing to the presence of a much frequented temple. Frequency of state buses to the village is nearly 4 times a day.

Kauthe Khurd is situated along the beds of the Mula river and is part of the middle catchment of the Mula-Pravara basin. The area is characterized by alluvial soil and good thickness of soil. Thomas and Duraiswamy (2016) characterize the village as an area of low vulnerability owing to the soil structure of the area and the water availability.

The Gram Panchayat has a geographical area of 299 Hectares and has been divided into 4 hamlets. It is nearly 52km from the block (taluka) headquarter, Sangamner. The connectivity to the village is good with access to public and private transport service. The road leading to the Gram Panchayat is black topped (pucca) road while the internal roads are concretized. There is a milk collection centre, managed by the society named *Kamladevi Sahkari Dudh Sanstha*, in Kauthe Khurd since the past 25 years and the centre records a daily collection of nearly 2,000 litres of milk a day.

The population of the village is 977 (*Census 2011*) and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes together comprise 10% of the total population. The overall literacy rate in the village is 81% (91% literacy rate for men and 71% for women).

Hivare Korda is a Gram Panchayat in the Parner Block of Ahmednagar district and is located in the lower catchment area of the Mula-Pravara basin with a total geographic area of 1,831 Hectares. There is a milk collection point in Hivare Korda with a daily collection of 1,200 litres of milk. The population of the village is 2,065 and Scheduled Castes and Tribes account for a combined 13.12% only. The literacy rate in Hivare Korda is 74% with the male literacy rate at nearly 81% and a lower 66.5% for women.

Sutarwadi is located at a distance of 4km from the main Gram Panchayat. The hamlet is spread over a total geographic area of 712 Hectares. The nearest access point for amenities like bus stop, government secondary school, health sub-centre and primary health care and veterinary clinic is the main Gram Panchayat.

The population in Sutarwadi is 428 and nearly 97% of the households are from the *Vanjari* community (part of the *VimuktaJati and Nomadic Tribes* (VJNT) category) and the rest are Scheduled Castes and Tribes households. Traditionally the *Vanjari* community comprised of sheep herders and those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the village were landless. Sheep and goat rearing along with farming is the mainstay of the *Vanjari* community while the Scheduled Castes and Tribes community comprise the labor force in the hamlet.

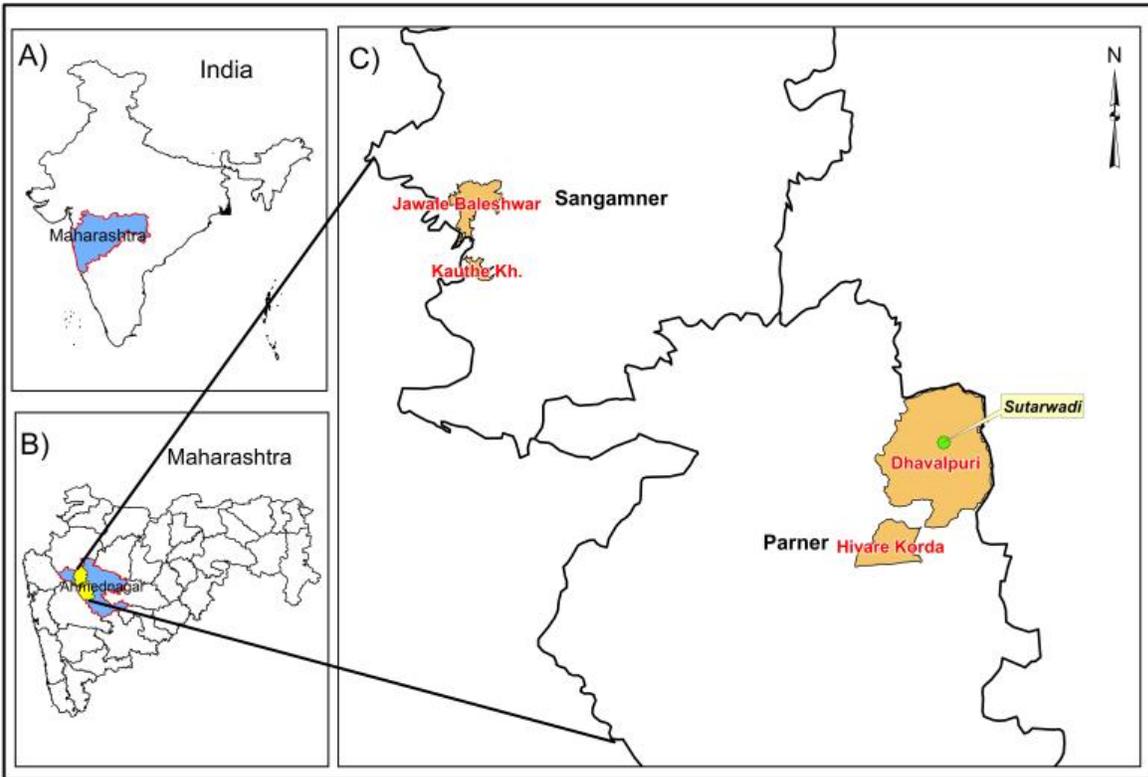


Figure 1: Map Showing the Study Area

3. Methodology

Each village is taken as a case study to understand the inclusivity of community aspirations (or the lack of it) in the village level development plans (Gram Panchayat development plans). This study is part of a larger study in applying wellbeing approach to understand the needs and satisfaction of socially differentiated communities.

A structured questionnaire was used to capture the aspirations of the local communities. The questionnaire was developed along the lines of Resources and Needs Questionnaire (RANQ) by Wellbeing in Developing (WeD) countries (McGregor J. ,2007; Copestake and Camfield, 2010). A stratified random sampling was used to select sample households based on social categories in the villages. In each social category, 10% of households were selected resulting in a sample of 149 households across the four villages. The questionnaire captures the aspirations and the corresponding level of ‘satisfaction’ perceived against a list of 22 life resources. The list of 22 life resources were identified based on discussions in the villages and key informants, and these represent domains like basic needs, material needs, natural capital, services, social capital, financial capital and human capital. The respondents were asked to rank how ‘necessary’ he/she feels a particular resource is to their lives and the corresponding ‘satisfaction’ one feels for a particular resource. The idea here is that each respondent would rank a resource within the varying degrees of ‘necessity’ and the congruent ‘satisfaction’ felt, based on the “objective circumstances of a person

and their ‘subjective’ perception of their condition” (McGregor J. , 2007). The ranking for ‘necessity’ was done on a scale of 0, 1 and 2, with 0 standing for ‘not necessary’ , 1 for necessary and 2 for ‘very necessary’. Similarly, for ‘satisfaction’ with respect to a particular life resource, code 0 stands for ‘not adequate’, 1 for ‘adequate’ and 2 for ‘more than adequate’. The difference in ranks as accorded to ‘necessities’ and ‘satisfactions’ of each of these resources, reflects the presence of ‘aspiration gaps’ (Copestake and Camfield, 2010). A negative aspiration gap points towards relative dissatisfaction, meaning that the resource is ranked higher in terms of ‘necessity or importance’ but lower in terms of the satisfaction (relative to its presence or the lack of it). A positive aspiration gap points towards relative satisfaction for the particular resource.

In order to understand the local governance structures, processes and perceptions of the village level functionaries, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the gram sewak, who is the bureaucratic functionary in the village and elected representatives including the *Sarpanch* (President) and *Upa-sarpanch* (Vice-President). The Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDs) for the period 2016-20 of all the 4 Gram Panchayats were accessed and analyzed in order to understand the priority areas in each Gram Panchayat. This helped to cognize the organizational framework and to get a keen understanding of the barriers faced by the representatives at the village level.

4. Local governance in Maharashtra

The paper delves into the village governance mechanisms with focus on Maharashtra in section 4.1 and into gram panchayat development plans or the village development plans in section 4.2. These give a prelude to the individual village case studies in section 4.3 where we analyze the respective village development plans and juxtapose the same on the requirements of the community.

4.1. Governance Structures

The system of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Maharashtra is a three tiered one, governed by the Maharashtra Village Panchayat Act (1959). It is represented by the Zilla Parishad (ZP) at the district level, the Panchayat Samiti at the block and the Gram Panchayat at the village. The organizational structure of the Panchayati Raj Institutions flanks to two arms; the elected representatives and the government functionaries. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at the Zilla Parishad, the block development officer at the block/ taluka and the gram sewak or the village development officer at the village level report functionally to their respective elected representatives at each level and administratively to higher authority in the state government hierarchy.

The Zilla Parishad at the district level has a ‘President’ as the head of the elected representatives. There are different subject committees at this level, namely; education, public works, minor irrigation, rural water supply, social welfare, animal husbandry, agriculture, women and child welfare, finance, general administration and village panchayat (CAG, 2017). These respective subject committees take decisions regarding the allocation for different activities as given in the village development plans submitted to them, with due consultation with the CEO. The sanctions for

the select activities then go to the block development officer, who after discussion with the Panchayat Samiti gives the final approval to the village development plans as submitted by the different gram panchayats under the block.

Figure 2 presents a structure that describes the power nodes and the flow of authority and accountability within the three tiered Panchayati Raj Institutions.

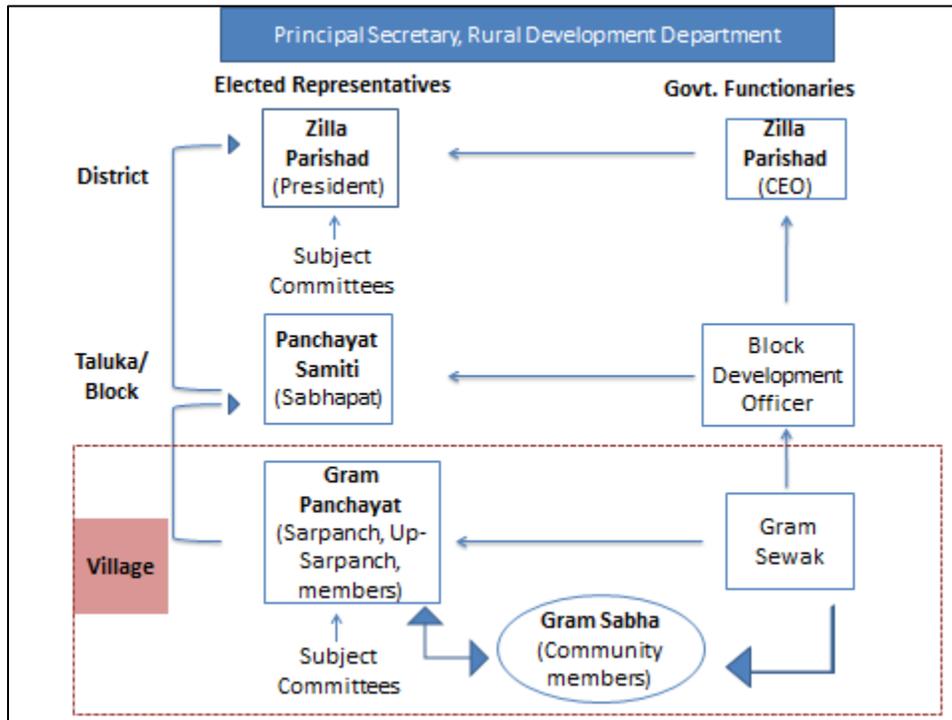


Figure 2: Adapted from (CAG, 2017)

The paper elucidates on the lowest rung of the Panchayati Raj Institution i.e. the gram panchayat. The governance structure at village is headed by the body of voters called the gram sabha to which the gram panchayat is accountable and which forms the cornerstone of grass root democracy in India (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2014). Gram sabha allows for deliberation and prioritization of developmental activities within the village and efficient dissemination of information on public issues. It gives a platform for identification of beneficiaries for state/ central schemes and thereby increases the scope for transparency (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2014). The governance structure at the village, similar to the other levels is served by both elected representatives from the gram panchayat and the government functionaries. The elected representatives of a gram panchayat are the sarpanch (president), upa-sarpanch (vice president), gram panchayat members and members of the various sub-committees. The government servants at this level are the gram sewak (village development officer), line department officials, Computer Operator, clerk and the peon.

4.2. Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs)

Once the priorities and needs are identified, as flagged in the gram sabha, strategies and activities are then prepared as a response by the gram panchayat. The standing committee² or subject committees of the gram panchayat help narrow down on strategies and activities to be included in the gram panchayat development plan and also identifies the funds available to implement the listed activities (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2014). It is the responsibility of the state to communicate the funds that are available to each gram panchayat, called the resource envelope. Few sources like the Fourteenth Finance Commission (FFC) grants, State Finance Commission (SFC) grants, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Own Source Revenue (OSR), Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) and State Sponsored Schemes are available to the Gram Panchayat; voluntary contributions funds are mandatory funds that form part of the resource envelope (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2015). The gram sabha gives a platform for the villagers to not just air their grievances but also to participate in decision making process at the village. Among other things, it is a forum for the residents to deliberate on the requirements of the village, to select the beneficiaries of government schemes and to examine the financial statements of the gram panchayat. The panchayat committee, along with the gram sewak, use the discussions generated during the gram sabha to chalk out a tentative village development plan. The planning and discussion regarding developmental activities to be included and the respective budget allocation happens during the *Quorum*³ and any difference of opinion is resolved by endorsing the decision of the majority. The village development plan is again presented before the gram sabha for ratification, after which the same is forwarded to the panchayat samiti and the block development officer at the block/ tehsil level. If the village development plan for a particular year falls short of accommodating an activity, then the same is taken up in the coming years, provided the fund feasibility.

5. Village case studies

The following four cases illustrate local governance under different conditions such as poor natural resource endowment, active community engagement and limited reach due to large size of gram panchayats. Each of these conditions either hinders or enables the performance of local governing institutions.

Governance under conditions of poor natural resource endowment: Case of Jawale Baleshwar

Jawale Baleshwar is a resource poor village with low soil productivity and low water availability. It is an area that falls in the non-rechargeable areas. The village has substantial population of

² All the elected members of the Gram Panchayat together with the Gram Panchayat functionaries deal with different aspects of local development (education, livelihood, sanitation, employment generation, health etc). The state act for PRIs call for the formation of a Standing Committee on different subjects for focused dealings in these prime areas (paper 11)

³One-third of the existing elected representatives are necessary to form a Quorum.

Scheduled Castes and Tribes category communities (56% of total population), who are inherently resource poor (small and marginal landholdings) and engaged in wage labor (non-farm) as their major livelihood occupation. The village has good road connectivity due to its proximity to pilgrimage centre.

6. Perceptions of community members:

In Jawale Baleswar, food consumption, housing infrastructure and employment opportunities were identified as high necessities but also had relatively low satisfaction rankings (-14, -16, -18 respectively).

In the context of food consumption, the average expenditure on food, as reported by the sample, was INR 24,550 per annum accounting for nearly 40% of a household's annual expenditure. There is dependence on Public Distribution System (PDS) for few essential commodities such as rice, wheat, sugar and kerosene and majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with availability and quality of these items.

Majority of the houses in the village have tin and burnt mud tiles (*Kaurelu*) roofs. The dissatisfaction regarding the housing infrastructure (-16) within the community could be an indication of aspiration or 'want' for modern houses with Reinforced Cement and Concrete (RCC) roofs.

There is a great dissatisfaction regarding employment opportunities (-18) among the respondents. Majority of the villagers commute to the nearby urban centre for non-farm and daily-wage labour. This, when seen with the low necessity and relatively high satisfaction ranking (+3) for agricultural inputs, suggests the low importance given to agriculture as a livelihood source as compared to non-farm labour. The income generated from agriculture is low and most farmers supplement the same by working in sugar mills and other industries. Water scarcity is a pressing concern and even the farmers who have wells have complained of the insufficiency of water. Water levels in wells and access to markets for crops have been identified as concern areas, with low levels of satisfaction.

Sanitation was ranked high on necessity and low on satisfaction (-6). The reasons for low satisfaction could be the water scarcity and poor quality of the toilet, thus making them unusable. Digging pits for the toilet was also reported to be arduous since the area has hard rocks.

The categories with high relative satisfaction⁴ include access to credit and recognition in the community (+17 and +12 respectively). All the households indicated having bank accounts and almost 50% of the households have accessed bank loans. The gram panchayat has one cooperative society called the *Vividh Karykari* society, which provides crop loans to the members around and about 30% of the farmers are its members. Additionally, there are 7 functional self-help groups in the village. The high relative satisfaction in terms of 'recognition in the community' can be understood since nearly 56% of the population in the village is of tribal origin and there is a strong sense of community due to cultural affinity.

⁴ Ranked higher in terms of satisfaction as compared to their necessities

Education was ranked relatively low on necessity but high on satisfaction (+7). The village has a well-functioning primary and secondary schooling system and there exists good access to higher education (government and private colleges) due to the proximity to urban centres. Since the village has adequate educational infrastructure, the immediate need of educational facilities was low which was reflected in the relatively low necessity.

Clean water was ranked high on necessity as well as satisfaction (+1). This could be traced back to the various government initiatives on this front. Currently, the households have access to drinking water from community taps, located at different points in the village. Drinking water is drawn up from the Mula River, 7 km away and stored in community tank. With the 2016-17 GPDP, there is provision to make an arrangement for tap water in every hamlet and the work for the pipelines is under way.

Table 1: Necessity and Satisfaction Ranks; Jawale Baleshwar

Life Domains	N	NR	S	SR	RD
Food consumption	1.74	1	1.72	16	-15
Housing Infrastructure	1.69	2	1.64	19	-17
Employment opportunity	1.68	3	1.43	21	-18
Clean water	1.63	4	1.97	3	1
Sanitation	1.58	5	1.78	12	-7
Health care	1.54	6	1.91	6	0
Landholding	1.49	7	1.73	15	-8
Access to markets (crops)	1.48	8	1.62	22	-14
Water levels in your wells	1.48	8	1.56	20	-12
Basic household goods (like furniture)	1.47	10	1.84	10	0
Family relations	1.45	11	2.27	1	10
Clothes	1.44	12	1.95	4	8
Education	1.43	13	1.91	6	7
Recognition in the community	1.41	14	2.19	2	12
Fodder availability	1.39	15	1.69	17	-2
Access to markets (Livestock)	1.35	16	1.76	13	3
Access to wells	1.31	17	1.74	14	3
Veterinary services	1.28	18	1.84	9	9
Information on weather and crop-advisories	1.26	19	1.84	10	9
Agricultural inputs (fertilizers, pesticides, tractors etc.)	1.25	20	1.65	18	2
Access to common pastureland (grazing land)	1.22	21	1.88	8	13
Credit	1.22	22	1.93	5	17

*N= Necessity, NR= Necessity Ranking, S= Satisfaction, SR= Satisfaction Ranking, RD= Rank Difference

Village development plan:

As per the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (2016-17 to 2019-20) of Jawale Baleshwar, the major focus has been drinking water supply and road construction which accounted for nearly 24% and 21%, respectively, of the total planned budget.

Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee (MGNREGA) Scheme was one of the major sources of funding for the road construction activity with the main objectives of developing the local assets as well as generating local employment (wage labor).

Sanitation appears to be another important area that accounts for 12% of the budget. These also reflect the priorities of the central government. Sanitation is a component of one of the flagship programmes, the *Swatchh Bharat Abhiyan*, of the present national government in power. The objective is to make the country Open Defecation Free (ODF) by 2019. Under this scheme, funds have been provided for constructing individual private toilets for the households.

The gram panchayat development plan of Jawale Baleshwar does not apportion for livelihood and capacity building and does bare minimum for few key areas like health, women and child welfare etc. (part of 'others')

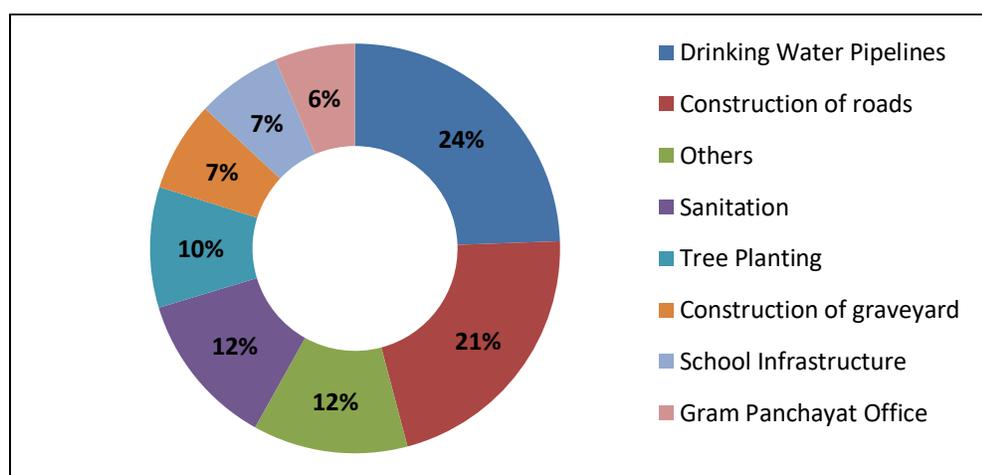


Figure 3: Jawale Baleshwar GPDP (2016-17 till 2019-20)

The Panchayat gave priority to clean water, roads and sanitation in their planned budget. The efforts of the gram panchayat towards provision of portable water to each hamlet is reflected in the budget provisioning as well as the positive perception of the community in terms of access to drinking water. The community perception is not so much regarding sanitation despite nearly 12% budgetary allocation and this was owing to poor implementation resulting in poor quality toilets. Employment generated through the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee scheme (through allocation under activities like construction of roads) does not seem to suffice the employment needs of the communities. The poor natural resource base in the area is a limitation to further agriculture development. Even though basic necessities may be fulfilled by the government initiatives, fulfilling employment needs remains a challenge for the gram panchayat.

Governance in case of active and well-informed Community: Case of Kauthe Khurd

One of the dominant groups in Kauthe Khurd is the Maratha community, who account for nearly 62% of the sample. Maratha's are an agriculturally and politically dominant community in Maharashtra and this can be noticed from their stronghold on land and politics of the state (Deshpande, 2004; Carras, 1972). They are proactive as a community and actively participate in the gram sabhas.

Perceptions of community members:

The respondents from Kauthe Khurd identified health care, landholding and employment opportunities as life resources that are not met with the requisite satisfaction in comparison to their congruent necessity in life (-17, -13, -12 respectively). Nearly 92% of the sample households have reported 'no access to health facilities' and the corresponding level of dissatisfaction is high (-17). On an average, about 8% of the total annual expenditure by a household is health related. The nearest primary health care centre and the nearby gram panchayats (Kauthe Bhudruk. and Khandgedra) is in Ghargaon. So, the communities from these villages have to make a commute of 11km to Ghargaon, for any medical assistance. The government doctor visits Kauthe Khurd only once a month. There are few ASHA⁵ workers in the village. The Gram Panchayat of the neighboring village (Kauthe Bhudruk) has been allotted money for construction of Primary Health Centre for 2017.

Regarding 'landholding' (-13), the average landholding size in Kauthe Khurd is 3.99 acres. The entire gram panchayat has 9 landless households. Large farmers (more than 5 acres of land) account for 10 percent of the households and small farmers (2-5 acres) account for 80 percent while marginal farmers (less than 2 acres) make up 10 per cent of the total households in the gram panchayat. There are 10 acres of fallow land in the village.

'Employment Opportunities' is a major concern with high relative dissatisfaction (-12). The main source of livelihood in the village is 'farming' and dairy. Village youths often travel to cities like Pune and Mumbai in search of employment opportunities. There is disinterest among villagers towards employment generated through the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee scheme. According to the gram panchayat committee, villagers have been observed to not turn up for labour work that is available in the village. This has prompted the panchayat committee to hire non-farm labour from outside. This comes with its own set of problems since the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee scheme requires that employment under the scheme be given to the residents of the area where the construction happens. In cases where no labor is available for work in the village, the activity gets till the issue of labor availability is solved.

⁵Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) is trained community health worker at village level. They act as the intermediary between communities and the public health system. There is one ASHA worker in every village with a population of 1,000.

Available at <http://vikaspedia.in/health/nrhm/national-health-mission/initiatives-for-community-participation-under-nhm/accruited-social-health-activist-asha> on 01/01/18.

There is high relative dissatisfaction expressed for 'access to market for crops' (-8) and considering that majority households depend on agriculture as their mainstay, it is an issue for concern. The nearest rural haat or weekly agricultural market is 11km away at Ghargaon and the crop collection point is at Sangamner, 26Km away. The access road to the village, though black topped (census 2011), is riddled with multiple potholes. The main livestock markets, frequented by the villagers from Kauthe Khurd, are at Sangamner (26km), Bela (40km) and Loni (70km). Reaching these markets with their livestock is expensive since it requires a total vehicle rent of nearly INR 3000.

As far as food consumption is concerned, relative dissatisfaction was identified (-5). Nearly 88% of the sample households reported that they had been purchasing food grains from the public distribution system and nearly 74% of the households that access public distribution system have reported satisfaction with food quality. The relative dissatisfaction accorded to this life constituent could be traced back to the fact that in the past 1 year, owing to the expired licenses, the ration shop in the village was unable to procure sugar and kerosene; and despite repeated requests there has been no response from the block and nor from the panchayat. What could further fuel the dissatisfaction could be that the recent member additions to the public distribution system list has not been updated in the official records which means that the quantity of food grains at times falls short of the demand.

Kauthe Khurd is situated on the banks of the Mula River and this affluence in availability of water is reflected in the low priority and high relative satisfaction accorded to the 'water levels in wells' (+10). Water accessed through wells and lifted from the river is of potable quality and this is reflected in the relative satisfaction by the community (+1). The village has 1 public overhead tank, 8 public tap connections and 70 private open wells. The piped water is generally chlorinated. It has not been possible to extend pipeline to the far away hamlets, despite the constant demand by the inhabitants, owing to shortage of funds.

The respondents also ascertained 'clean water' and 'sanitation' to be areas of high necessity and positive relative satisfaction as well (+1, 0 respectively). This is not surprising since the gram panchayat has been declared an Open Defecation Free (ODF) village under the *Swatchh Bharat Abhiyan* scheme since 2011. Most houses have individual toilets that are used by families. Such Initiatives were taken by households to build toilets even before government schemes started incentivizing the same. Open drainage is a concern that the panchayat plan for 2016-20 attempts to address.

The village has a primary school within the premises which has been digitalized under the 14th finance commission but the nearest secondary school is nearly 3km away in Kauthe Bhudruk. The community as well as the panchayat has identified this to be a concern since the community puts strong focus on education. Children from the village are often sent to hostels if the daily commute is long.

Recognition in the community and family relation enjoy high relative satisfaction among the community members (+10, +4 respectively). This is substantiated by the fact that the community celebrates various occasions of religious and social importance. It can be noted that the community rated 'credit' as lowest in terms of necessity. This lower necessity given to credit when agriculture

is one of the key mainstays of the village is substantiated by the easy availability of agriculture loans from credit societies in the village.

Table 2: Necessity and Satisfaction Ranks; Kauthe Khurd

Life Domains	N	NR	S	SR	RD
Food consumption	1.79	1	2.04	6	-5
Clean water	1.69	2	2.12	1	1
Sanitation	1.64	3	2.11	2	1
Health care	1.63	4	1.42	17	-13
Landholding	1.63	4	1.73	22	-18
Housing Infrastructure	1.61	6	1.91	10	-4
Employment opportunity	1.60	7	1.71	20	-13
Education	1.55	8	1.88	12	-4
Family relations	1.51	9	2.09	5	4
Access to markets (crops)	1.49	10	1.72	18	-8
Clothes	1.48	11	2.03	18	-7
Water levels in your wells	1.47	12	2.12	2	10
Agricultural inputs (fertilizers, pesticides, tractors etc.)	1.45	13	1.88	11	2
Recognition in the community	1.43	14	2.11	4	10
Basic household goods (like furniture)	1.40	15	2.04	6	9
Information on weather and crop-advisories	1.40	15	1.83	13	2
Veterinary services	1.36	17	1.72	18	-1
Access to wells	1.35	18	1.99	9	9
Access to common pastureland (grazing land)	1.27	19	1.65	21	-2
Access to markets (Livestock)	1.27	20	1.81	15	5
Fodder availability	1.25	21	1.81	16	5
Credit	1.21	22	1.83	13	9

*N= Necessity, NR= Necessity Ranking, S= Satisfaction, SR= Satisfaction Ranking, RD= Rank Difference

Village Development Plan:

The Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) of Kauthe Khurd has focused majorly on construction (and/or repair) of roads, construction of check dam and construction and repair of graveyard with 19% of the budget allocated to the former and 17% each to the latter two heads.

Concretization and repair of internal roads and the ones connecting different wards (hamlets) was underway during the course of the survey. While activities like concretizing and graveling of village roads use the village fund along with allocations from the 14th finance commission. Other major allocations (for graveyard and check dams) are sourced solely from the 14th finance commission.

Sanitation has also featured as an important budgetary head with an allocation of nearly 13% from the aforementioned source.

A dedicated fund amounting to 3% of the estimated fund of each year under the GPDP is kept reserved for the disabled (categorized under the head 'Others'). Earlier, the gram panchayat would buy aids under the relevant scheme but now the beneficiaries can purchase the aids or medicine (up to certain limit) they require and submit the bill to the gram panchayat office to get reimbursement.

There were no allocations made for areas like 'health' and 'livelihood and capacity building', which were the requirements of the community members. This was gauged through the relative dissatisfaction accorded by the community members to the particular areas.

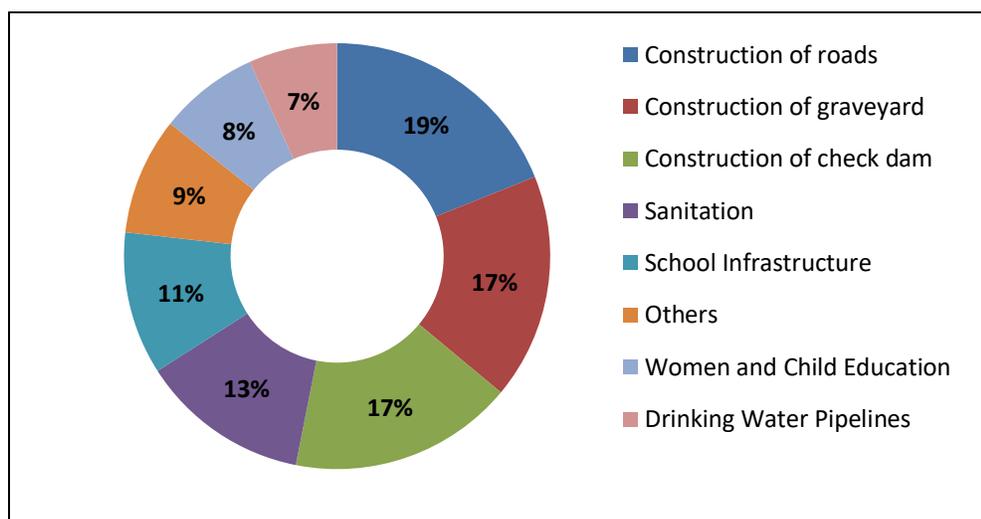


Figure 4: Kauthe Khurd GPDP (2016-17 till 2019-20)

However, despite the community being proactive regarding village matters, the GPDP was not as inclusive as would have been desired (Figure 4). There were no allocations made for areas like 'health' and 'livelihood and capacity building', which in turn were the requirements of the community members. This echoed in the relative dissatisfaction accorded by the community members to the particular areas. The gram panchayat is also a case of proxy sarpanch (president) where despite a lady been elected to the reserved seat of the sarpanch, the decision making was in the hands of her husband and her son. This lays waste the very reasoning for reserving seats for women at Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Challenges of managing increasing aspirations: Case of Hivare Korda

The distinctive feature of Hivare Korda is the presence of a small-scale manufacturing unit since the last 20 years which helped diversify the employment opportunities from farm to non-farm especially during the lean seasons. This enterprise manufactures decorative ornaments for the Bail

Pola⁶ festivities and the sales are across Maharashtra and even to the neighboring state of Karnataka. Nearly every individual from the village and many from the neighboring villages as well work at the establishment.

Perceptions of community members:

In Hivare Korda, health care and sanitation were the top ranked necessities but had extremely low relative satisfaction (-21, -18 respectively). The nearest primary health centre is nearly 8 kms away. A private doctor visits the village regularly but not daily and in the absence of a government doctor, the villagers consult him despite higher fees. There are no rounds made by government appointed doctors. Nearly 60% of the sampled households have stated lack of access to health facilities. On an average, 14% of a household's total annual expenditure is on health. The village has an ASHA worker and an assistant.

It could be noticed that 'veterinary services' rank low on necessity and lower on satisfaction and with a relative dissatisfaction (-3) amongst the respondents. Livestock rearing is an important source of livelihood in the village along with farming and daily wage work. The village has 160 large ruminants, 195 small ruminants and 166 units of backyard poultry. The veterinary doctor who visits the village is a private practitioner who is expensive to afford. If the community wants to access a government veterinary doctor, then they would have to travel a minimum distance of 4.4 km with their ill livestock to Goregaon. When the question regarding the lack of rotation of the government veterinary doctor was raised, the villagers were themselves unaware of the possibility of such a provision. Therefore the issue was never addressed in gram sabhas either. Lack of awareness and to also save time, the community uses the services of the private practitioner, despite it being heavier on their pockets. Nearly 60% of the respondents have mentioned lack of access to veterinary services.

Education and employment opportunities, feature in the top 5 necessities but enjoy very low relative satisfaction (-9, -12 respectively). Regarding educational facilities, the village has a primary and upper primary/ secondary school. Higher secondary educational services are available in the village of Bhalawani, at a distance of 7.2km. In general, the discussions in the gram sabha revolved more on the educational infrastructure instead of quality of education imparted. However, the GPDP 2016-17 has considered 'digitization of primary schools' and requisite training of teachers as a component.

'Employment opportunities' was raised as a major concern by not just the youth but also by middle aged population. The village witnesses significant migration for work purposes. Young people from the village migrate for work purpose to any big towns/cities, with maximum out flux to Ahmednagar and few to Pune and Mumbai. Women are also encouraged to go out for higher education. The ones who are unable to leave the village for work are forced to take up agriculture. It was, congruently, also observed that the youth who take up agriculture are very proactive in using new techniques, irrigational facilities and inputs in agriculture and thus, are seen as successful. Farmers also go for exposure visits which in turn act as capacity building technique. The

⁶*Bail Pola* is an important festivity for the farmers in Maharashtra. The celebration is marked by families decorating their bullocks with colorful ornaments and worshipping them.

aspirational gap for 'employment opportunities' is despite the fact that Hivare Korda is the only village of the four sample ones which has a flourishing small scale unit that manufactures decorative accessories for livestock. This unit, in existence for the last 20 years, is often a source of employment to the surrounding villages as well. However, despite there being an alternate non-farm livelihood option in the village, there is strong desire and demand for workshops, seminars and career guidance camps for recently graduated students. Youth related issues, be it employment or capacity building, has never been raised in the village gram sabha till now.

Access to market for crops has also been identified as an area with high relative dissatisfaction (-11). The village does not have a weekly haat or market of any sort within its boundaries and the nearest market centre is at Bhalawani (7.2km away), which is a weekly market held every Wednesday. The mode of transport used ranges from personal vehicles, tempos to state buses as well. This is however, not a major market. Villagers visit the market Narayangaon (74km) for selling bulk quantities of produce. Access to market is good. There is a bus stop right outside the village perimeter.

An interesting point to be noted here is the placement of 'credit' in terms of necessity; least important and high satisfaction. One could argue that high level of satisfaction stems from the low importance attributed to the life constituent. Nearly 96% of the sampled households have bank accounts which are indicative of access to and availability of credit.

Table 3: Necessity and Satisfaction Ranks; Hivare Korda

Life Domains	N	NR	S	SR	RD
Health care	1.69	1	1.40	22	-21
Sanitation	1.66	2	1.53	20	-18
Food consumption	1.64	3	1.80	9	-6
Clothes	1.47	4	2.00	3	1
Education	1.47	5	1.73	14	-9
Employment opportunity	1.47	5	1.64	17	-12
Clean water	1.46	7	1.98	4	3
Housing Infrastructure	1.46	7	1.86	7	0
Access to markets (crops)	1.45	9	1.53	20	-11
Family relations	1.45	9	2.14	1	8
Landholding	1.44	11	1.79	10	1
Water levels in your wells	1.39	12	1.71	15	-3
Recognition in the community	1.38	13	2.04	2	11
Access to wells	1.35	14	1.83	8	6
Veterinary services	1.34	15	1.63	18	-3
Information on weather and crop-advisories	1.33	16	1.71	15	1
Basic household goods (like furniture)	1.29	17	1.93	6	11
Access to common pastureland (grazing land)	1.27	18	1.76	11	7

Life Domains	N	NR	S	SR	RD
Fodder availability	1.26	19	1.74	13	6
Access to markets (Livestock)	1.23	20	1.62	19	1
Agricultural inputs (fertilizers, pesticides, tractors etc.)	1.18	21	1.75	12	9
Credit	1.15	22	1.94	5	17

*N= Necessity, NR= Necessity Ranking, S= Satisfaction, SR= Satisfaction Ranking, RD= Rank Difference

Village Development Plan:

The major focus of the GPDP (2016-17 till 2019-20) of Hivare Korda was sanitation (21%) and drinking water supply related activities (15%). Construction of roads in the village also accounted for a sizeable proportion (13%). The major source of funding for these activities has been the 14th finance commission.

Water to Hivare Korda is accessed through a common water tank that is shared with two other villages. There was a general agreement over the need to have a water source separate from other villages and the GPDP has considered the same in year 2016-17.

The gram panchayat of Hivare Korda has ample focus on improving connectivity within the gram panchayat premises through construction of roads to connect the fringes to the village centre. These issues were identified in gram sabha and promptly taken up by the gram panchayat through inclusion in the GPDP.

As with the other villages, the consistent focus on sanitation through the whole duration of the plan point towards a strong downward push from the centre and the state to achieve open defecation free status for the block by a specific date. Interaction with the community has revealed a desire for better roads in the village and the same has been addressed by the GPDP in each year.

Activities like construction of a health care centre within the village (work underway), arranging for solar street lights, graveyard concretization and construction of school compound wall were undertaken by the panchayat on their own accord as and when they saw the need. 'Others' here is inclusive of expenditure for infrastructure for the village community hall, construction of graveyard and gram panchayat office.

Even though there is significant allocation of funds to sanitation (21%), there is dissatisfaction among the community members. Drinking water needs have been met by the gram panchayat through piped water supply meeting the requirements of the communities. Health care is seen as one of the top priorities by the communities as indicated by the high difference in the necessity and satisfaction but this has not been adequately reflected in the plan since a 7% allocation may not be sufficient to address the high relative dissatisfaction (-21). Hivare Korda has 8% of the total budget allocated for Livelihood and capacity building, which is inclusive of expenditure kept aside for *Aaple Sarkar Kendra*. Aspirations for higher education, skill development and employment (salaried) among the youth have not been brought into discussion in the gram sabhas and some of these maybe beyond the scope of the gram panchayat.

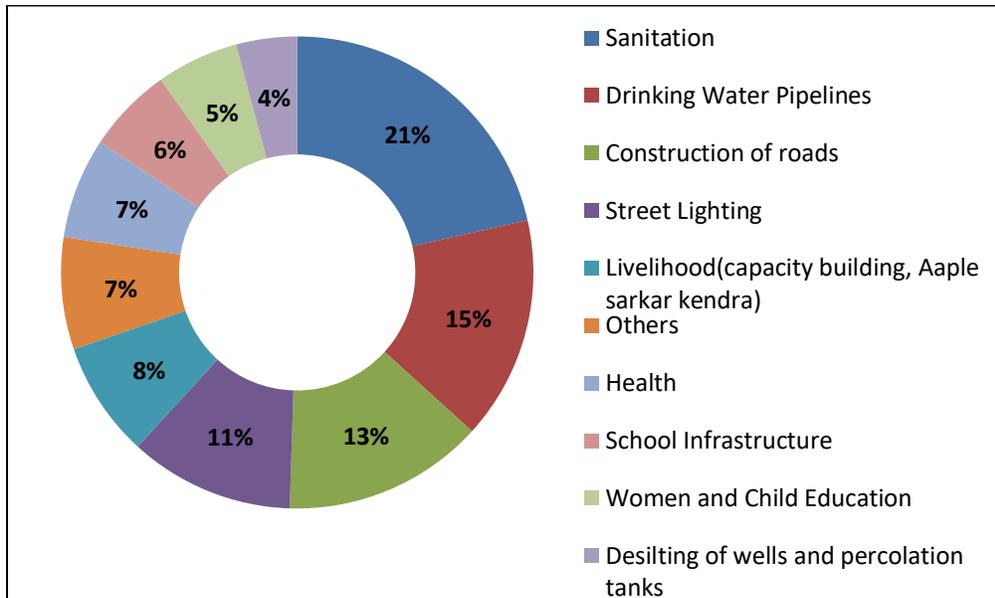


Figure 5: Hivare Korda GPDP (2016-17 till 2019-20)

Yet, regardless of an insufficiency of fund allocation one can construe that Hivare Korda has a Gram Panchayat that is tuned-in with the requirements of their village

Large panchayats - an Impediment to Inclusion in GPDP: Case of Sutarwadi

Sutarwadi is one of the 12 wards of a larger group gram panchayat of Dhavalpuri, spread across a total geographic area of 10362 HA. The Gram Panchayat (Gram Panchayat) of Dhavalpuri comprises of two revenue villages; Dhavalpuri and Bhangadewadi. The Gram Panchayat is located in the lower catchments of the Mula-Pravara basin. It has a total population of 1535 households (*Census 2011*) while Sutarwadi has a population of 95 households.

Perceptions of community members:

The life constituents which were identified by the community in Sutarwadi as the most crucial were also the ones that were identified as having high relative dissatisfaction with, namely; health care (-21), education (-18) and sanitation (-16). Nearly 96% of the sampled households have stated that they do not have access to any health services in their village. This explains and supports the high level of dissatisfaction with 'health services' as expressed by the villagers. The primary health sub-centre is present at the Dhavalpuri gram panchayat and so are the government appointed doctor and private practitioner but none in Sutarwadi. The educational facilities in Sutarwadi are limited to the presence of a primary school. For higher education (including college) the community has to go to the main Gram Panchayat Dhavalpuri. The community in Education is highly valued by the community Sutarwadi and the main contention Sutarwadi was the poor quality of education at the primary school level at the hamlet Sutarwadi. The residents are of the opinion that the quality has declined further over the years.

Sanitation (-16) is another area of high relative dissatisfaction. Sutarwadi is not open defecation free and only 31% of the sampled households have toilet of which only 50% make use of the facility,

though there has been improvement in the status. There are open drains in the hamlet and the presence of hard rock in the area makes construction of soak pits difficult.

The Dhavalpuri gram panchayat laid down a common drinking water pipeline to Sutarwadi nearly 6 years back and since then the hamlet has had water supply nearly throughout the year. This reflects in their high relative satisfaction in terms of 'Clean water' (+1). Nearly 88% have said that they have access to clean water.

The main market for crops is at Ahmednagar district, nearly 32km away and that for livestock is nearer at Bhangadewadi (another hamlet in the Dhavalpuri gram panchayat itself, 12km). Although access to both these markets have been relatively low on priority (which could be due to their very presence itself), their relative satisfaction levels have also been low. What differs is the relative dissatisfaction with respect to the 'Access to Crop market' (-6) unlike the 'Access to livestock market' (+5) and distance could be the reason here. Sutarwadi is well connected to the main gram panchayat as well as the main road and there are regular public and private transportations.

Employment opportunities that are available at the hamlet are limited to agriculture, livestock rearing and non-agricultural labour. This could explain the lower satisfaction to this life domain vis-à-vis the high level of importance (-11).

Table 4: Necessity and Satisfaction Ranks; Sutarwadi

Life Domains	N	NR	S	SR	RD
Health care	1.70	1	1.21	22	-21
Food consumption	1.58	2	1.89	5	-3
Education	1.55	3	1.33	21	-18
Sanitation	1.55	3	1.42	19	-16
Clean water	1.50	5	1.96	4	1
Information on weather and crop-advisories	1.50	5	1.50	16	-11
Employment opportunity	1.47	7	1.47	18	-11
Family relations	1.47	7	2.12	1	6
Housing Infrastructure	1.42	9	1.79	8	1
Clothes	1.39	10	2.05	2	8
Recognition in the community	1.36	11	2.00	3	8
Water levels in your wells	1.36	11	1.63	14	-3
Fodder availability	1.34	13	1.71	11	2
Access to markets (crops)	1.29	14	1.41	20	-6
Landholding	1.29	14	1.64	13	1
Veterinary services	1.29	14	1.49	17	-3
Access to common pastureland (grazing land)	1.24	17	1.67	12	5
Access to wells	1.24	17	1.74	9	8
Basic household goods (like furniture)	1.13	19	1.89	5	14

Life Domains	N	NR	S	SR	RD
Access to markets (Livestock)	1.12	20	1.55	15	5
Credit	1.11	21	1.86	7	14
Agricultural inputs (fertilizers, pesticides, tractors etc.)	1.04	22	1.72	10	12

*N= Necessity, NR= Necessity Ranking, S= Satisfaction, SR= Satisfaction Ranking, RD= Rank Difference

Village Development Plan:

The village development plan or the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) analyzed for Sutarwadi is that of the gram panchayat of Dhavalpuri. Developmental activities undertaken for the Sutarwadi (the ward/hamlet considered for the case study) have been studied separately.

The GPDP of Dhavalpuri for year 2016-17 to 2019-20 has budgeted for INR 5,097,456 and from the 14th Finance Commission. Since the gram panchayat is large (nearly 1535 households), the proportion of funds allocated under the 14th Finance Commission is also high. Off the total budgeted activities for the gram panchayat of 'Dhavalpuri', only 1% is for activities directly concerning Sutarwadi.

The highest allocation from the INR 1,439,147 (1%) allocated to Sutarwadi is for construction of roads (64%). This is however only 5% of the total amount reserved under the 'construction of roads' for the gram panchayat of Dhavalpuri. The said concretization of a road connecting Sutarwadi to the nearby wards/hamlets is slotted for year 2019-20. The next highest allocation was for 'school infrastructure' (17%). It should be noted that activities budgeted under this head consisted of activities like building sidewalls and compound walls for the primary schools in all the 12 hamlets of the gram panchayat and for concretizing area inside few schools. Most activities, except the construction of a library at the main gram panchayat centre, were towards ameliorating the existing 'school infrastructure' in the gram panchayat and not towards improving the quality of the same. The hamlet also had provision for street lighting (11%). Investments apportioned for water supply improvement in Sutarwadi accounted for only 5% of its total allocation.

It should also be noted that Sutarwadi had no allocation pertaining to key activities like 'health' and 'Sanitation'. These are also areas where the respondents have expressed high relative dissatisfaction (-21 and -16 respectively). These along with few other important allocations for 'women and child development' and 'livelihood and capacity building', are part of the gram panchayat development plan of Dhavalpuri.

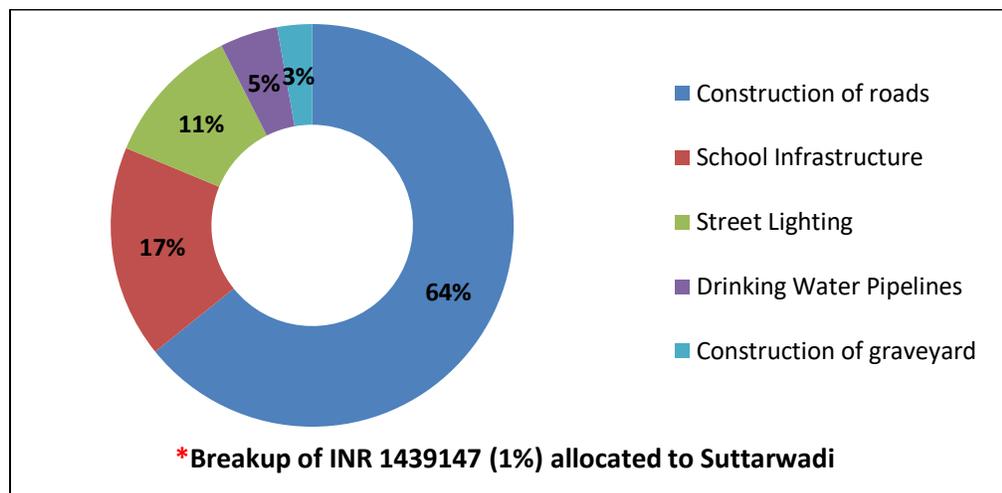


Figure 6: Breakup of GPDP (2016-17 till 2019-20) allocation to Sutarwadi

The GPDP of Dhavalpuri reflects gaps in terms of allocation down to hamlet level vis-à-vis budget allocation at the gram panchayat level. This especially echoes in the areas of health care, education and sanitation for Sutarwadi, where the sampled households have expressed high relative dissatisfaction.

Sometimes when the Gram Panchayat is as large as Dhavalpuri, the requirements of all hamlets do not find adequate representation in the Gram Panchayat plan (and especially if the sarpanch is not from the hamlet), thus impeding the idea of inclusivity during the formulation of GPDP.

Perceptions of village level functionaries

This section gives the limitations as perceived by the key village functionaries, namely, the elected representatives (sarpanch (president), up-sarpanch (vice-president)) and the government functionary (village secretary, locally called as gram sewak).

Sarpanch: The Maharashtra Village Panchayati Raj act (1959) mandates the Sarpanch to regulate meetings of the panchayat, to prepare reports, supervise the work done by all the members and preside over the gram sabha. It was only in 2017 that a direct election to the post of the Sarpanch took place in Maharashtra as a result of an amendment to the Act. All the four villages had women sarpanchs. Reservation of seats for women for this post was an institutional step for ensuring larger representation of women. This is done in rotational basis when certain panchayats have to elect a female sarpanch. Consequently, 50% seats in a gram panchayat at any point of time is reserved for women. However, it was discernible during focus group discussions that representation does not automatically translate to participation. In two of the villages, '*sarpanch-pati*' which roughly translates to 'husband of the sarpanch' is the key decision maker in the Gram Panchayat. In Dhavalpuri, the upa-sarpanch i.e. the vice president and the *sarpanch-pati* were more active than the woman sarpanch. Lack of education and awareness about the responsibilities of the elected position were common to the sarpanchs of both Kauthe Khurd and Dhavalpuri.

In Hivare Korda, the women sarpanch was a first timer in the position but was pro-active and firm in asserting her position. She was also well informed and aware about the responsibilities of the elected position.

Inadequate funds and the delay in the release of the same on the part of higher authorities was flagged as an impediment to proper functioning of the gram panchayat by representatives in all the four gram panchayats.

It was evident that the sarpanch has high dependence on the gram sewak to introduce new government schemes to the village. This excessive dependency can at times be an impediment to the quick functioning at village level. There were complaints about the unavailability of gram sewaks. Another point that was highlighted was the differences in the political affiliations within the gram panchayat. The latter can hamper consensus on prioritization of activities.

Upa-Sarpanch (Vice President): An Upa-Sarpanch presides over and regulates the meetings of the panchayat in the event of absence of the sarpanch. He/ she has to perform the duties which the sarpanch may delegate to him/her from time to time. The concerns of Upa-Sarpanch are:

At times the Sarpanch may not be aware of the roles and responsibilities of the position and this becomes a hindrance to smooth functioning of the system. In some instances, it was indicated that political affiliations take precedence over village development while taking decisions in gram panchayats.

There was unhappiness regarding lack of accountability of contactors to the gram panchayat. In general, contracts for activities such as road construction, watershed developments etc. were awarded through tenders. Even though a gram panchayat can register a complaint in case of non-compliance by the contractors, action is limited due to political connections of the contractor.

Gram Sewak: Gram Sewak is the first point of bureaucratic contact in the gram panchayat and often has more than one village under his purview. Following are the shortcomings;

There was a unanimous concern on the over-burdening of gram sewaks, which is made severe due to the multiple responsibilities of the position and causes delay in introduction of schemes and policies at village level (YASHADA, 2015).

At times the gram sewaks are also required to assist the government with immediate tasks. For e.g. the state government of Maharashtra had the target of making the Sangamner block Open Defecation Free (ODF) by the 31st October 2017 and for this purpose the gram sewaks were assigned extra villages to overlook tasks like construction of individual toilets, of spreading awareness about the importance of sanitation etc. This often leads to a disruption in their already stretched out regular duties.

The gram sewak is not immune to the interference by social, political and local pressures in a village (Sarma and Chakravarty, 2017; YASHADA, 2015; Gupta, 2006). The gram sewak of Kauthe Khurd mentioned that he had to leave the posting of one Bramhanwada village within 6 months due to hindrances posed by such forces.

The Gram sewak is responsible for recording the proceedings of the gram sabhas, which are a platform for the villagers to make their concerns and demands heard. One of the gram sewaks who was interviewed claimed that the gram sabhas are more a platform for representatives from rival political factions to have verbal volleys and less of a podium for productive discussions and deliberations.

*Aaple Sarkar Kendra*⁷ launched in 2015, is a comprehensive online portal, through which each gram panchayat provides services like issuance of caste certificate, death certificate, birth certificate, payment of electricity bills, marriage registry etc. in order to make the governance more efficient. Each gram panchayat has the required infrastructure (computer set, printer, papers etc.) and is provided with a data operator to handle the requests. In all the four cases, 'Aaple Sarkar Kendra' was not functioning as there were no data operators due to non-payment of salaries. In Jawale Baleshwar, poor internet connectivity was another constraint. The process of hiring the operators and payment of salaries has been outsourced by the government to a private company. This inherent lack of accountability to gram panchayat impedes transparency and convenience of function at the village level.

7. Overall discussion and conclusion

The GPDP of a Gram Panchayat from the time of its formulation till the point of sanctioning of funds is an iterative process of discussions, deliberations and justifications between the community and the Panchayati Raj Institutions, specifically the gram panchayat.

Inclusivity of local aspirations in GPDP hinges on how involved the community is in the planning process. The awareness about the problems of the village, of newer schemes and programs and of their own rights and responsibilities can be intrinsically linked, though iteratively, to how efficiently and transparently the gram sabhas are held. Any action that jeopardizes the sanctity of a gram sabha robs the community members of a platform to interact and participate in the village governance with the Gram Panchayat.

In majority of cases, health care, sanitation, education and employment opportunities were identified as priorities. There were also a few differences among the villages wherein housing, landholding were given high priorities. As can be seen from the village case studies, the major allocations reflect the key concerns of the central government; road and sanitation. While these are necessary amenities for a village, similar rigor is conspicuous by its absence in areas like health, education and employment.

The priorities of the communities are influenced by resource endowments of the village, awareness regarding the programmes and schemes of government, literacy and major occupations. In most of the cases, it was found that the GPDPs reflect priority needs of the communities even though the satisfaction levels of the community members differed across the villages based on the quality of execution at the ground.

⁷ Information from <http://aaplesarkar.maharashtra.gov.in/en/>. Accessed on 01/10/2016

Some of the needs (e.g. salaried employment, health care facilities, higher education, skill development) that are not reflected in the village plans could be discussed in the gram sabhas even if they are beyond the scope of the immediate panchayat level decisions. These could be at the least conveyed to higher governance levels (State or Central) for any future plans or strategies.

In the context of local level governance, women became sarpanchs of respective villages due to reservations. But the decision making in many cases still vests with men (such as the husband or the vice-president). Illiteracy and lack of knowledge about the roles and responsibilities hinder active participation of women in such cases. Focused training and capacity building of elected representatives (whether women or men) can improve their capabilities and contribute to becoming leaders in their own right.

Over burdening of gram sewaks (because of one single gram sewak catering to multiple villages) hampers smooth execution of programmes and schemes. Increasing the number of gram sewaks (government functionary) could help ease the burdens of those already in the system. Local political conflicts also affect implementation of activities on the ground.

Even though there are recent government initiatives to improve the local governance through information and communication technologies such as *Aaple Sarkar Sewa Kendra* that could reduce red tape and the time taken to access certain documents by rural communities, there many operational constraints due to lack of finances, human resources and supporting infrastructure (poor internet connectivity), which make the whole system redundant. There are problems that emerge due to contracting the job to private players who in turn are not accountable to the panchayats resulting poor accountability.

Since the development plans at the village level are aggregated to make the district level development plans, addressing the structural and institutional barriers at local level will help in bringing the national and state level policies closer to the ground. At the same time it would improve engagement with communities making the village planning process more inclusive.

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Appendix

Village Development Plans (Gram Panchayat Development Plan)

Table 1: Gram Panchayat Development Plan (2016-17 till 2019-20) of Jawale Baleshwar

Budgeted Activities	Allocation (INR)	%
Drinking Water Pipelines	3849873	24%
Construction of roads	3377177	21%
Sanitation	1925771	12%
Tree Planting	1500000	10%
Construction of graveyard	1120000	7%
School Infrastructure	1054997	7%
Gram Panchayat Office	1000000	6%
Others (Women and Child Education, Health, Funds for people with disability, Street Lighting, Infrastructure for Community hall, Infrastructure for Community temple)	1926209	12%
Total	15754027	100%

Table 2: Gram Panchayat Development Plan (2016-17 till 2019-20) of Kauthe Khurd

Budgeted Activities	Allocation (INR)	%
Construction of roads	1104936	19%
Construction of graveyard	1000000	17%
Construction of check dam	996308	17%
Sanitation	749321	13%
School Infrastructure	633487	11%
Women and Child Education	442934	8%
Drinking Water Pipelines	392572	7%
Others (Funds for people with disability, Street lighting, Individual Benefit schemes for backward class, Infrastructure for community temple)	519786	9%
Total	5839344	100%

Table 3: Gram Panchayat Development Plan (2016-17 till 2019-20) of Hivare Korda

Budgeted Activities	Allocation (INR)	%
Sanitation	2571005	21%
Drinking Water Pipelines	1834707	15%
Construction of roads	1650000	13%

Budgeted Activities	Allocation (INR)	%
Street Lighting	1353992	11%
Livelihood(capacity building, Aaple sarkar kendra)	951048	8%
Health	825000	7%
School Infrastructure	710000	6%
Women and Child Education	673548	5%
Desilting of wells and percolation tanks	500000	4%
Others(Construction of Bridge, Gram Panchayat Office, Infrastructure for community Hall)	1421639	11%
Total	12490939	100%

Table 4: Gram Panchayat Development Plan (2016-17 till 2019-20) of Dhavalpuri and the subsequent allocation to Suttarwadi (Hamlet of Dhavalpuri)

Dhavalpuri			Suttarwadi (Hamlet of Dhavalpuri)	
Budgeted Activities	Allocation (INR)	%	Allocation (INR)*	%
Construction of roads	18623094	46%	920625	64%
School Infrastructure	5853043	15%	250000	17%
Women and Child Education	2102791	5%	-	-
Sanitation	2016668	5%	-	-
Construction of graveyard	1806667	5%	40000	3%
Drinking Water Pipelines	1796667	4%	66667	5%
CD work	2200000	5%		
Street Lighting	946421	2%	161855	11%
Others (Health, Livelihood, Construction of check dams, Infrastructure for Community temple, Concretization of old market place, Expenditure for voter meter)	4710942	12%	-	-
Total	40056293	100%	1439147	100%

*Breakup of INR 1439147 (1%) allocated to Suttarwadi