CHAPTER - III

PROCESS AID IMPLICATIONS OF TRAINING

3.1. Socio Economic Status of the Respondents

Thiruchirappalli is a land locked district located in the centre of Tamil Nadu state. Being a beneficiary of the river Cauvery it is relatively fertile. It has predominantly an agrarian economy though their do exist few major industries. The people possess at traditional outlook and are positive in nature.

The district has 408 village panchayats of which 132 are reserved for women. The district also has a sizable population of SC and ST. Among the respondents 27% belong to SC/ST, 52% belongs to BC and 21% belongs to MBC. The literacy level of the district is quite higher than the state average. Among the sample women panchayat presidents 3% were illiterates, 12% have studied up to primary level, 25% upto high school level, 48% upto higher secondary level. Apart 7% are degree holders, 2% were master degree holders and 3% of the sample panchayat presidents have professional degree.

The age group of the respondents ranges from 22 to 67. Among the respondents 21% were below 30 years of age, 24% were in the age group of 31 to 40, 37% in the age group of 41 to 50, 13% in the age group of 51 to 60 and 5% above 61%.

While some of the respondents belong to economically affluent family, majority of them were poor or belong to lower middle class. Among the respondents 19% have an annual income below Rs.25000/-,
27% in the income range of Rs.25001 to Rs.50000/-, 22% in the income range of Rs.50001/- to Rs.75000/-, 18% in the income range of Rs.75001/- to Rs.100000/- and 14% of the respondents have annual income above Rs.100000/-. 

Among the respondents a majority of 81% were Hindus, 16% were Christians and 3% were Muslims. 

Assessing the agency and the opportunity structure, both formal and informal, for the women panchayat presidents before and after attending the training programme and assessing the ability of the women panchayat presidents to make effective choices and convert them into action a year after the training programme will indicate their level of empowerment. 

To asses the ability of the women panchayat presidents to take up the required action for development of the panchayat, the asset endowments such as knowledge, awareness, accessibility, self-confidence, general ability, decision making power, self reliance, leadership quality that determine the ability of the women panchayat presidents to use the opportunities given by the 73rd Amendment are used as indicators. 

The ability of women panchayat presidents to take up required action for the development of the panchayat depends upon the opportunity structure. Opportunity structure is defined as formal and informal contexts within which women panchayat presidents operate. The formal structure includes the legislations, rules, regulations, reservations and policy on training for improving capacity. The informal institutions are social customs, public opinion on women
leadership, traditional panchayat, caste system, gender discrimination, and spouse/family cooperation, officials and non officials’ attitude to women leadership.

The empowerment of women panchayat presidents is to be assessed with the following perspectives on the level of assets and opportunity structures existing for the women.

Many indicators have been developed and classified under each factor of empowerment. The agency/assets are to be indicated by various aspects which determine the performance of the women panchayat presidents. These aspects may be educational background, awareness and knowledge of panchayat Act, accessibility, positive attitude towards panchayat development, personal interest and responsibility to perform the duty, self confidence in all the positions to be taken as panchayat president, general ability to serve as panchayat president, timely decision making power, leadership quality to attract colleagues and people.

The opportunity structure defined as formal and informal contexts within which women panchayat presidents operate, may be indicated by the following characteristics, which determine the opportunities for the women panchayat presidents. The formal structure consists of panchayat legislation and its provision to support women empowerment, rules of panchayat and its circumstances for holding up the women presidents, panchayat regulations and their relevance for the women to be good panchayat presidents, reservation for women and SC/ST people, training policy and its availability, clarifications and doubts about power and functions of women.
panchayat presidents. The informal structure includes social customs at the local/grassroot level, public opinion about women leadership, role of traditional panchayat, caste system in the society/village, gender discrimination in all spheres, spouse/family cooperation and support for the women who are panchayat presidents, official and non official attitude to women leadership.

The indicators developed to assess the training process are contents and relevance of the syllabus of the training manuals, use of participatory methods in the training programmes, opportunities for clarifying doubts in the training sessions, accessibility of the training places, contacts and correspondence of the trainees with the resource team after the training programme, follow up activities of the training institute.

Degree of empowerment is indicated by changes and development that transpired after the training programmes in agency/assets of women panchayat presidents, changes and development that occurred after the training programmes in the opportunity structure, level of changes that happened after the training programmes in the use of power and functions of the women panchayat presidents, achievements of the women panchayat presidents.

The development outcome is assessed through the performance of the women panchayat presidents and the collective action on panchayat development.
3.2. Capacity Building Exercise Organised by Gandhigram Rural Institute

The Department of Political Science and Development Administration, Gandhigram Rural Institute, has taken the initiative to create awareness among the people from various parts of Tamil Nadu about the New Panchayat Raj System since 1992. It has produced abundant reading materials for the panchayat leaders. Awareness generation programmes have been earned out for years with the support of both Government non-governmental organizations.

Basic Issues

The woman panchayat presidents need to be educated, motivated and trained about their rights, duties and responsibilities. Considering the wide divergences and the element of heterogeneity in their social, economic and educational backgrounds, it was a difficult task. Moreover, these women members, who, traditionally, were housewives and mothers, will assume new roles as decision-makers for welfare and development activities. This will imperatively call for suitable strategies and methodologies for training of the panchayat presidents including development of training material and self-teaching training aids. The primary focus of the training programmes would have to be on empowerment of the elected women representatives to enable them to perform their role effectively rather than on training of individuals. Besides, the methods of training would need to ensure long-term sustainability of the programme which can be achieved only with an effective follow-up and evaluation system.
Objectives of the Training Programme

The objective of the training programme was to enable the women panchayat presidents to understand the Panchayati Raj System and its deep implications for the society in the context of the 73rd Amendment and their roles and responsibilities. Further, it was intended to equip them to manage the institution to achieve economic development and administer social justice. This training had to enhance the capacity of the leaders to involve the people in the development process of the society. Basically, this programme was intended to bring about a change of mindset among the leaders. The specific objectives of the training programme were:

- to create wider awareness about the new Panchayat Raj System, the concept, principles and importance of Panchayat Raj in general and knowledge on Panchayat Raj Act in Tamil Nadu, in particular.

- To familiarize the participants with the tasks of the village panchayat and its role and responsibilities within the scope of the Panchayat Raj Act.

- To discuss the various development schemes available to the village panchayat and individuals and to ensure maximum utilization of State and Central resources.

- To develop leadership qualities required to lead, manage and control the community activities and resources and to recognize
different leadership qualities required to become successful panchayat leaders.

- To expose the leaders to the participatory techniques of planning and executing project activities.

**The Training Content**

The training content of the programme includes the historical aspects of the Panchayat Raj System, constitutional aspects of the panchayats, main provisions of the central and state Acts, planning experience in India for economic growth and development, micro level planning for comprehensive development of the areas, activity dimensions of the panchayat on 29 subjects in the Eleventh Schedule, behavioural and performance dimensions of the presidents of gram panchayats. Audio Visual aids and exposure visits were added to demonstrate the success stories. Pre and post evaluation of the training programmes were also done through administering an interview schedule.

The training was organized in spacious halls with sufficient amenities for the participants. The communication for the training was sent through the district administration well in advance. The attendance at the programmes was always near by 100%.

**Training Material**

A handbook on the new Panchayat Raj administration with key features, duties and responsibilities of the presidents, a note on the schemes and programmes implemented by the village panchayat, a
copy of the Eleventh Schedule containing the 29 subjects allotted to the panchayat, a set of government orders and a handbook on the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act, 1994 were supplied to the participants.

**Pre-Test**

Before the commencement of the training a pre-test schedule was circulated among the participants to assess their understanding. The pre-test schedule included queries on basic objectives, special features and functions of the new Panchayati Raj System, responsibilities of the President, methodology of organizing the people and their participation in panchayat activities, the status of women and SC/ST and the qualities of a leader.

**Methods Adopted In the Training**

Depending on the participant and the subject, the methodology that was best suited to yield maximum benefits was adopted by the resource persons. The methods used in the training programme included

- Group exercise
- Individual Assignment
- Lecture with visual aids
- Lecture-cum-discussion
- Case illustration
- Games
- Pictorial representation
• Charts
• Question-answer session
• Role play.
• debate
• panel discussion
• Interaction with successful leaders
• Exposure visit

**Inputs** given by the Resource Persons to the Women Panchayat Presidents

• Background of 73rd Constitutional Amendment.
• Salient features of 73rd Constitutional Amendment.
• Features of the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act 1994.
• Powers and responsibilities entrusted to panchayat.
• Government orders passed in Tamil Nadu akin to panchayat.
• Schemes and programmes guidelines of both governments.
• Employment Generation and administering social justice.
• Participatory Planning.
• Multi Level Planning in panchayat.
• Resource Mobilization.
• Maintenance of Accounts.
• Participatory Governance through Gram Sabha.
• Improving Leadership qualities.

• Making this institution as people’s institutions.

• Common Property Resource Management.

• Communication skill.

• Transparency and accountability.

• People’s charter and its implication.

• Containing corruption at the Grassroots level.

• Gender sensitization

• Water Supply and sanitation.

• Pre-natal and post-natal care.

• Children and women Development

• Agriculture and Animal Husbandry.

• Self Help Groups and Village Industries.

• Environmental issues.

• Special focus on individual development

Post-Evaluation

At the end of the session a post-evaluation was carried out through a questionnaire. This exercise revealed that the training had helped the participants to acquire a better understanding of the Panchayat Raj System and its functions.
33. The Agency/Assets of the Women Panchayat Presidents

The agency/Assets of the women panchayat presidents before they attended the training are depicted in table No.3.1.

38 percent of the elected members/leaders knew the meaning of panchayat while 62 percent of the respondents did not. Village panchayat has its own meaning and knowledge of the meaning of panchayat is essential for not only elected members/leaders but for all. Knowledge of the Indian Constitution is evident among 17 percent, while 83 percent, were not aware of it. Knowledge of the 73rd Amendment is evident among only 32 percent of the respondents, while the majority, 68 percent, are not familiar with it. Knowledge of the three-tier system is evident among only 41 percent of the respondents, while the majority, 59 percent, are not familiar with it. Only a very low number of respondents (16 %) have knowledge about the Tamil Nadu State Panchayat Act, which 84 percent are not aware of it. Knowledge of reservation for women in Panchayati Raj System is evident among 60 percent of the respondents while 40 percent have no knowledge of it.

Knowledge of the existing status of women is evident among 26 percent of the respondents only and 74 percent are not aware of it. Knowledge of existing status of Dalits is evident among 83 percent of the respondents and only 17 percent are not aware of it. Knowledge of social justice is evident among 32 percent of the respondents, while 68 percent said that they have no knowledge of it. 21 percent of the respondents said that they have knowledge of planning, while 69 percent admitted their ignorance of it. Locally available natural
resources are indispensable for planning the growth and development of the panchayat and knowledge is a pre-requisite for protecting the natural resources in the panchayat. 28 percent of the respondents have knowledge of protecting natural resources while 72 percent have no knowledge of it. 18 percent of the respondents expressed the confidence that they can create good contact with the* government officers of the concerned and other related departments, while 82 percent were not aware of it. 25 percent of the respondents said that they can behave nicely with others in the society and at public places, while 75 percent needed guidance through training. 36 percent of the respondents are aware of community-based organizations such as SHGs, NGOs, Youth Clubs, Village Committees etc., while 64 percent are not aware of them. 30 percent of the respondents said that they have no idea for generating income for the panchayat. Ability to speak in public is claimed by 19 percent of the respondents while 81 percent expressed inability. 36 percent of the respondents said that they knew the modus operandi of conducting Gram Sabha/village panchayat meetings while 64 percent said that they did not know to conduct meetings. Knowledge of administration of panchayat office is claimed by 12 percent of the respondents while 88 percent did not know how to administer the panchayat office. Knowledge of maintenance of panchayat records and registers is claimed by 8 percent of the respondents, while 92 percent did not know about it. 15 percent of the respondents said that they have ability to overcome the problems arising in the administration of the panchayat while 85 percent said that they can tackle the problem if they are guided and trained. Unattended visit to the office was made by 27 percent of the
respondents, while 73 percent did not visit the office alone before the training program. 18 percent of the respondents said that they associate with political parties while 82 percent have no association with any political party.

79 percent of the respondents said that they are not sure to become accustomed with male leaders while 21 percent said that they can adapt and work together with male leaders and members. 79 percent of the respondents said that they are not sure to become accustomed with male officers while 21 percent said they can adapt and work together with male officers and workers. Knowledge of foundation work for social development is claimed by 64 percent of the respondents but not 36 percent. Barely 9 percent of the total respondents are members of Self Help Groups while the remaining 91 percent are not. nevertheless the majority of the respondents are able to cope up with the panchayat responsibilities. Rarely 8 percent of the total respondents are members of Women’s Organizations while the remaining 92 percent are not. Nevertheless the majority of the respondents are able to cope with the panchayat responsibilities. The 73rd Amendment which is a formal opportunity structure for empowerment of women panchayat presidents, provides choices to act upon in panchayat administration and development whereas the social structure and system, which is an informal opportunity structure, constrains the women panchayat presidents to make the choices by utilizing the 73rd Amendment. The causes for the lacuna are the social custom, domination of males, wrong belief about women serving the public etc.
The assets such as education, awareness, accessibility, positive attitude, personal interest, self-confidence, general ability, decision making power, dominating character, leadership quality that determine the ability of women panchayat presidents to use the opportunities given in the 73rd Amendment are deficient among the women panchayat presidents. Owing to this, the women panchayat presidents are unable to utilize the 29 subjects, which directly and indirectly have a bearing on women empowerment. So appropriate training to build the assets required for empowering women panchayat presidents is very much required. In this context, GRI is playing an immense role in creating assets to empower women panchayat presidents for utilizing the outstanding features of the 73rd Amendment through providing training programmes designed particularly for women panchayat presidents. GRI is providing training with a separate training manual and using the participatory approach to empower women panchayat presidents. The empowerment of women panchayat presidents has been effected and the degrees of empowerment augmented. The capacity has been improved for women panchayat presidents. They have been enabled to overcome the social obstacles which restricted their functioning and they are able to utilize the choices offered by the opportunity structure. The women panchayat presidents are skillful to administer the panchayat and carry out development activities through the provisions made in the Act.
### Table - 3.1 - Pre-Training

**Agency/Assets of Panchayat Presidents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No</th>
<th>Particulars</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Knowledge of the Meaning of Panchayat</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Knowledge of Indian Constitution</td>
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<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Knowledge of 73rd Amendment</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Knowledge of Three-Tier System</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Knowledge of Tamil nadu State Panchayat</td>
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<td>84</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Knowledge of Reservation for women in Panchayat i Raj</td>
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<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Knowledge of existing status of women</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Knowledge of existing status of Dalit community</td>
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<td>83</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Knowledge of social justice</td>
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<td>68</td>
</tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Knowledge of Planning</td>
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<td>69</td>
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<td>Knowledge of Defending Natural resource in the Panchayat</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Knowledge of liaison with officers</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Knowledge of Social Behavior</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Knowledge of community based organizations</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Awareness of Income generation of the Panchayat</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Ability to speak in public</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>81</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Knowledge of conducting Grama Sabha/village panchayat meeting</td>
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<td>64</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Knowledge of Administration of Panchayat Office</td>
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<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Knowledge of maintenance of Panchayat records and registers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Knowledge to conquer the problems in the administration of Panchayat</td>
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<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Solitary visit to the office</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Association with political party</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Hesitation to talk with male leaders</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Hesitation to talk with male officers</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Knowledge of foundation works for social development</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Membership in SHG</td>
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<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Membership in women organization</td>
<td>8</td>
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3.4. **The Training Process Adopted by the Gandhigram Rural University**

The Training Process Adopted by the Gandhigram Rural Institute for empowering women panchayat Leaders is presented in Table No.3.2.

83 percent of the respondents said the contents of the syllabus of the training programme is sufficient and covers all the important topics and subjects related to Panchayat Raj. Barely 13 percent of the members said they do not feel that the syllabus is sufficient and they need more about Panchayat Raj. All the subjects and topics have been elucidated very well in the training programme said 97 percent of the respondents. Just about three percent of the respondents did not say that the explanations in the training programme were sufficient. 99 percent of the members appreciated the methods followed in the training programme. All the respondents said that they participated happily and effectively in the training programme. All the respondents said that the group discussions in the training programmes were very relevant to them and created an opportunity to share all kinds of experiences and learning. The place of the training programme is accessible to all the respondents, convenient, comfortable and conducive to learn. Books and materials provided in the training programme are very useful to all the respondents except only one respondent who did not know how to express what he required more.

All the respondents have received information about the training programme systematically. All the respondents have received
information about the training programme in time. All the respondents said that the place of the training programme is very safe in all respects. All the respondents except only one said that they had good opportunities for clearing their doubts in the subjects and topics. 52 percent of the respondents said that alterations and changes are required in the syllabus and 48 percent of the respondents said that the syllabus is good enough to learn about all aspects of Panchayat Raj. 92 percent of the respondents uttered that they have close contact with the training resource persons/team and clarified their doubts about Panchayat Raj whenever they required. Only eight percent of the respondents have no such contact. 93 percent of the respondents said that the institute, which organized and conducted the training, provided knowledge support even after the training programme. The remaining seven percent said that the training institute did not follow up. All the respondents except two percent claimed that their quality and ability had increased after the training programme.

Their ability to administer the panchayat office and system has been developed according to all the respondents except only one percent. 99 percent of the respondents said that they are very transparent in carrying out all the activities of the panchayat. Only one percent said that they are not transparent. 95 percent of the respondents said that they create opportunities for the public to criticize their activities while five percent said that they do not allow the public to criticize their activities. 89 percent of the respondents said that they involve themselves in all the activities of panchayat directly, while 11 percent said that they do not.
said that they divide the panchayat works among the members. Only five percent said that they are not giving responsibility to other members. 98 percent of the respondents said that they expect the members of the panchayat to share the works of the panchayat. Only two percent said that they do not.

All the respondents except only one percent said that they share with other members and officers all the information gathered by them. All the respondents except only one percent said that they correct wrong information. 93 percent of the respondents feel that they require further training, while seven percent said that they do not. 94 percent of the respondents said that they voluntarily visit the office and discuss with the officers the problems of development. 83 percent of the respondents said that they seek the assistance of NGOs for the development of the panchayat. The remaining 17 percent said they do not. 75 percent of the respondents said that they seek the assistance of SHGs for the development of the panchayat. The remaining 75 percent said they do not. 71 percent of the respondents said that they have experience of leadership in other organizations while 29 percent have no such experience.
### Table - 3.2

**Training Process**

The training process adopted by the Gandhigram Rural Institute for empowering women Panchayat leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No</th>
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</tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Contents of the syllabus</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Elucidation in the training program</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Methodology of training programme</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Relevance of Discussions in the training program</td>
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<td>Utility of books and materials provided in the training program</td>
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<td>Timely information about the training program</td>
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<td>Safety of the place of the training</td>
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<td>Opportunities for clarification of doubts</td>
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<td>Changes ranges in the syllabus</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Contact with training resource person/team</td>
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<td>Follow up by the training institute</td>
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<td>Development in Panchayat administration due to the training</td>
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<td>Transparency of the activities</td>
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<td>Opportunity for criticism</td>
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<td>Direct involvement in all Panchayat</td>
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<td>Division of the work to the members</td>
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<td>Expecting members to share the works</td>
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<td>Sharing information</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Correction of wrong information</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Requirement of further</td>
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<td>Discussion with officers in the Panchayat</td>
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<td>Seeking the assistance of NGOs for the development of Panchayat</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Seeking the assistance of SHGs for the development of Panchayat</td>
<td>75</td>
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3.5. Changes and Developments after the Training Programmes in Agency/Assets of Women Panchayat Presidents

Changes and Development after the Training Programmes in Agency/Assets of Women Panchayat Presidents is presented Table No.3.3.

Ability and knowledge on developing the incomes of the panchayat have been created among 98 percent of the respondents and while 2 percent said that they need more training. 87 percent of the respondents said that they acquired thorough knowledge on social justice while 13 percent said that they did not. 92 percent of the respondents said that they were trained well in planning for panchayat development while 2 percent felt that they need more training. Knowledge on protecting natural resources has been created among 97 percent of the respondents. While three percent said that they required more training. 99 percent of the respondents said that they are aware of community based organizations. All the respondents have knowledge of the meaning of panchayat. 80 percent of the respondents said that they learnt about the Indian Constitution while 20 percent said that they needed to learn more. 77 percent of the respondents said that they learnt about the 73rd Amendment while 23 percent said that they had yet to learn. Knowledge of the three-tier system was claimed 81 percent of the respondents while 19 percent did not do so.

84 percent of the respondents said that they learnt about the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Raj Act in the training programme while 16 percent said that they did not. Knowledge or reservation for women in
the Panchayat Raj System was imparted in the training programme, said 91 percent of the respondents, while 9 percent said that they did not learn about it. 94 percent of the respondents said that they have knowledge of the existing status of women after the training programme. Only six percent said that they did not. 95 percent of the respondents said that they are able to liaison with officers after the training programme while 5 percent said that they yet to learn about it. 99 percent of the respondents said that they had become aware of behaving nicely in the community, at public places and at the office. Only one percent did not say so. 92 percent of the respondents said that they had become able to be good orators in public meetings. Only 8 percent said that they did not learn oratory. 98 percent of the respondents said that they had learnt to conduct Gram Sabha / village panchayat meetings. Only 2 percent said that they did not learn it. All the respondents said that they learnt about the administration of the panchayat office and had become able to do the same. Knowledge of maintenance of panchayat records and registers was claimed by 98 percent of the respondents while two percent did not do so.
## Post Training

**Changes and development after the training programme in agency/assets of women Panchayat Presidents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Knowledge on Reservation for women in the Panchayati Raj System</td>
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<td>Knowledge on existing status of women</td>
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<td>Knowledge on liaison with government officers</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Knowledge on Social Behavior</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Ability to Public Oration</td>
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<td>Ability to conduct Gram Sabha/village panchayat Meeting</td>
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<td>Knowledge on maintenance of Panchayat records and registers</td>
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</table>
3.6. Development Outcome

The performance of the women panchayat presidents in their respective panchayats is presented in Table No.3-4.

95 percent of the respondents said that they learnt about on the requirements for the development of women while five percent were yet to learn. 95 percent of the respondents said that they will concentrate on women development programmes while five percent said they will concentrate on all programmes. 98 percent of the women said that they are aware of the role of women’s health in the development of the nation while two percent said that they are not aware of it. All the respondents said that they will attend to pre-natal care activities for women since women and child health is very important for the nation’s development. All the respondents said that they will attend to post-natal care activities for women since women and child health is very important for the nation’s development. 96 percent of the respondents said that they used to discuss the problems of women with women while four percent said that they never discussed them. 96 percent of the women said that they enrolled all five year old children in the school. While four percent said that they did not.

97 percent of the respondents said that they enroll drop out children in the school while three percent said that they did not. Child labor has been prevented in the village panchayats, said 95 percent of the respondents. While five percent said that they did not prevent child labor in their village panchayats. 96 percent of respondents said that they are supervising the anganwadies and noon meal scheme
centers. Only four percent said that they did not. All the respondents said that they ensure food supply in the anganwadies and noon meal scheme centers. All the respondents said that they hold frequent meetings with the Village Health Nurse and monitor the health problems and status in the village panchayat. 99 percent of the respondents said that they provided water and toilet facilities in the schools in their respective village panchayats. Only one percent of the respondent said that they did not. 98 percent of the respondents said that they always participated in public meetings and festivals and only two percent said that did not. 90 percent of the respondents said that they have close contact with the people in the village panchayat while ten percent said that they do not.

90 percent of the respondents said that they provide assistance to the SHGs in the village panchayat and ten percent said that they do not. 93 percent of the respondents participate in the activities of the SHGs in their village panchayats and seven percent do not. 98 percent of the respondents said that they take care of their village panchayat sanitation and two percent said they do not. 98 percent of the respondents said that they cooperate in the Total Sanitation Programme of the Government in their village panchayat while two percent said they do not. 97 percent of the respondents said that they pay special attention to women and child welfare in their village panchayat and three percent said that they do not. All the respondents said that they paid special attention to the education of the girl children in their village panchayat. 93 percent of the respondents said that they conducted General Medical Camps in their village panchayats while
seven percent did not say so. Almost all the respondents except only one supervise the government schemes and its reaching the right beneficiaries at the right time. 83 percent of the respondents attend at the panchayat office daily while 17 percent do not.

76 percent of the respondents said that they allotted a fixed time to visit the village panchayat office while 24 percent said that they visit whenever they find time. 85 percent of the respondents said that they carefully maintain the common property resources such as irrigation tanks and canals, while 15 percent said that they do not. 82 percent of the respondents said that they practice tree plantation on the bank of rivers, canals, tanks and waste lands to improve the ecological balance of their village panchayat. But 18 percent said that they do not. 95 percent of the respondents said that they provide building facilities for the anganwadis and schools in their village panchayats, while five percent said that they do not. 94 percent of the respondents said that they take efforts for developing the income of their panchayats, while 6 percent said that they do not. 94 percent of the respondents said that the women participation in the Gram Sabha meetings has increased and six percent said that it has not. 91 percent of the respondents said that the Dalit participation in the Gram Sabha meetings has been increased and six percent said that it has not.

97 percent of the respondents said that they have close contact with the community based organizations serving in the village panchayat and three percent said that they do not have. 91 percent of the respondents said that they used to discuss the Panchayati Raj System and its amendment in the panchayat meetings as against the
nine percent who did not. 97 percent of the respondents said that they are implementing and maintaining the government orders and only three percent said they are not. 98 percent of the respondents said that they are collecting and maintaining the statistics and the records, while Two percent said that they are not. 93 percent of the respondents said that they are planning, preparing and keeping the development project reports in the village panchayats, while seven percent said they are not. 94 percent of the respondents said that they undertake development activities based on the financial position of their village panchayats, while six percent undertake development activities of their village panchayat without considering the financial position of their village panchayat. 92 percent of the respondents said that they have close contact with the training resource person/team and clarify their doubts about Panchayati Raj whenever they require, while eight percent have no such contact.
### Table - 3.4

**Development Outcome**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SI. No</th>
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<th>Performance</th>
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<td>Supervision and verification of food supply in anganwadis and noon meals centres</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Frequent meeting with village health nurse</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Provision of water and toilet facilities</td>
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<td>Participation in the public meetings and festivals</td>
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<td>Contacting the people</td>
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<td>Assistance for SHG</td>
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<td>Participation in the activities of SHGs</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Maintenance of Sanitation in Village</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Implementation Total Sanitation program</td>
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<td>Special Attention to women &amp; child welfare</td>
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<td>Level of women participation in Gram Sabha meetings</td>
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<td>Level of Dalith Participation in Gram Sabha meetings</td>
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<td>Practice of discussing of the problems of women with women</td>
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<td>Reenrollment of dropped out children in the school</td>
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<td>Prevention of child labor</td>
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Case – I Mrs. Thenmozhi Rengasamy, President, Maniankurichi Village Panchayat, Marungapuri Panchayat Union

Assets/Agency

Mrs. Thenmozhi Rengasamy was born in a wealthy family. She became the panchayat president in the year 2001. She contested in the panchayat election and was elected as President since the Maniankurichi village panchayat was reserved for women. The reservation system provided her the opportunity to be elected as panchayat president. Had it not been reserved for women, her husband would have contested. She was coaxed to contest by her husband, family members and friends of her husband. Her husband was in a powerful position in a political party. He was also serving as traditional panchayat leader.

Thenmozhi did not know anything about the panchayat or its administration when she was elected but her husband virtually functioned as panchayat president. Mrs. Thenmozhi Rengasamy has studied up to 10th standard and is capable of reading and writing well. Thenmozhi was not having any idea of the basic objectives, special features and functions of the new Panchayat Raj System, responsibilities of the president of the gram panchayat, ways and means of performing her role successfully, methodology of organizing the people and involving them in the development activities of the community, possibilities for rural economic development and people’s participation in panchayat activities. She was not aware of all the rural
development programmes and schemes. The needs of the people were going on increasing and it required enormous amount of resources to meet all their requirements. She had no comprehensive plan.

She never had the freedom of independently functioning beyond her husband. Mr. Rengasamy represented her in public and in the official meetings. People called him President and dealt always with him. The panchayat Clerk and other staff of the village panchayat reported to him and took orders from him. When Thenmozhi came to power in the panchayat, the village people suffered from insufficient transport, drinking water and streetlight facilities, which affected the people. The colony where scheduled caste people are living was not connected with proper electric supply and drinking water connections.

Thenmozhi promised to create transport facilities and establish drinking water and streetlight facilities in her election manifesto. She took efforts to establish the drinking water and streetlight facilities but she did not know how to proceed. The village people were pressurized her to solve the problems of drinking water and streetlights. Providing more streetlights and drinking water facilities required more money. Thenmozhi did not know to arrange people’s participation, approaching the government departments and getting support from the NGOs and others.

Another major problem which affected the panchayats was illicit liquor. This habit affected the families, particularly women, physically as well as economically. She wanted to eliminate illicit liquor from her village panchayat area, but she did not know how to solve this problem through the panchayat administration.
Opportunity Structure

Since the 73rd Amendment provides reservation for women, Thenmozhi had the opportunity to become women panchayat president. She utilized the opportunity. The village community accepted her as President due to her husband’s position as the traditional caste leader of the village. She was never ill treated by her village people even during the emergence of local problems. The village people, her husband, her family members and her relatives encouraged her to remain passive and allowed her husband to look after the duties and responsibilities of the village panchayat President. In unavoidable circumstances, she accompanied her husband to official meetings.

Training

She participated in the 5-day training programme organized by Gandhigram Rural Institute. For Thenmozhi this was the first time she got an external input related to her position. Being from a remote village and having a husband who keeps her in isolation from official work she never got any chance to understand the powers and responsibilities devolved to panchayats.

She went with her husband and attended the training. She participated in the training programme with the intention of finding a way to solve the problems of drinking water and streetlights in her village panchayat. Instead she leaned that solving the problems of drinking water and streetlights is not the only duty of the village panchayat president but that the village panchayat president has much
more duties and responsibilities. She also gained knowledge of the powers of the panchayat president and all the works that are to be carried out in a village panchayat. She understood that the real role of the panchayat is to bring about development with social justice and that development did not mean roads and building but rather the quality of living and creating a conducive atmosphere for achieving that.

**Outcomes**

**Abolishing illicit liquor**

The training taught Thenmozhi that serving for the overall development of the village is the main duty of a panchayat president. She decided to eliminate the illicit liquor in her village. She organized women groups into a Village Illicit Liquor Abolition Committee with the cooperation of the village elders. She brought the problem of illicit liquor to the notice of the police department.

As a lady she understood that the prevalence of illicit liquor and the consequent disastrous effect of it on the families was a serious problem she had to address. Initially she thought that she has nothing to do with that. In the training she found out that the economic well being of her village could not be accomplished if the illicit liquor is not stopped. When the illicit liquor barons turned against her she convened an Illicit Liquor Abolition Committee Meeting in her village with the help of the police department. Due to public pressure very stringent action was taken on the illicit liquor sellers. Now the Maniankuriehi panchayat is free from illicit liquor.
**Education**

She decided that a good education is the basis for a strong future. The Panchayat Union Elementary School did not have adequate building facilities. Thenmozhi approached the education department for the construction of a school building under the S.S.A. With the help of the SSA, the school building has been constructed. She convened parents-teachers meetings regularly and encouraged the students to study well. She announced a prize for the top rankers in the school. Thenmozhi identified twelve drop out students from the village and arranged for separate classes for them, and enrolled them in the regular school.

**Production of electricity**

Maniankurichi was situated in a remote corner of the district in the foothills of a huge mountain. Power supply and proper voltage was always a problem. The district administration wanted to introduce production of electricity through biomass gassifier by using locally available waste wood. Among 408 panchayat presidents she volunteered to erect the plant in her panchayat. The biomass gassifier plant was introduced for the first time in Trichy District in Manianguruchi. She appointed an SHG to operate the plant and fetch wood from the nearby hills. The power produced by the plant was utilized to run the power pump, thereby ensuring uninterrupted power supply as well as water supply.
Decision Making and Problem Solving

The village women wanted Thenmozhi to provide a women’s sanitary complex. Since construction of a new IWSE will be a burden on the panchayat finance she decided to renovate the old women’s sanitary complex, which was not in use. The subject was placed in the Gram Sabha. Funds were the problem since most of the government programmes do not allow repair works. The finance was arranged through public contribution as decided in the Gram Sabha. The women Self Help Group members contributed much. The women’s sanitary complex was renovated with adequate water supply and was put to beneficial use.

Provision of housing facilities

Housing was another major initiative. Most of the people lived in huts. She arranged 130 houses for those who had house plot with the help of an NGO. She had to overcome several problems created by those who were not provided houses due to their non-eligibility.

Development of infrastructures

A spacious new building has been constructed for anganwadi children. Now more children are attending anganwadi since they have more space and toys to play. Healthy education and nutritious food are provided to the children. A separate community hall has been constructed for the Scheduled Caste people. The other caste people also demanded a community hall for their meeting purposes. The community hall already available for other caste people was renewed and utilized for this purpose.
Flood Relief

During incessant rains in October and November 2005, Maniankurichi was surrounded by water because the Pannai Periakulam breeched. Seven houses sank in the floods. Thenmozhi and her team rescued the families and brought them to safer places. Due to floods throughout Manianguricy village panchayat people were assembled in secure places and were provided with food. She collected rice and other food materials through public contribution to meet the additional demand over and above the materials supplied by the government.

Sanitation

The villagers were used to open defecation and the village was full of garbage and plastic wastes. She took up the issue of cleanliness in the village. The standing of her husband as community leader helped her mobilize the support of the opinion leaders. After enlisting their support she placed the subject in the Gram Sabha where everyone decided to construct a toilet in their houses. She approached the district Co-coordinator of Total Sanitation Campaign and the Block Development Officer and got subsidy for the below poverty line families for construction of household latrines. Others were motivated to construct toilets from their own funds. Within a short span of three months every house had a toilet attached to it. The Gram Sabha, with the active support of the traditional village leaders, passed a decree that no one shall defecate in public places in the village. It had a dramatic effect. The people obliged.
The village has a very popular temple which was visited by the neighbouring villagers too. On special occasions, once or twice in a month, thousands of people gathered in the village, causing major strain on the sanitation and cleanliness. The panchayat, otherwise clean and without open defecation, became messy during that time with night soil spread all over the area. The Panchayat constructed public convenience around the temple. The visiting devotees were advised to utilize the toilets instead of resorting to open defecation since it was banned in the village. The visiting devotees also co-operated. The Panchayat also arranged for collection of garbage from households and disposed of it properly in the dumping yard. This remote village under Thenmozhi’s leadership was selected for the Nirmal Gram Purashkar Award of the Government of India. Thenmozhi who has not crossed her village border went all the way to Delhi to get the award from the hands of the President of India.

Case - n ; Mrs. Vijaya Mathivaanan, President,
Aaraichi Village Panchayat, Thathiengarpet Panchayat Union

*Assets /Agency*

Mrs. Vijaya Mathivaanan was elected President of Aaraichi Panchayat for the first time in the election held in 2001. Her family was rich and possessed vast lands in that village. Her father in law was an important member of the traditional caste panchayat of the village. Her family was educated and well placed. Her husband was a
headmaster and one of her uncles was an Officer in Indian Police Service.

When the office of the President of the Aaraichi village panchayat was reserved for women, the family and friends advised Vijaya to contest in the election. The image of the family, a few philanthropic acts of Vijaya, and an effective election campaign took her to the Chair of the President with a comfortable margin against the opposing candidate.

Vijaya had very little understanding about her role and responsibilities as panchayat president. Her idea about the panchayat was that it was an agency to lay roads, maintain water supply and streetlights. She had gained some knowledge of politics by browsing through the local magazine. However she had little opportunity to understand her responsibilities, gain knowledge of rules and regulations through formal training. As a person she understood that she is deficient in decision making, oratory and courage to move independently and deal with government official. The formal meeting of the panchayat presidents gave her the opportunity to interact with other presidents and gain knowledge and experience. She could not get any books or materials to learn the powers, rights, duties and responsibilities of a woman panchayat president.

She understood that creation of drinking water facilities and installation of streetlights are not only duties of a panchayat president but serving without any colour, caste, religion discrimination and with hard work and for the overall development of the village. However she was not equipped to exercise the twenty-nine powers provided in the
amendment for the panchayat presidents to bring about overall village development. When Vijaya took the mantle of the President of the panchayat, the village suffered from insufficient drinking water supply, poor road and streetlight facilities. Vijaya promised to establish roads, drinking water and streetlight facilities.

**Opportunity Structure**

The 73rd Amendment gives village, block and district level bodies constitutional status under Indian law. At the village level, the most important provisions relating to participation and accountability are those governing reservations and the Gram Sabha. Under the 73rd Amendment one-third of all seats are reserved for women. In this context, the office of the President of Aaraichi village panchayat was reserved for women. Hence, Vijaya contested and won the election. Vijaya would not have even a distance possibility of contesting the election had it not been reserved for women. The standing of the family in the village gave her the opportunity to be accepted by the people as their panchayat president. They supported her once she was elected. All the members of the panchayat co-operated well with the lady and backed her in all her endeavours. The panchayat faced serious problems of drinking water supply, road facilities and streetlights. The people hoped that she would be able to set right these issues and bring about development.

**Training**

Vijaya attended a five day training programme in Gandhigram Rural Institute and participated in the conference of women panchayat
presidents. The information about the training was passed on through the district administration. In the training programme she learnt about the 73rd Amendment, powers, duties and responsibilities of panchayat presidents and various development opportunities for the village panchayat. The training offered good guidance to function as village panchayat president. She also learnt about the operation of the panchayat the fact that it should focus on the development of the village and its duty is not merely the implementation of programmes.

**Outcomes**

**Total sanitation campaign**

In Aariachi, as in most of villages, open defecation was in practice. As an enlightened leader, she decided to put an end to this evil practice, which is the root cause of most of the diseases in the village. Having got an idea from the training programme to take people into confidence, she placed the subject in the Grama Sabha. After fierce discussion, the Grama Sabha decided to ban open defecation in the panchayat. However, the leaders faced stiff opposition to the move since the families could not afford to construct a toilet costing Rs. 2500 to 3000 immediately. She advised the people to use the direct pit toilet model introduced to her in the training programme. The Grama Sabha directed all families to construct direct pit toilet with locally available materials without incurring any cost. The Grama Sabha banned open defecation in its area and ordered a fine of Rs.50/- on those who defecated openly. They laid a stone in the centre of the village declaring the decision taken by the panchayat. Boards were also erected at vital points declaring that open defecation
had been banned. The village Watsan Committee was organized under her leadership to monitor the cleanliness of the village. She created a Children’s Club in the village to support her in her effort. The children took the message of cleanliness to the houses. The SHG was the backbone of this great achievement. Overnight an old habit was stopped in this village. The Government of Tamil Nadu conferred the Clean Village Award on this village along with the prize money of Rs. 5.00 lakh.

The Sanitation Committee met frequently and ensured construction of permanent individual household latrines. Subsequently, hamlets of Aaraichi panchayat, namely Aaraichi, Sakkampaty, Manickapuram East, Thandavampatty had latrines in all the houses and the same are used. The panchayat has two primary schools; a teacher has been allotted the responsibility for school sanitation. A Student Sanitation Committee consisting of six students was also convened. This group, under the supervision of a designated teacher, was ensuring safe drinking water, environmental sanitation, personal hygiene and clean school premises. Baby friendly toilets have been constructed in anganwadies.

**Rural Drinking Water Project under Swajaldhara**

Manickapuram Salapatti, one of the hamlets of Aaraichi panchayat, is located at the way side of Thuraiyur CWSS. Vijaya proposed to include the Manickapuram Salappatti Village in the Swajaldhra scheme for drinking water. The TWAD Board authorities visited the village and passed orders for sanctioning drinking water supply under the Swajaldhara Project. They estimated the cost up to
Rs.2,50,000. The Manickapuram Salapatti Village had to contribute ten percent of the total cost of the project as per the criteria of the TWAD Board. Viajaya mobilized this amount from the public and paid the contribution. The village has got sufficient drinking water supply now.

Watershed Development Program

The integrated watershed development programme is being implemented in Aaraichi panchayat. The involvement of the panchayat and the community was very good as it was observed in the formal meeting held to explain the objectives of the scheme. Participatory Rural Appraisal methods were adopted to identify and prioritize the works necessary for the development of the wasteland. A Watershed Committee has been organized to finalize the action plan for the five year period and the same was duly approved by the Gram Sabha. Five check dams have been constructed in the watershed in the untamed stream. This resulted in the raising of the water table in the nearby wells. Thirty-two hectares of land are benefited by these check dams. Through this programme the panchayat was able to manage the natural resources and maintain the ecological balance in the Aaraichi village panchayat.

Creating rain water harvesting systems

The village lies in an arid zone. The Gram Sabha decided to harvest the rain water through special awareness campaigns. Through rallies of school children, cultural programmes, pamphlets etc. to create rainwater harvesting structures in government and non-government
buildings were organised. The Self Help Groups were trained to carry the message to the public. The Gram Sabha passed a resolution to install rainwater harvesting structures in all the houses. As a result, rainwater harvesting structures were established in all the 651 individual homes, three government buildings and ten local body buildings.

Creation of ecology

The village people have been given awareness on the usefulness of planting trees to save the environment and ecology. The harmfulness of using chemical fertilizers for crop raising, use of bio fertilizers and production of bio fertilizers and pesticides were also explained to the women. The women were motivated to create kitchen gardens and use the wastewater for irrigating vegetables and trees. The majority of the women created gardens in their homes and trained their children to maintain them. Now the home garden is used as commercial home garden by planting vegetables, greens. More than one hundred horticultural seedlings have been planted in the panchayat area and Self Help Group members and school children are looking after the survival of tree plants.

Clean village

Vijaya took special efforts to make the village panchayat clean and environmental friendly. The people were advised to segregate organic and inorganic waste at source and put them in separate garbage bins kept in each street. The people were also requested to curtail the use of plastics. Steps have been taken by the President of
the village panchayat to prevent water stagnation in the streets and surroundings of the public fountain by digging soak pits. The village is always neat and clean.

**Involving in Women Issues**

The President organized reproductive and child health care awareness, women’s health awareness, HIV/AIDS awareness etc. to the women in all the villages through the V.H.N. The President tied up with DRDA and arranged entrepreneurship development training and skill training to the SHG members.

**Case -III Mrs. K. Umarani, President,**

Reddimangudi Village Panchayat, Pullampadi Panchayat Union

**Assets /Agency**

Mrs.K.Umarani became panchayat president of Reddimangudi village at the age of twenty-one. She is the youngest Woman panchayat president in Tiruchirappalli District. She contested in the panchayat election and was elected President since the Reddimangudi village panchayat was reserved for women. The reservation system provided an opportunity for Umarani to be elected woman panchayat president. She was motivated to contest in the panchayat election by her husband, family members and friends. Umarani had no idea about the panchayat and its administration when she was elected but her husband and his friends supported her to function as panchayat president. Her husband was working in Chennai before she was elected. Umarani has studied 10th standard and is capable of reading
and writing well. Though the SHG movement was widespread in her area she never became a member in it.

Three women, including Mrs. K. Umarani contested in the election conducted for Reddimangudi panchayat with 1800 votes. Umarani won the election by 167 votes. She was also ignorant of legislations, rules and regulations at the time of taking oath as panchayat president. The opportunity provided in the reservation system for women was the main cause for her to become the panchayat president.

Being a very young lady, she developed keen interest to learn about the duties and responsibilities of a woman panchayat president and to gather knowledge on the panchayat administration. She did have knowledge about the twenty-nine subjects over which the panchayats have been given a co-ordination control. However, she was confident at the time of her victory in the election that her husband would look after all activities relating to the panchayat administration. As per her understanding of the role of the panchayat she promised to establish drinking water, streetlight facilities and roads in her election manifesto. She did take efforts to establish drinking water, roads and streetlight facilities but she did not know how to proceed. The village people urged her to solve the problems of drinking water and streetlights. The expenditure on electricity consumption charges went up to Rs. 28,000/- per two-months. Providing more streetlights and drinking water facilities required more money to meet the installation charges, recurring expenditure as electricity consumption charges and maintenance.
The colony where the Scheduled Caste people are living was located far way from the main village and connecting the colony with electricity was also expensive. Though she was honest in her efforts to provide basic amenities she found no solutions. She was convinced that solving the problems of drinking water and streetlights was not possible. Umarani did not know how to arrange people’s participation, approaching the government departments and getting support from NGOs. Another major problem which affected the people was the use of illicit liquor by the men in the village. Many men were addicted to illicit liquor and this had disastrous effect on their physical and mental health and on their family. It also resulted in the serious violation of women’s rights by way of physical violence and coercion.

**Opportunity Structure**

Since the 73rd Amendment provides reservation for women, Umarani had the opportunity to become panchayat president. But for that her husband or some other man might have become the President of Reddimangudi panchayat. Umarani utilized the opportunity in the Amendment. The village community accepted Umarani’s victory and it did not set her aside. No opposition to women leadership could be found in this village.

But, during the initial stage, age was a constraints on her. The elderly people did not show proper respect to her since she was veiy young (21 years). Later, when she started showing results, the village elders appreciated the performance of Umarani and supported her. Village people, Umarani’s husband, her family members and her relatives cooperated with her and encouraged her to function as village
panchayat president. Her husband, himself a novice in politics and panchayat administration didn’t interfere in her administration. Being young, she was adept at learning to keep good relationship with her colleagues and other. But caste has at times curtailed her from being aggressive. People opposing her took the caste card to curtail her functioning.

Training

The information about the training was passed through the Project Officer. She went with her husband and attended the training. She was a very aggressive learner. She was always on her toes in the training programme with some point to prove or question. She was eager to find a solution to the long pending issues like poor infrastructure, lack of basic amenities and illicit arrack in her panchayat from this training programme. But in the end she got more than what she expected. She realised that solving the problems of drinking water and streetlights is not the only duty of the village panchayat president but has more. She also gained knowledge of the powers of the panchayat president and all the works that are to be carried out in a village panchayat for the development of the village with equity.

The training material given in the programme was useful to her since she refers to it whenever she gets doubts while performing her duty and while conducting various meetings. Umarani, while sharing about her experiences in the training programme, said that the training brought about a paradigm shift in her knowledge, attitude and approach to people as well as problems. Further she said that she draws support from the Women panchayat presidents Federation and it
has enhanced her confidence. She felt her improvement from when she vacillated to contest in the village panchayat election to her desire to contest elections for the State Assembly.

**Outcomes**

**Solving Drinking Water Problem**

Water supply shortage was one of the perennial problems of the panchayat. She approached the BDO and requested for drinking water facilities that are to be established in her village panchayat. The BDO sanctioned a hand pump, which could supply water to only a few families in the village. Her request for more borewells at least, was not accepted. She decided to take the support of the people to solve the problem. She met the elders, women Self Help Groups, youths and discussed the matter. They decided to collect money and construct a power pump scheme utilizing the sanctioned borewell as source. She identified a place, which has excess ground water aquifer and dug a borewell, fitted a motor with the public money and pumped water to the existing OHT. Thus she was able to fulfill her first major commitment in her election manifesto.

**Abolishing illicit liquor**

The training gave her an awakening that abolition of illicit liquor from her panchayat is an important step towards attainment of development with social justice. Before attending the training she was of the view that abolition of illicit liquor is the responsibility of the police and government department and she has nothing to do with that. The death of one Mr.Subramani owing to consumption of illicit
liquor was seized by her as a good opportunity. In the aftermath of the sad incident she organized the village Illicit Liquor Abolition Committee with the cooperation of the village elders, women Self Help Groups, women and youth, including Ward Members. With the help of few youth who were also working against such social evils she brought the problem of illicit liquor to the notice of the police department. The police got into action when they got necessary support from the public and the President. They raided the village and made illicit liquor brewing impossible. The angry illicit liquor barons in retaliation cut the drinking water pipeline between the borewell and the OHT disrupting the water supply to the entire village. Umarani was relentless. With the courage of a woman propelled by the suffering of fellow womenfolk she stood stubborn. The meeting of the Illicit Liquor Abolition Committee was conducted more frequently in the presence of senior police officials. The relentless pursuit by Umarani slowly started yielding results. The illicit brewing as well as drinking of illicit liquor was abolished completely. She proved her mettle in this incident by showing extraordinary courage in the face of threat and personal risk.

Involving in women issues

Though she herself never became a member of the SHG movement, she understood the importance of the SHG movement in the empowerment of women. She motivated her village women and promoted ten women Self Help Groups in her panchayat. She arranged training for all groups and financial support for 5 SHGs through the District Rural Development Agency. She constructed two sanitary complexes for women and gave the responsibility to the women self
help groups to maintain these sanitary complexes. A separate building was constructed for the women Self Help Groups to conduct the meeting and business.

Umarani is coordinated with the VHN who counseled her village women on pre-natal and post-natal care, childcare, reproductive health etc. She has displayed educational wall posters also in the panchayat office. She shares her experience in the panchayat administration, implementation of schemes etc with the women and gets their views and participation. As a woman she can always sense domestic problems and extends her help. She gave importance to the welfare of adolescent girls also. She conducted nutrition awareness and health camps for adolescent girls with the help of the Integrated Child Development Scheme. She herself being a victim of early marriage she advocated their age at marriage should be above eighteen years and they should avoid marrying their close relatives. She invited doctors and nurses to address the adolescent gills on their health issues.

**Education**

Reddimangudi village panchayat School had no adequate building facilities. Umarani approached the District Collector and got a building under small savings incentive fund for rupees three lakhs. The school, which runs up to eighth standard, had only four teachers. This was insufficient to run the school. Umarani collected money from the public and appointed a local educated girl as a teacher.

Further she approached the education department and got the vacancies in the primary school filled up. She convened parent teacher
meetings often and encouraged the students to study well by giving prizes to the top ranking students in the school. She also made the students participate in the development of the panchayat schemes. The students were motivated to grow trees in their houses and on the road margins adjacent to their houses. Those who maintained them well were appreciated.

Umarani identified nine drop out students, arranged separate classes for them, and enrolled them in the school. Umarani arranged sponsors for two children of a widow who had little income for providing education to her children.

**Main Water Harvesting**

Pudu Eri, a rain-fed tank, is the only source of irrigation for the Reddimangudi panchayat. It has an ayacut of more than 100 acres. Since the monsoon failed for many years the inlet channel was not maintained properly, resulting in poor inflow of water into the tank from the catchment area.

Umarani estimated that the work would require a lakh of rupees. She got fifty thousand rupees from the SGRY scheme. She talked to the people. The agriculturalists and the field owners came forward to help her. She accomplished the task with their support. The year 2004 and 2005 saw very good monsoons. Incessant downpour filled the tank and the ground water level also improved.
Decision Making and Problem Solving

The village women requested Umarani to construct a women sanitary complex. Umarani asked the women Self Help Group to choose the place for constructing the women sanitary complex. All the women Self Help Groups decided to construct the women sanitary complex near the colony where the Scheduled Caste people lived because they felt the place was comfortable for all to use the sanitary complex. The women Self Help Groups informed their decision to Umarani. A resolution in the Gram Sabha for construction of the women sanitary complex at the decided place was passed. The women Self Help Groups ousted the encroachment in the place.

But the contractor appointed to construct the women sanitary complex found it inconvenient for him since the place selected for construction of the women sanitary complex was located far away from the main village and transportation of building material was expensive. So he induced the village women that if the women sanitary complex was constructed near to the Scheduled Caste people’s colony, the other caste women cannot use it as and when they need.

The non-Scheduled Caste women Self Help Groups selected another place and the contractor proceeded to construct the women sanitary complex at that place without informing Umarani. It was surprising and painful to Umarani because the resolution passed in the Gram Sabha had been violated by some of the Self Help Groups and the building contractor. This event incensed the Scheduled Caste people and they felt that still untouchability exists in the Reddimangudi panchayat. Communal clash emerged between Scheduled Castes and
non-Scheduled Castes. The Scheduled Caste people stopped the construction of the sanitary complex, and both the communities clashed with each other. The police and the Revenue Divisional Officer intervened but the problem continued. The contractor induced Ward Members to act against Umarani. The panchayat administration got strangled.

She approached the District Collector and got sanction of one more women sanitary complex to her panchayat as a special case. She convened the meeting of SHGs, held dialogues, announced that one more women sanitary complex had been sanctioned by the district administration and requested them to give up the conflict and clash. Thus Umarani prevented quarrels between both the communities in her village panchayat. Now the people use both the sanitary complexes.

Case — IV Mrs. R. Maragatham, President,
Alagapuri Village Panchayat, Uppiliapuram Panchayat Union

Assets /Agency

Mrs. R. Maragatham, 42 years old, was consecutively elected to the post of panchayat president in 1996 and in 2001. This village panchayat has been reserved for an SC woman under the law of the country. The father-in-law of Maragatham was the panchayat president prior to her. She contested for the post of President to serve the convenience of the family since the office was reserved for women. Her father-in-law was a local functionary of a regional party. This
influence helped her to win the election smoothly. Maragatham was a humanitarian by heart and supported many students to continue their studies. Her services and the efforts she had taken in her first term earned her the support and the confidence of the public. She wanted to continue as President because that would give her the right opportunity to serve the community. Reservation of the post of President for women gave her the opportunity to contest in the election and continue her services.

The experience gained by the family’s association with local bodies, knowledge of rules and regulations acquired from friends and elders, information gained by reading local books and magazines gave her some ground to administer the panchayat. This was supplemented by official communication and documents and the orientation programme conducted by government agencies. She felt the handicap of not having adequate knowledge and information required to discharge her responsibility. She wanted to know the powers, functions, duties and responsibilities of the panchayat president so that she can be more authentic in her approach.

**Opportunity Structure**

The 73rd Amendment and the consequent reservation of the post of the President of Alagapuri panchayat gave the opportunity for Maragatham to contest in the election. This Amendment shut off the possibility of all higher leaders of the village contesting in the election. The necessity of the family to keep the post of panchayat president in its fold made it shed its prejudice against women and to allow her to participate in the election and the subsequent administration.
Maragatham had the added advantage of being associated with public life for a very long time. Her record of the first term also played a critical role in getting a second opportunity from the electors as panchayat president.

Training

Maragatham attended the five-day training programme organized by GRI for the panchayat presidents. The training gave her the opportunity she was waiting for. She gained a sound knowledge of the powers and functions of the President, rules and regulations governing the local bodies, guidelines of the antipoverty and the employment generation programmes.

Maragatham attended the five-day training programme in Gandhigram Rural Institute and participated in the conference of women panchayat presidents, presided over by the Tamil Nadu State Rural Development and Local Administration Minister. The information about the training was passed through the district administration. She learnt about the 73rd Amendment, powers of panchayat presidents and development opportunities for her village panchayat. The training material given in the training programme is very useful for her since she refers to it whenever she has doubts in performing her duty and asserting her power in the panchayat administration. Maragatham, while sharing her experiences at the training programme, said that the training taught her several lessons on panchayats and she has become more socialized than an individual woman in her village. Maragatham improved her confidence to overcome the problems that she faced in
her village panchayat and she became brave to struggle against the village poverty.

**Outcomes**

**‘A’ Grade in Namathu Gramam**

Maragatham aspired to get ‘A’ grade for Alagapuri panchayat under the ‘Namathu Gramam’ scheme. She understood the objectives and the strategies to carry out the works for establishing basic amenities under the seven components. She diligently took efforts to give her village panchayat all basic amenities and arranged for awareness campaign to enhance public participation.

**Removal of encroachment**

The burial ground in Alagapuri did not have a footpath. The only way to the burial ground was by crossing the river. Crossing the river was very difficult at times of monsoon. Funeral processions had to stop at the river bank, and some of the people would carry the dead body to the burial ground. Maragatham took efforts to lay a footpath to the burial ground and arranged finance to buy a part of the land where a footpath could be created. The landowners refused to sell the land. She raised this issue in the training programme. The resource persons guided her to conduct a land survey with the help of the Survey Department, and check whether government land was available. The survey revealed that the pathway to burial ground did exist but was now under encroachment. She took up the matter in the Gram Sabha. Due to public pressure they vacated and the panchayat laid a good road in the land for use.
Involving in Women Issues

Reproductive and child health care awareness, women’s health awareness, HIV/AIDS awareness etc. were provided to the women in all the villages of Alagapuri panchayat. Women Self Help Groups were provided with entrepreneurship development and skill training. Financial assistance through banks and NGOs was arranged for the women Self Help Groups for starting of business and trade.

Drinking Water Supply

The panchayat was self sufficient in water supply. But Kalakkadu village was in dearth of drinking water and it required construction of an overhead water tank for uninterrupted supply of water. Maragatham searched for a suitable place for the construction of an overhead tank but she could not find enough space. She decided to buy a certain land for overhead tank construction and requested the village people to contribute cash. Each of the families contributed cash ranging form Rs.10 to Rs.1000 and the landowner also reduced the price. Now the Kalakkadu village has uninterrupted water supply.

Creating Bain Water Harvesting Structure

Special awareness campaigns through rallies of school children, cultural pregnancies, pamphlets etc. to create rainwater harvesting structures in government and non government buildings were held. The Self Help Groups were trained to carry the message to the public. Resolutions were passed in the Gram Sabha to install rainwater harvesting structures in all the houses. As a result, rain water harvesting
structures are established in individual homes, government buildings and local body buildings.

**Education**

Maragatham showed keen interest in providing quality education to the children. She provided uniform dresses, shoes, books and play materials with the help of an NGO. She also made arrangements to watch the dropouts and prevented the children from going in for child labour.

**Social Work**

Eye camps were conducted on behalf of the village panchayat with the help of an NGO. More than one hundred patients were benefited by the cataract surgery in Alagapuri village panchayat. An environment awareness camp was organized in collaboration with a local NGO and more than 300 trees have been planted. Financial assistance has been arranged with the help of an NGO for thirty poor students for their higher studies.

**Case - V Mrs. Nirmala**, President,
Unniyoor Village Panchayat, Thottiam Panchayat Union

**Assets /Agency**

Mrs. Nirmala, aged forty-six, is a graduate and contested in the 2001 panchayat election and became panchayat president of Unniyoor village. Unniyoor village panchayat people knew Nirmala and her family well since her father-in-law was President of the Unniyoor
panchayat continuously for three periods and also led the traditional panchayat. This family is holding the Presidential position in all bodies including the traditional panchayat since 1926. They owned the major portion of the land of Unniyoor panchayat in ancient days and the majority of the people were employed in their land. The village people were provided with all facilities including financial assistance for marriage, education of their heirs and special contributions during festival seasons. The people have a debt of gratitude to her family, trust them in getting justice for their issues and love them. She searched for opportunities to serve humanity. Her intuition induced her to contest in the panchayat election when she became aware that the Unniyoor panchayat was reserved for women. She considered the reservation as an opportunity for making attempts to achieve her ambition.

Nirmala did not know about the democratic set up of local administration and decentralized governance. Though she did learn something about decentralized democratic governance by reading political magazines, news dailles and by watching visual media, she did not have any opportunity of training in panchayat administration and panchayat legislations and to learn about her rights through training institutions. She felt that she had some deficiency in decision-making, in public speaking and in approaching government officials for development schemes and her trait of hesitation to repeat her efforts several times. Also she did not know whom she had to approach for learning about the panchayat administration.
At the beginning, she kept a distance from the panchayat administration since she did not have a right guide for her services. Her husband was a government employee and could not support her in panchayat administration. In this situation, her husband resigned his job and joined her to support her in panchayat administration but he did not intervene in other matters relating to panchayat personnel. Naturally Nirmala was interested in learning new subjects, and gradually she improved her knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of women panchayat presidents through contacting successful former women presidents, village elders and women. But she could not find any sources for knowledge support on panchayats in the form of books and manuals on women panchayat presidents’ powers, rights, duties and responsibilities to learn. She understood that creation of drinking water facilities and installation of streetlights are not the only duties of a panchayat president but serving without any colour, caste, religion discrimination and with hard work and for the overall development of the village.

**Opportunity Structure**

Under the 73rd Amendment one-third of all seats are reserved for women. In this context, Unniyoor village panchayat was reserved for women where Nirmala contested and won the election. Nirmala said that her husband was proposed to contest in the election. Since Unniyoor panchayat was reserved for women she utilized the opportunity under the Amendment and contested in the election. Unniyoor village people appreciated Nirmala. The village people, her
husband, her family members and her relatives cooperated with her and encouraged her to function as village panchayat president.

Training

Nirmala attended a five-day training programme in Gandhigram Rural Institute and participated in the conference of women panchayat presidents. The information about the training was passed through the district administration. She learnt about the 73rd Amendment, powers of panchayat presidents and development opportunities for her village panchayat under the amendment etc. The training was good for functioning as village panchayat president, said Nirmala. She also learnt the operation of the panchayat-that it should focus on the development of the village and its duty is not only the implementation of plans. She also gained knowledge of the powers of the panchayat president and all the works that are to be carried out in a village panchayat. The training material given in the training programme was very useful to her since she refers to it whenever she has doubts in performing her duty and asserting her power in the panchayat administration.

Outcomes

Abolishing illicit liquor

The training taught Nirmala that serving for overall development of the village is the main duty of a panchayat president. She decided to eliminate illicit liquor from her village. A few families of Unniyoor were involved in the production and marketing of illicit liquor. Nirmala took steps to stop the sale of illicit liquor through police action. But she
received life threats from the illicit liquor selling group. The training institute guided her to arrange a meeting with the people and convince them by suggesting the provisions for alternative employment opportunities. She organized women groups as a village Illicit Liquor Abolition Committee with the cooperation of village elders. She convinced the illicit liquor selling group and assured them to arrange training and financial assistance for alternative employment opportunities. The illicit liquor selling group agreed to give up their profession. She arranged training in different trades and financial assistance for self-employment with the help of the district administration. Now, the sale and circulation of illicit liquor have fully stopped in Unniyoor village panchayat.

Total Sanitation Campaign

Total sanitation campaign is being implemented in Unniyoor village panchayat through a Committee constituted by the village panchayat president. The Committee met frequently and ensured stoppage of open defecation and construction of individual household latrines in the houses. Though the Gram Sabha banned open defecation and directed all the families in the village to construct toilets in their houses, the villagers resorted to open defecation. Many of the people who have constructed sanitary latrine in their house also used the open space for defecation. Nirmala threatened to cut the drinking water pipe connection of those who practised open air defecation. This effort yield considerable results in stopping the open defecation practice. She further arranged spiritual training programme for the women, stressed hygienic and clean habits to realize god and
motivated them to use sanitary latrines. The spiritual approach to change the open air defecating attitude reached the women, children and males effectively.

**Preservation of Ecology**

The village people have been given awareness on the usefulness of planting trees for saving the environment and ecology. The harmfulness of using chemical fertilizers for crop raising, use of bio fertilizers and production of bio fertilizers and pesticides are also explained to the women. The women are motivated to create home gardens and use wastewater for irrigating vegetable and tree plants. The majority women created their home garden and trained their children to maintain them. Now the home garden is used as commercial home garden by planting vegetables and greens, More than one hundred horticultural seedlings have been planted in the panchayat area and Self Help Group members and school children are ensuring the survival of tree plants.

**Agricultural Development**

The primary profession of Unniyoor panchayat people is agriculture and it was affected severely owing to drought. Nirmala intended to develop the agriculture in her village panchayat. She organized a farmers association and arranged many training programmes and exposure visits for the farmers to learn about the natural practices of agriculture using bio fertilizer and pesticides, water management, drought management and multi cropping systems. This
effort worked out effectively and the majority of the farmers got more yield and profit than in the past years.

**Creating rainwater harvesting systems**

Special awareness campaigns were conducted through rallies of school children, cultural programmes, pamphlets etc. to create rainwater harvesting structures in government and non-government buildings. The village Self Help Groups was trained to carry the message to the public. A resolution to install rainwater harvesting structures in all the houses was passed in the Gram Sabha meeting. As a result, rainwater harvesting structures were established in all houses, government buildings and agricultural fields.

**Clean Village**

Nirmala took special efforts to make the village panchayat clean and environmental friendly. The Unniyoor village panchayat people were given advice to separate decomposable and non-decomposable garbage and deposit them in the garbage bins provided for each street. The people were also requested to curtail the use of plastics. Steps were taken by the President of the village panchayat to prevent water stagnation in the streets and surroundings of the whole village. Continuous action was taken to remove the waste articles from the water sources with the services of volunteers and panchayat officials.
Education

Nirmala organized children and conducted health and basic general knowledge classes during holidays. Personal hygienic practices were stressed in the classes. She provided uniform dresses, shoes, books and play materials with the help of an NGO. She also made arrangements to watch the dropouts and prevented the children from going in for child labour.

Involving in Women Issues

Reproductive and child health care awareness, women’s health awareness, HIV/AIDS awareness etc. are provided to the women in all the villages of Unniyoor panchayat. Women Self Help Groups were provided with entrepreneurship development and skill training. Financial assistance through banks and NGOs was arranged for the women Self Help Groups for starting business and trade.

Social work

Eye camps were conducted on behalf of the village panchayat with the help of an NGO. More than one hundred patients were benefited by cataract surgery in Unniyoor village panchayat. An environment awareness camp was organized in collaboration with a local NGO and more than 200 tree species have been planted. Financial assistance has been arranged with the help of an NGO for thirty poor students for their higher studies.
Case - VI Mrs. Rajeswari, President,
Koppu Village Panchayat, Anthanallur Panchayat Union

*Assets /Agency*

Mrs. Rajeswari, a retired headmistress of the local school, was born in a teachers’ family and married a college lecturer. Koppu village is the hometown of both Rajeswari and her husband. People of Koppu village panchayat know Rajeswari’s family since her early childhood because her parents served as teachers in the village schools. Rajeswari and her siblings also served as teachers in the village schools. She taught thousands of students. The majority of the people in the Koppur village were her students. Rajeswari is also known for her humanitarian attitude since she helped many students to continue their higher studies. She never failed to keep contact with the parents also.

Rajeswari came to know that the post of President of Koppu panchayat was reserved for women after the announcement of the panchayat election. She thought of serving the people through the panchayat and decided to contest. As an educated lady she has some knowledge of the political happenings. She understood that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment had given the opportunity for women to become panchayat leaders and get empowered. Her idea about being panchayat president was to implement the government programmes and maintain public services. She thought of using the power vested with the panchayat to solve all the problems of the village.
Soon she found out that her knowledge of the panchayat was not authentic. She was not able to interpret the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act and implement programmes. Moreover, she was not aware of who should be contacted for specific purposes. Her public relation was also weak. She was unable to meet the ever growing needs of the public.

**Opportunity Structure**

The main reason for Rajeswari to contest in the panchayat election was the reservation for women in the 73rd Amendment. Had it not been reserved for women, she would not have contested in the panchayat election, said Rajeswari. Her popularity and image as a good hearted headmistress of the village school and the majority of the voters being her former students helped her win the election easily. The reputation of the family also helped. Her educational background and knowledge were other assets for her to function effectively as panchayat president.

**Training**

Rajeswari had basic knowledge of decentralized governance but she was ignorant about the functioning of the village panchayat and she felt that she needed training in Panchayat Raj. She attended a three-day training programme in Gandhigram Rural Institute and participated in the conference of women panchayat presidents.

The information about the training was passed on through the Project Officer, DRDA. She leant that solving the problems is not the only duty of the village panchayat president but the village panchayat president has more duties and responsibilities. She also gained
knowledge of the powers of the panchayat president and all the works that are to be carried out in a village panchayat. She also learnt the operation of the panchayat. The training material given in the training programme was very useful to her since she refers to it whenever she has doubts in performing her duty and asserting her power in the panchayat administration.

Outcomes

Road facilities

She focused on connectivity and infrastructural development. The road between Pannangombai of Koppu Panchayat and Surian Kadu has been repaired and renewed. A metal road has been laid from Koppu water tank bund to Uyyagondan river for the convenience of pedestrians. A metal road was laid newly by using porambok land and getting a little bit of cultivable land from the farmers who were in need of road facilities for transporting their agriculture inputs and outputs. Only two farmers refused and they filed a case in court. The need of the road for the majority farmers in the Koppu panchayat was explained in court on behalf of Koppu panchayat and the court ordered those two farmers to give up a little bit of land for the welfare of all the Koppu panchayat people. Keelatheru and Melatheru were provided with metal roads. A metal road has been laid in the Therodu Street, which none of farmer panchayat administrations had even thought of, said Rajeswari. The mud road between Koppu Mariamman Temple and Muthalaippatti has been transformed into a black topped road. A metal road has been laid between Muthalaippatti road and Vinayagar Temple. The mud road in
the Scheduled Caste street has been changed into a metal road. The market site has been levelled with thirty lorry loads of soil. A wall has been constructed to embank the flood near River Bridge

**Infrastructure Facilities**

A community hall for women Self Help Groups has been constructed. Though the opponent parties obstructed the construction of a building for the Village Administration Office, it has been constructed near the panchayat office and now the Village Administrative Officer uses the building. The Youth Club obstructed building a Primary Health Center by claiming the site selected for the construction of the PHC as their playground. The Youth Club was convinced by the panchayat and the Primary Health Center has been constructed. Rajeswari provided Rs.10,000 for PHC construction from her own money. Now the Village Health Nurse permanently stays in the PHC and serves the Koppu village panchayat. The old and ugly anganwadi building has been renewed and provided with educational wall pictures for children. Now the anganwadi center is divided into two centers and the building has been fenced. It has been provided with tumblers, vessels and necessary accessories for hygienic cooking of nutritious food for the children. Five women and men sanitary complexes, which were constructed earlier, were renewed. Now the people are using them since those sanitary complex are hygienically maintained. A new women sanitary complex is also constructed and the women Self Help Groups maintain it. A drying yard for agricultural purposes has been built at an estimate of Rs.60,000/-. A fertilizer warehouse has been constructed and it is used to store fertilizers for
timely availability of fertilizer to the farmers. Two women Self Help Group members are employed to look after the fertilizer warehouse. The excess expense of Rs.3000 being met from her own money, twenty-two smoke-less chulahs have been constructed at the twenty-two homes of distressed families. Fifteen individual sanitary latrines have been provided for fifteen needy families in the panchayat. Free housing facilities are provided to one poor Scheduled Caste family and two Backward Class families. A garbage cart is provided separately for daily cleaning of the garbage in the market.

**Streetlights Facilities**

Four streetlights were installed in the road towards Kulathukkarai. Two streetlights were installed in Varikkarai Kallakkudai. Ten streetlights were installed in Puduveetukkaran Kadu. Streetlights were provided for Scheduled Caste people’s streets. Three sodium lights were installed in Melatheru of Koppur. Four streetlights are installed on Mudalippatti Road. Eighty single bulbs were provided for eighty needy families. Electric transformers and streetlights affected during floods were renewed.

**Drinking Water Facilities**

Two of the old wells were renewed and restored and these two wells are used for drinking water. The old motors were replaced with new ones and submersible motors were fixed for the drinking water tanks. New drinking water pipelines were extended to Vandikkaran Thoppu, Melatheru and Puduveetukkaran Kadu. Three mini-tanks have been constructed newly. Nine new hand-pumps have been
installed. Forty-six public drinking water pipes and drinking water pipe connections have been provided for 110 homes.

**Drainage Facilities**

Twenty drainages were created with the participation of the people under the ‘Namadhu Gramam’ scheme. A long drainage was provided in Melatheru and it was maintained daily to prevent leakages since it has thousands of connections. Drainages in temples, playgrounds etc. were renewed.

**Flood Relief**

All losses were prevented through flood warning and people were assembled at elevated places. Emergency relief such as food, clothes and medical assistance were provided for three days. Cash vouchers for flood relief @ Rs.1000 with a dhoti, a saree and ten kilograms of rice were supplied to 1126 flood affected people. Rs.2000 was released to flood affected people whose homes were damaged due to the flood.

**Case – VII**

Mrs. Usharani, President, Thinnanur Village Panchayat, Musiri Panchayat Union

**Assets / Agency**

Mrs. Usharani was elected panchayat president of Thinnanur village panchayat in 2001. She belongs to a politically affluent family. Her husband and one of her cousins have occupied senior positions in
a regional party and she was also an active member in the women’s wing of the party.

Usharani did not have any understanding of the role of the panchayat in the development of the rural area and her part in it. All she saw in the panchayat president’s post was power. She wanted to get into a position. Since the office of the panchayat president was reserved for women, she contested and won. Usharani has studied up to 12th standard and is capable reading and writing well. The village people considered her educated and qualified for the post of panchayat president. The opportunity provided under the reservation system for women made her become panchayat president, said Umarani.

Usharani improved her knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of women panchayat presidents through the orientation programme organized by the government. These programmes were primarily aimed at giving inputs on government schemes and making them implement them without fault. This orientation was in conformity with her idea of the panchayat, an agency as to implement government programmes and maintain basic amenities. She could not find any sources for knowledge support on panchayats in the form of books and manuals on women panchayat presidents’ powers, rights, duties and responsibilities.

She was not capable of exercising the powers provided in the amendment to the panchayat presidents to bring about overall village development in the village panchayat. However, she was very confident and strong from the time of her victory in the election.
because the village people were behind her. Usharani’s experience in political activities encouraged her to meet the district officials and other men along with her husband for getting support and assistance to bring about overall development of her village. She also ensured the cooperation and participation of the people in her efforts.

She thought that she had no problems in functioning as panchayat president since she has political experience and people’s support. Her family also stood behind her and extended its cooperation in all her moves since it brought power to them all. Her family members and her husband shared her roles and responsibilities as panchayat president in panchayat related works.

**Opportunity Structure**

In the case of Thinnanur panchayat, her cousin was tipped for contesting in the election. But, when the Thinnanur panchayat was reserved for women, Usharani’s cousin nominated her and so the main reason for Usharani’s contesting in the panchayat election was the reservation for women under the 73rd Amendment. She finds no opposition to a woman being panchayat president in this village, village people, her family members and her relatives cooperate with her and encourage her to function as village panchayat president. Insufficient drinking water, streetlights, infrastructure facilities such as road, drainage, buildings for women Self Help Group etc. were the major problems of Thinnanur village panchayat people. They trusted that Usharani will take efforts to solve these problems.
Training

She attended a three-day training programme in Gandhigram Rural Institute and participated in the conference of women panchayat presidents. The information about the training was passed through the Project Officer. In the training programme, contrary to her own idea, she found out that the duty of panchayat president is not to lay roads, implement government schemes and maintain basic amenities but bring about economic well being of the people, social justice and quality living standards. She realised that the notion she had about the panchayat was not correct. She also gained knowledge of the powers of the panchayat president and all the works that are to be carried out in a village panchayat.

The training material given in the training programme was very useful to her since she refers to it whenever she gets doubts in performing her duty. She used the training manual to counter a heated argument about the powers of vice-presidents and Ward Members in the Gram Sabha meetings. Usharani, while sharing her experiences at the training programme, said that the training was a good guidance for her to function as village panchayat president. It taught her several lessons on panchayats, as well as on individuals.

Outcomes

Road facilities

The road between Thinnanur panchayat boundary and main highway has been repaired and renewed with application of broken
mud stones. A metal road has been laid from Thinnanur water tank bund to the village.

**Infrastructure Facilities**

Though the opponent parties obstructed the construction of a building for women Self Help Group, it has been constructed near the panchayat office and now the women Self Help Groups use the building. Women and men sanitary complexes, constructed earlier, were renewed. Now the people are using them since those sanitary complexes are hygienically maintained. A new women sanitary complex is also constructed and the women Self Help Groups maintain it. Smoke chulahs have been constructed at twenty-two homes of distressed families. Individual sanitary latrines have been provided for fifteen needy families in the panchayat.

**Irrigation Facilities**

One of the Thinnanur irrigation tanks was not desilted for the past twenty years. Usharani took efforts to desilt the irrigation tank. But she needed funds—about rupees one lakh fifteen thousand—and she approached a private company. They contributed rupees one lakh fifty thousand and the tank was desilted. Now the capacity of the tank is increased and farmers are happy that the availability of water for irrigation is adequate for two seasons of farming.

**Social Work**

Health camps were conducted on behalf of the village panchayat with the help of NGOs. Thirty women were benefited medical aid in
Thinnanur village panchayat. An environment awareness camp was organized in collaboration with J.J. College of Agriculture and more than 300 tree species have been planted. Financial assistance has been arranged with the help of an NGO for eight poor students for their higher studies. Usharani is continuously contacting her village women and discussing pre-natal and post-natal care, childcare, reproductive health etc. She fixes awareness wall posters in the panchayat office. She shares about the panchayat administration, implementation of schemes etc with the women and gets their participation. As a woman she could understand some of the indirect problems of women and extends her help.

Case – VIII
Mrs. G. VISALATCHI, President,
Omandur Village Panchayat,
Mannachanallur Panchayat Union

Assets / Agency

Mrs. G. Visalatchi was born in a middle class family and is married to a businessman who is a close relative of hers. Omandur village is the hometown of both Visalatchi and her husband. Omandur village panchayat people know Visalatchi and her family for the past twenty years because her father also did public service in Omandur. Her husband worked in Malaysia and returned with good earnings. She has three sons and a daughter. All her sons have studied up to college level and are working in various places. Her daughter serves as counsellor for a popular political party in Tamil Nadu. Visalatchi has
become panchayat president of Omandur village panchayat for the second time.

Visalatchi learnt the democratic setup of local administration and decentralized governance through her experiences during the last period and by involving in political activities. She learnt about decentralized democratic governance by reading political magazines, news dailies and watching visual media. But she did not have any opportunity of training in panchayat administration and panchayat legislations. She felt that she has some deficiency in decision-making, in public speaking and in approaching government officials for development schemes and her trait of hesitation to repeat her efforts several times. Also she did not know whom she has to approach for learning about the panchayat administration and some of the technical knowledge on water harvesting and sanitation etc.

**Opportunity Structure**

Though the Omandur village panchayat was not reserved for women or for the Scheduled Caste during 1996 election, Visalatchi was induced by the Omandur panchayat people to contest. She earned the trust and love of most of the people and they assured her victory and requested her to contest in the election. Some of the people attached to opponent political parties did not vote for Visalatchi. They defamed her and spread rumors about Visalatchi. But the majority of the people in Omandur village panchayat ignored the campaign by the opponent parties.
She found no opposition as a woman to be panchayat president in this village. Village people, Visalatchi’s husband, her family members and her relatives cooperated with her and encouraged her to function as village panchayat president independently. She keeps good relationship with her colleagues and government departments. Her official relationship is maintained smoothly and well so far. Though she was the panchayat president during 1996-2001, the main reason for Visalatchi to contest in the panchayat election was the reservation for women under the 73rd Amendment. At the village level, the most important provisions relating to participation and accountability are those governing reservations and the Gram Sabha. Had the Omandur panchayat not been reserved for women, she would not have contested in the panchayat election, said Visalatchi.

Training

Visalatchi has basic knowledge on decentralized governance through her experiences as panchayat president during the previous period but she felt the need to learn more about the functioning of the village panchayat and training in Panchayat Raj. She attended a five-day training programme in Gandhigram Rural Institute and participated in the conference of women panchayat presidents. The information about the training was passed through the Project Officer. She yearned to learn about the powers of women panchayat presidents and functions of the panchayat through the training programme. She leant that solving the problems is not the only duty of the village panchayat president but the village panchayat president has more duties and responsibilities. She also gained knowledge of the powers of the
panchayat president and all the works that are to be carried out in a village panchayat. She also learnt that the panchayat should focus on the development of the village and its duty is not only the implementation of plans. The training material given in the training programme was very useful to her since she refers to it whenever she has doubts in performing her duty and asserting her power in the panchayat administration. She used the training manual for reference during discussions on the powers of vice-presidents and Ward Members in Gram Sabha meetings.

**Outcomes**

**Housing Facilities**

Houses have been constructed and provided to the needy and eligible families of Scheduled Castes. Twenty-two houses in 1996 and forty houses in 2002 were provided to the Scheduled Caste people. Thirty houses are arranged for those who have land. Visalatchi took efforts to provide these housing facilities in her village panchayat and she overcame several problems created by others who were not provided house due to their non-eligibility.

**Infrastructure facilities**

A community hall for women Self Help Groups has been constructed. Separate burial grounds for both the Gowder and the Scheduled Castes were allotted permanent sheds. The opposite parties obstructed the women sanitary complex by claiming the site selected for the construction of the women sanitary complex as poramboke land. The opposite group was convinced by the panchayat and the
women sanitary complex has been constructed. As old and ugly anganwadi building has been renewed, fenced and provided with wall pictures for children. It has been provided with tumblers, vessels and necessary accessories for hygienic cooking of nutritious food for the children. Now the anganwadi center receives more number of children.

Sanitary complexes for Scheduled Caste women and other communities men have been constructed and hygienically maintained. The Scheduled Caste women were very happy to have a separate sanitary complex. A new women sanitary complex was also constructed and the women Self Help Groups maintain it. A drying yard for agricultural purposes has been constructed. A fertilizer warehouse has been constructed and it is used to store fertilizers for timely availability of fertilizer to the farmers. Smokeless chulahs have been provided for forty homes of distressed families. More than fifty individual sanitary latrines have been constructed. A primary school building has been constructed at an estimate of Rs.2,60,000/-.

Road Facilities

The road between Omandur panchayat boundary and the main road has been repaired and renewed with application of broken mud stones. A metal road has been laid from Omandur water tank bund to Upparu River for the comfort of pedestrians. A metal road has been laid in the main street, which was a long term dream of Omandur village people. A metal road was laid by using poramboke land and getting a little bit of cultivable land from the farmers who were in need of road facilities for transporting their agriculture inputs and outputs. The mud road in the Scheduled Caste street has been changed into metal road.
Streetlights Facilities

Four streetlights were installed in the road towards the burial grounds of Scheduled Caste and Gowder communities. Two streetlights were installed in the road towards Upparu. Streetlights are provided for Scheduled Caste streets. Three sodium lights in Main street of Omandurr and four streetlights were installed in Ottar community area.

Drinking Water Facilities

A new water tank with a capacity of one lakh litre has been constructed at an estimate of Rs.2, 60,000 and special attention was paid to reducing the drinking water supply problem. One old well was renewed and restored and this well is used for drinking water. The old motors were replaced with new ones and new drinking water pipelines were extended and mini-tanks have been constructed newly. New hand-pumps have been installed. Six public drinking water pipes were installed.

Drainage Facilities

Twenty drainages were created with the participation of people under ‘Namadhu Gramam’ scheme.

Rescue of Panchayat Marriage Hall

Five years back, a man manipulated the records of a marriage hall of the village community and converted the document to his name by fraudulent method. The community marriage hall was the property of the village panchayat. Visalatchi filed a case against Mr.Ravichandran in the Chennai High Court for the panchayat property. But, a few
members extended their support to Mr. Ravichandran. Visalatchi took the issue to the District Collector and produced all the evidence for proving that the community marriage hall is the panchayat property. The District Collector intervened in this problem and permitted Visalatchi to continue the case in the court.

**Flood Relief**

The 2005 flood in this district affected this panchayat also. She took many preventive steps to reduce the impact of the flood. All losses were prevented through flood warning and people were assembled at elevated places. She arranged emergency relief such as food, clothes and medical assistance for three days when no supported was coming from outside.

Case - **IX jyij-g, Vijayalakshmi, President,**

Palaya Rottai Village panchayat, Vaiampatti Panchayat Union

**Assets /Agency**

Mrs. Vijayalakshmi, aged forty-two, contested for the second time in the 2001 panchayat election, won and has become panchayat president of Palaya Kottai village panchayat. She lost in the previous election held in 1996 by a few votes because the traditional panchayat did not support her. She belongs to the affluent Reddiar community, which constitutes the majority in the Panchayat.

Vijayalakshmi was basically a milk vendor distributing pure milk for the past twenty-five years and was well known to all the people in the panchayat. She is attached to a popular political party in Tamil
Nadu for the past eighteen years. She has brought a few welfare schemes to Palayakottai village through this association.

Out of the eighteen habitations of Palayakottai village panchayat, five villages have Reddiars as the majority population. She had the capacity to make decisions herself since she was an independent entrepreneur for the past twenty-five years. Vijayalakshmi has studied up to 8th standard and is capable of reading and writing well and she stressed that she was also aware of the panchayat, the 73rd Amendment, legislature, rules and regulations at the first time of contesting in the panchayat election in 1996.

She said that she has no problems in functioning as panchayat president since she has political experience and people’s support but the Traditional panchayat was antagonistic. But people trust her truthfulness and service attitude, stressed Vijayalakshmi.

**Opportunity Structure**

The traditional panchayat, which consists of the majority people from her own Reddiar community, opposed her and defeated her in 1996. In the 2001 election also the traditional panchayat asked her to withdraw and threatened to excommunicate her if she contested. The traditional panchayat put pressure on the husband. Yet she filed her nomination and contested in the panchayat election. The traditional panchayat took a non-cooperative stand. Her business also suffered. But she was supported by women Self Help Group members who canvassed for her. She was not allowed to enter into five habitations. She contacted all the voters in the five villages through telephone, gave
self-explanation, and canvassed for votes. The majority of her community people over telephone assured her of support in the election since they never liked their traditional panchayat. Since the 73rd Amendment provides reservation for women, Vijayalakshmi had the opportunity to become a woman panchayat president. Vijayalakshmi utilized the opportunity. Though she did not know about the official relationship, she learnt to keep good relationship with her colleagues and government departments after attending the training programme organized for women panchayat presidents. But problems arose out of the caste system in the village.

**Training**

Vijayalakshmi attended the five-day training programme in Gandhigram Rural Institute and participated in the conference of women panchayat presidents. The information about the training was passed through the district administration. She learnt about the 73rd Amendment, the powers of panchayat presidents and development opportunities for her village panchayat. She also learnt the operation of panchayat—that it should focus on the development of the village and its duty is not only the implementation of plans. She also gained knowledge of the powers of panchayat presidents and all the works that are to be carried out in a village panchayat. The training material given in the training programme is very useful to her since she refers to it whenever she has doubts in performing her duty and asserting her power in the panchayat administration. Vijayalakshmi improved her confidence to overcome the problems that she faces in her village.
panchayat and she became braver to struggle against the traditional panchayat.

**Outcomes**

Since she stressed creating road facilities in her manifesto, she brought road and transport facilities. The footpath between Vaiampatti and Poolampatti was not maintained for many years. Six landlords own all the cultivable land in the area where the footpath is located. The landlords blocked maintenance because they have encroached on the road. The people suffered to pass through the narrow footpath. Vijayalakshmi gathered the village people, met the landlords and requested them to cooperate with the panchayat administration for construction of a road. The landlords argued that their crops may be plundered if a road is constructed through the footpath where their lands are located. Vijayalakshmi and the village people made the landlords realize their responsibility of protecting their crops by fencing their lands and that using public property is an offence. The landlords, reading the writing on the wall, gave back the encroached land. The panchayat laid a good all weather road on it.

For the past thirty-five years the road from Morappatti to Purathanpatti could not be laid due to insufficient finance. Vijayalakshmi approached the MLA along with the people for finance to lay the road. The MLA recommended allocation of fund from the MLACDS. Now the road has been laid and transport facilities are available for the village people. A road has been newly formed between Purathangudi and Mannapparai via Authoor. The Authoor people are benefited by frequent transport facilities.
Involving in Women Issues

Throughout her political career she has been strongly supported by the womenfolk. Their welfare was always a priority for her. Reproductive and child health care awareness, women’s health awareness, HIV/AIDS awareness etc are provided to the women in all the villages of Palaya Kottai panchayat through public campaigns.

Women Self Help Groups were provided with entrepreneurship development and skill training. Financial assistance through banks and NGOs was arranged for the women Self Help Group for starting a business activity.

Advocacy Role

Whenever some of the other panchayat presidents were in trouble she extended a supporting hand. When Mr.Liyakath Ali filed an unnecessary case against Ayyanaredipatti panchayat president Mrs.Kaladevi, Vijayalakshmi met him, convinced him and requested him to withdraw the case. He withdrew the case.

Changes in the Attitude of Traditional Panchayat

The performance and good name of Vijayalakshmi changed the negative attitude of the traditional panchayat people. They started approaching her for creation of drinking water facilities in five villages where the majority of their community people are living. Vijayalakshmi had already taken efforts to establish drinking water facilities in all the villages. Now some of the traditional panchayat members extended their support to her in carrying out development activities.
Social Work

Eye camps were conducted on behalf of the village panchayat with the help of an NGO. More than one hundred patients were benefited through cataract surgery in Palaya Kottai village panchayat.

An environment awareness camp was organized in collaboration with a local NGO and more than 100 tree species have been planted. Financial assistance has been arranged with the help of an NGO for thirty poor students for their higher studies.

Education

Primary school buildings were renewed in Palayakottai village. She enrolled about 26 school dropouts through meeting their parents. Private scholarships were arranged for nine poor students for their higher studies.

Social Service

Cultural programmes, street plays, dramas and film shows were conducted to create awareness on HIV/AIDS in all the areas of Palayakottai village panchayat.

Flood Relief

All losses were prevented through flood warning and people were assembled at elevated places. Emergency relief such as food, clothes and medical assistance have been provided for three days. Cash vouchers for flood relief @ Rs.1000 with a dhoti, a saree and ten kilograms of rice were supplied to 1126 flood affected people.
Mrs. P. Vasantha, President, Thalakkudi Village Panchayat, Laligudi Panchayat Union

*Assets / Agency*

Mrs. P. Vasantha, President of Thalakkudi village panchayat, is a diverse personality among all women panchayat presidents. She belongs to the Scheduled Caste community. The Scheduled Caste community people constitute one-fourth of the total population of the village and the people of this community are normally poor. The remaining three-fourths of the people of Thalakkudi village panchayat belong to non-Scheduled Caste community and they were well off than the Scheduled Caste community people.

The family is associated with a leading political party in Tamil Nadu. Her husband is working in Tiruchirappally Corporation. Vasantha is also involved in party activities and served as a member of the party’s district women’s wing.

As part of her political carrier she decided to participate in the election. This village panchayat was not reserved for women or for scheduled community. Seven men contested against Vasantha and she defeated them by a comfortable margin. She did not spend any money for the election and won the election by the support of the Thalakkudi village people.

The male candidates opposed her in the election concealed a ballot box at the time of counting of votes wherein the majority of the votes were polled in support of Vasantha. The election officers were
requested to stop the counting and the Thalakkudi panchayat people searched for the hidden ballot box. Finally, the election officers declared Vasantha elected.

She was confident that she had a good knowledge of the Panchayat Amendment, legislations, rules and regulations at the first time of taking oath as panchayat president. The opportunity provided by the reservation system for women motivated her to contest in the election though this panchayat was not reserved for women.

However, she was confident of her victory in the election because the village people and her husband were behind her initiative.

Vasantha’s experience in political activities encouraged her to meet the District Collector, the Project Officer, and the Assistant Director for panchayats, officials of the Water Board, Public Works Department and NGOs for support and assistance to bring about overall development of her village. She also ensured the cooperation and participation of the people in her efforts for establishing drinking water and streetlights facilities.

**Opportunity Structure**

Though the Thalakkudi village panchayat was not reserved for women or for a Scheduled Community, Vasantha was induced by the reservation policy of the Government to bring more women in to the local bodies. Vasantha, belongs to a Scheduled Caste community in Thalakkudi panchayat where the scheduled community people constitute only one-fourth of the total population. But she earned the trust and love of all the people and they ensured her victory. The
reasons for her victory were her honesty, humanitarian attitude, truthfulness and her earlier services.

Some of non-Scheduled Caste community people disturbed Vasantha during the election. Non-Scheduled Caste community members group belonging to another political party motivated its supporters not to vote for Vasantha. But the majority of the people in Thalakkudi village panchayat ignored the campaign by the opponent parties. Village people, Vasantha’s husband, her family members and her relatives cooperated with her and encouraged her to function as village panchayat president. She keeps good relationship with her colleagues and officials of government departments.

**Training**

Vasantha was ignorant of the functioning of the village panchayat and she felt that she needed training in Panchayat Raj. She attended a three-day training programme in Gandhigram Rural Institute two times and participated in the conference of women panchayat presidents. The information about the training was passed through the district administration. She yearned for learning the ways to solve the problems of drinking water and streetlights in her village panchayat. However in the training programme she learnt that solving the problems of drinking water and streetlights is not the only the duty of the village panchayat president but that she has more duties and responsibilities. She also gained knowledge of the powers of the panchayat president and all the works that are to be carried out in a village panchayat.
The training was a good guidance for her to function as village panchayat president, said Vasantha. She learnt that the operation of panchayat should focus on the development of the village and that its duty is not only the implementation of plans. The training material given in the training programme was very useful to her since she refers whenever she has doubts in performing her duty and asserting her power in the panchayat administration.

Outcomes

Solving the Problem of Burial Ground

Thalakkudi village panchayat has different sub-sections of people. This was the cause of many communal tensions. She decided to earmark specific place for each community in the burial ground. Vasantha filed a special requisition for a resolution in the Gram Sabha to divide the burial ground for all sections of the community. The problem was solved by the collective resolution of the Gram Sabha that the burial ground was to be sub divided among all sections of the village community. Now each section of the village community has its own place in the burial ground.

Drinking Water Facilities

Two of the old wells were renewed and restored and these two wells are used as drinking water source. The old motors were replaced with new ones and submersible motors were fixed to the drinking water tanks. New drinking water pipelines were extended to all the streets and wards of the panchayat. Ten new hand-pumps have been
installed. More than one hundred public drinking water pipes and drinking water pipe connections have been provided for homes.

**Streetlights Facilities**

Four streetlights were installed in the road towards Kulathukkarai. Two streetlights were installed in Varikkarai Kallakkudai. Ten streetlights were installed in Puduveetukkaran Kadu. Streetlights were provided for Scheduled Caste community streets. Three sodium lights were installed in Melatheru. Four streetlights were installed in Mudalippatti Road.

**Road Facilities**

A metal road has been laid from the tank bund to the river. A metal road has been laid newly on non-road site by using poramboke land and getting a little bit of cultivable land from the farmers who were in need of road facilities for transporting their agriculture inputs and outputs. Streets in the Scheduled Caste community colony were provided with cement concrete road. The mud road in the Scheduled Caste street has been changed into a metal road. The market site has been leveled with thirty lorry loads of soil.

**Development of Infrastructure in Thalakkudi Panchayat**

A community hall for women Self Help Groups has been constructed. An old anganwadi building has been renewed and provided with educational wall pictures for children. It has also been provided with tumblers, vessels and necessary accessories for hygienic cooking of nutritious food for the children. Women and men sanitary
complex, constructed in the early 80s, have been renewed. Now the
people are using the sanitary complex. A new women sanitary
complex was also constructed and the women Self Help Groups
maintain it. A drying yard for agricultural purposes has been
established. More than two hundred individual sanitary latrines have
been provided for the needy families in the panchayat. Free housing
facilities were provided to poor Scheduled Caste community families
and Backward Class community families.

**Flood Relief**

During incessant rains in October and November 2005, the tank
breached due to heavy water percolation. The canal water was
redirected to prevent high floods that were expected to destroy many
villages. The water in the canal entered Thalakkudi and its nearby
villages. Vasantha and her team, with volunteers, transferred all the
people to the village school. All losses were prevented through flood
warning and people were assembled at elevated places. Emergency
relief such as food, clothes and medical assistance were provided for
three days. Cash vouchers for flood relief @ Rs.1000 with a dhoti, a
saree and ten kilograms of rice were supplied to 1126 flood affected
people. Rs.2000 was released to flood affected people whose homes
were damaged due to the flood.
Case - XI Mrs. Stella Mary, President,
Pitchaimaniarampatti Village Panchayat,
Manapparai Panchayat Union

Assets /Agency

Mrs. Stella Mary, bom in a middle class fam: ilv. is a graduate. She has no background of political parities but her family is well known to the people of Pitchaimaniarampatti village for services rendered by her family to the vulnerable community in struggling for wages and employment in many farms in and around the village panchayat. Pitchaimaniarampatti village is the hometown of both Stella Mary and her husband. Stella Mary formed a women Self Help Group in the village and took efforts for the economic uplift of the families of the Self Help Group members.

In the first election Stella Mary became panchayat president of Pitchaimaniarampatti village panchayat. She contested the panchayat election and was elected President since the Pitchaimaniarampatti village panchayat was reserved for women. The reservation system provided an opportunity for Mrs. Stella Mary to be elected as woman panchayat president.

Stella Mary did not know about the panchayat and its administration when she was elected but her friends and Self Help Group members supported and encouraged her to function as panchayat president. In the absence of her husband, she never came out of her home, attended office and never contacted any male other than her husband and family members before she was elected
panchayat president. Since she had studied B.A. and was capable of leading groups well, the village people considered her educated and qualified for the post of panchayat president. She said that she was not aware of the panchayat Amendment, legislature, rules and regulations at the time of taking office as panchayat president. The opportunity provided by the reservation system for women was the main cause for her to become panchayat president. When Stella Mary came to power in the panchayat, the village people suffered from insufficient drinking water, road and streetlight facilities. Stella Mary promised to establish drinking water and streetlight facilities in her election manifesto because she also experienced the same problems. Another major problem that affected the people was the use of illicit liquor sold by a strong male group in the village. Many of the village people took efforts to abolish the sale of illicit liquor but failed because men addicted to illicit liquor stopped any effort to do so by threatening.

She learnt a few things about decentralized democratic governance by reading political magazines, news dailies and watching the visual media and through contact with other presidents. But she did not have any opportunity of training in panchayat administration and panchayat legislations. Sometimes she imagined herself as a social servant through the democratic set up but she could not find the right opportunity, because she had no opportunity to learn about her rights through training institutions and she felt that she had some deficiency in decision-making, in oratory and in approaching government officials for development schemes and hesitation to repeat her efforts several times.
Opportunity Structure

Since the Pitchaimaniarampatti village panchayat was reserved for women in the village panchayat election, Stella Mary was induced by members of women Self Help Groups and the people to contest in the election. She earned the trust and love of all the people and they assured her of victory and requested her to contest in the election. The reasons for her victory in the election were her honesty, humanitarian assistance, truthfulness and her services through Self Help Groups.

Training

Stella Mary felt the need for training in Panchayat Raj. She attended a five day training programme in Gandhigram Rural Institute and participated in a conference of women panchayat presidents. The information about the training was passed through the district administration. The training was a good guide for her to function as village panchayat president, said Stella Mary. She also learnt that the panchayat should focus on the development of the village and its duty is not only the implementation of plans. She also gained knowledge of the powers of the panchayat president and all the works that are to be carried out in a village panchayat. The training material given in the training programme was very useful to her since she refers to it whenever she has doubts over performing her duty and asserting her power in the panchayat administration. She used the training manual for reference during discussions. Stella Mary, while sharing her experiences at the training programme, said that the training taught her several lessons on panchayats and she has been socialized also. Stella
Mary had not even basic knowledge on decentralized governance through her experiences as panchayat president during the previous period but she felt the need to learn more about the functioning of village panchayat and training in Panchayat Raj.

**Outcomes**

**Abolition of illicit liquor**

A group of unemployed youth was selling illicit liquor through a tea shop in Pitchaimaniarampatti and all the efforts taken by the village people to abolish the sale of illicit liquor in the village failed. The illicit liquor selling group somehow escaped from the law. This issue was taken to Stella Maiy and she inspected the teashop where the liquor was being sold. She found more than one hundred packets of illicit liquor and filed a petition with the Superintendent of Police. The Superintendent of Police raided the shop and caught the group which sold the illicit liquor. The teashop was also sealed. Now the village women are living in peace.

**Water Facilities**

Drinking water pipelines were extended to the Scheduled Caste community area in Alandur village. Twenty-three drinking water borewells were installed in the Pitchaimaniarampatti village panchayat during her tenure. Three borewells were installed in fallow lands at various places for irrigation purposes.
Infrastructure Facilities

A community hall for women Self Help Groups and a women sanitary complex were constructed and are maintained by a women Self Help Group.

Road Facilities

A road between Chettiampatti and Pitchaimaniarampatti was formed newly. There was no road in Pungambadi village even for mini bus transport and the people were very much suffering in transporting their goods and at times even to transport diseased persons to hospital. Stella Mary once saw a group of men and women carrying a pregnant woman to hospital in a hammock made of bed sheets. Stella Mary took efforts to construct a new road from Pungambadi to connect to the main road for transport. But she could not find financial allotment in the village panchayat budget. She gathered the youths of the village who were working in factories at Karur and collected adequate money for constructing the road. Pungambadi village people contributed their labour. Now the Pungambadi village has a road and mini bus facilities. This is a thirty years dream of Pungambadi village people. Road facilities were provided to all burial grounds.

Elimination of Encroachment

Encroachment on the footpath towards the burial ground by a strong political group was abolished through mobilizing elite groups. She won justice in this issue and laid a tar road on the burial ground footpath. About a kilometer of space between Sebasthiarpatti and Palakkarappatti was encroached upon by a group of people. They
threatened Stella Mary when she asked them to vacate the encroached places but she convened the Gram Sabha to resolve to make the encroachers vacate the area to construct a good road between the two villages. Now the road has been laid at the encroached place. Some of local the people encroached upon the compound wall of the panchayat office with petty shops in Chettiarpatti without paying any rent to the panchayat. Stella Mary purged the encroachments with the help of people’s cooperation.

**Economic Development Activities for Women Self Help Groups**

A women Self Help Group was started by her and through it she organized health, hygiene and sanitation awareness and other services in the village. Ten other Self Help Groups were also started in the villages of Pitchaimaniarampatti panchayat and were affiliated to it. Women members of Self Help Groups were provided with entrepreneurship development training and skill training in tailoring, borewell repairing, thatch making, doll making etc. with the help of an NGO.

**Education**

Primary school buildings were renewed under the Namakku Name Thittam. About 47 school dropouts were re enrolled through meeting their parents. Private scholarships were arranged for eleven poor students for their higher studies.
Social Service

A very big medical camp was arranged by Stella Maiy in the Athi Dravidar Higher Secondary School at Pambattipatti, which was presided over by Marungapuri MLA. Eighteen doctors and nurses contributed their services in the camp. More than 2000 people were benefited in the medical camp. Specialist doctors such as ophthalmologists, dieticians, gynecologists and also general medical practitioners gave consultancy. General awareness was also created among the people on symptoms of various diseases and on preventive measures.

Flood Relief

All losses were prevented through flood warning and people were assembled at elevated places. Emergency relief such as food, clothes and medical assistance were provided for three days. Cash vouchers for flood relief @ Rs.1000 with a dhoti, a saree and ten kilograms of rice were supplied to 1126 flood affected people. Rs.2000 was released to flood affected people whose homes were damaged due to the flood.

Case - XII Mrs. S.PARAMESWARI, President,
Natarajapuram Village Panchayat,
Thiruverumbur Panchayat Union

Assets /Agency

Mrs.S.Parameswari, aged forty, was born and brought up in a rich family in Batlagundu in Dindigul District. Her husband belongs to Natarajapuram. They lived in Tiruchirappalli, with her husband. They had agricultural lands in Natarajapuram and he visited the village very
often to supervise the cropping in his lands. Sometimes Parameswari also went with her husband to their lands. But she never liked to visit Natarajapuram since it was lacking in facilities.

Being a landlord, he was one of the power centers of the village. He wanted to become the panchayat president. But, since it was reserved for women, he proposed his wife in his place. Thus the reservation system provided an opportunity for Paramesswari to contest and to be elected as panchayat president.

Parameswari did not know anything about the panchayat, its administration and public life when she was elected. She has studied up to 9 standard and is able to read and write well. The opportunity provided by the reservation system for women was the main reason for her to become panchayat president, said Parameswari. The social standing and influence of her husband in Natarajapuram village panchayat determined her victory.

Parameswari improved her knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of women panchayat presidents with the help of her husband. But she could not find any sources for knowledge support on panchayats in the form of books and manuals on women panchayat presidents’ powers, rights, duties and responsibilities. This helped her husband to easily keep her under his grip. He conducted the administration of the panchayat and was virtually identified by the people as President. Her ignorance and incapability were bliss for him.
Opportunity Structure

Since the 73rd Amendment provides reservation for women, Parameswari had the opportunity to become woman panchayat president. If not, her husband might have become the President of Natarajapuram panchayat. Parameswari utilized the opportunity under the Amendment since she was motivated to contest in the election by her husband and his friends.

The village community accepted Parameswari. No opposition to women being panchayat president in this village is found from the acceptance given by the village panchayat people. She was never ill treated by her village people even during the emergence of local problems. Village people, her husband, her family members and her relatives cooperated with her and encouraged her to play a secondary role as village panchayat president, allowing her husband to wield the power of the presidentship. Though she did not know about the official relationship, she learnt to keep good relationship with her colleagues and government departments after she attended the orientation programme organized for women panchayat presidents by the Department.

Training

Parameswari attended a five day training programme in Gandhigram Rural Institute and participated in the conference of women panchayat presidents. The information about the training was passed through the district administration. She learnt about the 73rd Amendment, powers of panchayat presidents and development
opportunities for her village panchayat under the amendment etc in the training programme and it was a good guidance to her to function as village panchayat president, said Parameswari. She also learnt about the operation of the panchayat, that it should focus on the development of village and its duty is not merely the implementation of plans. She also gained knowledge of the powers of the panchayat president and all the works that are to be carried out in a village panchayat. The training material given in the training programme was very useful to her since she refers to it whenever she has doubts over performing her duty and asserting her power in the panchayat administration. Parameswari, while sharing her experiences at the training programme, said that the training taught her lessons on panchayat administration and she has been socialized more than any individual woman in her village. Parameswari gained confidence to overcome the problems that she faces in her village panchayat and to struggle against the traditional panchayat.

**Outcomes**

**Total sanitation campaign**

A total sanitation campaign was organized in Natrajapuram village panchayat through a People’s Committee constituted by the village panchayat president. The committee met frequently and ensured stoppage of open air defecation and construction of individual household latrines in the houses. The village panchayat is monitoring and ensuring the proper maintenance and use of the individual latrines, to ensure proper health and hygienic conditions in the village. The Gram Sabha banned open air defecation and directed all the families in
the village to construct toilets in their houses. The panchayat organized training programme for the villagers on how to use and maintain the toilets.

**Integrated Women Sanitary Complex**

In Natrajapuram village panchayat, an integrated women sanitary complex has been constructed for the use of women. One of the Self Help Groups in the village has been given the responsibility of maintaining the complex. The waste water from the complex is used to develop a garden around it.

**Conservation of Ecology**

The village people were given awareness on the usefulness of planting trees for saving the environment and ecology and motivated to grow trees in their homes. Two hundred horticultural seedlings and trees have been planted in the panchayat area. Self Help Group members and school children were trained to take care of the trees planted.

**Creating Rain Water Harvesting Structures**

Special awareness campaigns have been conducted through rallies of school children, cultural programmes, pamphlets etc. to create rainwater harvesting structures in all the buildings. Resolutions to instal rainwater harvesting structures in all the houses were passed in the Gram Sabha. As a result, rain water harvesting structures were established in all the 417 individual homes, four government buildings and four local body buildings.
Clean Village

Paremeshwari took special efforts to make the village panchayat clean and environmental friendly. The Natrajapuram village panchayat people were trained to segregate organic and inorganic garbage and deposit them in garbage bins provided for each street. The people were also requested to curtail the use of the plastics. Steps have been taken by the President of the village panchayat to prevent water stagnation in the streets and surroundings. Continuous action was taken to remove waste articles from the water sources with the service of volunteers and panchayat officials.

Removal of Encroachment

A long felt need was the removal of encroachments in the area of Puzhakkadai where Scheduled Caste and Non-Scheduled Caste communities were living. Owing to the fear of law and order problems, efforts were not taken to expurgate the encroachments. Parameswari held talks with the encroachers, the encroachments and were removed and a new road has been constructed through Puzhakkadai. She took effective steps to create a peaceful situation between both the Scheduled Caste and the non-Scheduled Caste communities.

Education

Paremeshwari wanted quality education for all the children in the village and she took efforts to make the panchayat primary schools offer education at the standard of private matriculation schools. She
approached the District Education authorities to employ quality teachers. She assured them to contribute all other facilities to ensure quality education in the school. She provided uniform dresses, shoes, books and play materials with the help of an NGO. She also made arrangements to watch the dropouts and prevented the children from going in for child labour. Now the quality of education in the school has improved.

Involving in Women Issues

Reproductive and child health care awareness, women’s health awareness, HIV/AIDS awareness etc. are provided to the women in all the villages of Natarajapuram panchayat. Women Self Help Groups are provided with entrepreneurship development and skill training. Financial assistance through banks and NGOs is arranged for the women Self Help Groups for starting business and trade.

Social Work

Eye camps were conducted on behalf of the village panchayat with the help of an NGO. More than one hundred patients were benefited through cataract surgery in Natarajapuram village panchayat. An environment awareness camp was organized in collaboration with a local NGO and more than 200 tree species of trees have been planted. Financial assistance has been arranged with the help of an NGO for thirty poor students for their higher studies.
Mrs. Meena Shanmugam was elected President of Punganoor panchayat by a margin of 1100 votes in the 2001 election by the same people who rejected her in the earlier election. She belonged to a family having membership in one of the leading political parties. Her husband’s brother had served as village panchayat president on an earlier occasion.

She had education up to 10th standard. As a student she was very active in sports and other extra-curricular activities apart from being the class leader. Thus leadership came to her at a young age. After schooling she took employment with a book binding company where she was the head of a 16 member girls team. This helped her later to lead the SHG movement.

The defeat on the earlier occasion didn’t deter her from upholding the public cause wherever necessary. She always championed the cause of the public with the authorities and other agencies and this attitude brought her the complete support of the village which was reflected in the huge margin in the election held in 2001. While assuming the office she had some knowledge of the duties, powers functions, rules and regulations of the panchayat. Her vision was to create an atmosphere for quality living for the inhabitants of her panchayat. With a good backing from her supportive husband
and family, and the ruling political party and experience of the family in handling panchayat administration, she was very confident that she can manage the panchayat and implement the schemes in such a way as to achieve her vision. Little was she aware that to achieve her vision she has to co-ordinate, supervise and monitor all the 29 subjects and department indicated in the 73rd Amendment Act.

**Opportunity Structure**

The village panchayat president’s post of Punganoor was reserved for women, giving her the opportunity to contest. The general public had no objection to her becoming the President, when election was held for the second time with reservation for women. The family and her husband were very supportive to the extent that they vigorously campaigned for her victory and later wherever some body came to represent to the village panchayat president in her absence took note of it and conveyed it to Meena Shanmugam.

**Training**

Meena Shanmugam was interested to learn more about the panchayat administration, performing the panchayat president’s duties and exercising power without disturbing her colleagues and opponent party members who served for village development. She knew about decentralized governance but she was ignorant of the functioning of the village panchayat and she felt that she needed training in Panchayat Raj. She attended a three-day training programme in Gandhigram Rural Institute and participated in the conference of women panchayat presidents. The information about the training was
passed through the Project Officer. She learnt that solving the problems is not only the duty of the village panchayat president but the village panchayat president has more duties and responsibilities for the overall development of the village panchayat. She also gained knowledge of the powers of the panchayat president and all the works that are to be carried out in a village panchayat. She also learnt the operation of a panchayat, that it should focus on the development of the village and its duty is not merely the implementation of plans. The training material given in the training programme was very useful to her since she refers to it whenever she has doubts. After assuming office she could understand the need to equip herself with authentic knowledge of rules and regulations and the methodology to co-ordinate the 29 subjects in the 73rd Amendment Act, ways and means to solve various social and development issues in the village, ensuring co-operation with government officials. She felt that without building her capacity she cannot attain her vision. She attended the three-day training programme organized by Gandhigram Rural Institute. Since she was awaiting such an opportunity she participated in the training programme enthusiastically and made optimum use of it. In her own words she made herself familiar with the administrative procedure, approaching the public, handling of government officials, , powers, rules and responsibilities of the panchayat, power of the panchayat president to visit schools, anganwadis, health center, promotion of SHGs and maintenance of registers and records etc.

Meena said that the training was held in a very conducive atmosphere with utmost participation and was very useful. Many of
the issues she had bottled up for many a day she could get clarified at the training. She said that her skills and capacity to function as an effective woman panchayat president were improved through the training programme.

Outcomes

Establishing Drinking water facilities

Six mini overhead tanks have been constructed in Punganur village panchayat through the efforts taken by Meena Shanmugam. The construction of a big overhead tank with a capacity of more than one lakh litre of water is in progress. Conflict between Scheduled Caste and non-Scheduled Caste people arose during the construction of a big overhead tank. But getting sanction for one more mini tank for the Scheduled Caste people area where only forty-one families were living solved the conflict.

Solving the Problem in Constructing Women Sanitary Complex

Two women sanitary complexes have been constructed in Punganur and Anthoniarpuram. A young advocate who belongs to a popular Scheduled Caste upliftment movement tried to forbid the construction of the women sanitary complex in Anthoniarpuram. This problem was solved with the cooperation of the same community women. Now Anthoniarpuram women are using the sanitary complex.

Provision of Housing Facilities

Twenty houses have been constructed and provided to the needy and eligible families of Scheduled Caste communities.
houses are arranged for those who have land with the help of an NGO at an estimate of Rs.1.40 lakhs per house. Meena Shanmugam took efforts to provide these housing facilities in her village panchayat.

**Development of Infrastructure in Punganur Panchayat**

A new building has been constructed for the balwadi with more space for children to play. A separate community hall has been constructed for the Scheduled Caste people. The other caste people were convinced that they needed a community hall for their meeting purposes. The community hall that was already available for other caste people was renewed. Nine cement roads to a length of 900 meters and two metal roads to a length of 1.5 kilo meters were constructed newly.

**Social Work**

Six eye camps were conducted on behalf of the village panchayat with the help of Sankaranethralaya. Sixty patients were benefited through cataract surgery in Punganur village panchayat. A diabetes camp was organized and more than 300 hundred people were benefited. Out of three hundred people, 63 were diagnosed for diabetics and were referred for further treatment. An environment awareness camp was organized in collaboration with J.J. College of Agriculture and more than 300 tree were planted. The biodata of seventy-two unemployed youths have been forwarded to the District Superintendent of Police on request. Arrangements for employment opportunities in private concerns are in progress. Financial assistance
has been arranged with the help of an NGO for eight poor students for their higher studies.

**Flood Relief**

During incessant rains in October and November 2005, Punganur was surrounded by water and the village was isolated. More than 100 buses could not proceed and were stopped in Punganur. Meena Shanmugam arranged all the facilities for the passengers who travelled in these buses and other vehicles. They were provided with food, and children were provided with milk. Each of the Punganur panchayat families gave three kg of rice to prepare food for more than 1000 people and children. Sunnambukkarapatti and Kalingangadu were also isolated. Meena Shanmugam and her team took risks and went there with 1500 food packets.

**Award for performance**

‘Paravasa Ulagam’ awarded Meena Shanmugam the best woman panchayat president award during 2003 near Salem. Mr.Krishnamoorthy, retired judge, who is currently involved in the consumer protection movement, gave away the award and praised her for her performance.
Arunadevi Ajtmadurai, President, Murugur Village Panchayat, Thuraiyur Panchayat Union

Mrs. Aruna Devi, wife of Anna Durai, aged 33 was elected President of Murugur village panchayat for a second consecutive term in 2001. Married into a politically active family, election and governance were not altogether new to her. Her in father- in- law was a Village elder and is an important functionary in a regional party of Tamil Nadu. Her husband is the Deputy Block Secretary of the same party. She herself was the Deputy Secretary of the party’s women wing.

Aruna Devi being member of one of the dominant castes with political connections and with a tradition of service to the village by the family in various capacities had earned their family a high level of respect. This background helped her to discharge her duties as President with confidence and ease.

Aruna Devi has studied up to 9th Standard and can read and write. She had an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the panchayat president and an average knowledge of the Panchayat Act and various provisions in it. Motivated by a desire to do service as well as enjoy power coupled with popular support she contested for the second term. She had a desire to improve her knowledge, capacity and functioning. She contacted other experienced presidents, elders,
officers and equipped herself. The support from her husband, family, villagers enabled her to find solutions to the long pending problem like drinking water, sanitation and drainage. But empowerment of people cannot come by mere solutions related to basic amenities. That needs better planning, co-ordination, implementation and monitoring of the 29 subjects which have a direct bearing on life in rural areas. Aruna Devi had no idea how to handle these issues.

**Opportunity Structure**

The 73rd Amendment has given women the opportunity to participate in the elections through the reservation of office. Under this provision Aruna Devi got the opportunity to contest in the elections. The standing of the family, her political connections, and her affluence gave her an opportunity to comfortably win the election. The society’s attitude towards her was not conditioned by the gender identity because of her family background. Her political connections gave her opportunity and confidence to deal with all levels of officers with ease and confidence.

**Training**

The information about the training was passed on through the Project Officer, District Rural Development Agency. Aruna Devi wanted to always improve her capacity. She felt handicapped in many of her day to day functions. Lack of authentic knowledge on the panchayat Act, rules, regulations, guidelines and government procedures was hampering her performance. She willingly participated in the training. Her thirst for performance made her an active learner and made her
make the most out of it. She was given lessons on various provisions of the Panchayat Act, guidelines of various Government programmes, effective mechanism to co-ordinate the 29 subjects indicated in the 73rd Amendment, Crisis management, co-ordination with others public representatives, working with government officials, leadership qualities and people centered approach. She understood that she has a role to play beyond mere provision and maintenance of basic amenities. The training material given in the training programme was very useful to her since she refers to it whenever she has doubts in performing her duty and asserting her power in the panchayat administration.

Outcomes

Achieved Getting Cauvery Water

The Murugur panchayat was not included as a beneficiary village under the Cauvery drinking water system. Her request was not heard at the Block level. She prepared all necessary documents including the fluoride content of the available water. She was able to convince the Executive Engineer to include her village as a beneficiary village.

Establishing the Drinking Water Facilities

An overhead tank has been constructed in Murugur village with a capacity of one lakh litres of water and provides water pipe connections to 170 homes. Arunadevi faced a serious problem in establishing the overhead tank at the place, which belonged to the Murugur temple. She solved the problem by convening a people’s committee for the development of Murugur village. Further she installed seven mini power pump schemes.
Construction of Road Facilities

Arunadevi took efforts to lay cement roads in the streets but the main road in Murugur village belongs to the Highways Department. The Highways Department had no funds for repairing the roads. She mobilized funds from the Member of Parliament Local Area Development programme and asked the Highways Department to execute the work.

Development of Infrastructure in Murugur Panchayat

A new integrated women sanitary complex with sufficient water supply was constructed and handed over to Self Help Groups for maintenance. On popular demand the old sanitary complex for women has also been repaired, renewed and made ready to use instead of struggling for a new women sanitary complex. This sanitary complex is also provided with a motorized hand pump and a mini tank and is maintained by women Self Help Groups.

Provision of death subsidy

Arunadevi set up a scheme of providing financial assistance, for cremation expenses to a family which lost its member. In this scheme, money is given as an emergency loan. The amount is to be recovered on installment basis after a month of the cremation of the dead person. This scheme has helped many eligible families in Murugur panchayat during the last four years.
Flood Relief

During incessant rains in October and November 2005, Sikkanthumpur tank in Thuraiyur Union breached due to heavy water percolation. The canal to Sikkanthumpur tank was redirected to prevent floods that were expected to destroy many villages. The water ran through the canal and entered Murugur and its nearby villages at midnight. Arunadevi and her team, with the help of volunteers, shifted all the people and placed them in the village school. More than 40 houses were destroyed. Due to the precautionary measures she saved the lives of many people before fire Service men could reach the village at 3 am. The flood took a week to drain. Arunadevi and her team arranged food for a week for more than 300 people.
Notes and References


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