Chapter 4: Effectuating Participatory Democracy and Good Governance at the Grassroots

Introduction

This chapter is organized to address the research questions that I have identified in Chapter 1 of my study. These include the following:

1. What are the tools used by the NGO to fill in the responsibility of the state, to create socially, economically and politically empowered citizens? 

2. Can non-state actors such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) successfully empower citizens?

3. What are the expectations of the NGO from the state and the funding agency?

4. What is the response of the state to the NGO and the funding agency?

5. Is the impact of such role assumption sustainable?

In the first section, I analyse the role played by civil society in empowering people at the grassroots level - at the level of the Panchayati Raj. Specifically, this chapter would study the role played by the NGO, Integrated Development Foundation (IDF), which is headquartered in Patna, Bihar and has a branch in Palamau District of Jharkhand. IDF has been working to mobilize and empower a target group of women in Palamau district to actively participate in the functioning of the Panchayati Raj. IDF uses mobilization as a social process wherein they incorporate different variables such as class, gender and social networks in empowering the target women.

1 In the context of this study, empowered citizens mean those who can demand their rights to education and universal suffrage as well as participate in future elections to the local government as candidates, campaign mobilizers and knowledgeable voters.
I begin this chapter by explaining that a centralized development model has failed in keeping its promises, especially those pertaining to distributive justice for the weaker sections. This resulted in the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments to decentralize governance to make it more effective and efficient. I then briefly summarize the efforts of the government to reserve a certain percentage, 33.33% to be precise, for women, to empower them politically and to allow them to participate fully in governance.

Next, I provide an introduction to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project titled “Capacity Building of Elected Women Representatives and Functionaries of PRIs” in Palamau district of Jharkhand. This project has been initiated by the UNDP in the year 2004 in target districts of selected states by partnering with credible NGOs in each of these states, to build the capacity of local women in order to bring them into the public sphere and make them informed and active participants in the local governance process. In Jharkhand, UNDP’s partner NGO is the Integrated Development Foundation (IDF).

I provide a brief background on IDF in terms of its history and scope as well as a brief socio-economic profile of the target area and group. After describing IDF’s intervention in Palamau district in terms of the strategies used and also include case studies to highlight their efforts, I try to answer some of the questions raised in Chapter 1, pertaining to the conditions required for an NGO to intervene successfully in a target area to achieve the desired results. Based on my discussions with the Project team of IDF in Palamau district, I also narrow down on the perceived successes and failures of the intervention and what the members of the NGO, who have been with this project since 2004, believe to be necessary conditions for successful and sustainable impact.

I then contextualize the Indian situation in regard to failure of the state to deliver on the promises made to the people in the Constitution and by using populist tactics, and the subsequent stepping in of non-state actors such as NGOs. To do this, I rely on the definition of citizenship Marshall and whether it is applicable in the Indian context. I also
bring in Oommen's and Beteille's definitions of citizenship and civil society explaining why they are more applicable to the Indian context. Finally, I bring in Sheth's explanation of why the state has failed in achieving its target of participatory politics, where individuals from diverse groups and identities have a role in decision-making that is meant to impact them positively. In this process, I develop some citizenship typologies that have been identified from the case studies in order to demonstrate how grassroots initiatives are trying successfully to develop citizenships at the micro-level, i.e. from below, since this effort has failed at the macro-level, i.e. at the level of the state.

I end this chapter with a summary of all the sections and by attempting to answer the four research questions that I had set for myself at the beginning of this study. These answers provide the setting for the final chapter.

**Women and Panchayati Raj**

Even after more than fifty years of 'planned development', the Indian government has failed on several fronts - the most obvious example being its failure to empower its citizens in the true spirit of the term. Even if one takes for granted that democracy is the best known form of government, past experience in India clearly demonstrates that the 'representatives of the people' have not been completely able to quell the numerous vested interests that arise and thwart the functioning of a democratically elected government. It is true that every organization gives rise to vested interests, be it a political party or a cooperative or even the State. What then is required is to quell this by empowering the people at the grassroots level. Only empowered people and not vested interests can make good governance for the people, of the people and by the people a reality.

Decentralization refers to the transfer of functions, finances and functionaries and the power to utilize and implement these, from a central government to local entities (HDR 134: 2003). The rationale behind decentralization is that it provides the people at the lowest or the grassroots level, the opportunity to participate in political decision-making, thereby making this a democratic process. Additionally, decentralization also
brings the government closer to the people, thereby making it more accessible and definitely, more accountable.

According to the Human Development Report 2003, in areas where decentralization has achieved some success, some positive impacts are common. These areas include Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and West Bengal in India. These include quicker response to needs of people, increased accountability and transparency and consequently, less corruption, better services delivery, improved flow of information, increased sustainability of projects, more effective conflict resolution mechanisms, feeling of collective ownership of development programmes and increased opportunities for political representation of issues and concerns (HDR 134 - 39: 2003).

For decentralization to be successful, three criteria are essential. These are the presence of an effective state capacity to decentralize and devolve power, empowered and conscientious local authorities and an aware and alert citizenry and civil society that is keen to engage with the authorities (HDR 139: 2003).

Realizing the need to empower people, the government introduced and enacted the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution, to give people the statutory right to participate in the political process and acquire the power to chart their own course of development.

When Panchayati Raj was first introduced in the year 1953, the number of women representatives was negligible. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, which was set up in 1957 to recommend better ways of functioning of the Panchayati Raj system, suggested that there should be two women in each Panchayat Samiti. These women were to be nominated (if no women were elected) by identifying whether they are interested in working amongst women and children or not. The Report of the Committee on Panchayati Raj Institutions, submitted in 1978 also recognized the role and relevance of

women in grassroots planning and decision making. It proposed the reservation of two seats for women and their cooption in cases where no woman was elected.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act initiated a unique experiment in India – that of giving one – third of total membership and chairperson of local self government to them. The provisions of Article 243 D (3) of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act 1992 states:

“Not less than one third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat, shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat. The offices of chairpersons in the Panchayats at the village or any other level shall be reserved for the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes and women in such a manner, as the legislature of a state may by law provide; provided further that not less than one-third of the total number of offices of chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women, provided also that the number of offices reserved under this clause shall be allotted by rotation to different Panchayats at each level.”

This has had a positive impact as women from various walks of life in rural India are now participating in governance. According to the Citizens’ Report on Governance & Development 2007 initiated by Social Watch India, elections to the three tiers of the Panchayati Raj system in the last fourteen years has resulted in more than 27 lakh representatives being elected to the three tiers of Panchayati Raj. The Social Watch India report states that out of this number more than 37.5% are women.

It was hoped that empowerment of marginalized sections such as women in rural India would accelerate the social development process in the country as the dream of achieving all – round empowerment of women would be remote unless they are given a share in the political space.


4 Ibid

Role of the State in Training Elected Representatives:

Following the operationalisation of the 73rd Amendment Act, it was seen that a majority of people elected to the three tiers of the PRI system were mainly first timers amongst whom a large number of persons were illiterates. In addition to the approximately three million elected representatives, there were almost one million PRI functionaries who would have to work these elected representatives.

The government realized the need to train these newcomers on the finer aspects of the Panchayati Raj system. However, at the same time, the government understood that training these huge numbers of elected members and functionaries would be a daunting challenge for which it would require the help of other organizations that have some knowledge and experience in the field of Panchayati Raj. Though many states have taken up the initiative of training PRI members, voluntary organizations have also become involved in the training process.

There have been various government initiatives to train elected representatives and PRI functionaries to build their capacity with the requisite knowledge and skill to manage the Panchayati Raj system. Some examples of state initiatives in this regard include the State Institutes of Rural Development (SIRD) with their networks of Regional Rural Development Institutes that have come up in several states. State Institutes of Rural Development also receive funding from international organizations. For example, the training programmes conducted by the SIRD in Uttar Pradesh are funded by organizations such as UNICEF.

The Indira Gandhi Panchayati Raj and Rural Development Institute in Rajasthan is another state initiative to strengthen PRI functionaries and elected representatives. Similarly, Kerala has the autonomous Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA)

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6 Capacity Building Initiatives in The State of Panchayats: A Participatory Perspective, Rai, Manoj; Nambiar, Malini; Paul, Sohini; Singh, Sangeeta U. and Sahni, Satinder S. (Eds.), Samskriti, New Delhi:2001

7 Ibid
set up by pooling contributions from all Gram Panchayats and headed normally by an Indian Administrative Services officer.

All these institutes are actively involved in training and building the capacity of Panchayat representatives and functionaries, which cover a broad range of subjects including PRI Act, funding and finance of PRIs, administrative set up and government programmes and schemes amongst others.

Role of Civil Society in Training Elected Representatives:
Civil society has an important role to play in empowering women in the grassroots to participate in local self governance. There are several examples of this in addition to the case study of the Integrated Development Foundation elaborated in this chapter. Other examples of NGOs which are working, in addition to other issues of social concern, with women in the grassroots include CENCORD in Bihar, UNNATI in Gujarat, PRIA in Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, Samarthan in Madhya Pradesh and Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra in Uttar Pradesh to name just a few.

The work of all these NGOs has aimed towards bridging the gap between women, both elected representatives and others, and the activities of the Panchayats. In the case of Jharkhand, where elections to the Panchayat have not yet been conducted, Integrated Development Foundation is attempting to raise the awareness of women about government works and programmes and their entitlements, in addition to building their capacity on the structure and functioning of the Panchayati Raj system.

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8 Capacity Building Initiatives in The State of Panchayats: A Participatory Perspective, Rai, Manoj; Nambiar, Malini; Paul, Sohini; Singh, Sangeeta U. and Sahni, Satinder S. (Eds.), Sanskarthi, New Delhi:2001

9 Ibid

10 Ibid

UNDP Project on Building Capacities of Rural Local Women in Palamau District, Jharkhand

The UNDP project "Capacity Building of Elected Women Representatives and Functionaries of PRIs" emerged from the realization that though the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution led to the decentralization process that provided the historically denied opportunity of representation of women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes at the grassroots level, such representation did not always directly translate to participation in political processes of these historically marginalized groups.

In the context of the patriarchal institutions and values that are prevalent, especially in rural societies, the sustainability of any real change in policies and priorities in local governance is a challenge recognized by all. Thus, UNDP realized the need for a concomitant process of raising awareness as to the objectives of the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution, of decentralization, of informed decision-making and participatory democracy for accountable and efficient governance.

It has been seen that representation of women in grassroots politics has not simultaneously led to their empowerment. Even today, after more than a decade of implementation of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, it is seen that women more often than not women act as proxies for the men. They are sometimes forced to contest elections by the male members of their family, families and communities themselves don't have much confidence in their women folk, which is an image that is internalized by the women and Pradhan Patis (husbands of elect women representatives) are a frequent occurrence.

All of these are a result of a combination of factors that include inadequate or lack of education of women, domination of public spaces by men, existence of traditional forms of division of labour that still places the entire onus of reproductive and productive roles

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12 IND/99/543: Capacity Building of Elected Women Representatives and Functionaries of PRIs The Next Plan of Activities

13 Ibid
on the women, lack of financial independence and control of assets and existence of entrenched religious and cultural views that don’t favour a proactive role for women in politics or in the public space in general.

Though improved participation of women in decision-making at the grassroots level is necessary, it does not always lead to a better articulation of their interests in public space. In many cases, it is seen that women belonging to marginalized communities such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are occupying public space for the first time. Thus, it is a big challenge for them to function in formal places that have been historically dominated by men.  

In addition to improved participation of women in public space, there is a need to change qualitatively the perception that women have limited capacity for public office. Such a change would enable women to play a larger role in governance of the state while at the same time sensitising the state about issues of poverty, inequality and injustice from a women’s perspective. The first step in bringing about such a social transformation can be taken at the grassroots level by bringing women into positions of power at that level. Thus, seeing this critical need to bring about gender sensitization of men and women beginning at the grassroots level, the UNDP project to build the capacity of elected women representatives and functionaries of PRIs was conceived.

**Socio-economic Profile of Palamau District, Jharkhand:**
The district of Palamau has a population of approximately 15 lakhs. Out of this, 93% lives in rural Palamau. Of the 12 Blocks in the district all, except 2, i.e. Daltonganj and Hussainabad are rural, while these two are partially urbanized. The population belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are one – fourth and one – tenth, respectively. Palamau district is characterized by a skewed sex ratio, in which there are only 929 females per 1000 males. This is worst in Daltonganj, where this ratio is 915

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14 IND/99/543: Capacity Building of Elected Women Representatives and Functionaries of PRIs The Next Plan of Activities
females per 1000 males, and better off for Lesliganj where it is 965 females per 1000 males.

The district is also characterized by a very low literacy rate of 38.08%. The literacy rate of men is around 49.79% whereas for women it is a shocking 25.47%. The district average is low in comparison with the national as well as the state averages in literacy rates. The highest rate of literacy is in Daltonganj block, whereas literacy rates are the lowest in Chattarpur Block, followed by Manatu and Panki Blocks.
Figure 1: Political Map of Palamau District
### Table 2: Palamau at a Glance

#### Basic Data Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Palamu (02), Jharkhand (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons: 2,088,359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males: 1,084,417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females: 1,013,942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural: 1,973,266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban: 25,093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Castes population: 539,701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage to total population: 25.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Literacy and Educational level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literates</th>
<th>Educational Level attained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persons: 750,293</td>
<td>Total: 750,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males: 510,338</td>
<td>Without level: 33,789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females: 239,955</td>
<td>Below primary: 206,209</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Literacy rates:**

| Persons: 44.95 | Primary: 216,865 |
| Males: 58.91 | Middle: 107,508 |
| Females: 29.88 | Matric/Higher Secondary/Diploma: 150,002 |

#### Workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workers</th>
<th>Age groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total workers: 793,658</td>
<td>0 - 4 years: 280,238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main workers: 444,921</td>
<td>5 - 14 years: 618,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal workers: 348,737</td>
<td>15 - 59 years: 1,081,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-workers: 1,004,701</td>
<td>60 years and above (incl. A.N.S.): 138,451</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Scheduled Castes (Largest three)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheduled Castes (Largest three)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bhuinya: 196,812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Chamrer etc: 145,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dusad etc: 90,241</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Religions (Largest three)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religions (Largest three)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Hindus: 1,740,948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Muslims: 242,980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Others: 63,100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Important Towns (Largest three)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important Towns (Largest three)</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Daltonganj (M): 71,422</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Hussainabad (NA): 23,441</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Latehar (NA): 19,082</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Amenities and Infrastructural facilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amenities available in villages</th>
<th>No. of villages</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drinking water facilities: 2,465</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Drinking water: 2,461</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Electricity (Power Supply): 410</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Electricity (domestic): 313</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Electricity (Agriculture): 122</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary school: 1,474</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle schools: 335</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary/Sr Secondary schools:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College: 8</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Medical facility: 349</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary Health Centre: 45</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary Health Sub-Centre: 98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post, telegraph and telephone facilities: 324</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus services: 305</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paved approach road: 581</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mud approach road: 2,271</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows clearly that the socio-economic indicators of Palamau are highly tilted in favour of males. Males outnumber the female population by a large margin almost one lakh and literacy rate for men is twice that of women and the overall literacy rates in Palamau are amongst the lowest in the state. In addition, there is a large number of marginal and non-working people in the district, which may be attributed to the fact that the district is rural in characteristic, as a result of which there would not be many opportunities for employment generation. The low level of importance given to education is inevitable in the absence of urbanization and growth and the prevalence of subsistence agriculture as the major occupation of the people of the district.

Table 3: Administrative Unit – Palamau District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Subdivision</th>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Block</th>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Circle</th>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Educational Block</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Daltonganj</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Daltonganj</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Daltonganj</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Daltonganj</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chainpur</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chainpur</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Municipal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Patan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Patan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chainpur - 1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bishrampur</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bishrampur</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chainpur - 2</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Panki</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Panki</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Patan - 1</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Lesliganj</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lesliganj</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Patan - 2</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Manatu</td>
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<td>Manatu</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bishrampur North</td>
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<td>Bishrampur South</td>
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<td>Panki East</td>
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<td>Panki West</td>
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<td>Lesliganj</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manatu</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hussainabad North</td>
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<tr>
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<td>14</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hussainabad South</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hariharganj</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chhatapur East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chhatapur West</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [http://palamu.nic.in/admin.htm](http://palamu.nic.in/admin.htm)
As is seen from Table 3, Palamau district has three sub-divisions for administrative purposes. These are Daltonganj, Hussainabad and Chattapur. While Daltonganj has 9 Blocks, Hussainabad has 2 and Chattapur has 1. Daltonganj is one of the more advanced Blocks of Palamau as it is partially urbanized, along with Hussainabad and has the highest literacy rate in Palamau, whereas Chattapur has the lowest literacy rates.

Integrated Development Foundation:
The Integrated Development Foundation (IDF) is a registered society. It was registered in the year 1993-94 under the Society's Registration Act 1860. IDF has been working in the field of social development for more than thirteen years. It has worked primarily with the most marginalized and vulnerable communities of Bihar and Jharkhand in the following areas:

- Women's Empowerment/Self Help Groups
- Reproductive & Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS
- Local Self Governance
- Population and Adolescents
- Income Generation
- Water & Sanitation and Hygiene
- Child Protection and Education
- Watershed and Livelihood

The mission statement of IDF is to: “Ensure a better quality of life to the poorest and deprived sections of the community as a whole and with special focus on the women through different sectoral intervening factors contributing to it”16

IDF works in four districts each in Bihar and in Jharkhand, working in 10 Blocks in Bihar and in 12 Blocks in Jharkhand. In Jharkhand, IDF is active in the districts of Palamau, Garwah, Chalbasa and Ranchi17.

15 Women Leaders in Local Self Governance, IDF Brochure, Vigyapan, Patna
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
In Palamau, IDF began its work in the year 1987 by beginning women self empowerment programmes by attaching them to Self Help Groups. In this way, they were able make some progress towards women’s economic and social development. However, women’s political empowerment, which is an integral component of women’s development, still remained a distant goal.

The role of Integrated Development Foundation to target and build the capacity of potential elected women representatives in Palamau district of Jharkhand came about as a result of a meeting at the United Nations Development Programme office in New Delhi 2004. The short-listed state-level NGOs from various states targeted for this project, the Secretary of Government of Jharkhand and Joint Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, were invited to discuss the strategy and role of NGOs in the project ‘Capacity Building of Elected Women Representatives and Functionaries of PRIs’. This project was agreed upon and signed between four parties: Integrated Development Foundation, United Nations Development Programme, State of Jharkhand (Secretary, Panchayati Raj) and Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

The implementation period for the project was the years 2004-2007. The project was implemented in five Blocks of Palamau district. These are Patan, Sarbarwa, Leslieganj, Chainpur, Daltonganj where work was begun in fifty - five Panchayats.

IDF had to start from the very beginning because there was very little or no knowledge about the Panchayat Raj system as a modern democratic concept and elections to Panchayati Raj in the state had not been conducted due to which there was a lack of a target group. Despite these challenges, the selection of Jharkhand as a state to implement the capacity building project and of IDF as the NGO to make the necessary interventions were approved by the Government of India and UNDP. The project was launched in June 2004 and formally ended in December 2007\(^\text{18}\).

\(^{18}\) Based on discussion with Mr. Manoj Verma, IDF, on 21 September 2007
Human Resources at Integrated Development Foundation: 19
IDF works at three levels:

1. District-level staff – there are two district-level staff
2. Block Coordinator – there is one Block Coordinator for four blocks
3. Panchayat Motivators – there are twenty-eight Panchayat Motivators at the Panchayat-level, with one motivator for two Panchayats

The Palamau District office keeps the Head Office, based in Patna, up to date with the events occurring in Palamau district as well as day to day functions, problems and possible solutions, when to drop a strategy, conceiving a new strategy and future actions, in respect of the UNDP project.

There are five blocks in Palamau district. Out of these five blocks, IDF is actively engaged in four. These are:

Table 4: Panchayats Covered by Integrated Development Foundation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Block</th>
<th>Total Panchayats</th>
<th>Number of Panchayats Covered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Patan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Daltonganj</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chainpur</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sarbarwa</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lesligenj</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>109</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>56</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on Discussion with Ms. Mini Kurup, IDF, on 22 September 2007.

There are a total of 370 SHGs, excluding Lesligenj. IDF intervenes in every SHG in every block, except Lesligenj. In Patan, there were already five Panchayat Motivators.

19 Based on discussion with Ms. Mini Kurup, IDF, on 22 September 2007
who were trained by an earlier project undertaken by UNICEF from 1997-2002, titled Convergent Community Action. Thus, around 150 SHGs already existed at the time the UNDP project began.

The motivator for each Panchayat is identified from local level staff. The criterion for selection include that they should be Inter pass. Out of the 28 Panchayat Motivators, 4 are women. They are all based in the village. They were all trained by IDF during a three-day workshop conducted in Satkar Bhawan. The trainers were mainly from IDF.

### Table 5: Target Area and Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Block</th>
<th>Total Panchayats</th>
<th>Panchayats Covered</th>
<th>Total Villages</th>
<th>Villages Covered</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Population Covered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Patan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>146899</td>
<td>111842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chainpur</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>177047</td>
<td>64823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Daltonganj</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>93612</td>
<td>70323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sarbarwa</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>51212</td>
<td>26531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lesliganj</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>79760</td>
<td>9708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>109</strong></td>
<td><strong>56</strong></td>
<td><strong>606</strong></td>
<td><strong>312</strong></td>
<td><strong>548530</strong></td>
<td><strong>283227</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Women Leaders in Local Self Governance: IDF Brochure, Vigyanpat, Patna*

Thus, IDF has covered 5 out of the 12 Blocks of Plamau district, for which it received funding from UNDP. The larger villages are divided into *tolas* (settlements). In small villages, there is 1 SHG each whereas the larger villages, which are divided into *tolas* had 4 or 5 SHGs depending on the number of *tolas*. A Panchayat covers 4 or 5 villages and consists of a population of about 5000. One Panchayat is divided into 10-12 federations or forums. So there are a total of 56 federations or forums since there are 56 Panchayats...
Characteristics of Members of the Women's Forums:

Women from the SHGs belonged to the SC/ST communities. In some cases there were women from the General Category also. Some leaders of the women’s groups were illiterate; Palamau is not the tribal belt. Tribes, especially the Cheros, are more prominent in southern Jharkhand whereas Palamau is in northern Jharkhand.

Members of the Scheduled Caste community generally belong to the lower class, but there are also a few exceptions here as some members belong to a higher class. By lower class is meant those who needed to save at least Rs. 1-2 through a SHG. Such women earn a meager Rs. 200 -300 per month. Low class occupations include labourers who work in others lands, those who migrate from the district and the state in search of better incomes. Higher classes are those who have land, those who hold government jobs, teachers, anganwadi workers, coal field area workers, those who hold private jobs in insurance companies in Delhi and Bombay as service class people.

Objectives of the Project:

The following were the objectives of the project conceived by the UNDP:

- To build the capacity of elected women representatives to influence the governance process at the level of the Panchayat and other tiers of local self governance

- To strengthen the existing networks of women in local governance and also to establish new ones in the form of institutional support mechanisms in order to create an enabling environment that would favour the articulation of women’s issues in governance.

- To strengthen research documentation and publications on women in local self governance and ensure wide dissemination to improve replication

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20 Based on discussion with Ms. Mini Kurup, March 2008
21 Women Leaders in Local Self Governance, IDF Brochure, Vidyapan, Patna
However, since till date no PRI elections have been conducted in Jharkhand, IDF laid emphasis on the following factors:

- Creating a favourable environment for the Panchayati Raj Institution in the target villages

- Building the capacity of a target group of potential elected women representatives to participate in Panchayati Raj elections in future

- Promotion of participation of women in Gram Sabha to articulate effectively their issues and concerns and

- Generating awareness of women and building their capacity to be informed about various government schemes and their entitlements vis-à-vis these schemes and projects of the government

The underlying principle behind IDF’s strategy was to generate awareness in the local community, especially amongst the women, about the Panchayati Raj system. In addition, they also spread awareness amongst the community members about the importance of encouraging women to participate and contest in elections to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

To set this process in motion, IDF identified potential women candidates. Since IDF involved male members and sensitized them about the advantages of allowing women to participate in and contest in elections, they overcame resistances of the male members of the community over a period of time.

While preparing the community for elections, IDF did not focus on whether there should be elections or not and did not try to generate debate amongst community members about the pros and cons of the Panchayati Raj as a system. Instead, IDF focused on whether
women should participate in elections should there be any in the near future and about the importance of giving women an equal chance in the electoral process.

**Tools Adopted by Integrated Development Foundation,**

The tools adopted by IDF were aimed at implementing the UNDP project to meet the target set by the development agency. However, the means by which IDF set about to achieve these goals was their own effort, aided by their knowledge of local realities and adding this to the methods, tools and strategies they employed to build capacities of local women and make them active participants in the development process. Below are described some of the tools that IDF employed to implement the goals and objectives set by UNDP:

*Forming Local Resource Groups*

Resource groups have members from diverse professions such as teachers, agricultural workers and locally influential persons. Though these resource groups are predominantly male, there are also some women members. The aim of these resource groups is to drive home the point to people about the relevance of including women in the public domain, particularly in participating in the political process and eventually contesting elections. These resource groups were used to create a favourable environment for Panchayati Raj elections and the participation of women therein.

*Information Dissemination*

Information was disseminated by printing pamphlets and pasting these on public buildings about what is Sarpanch, what is Gram Sabha etc. This method was used to generate and spread awareness about basic concepts relating to the Panchayati Raj system. These also included wall writings and paintings in every village in Palamau district. IDF initially did this on their own and later hired painters to do the same.

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22 Based on discussion with Ms. Mini Kurup and Mr. Manoj Verma, IDF on 21 and 22 September 2007 and *Women Leaders in Local Self Governance: IDF Brochure, Vigyanap, Patna*
Developing Panchayat Information Centres

IDF has developed Information Education Communication (IEC) material to help sensitize and raise the awareness in the community about the Panchayati Raj system. There are 20 Panchayat Information Centres. These will continue even after the program ends. They are Panchayat-based and not village-based.

Ms. Mini Kurup, IDF’s district-level staff member at Palamau, also mentioned that at the Information Centre, they receive daily newspapers and through this, any information about government schemes and programs. Now they broadcast information on the right to information. They used to initially broadcast information only on the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

Using Radio to Increase Awareness

IDF has used a team of professionals to prepare a CD around various themes of Panchayati Raj (using jingles, songs etc.). They presented a radio to the community, purchased air time on the local radio, informed the field workers about the time so that they could listen to short programmes about the Panchayati Raj structure and discuss the same to increase their awareness.

IDF has broadcast two series and is currently running the third one. Each series has 10 episodes. The series are broadcast on FM Daltonganj. The program is for a period of 15 minutes. Competitions are held on issues such as NREGA, RTI, child marriage and Panchayati Raj for which IDF receives responses in various forms such as postcards and plain paper. A winner who has provided the correct answer is selected from amongst the entries.

Nukkad Natak

IDF identified persons who have been members of singing and other performance troupes and formed four teams in every block except Sarbarwa. IDF trained them on performance and communication skills. They prepared a script, initially on Gram Sabha and its structure and functioning. After peoples’ awareness was generated on this issue, they...
consolidated the four teams into one team as that was easier to manage. The consolidated team was trained on issues such as NREGA, RTI, child marriage and broader issues relating to Panchayati Raj.

Mock Polling Exercise
Mock polling exercises were conducted in a few selected Panchayats in every Block during the Pre-Election Voters Awareness Campaign (PEVAC). Mock polling entails recreating an environment in which to conduct mock Panchayat elections. There were tables arranged in a room with 3 dummy 'presiding officers'. There were two separate queues for male and female voters. Before entering the booth, voters were asked to present some form of identification card. Then the voters were given the ballot papers, they cast their vote and in the end an ink mark was made on their finger nail. After the votes were cast and the ballot boxes filled, the votes were counted in front of the voters. IDF discussed in detail the cancelled votes providing reasons for their cancellation in order to minimize the cancellation of votes when the real elections take place.

As a result of the mock polling exercise, voters came to know about:

- Under what conditions their votes can be cancelled
- Importance of franchise rights
- Role of the different officials such as presiding officers at the booth
- The procedure to follow while voting such as: proper methods of casting votes, the fact that voters are not allowed to enter the booth before the start and after the end of elections, proper method of folding ballot papers, nature of assistance provided at the booth to help voters cast their votes properly

During the mock polling exercise, voters were given the opportunity to ask questions and clarify their doubts with regard to the PRI elections.

In addition to these, IDF also conducted video shows and Suchna Melas to generate awareness on these critical issues.
**Capacity Building**

IDF oriented the target group at the community-level itself through training and capacity building workshops which were 3-day, residential affairs. The target group was trained on various aspects of the Panchayati Raj. The issues that were taken up to train the women included the concept and role of women in local self governance, understanding the electoral process pertaining to Panchayati Raj election, conveying the importance of federated structure at Panchayat and Block levels, structure and functions of cluster and women’s forums, women’s rights and in depth information about NREGA and RTI

**Institution - building:**

The most important strategy used by IDF, in consonance with the project plan of UNDP, was to strengthen networks of women where they already existed, and create new one where there existed none. The idea behind these networks was the realization that women would be able to confront the social, economic and political power elite only in the form of a united group, whose aim it was to break the back of illegitimate actions of these elites, such as misuse of funds, abuse of power and toleration of social prejudices that further weaken vulnerable groups.

There were two main networks, one at the village – level, i.e. the Self Help Groups and the other being at the Block – level, i.e. the federation or forum or Sangh.

a) **Village -level: Self Help Groups**

Self Help Groups are an important point of entry as they are organized groups of women that had already realized the significance of coming together on one platform to pool resources for their economic empowerment. Importantly, IDF was able to identify the more vocal and active women, for training and capacity building purposes in this project.

b) **Block -level: Women’s forums**

These are not very structured. They are mainly groups of women who have been brought together at the Block-level:
Each forum had within 20-25 members in each – one member from each Panchayat. In some places, such as Sadbarwah, where IDF covered five out of eight Panchayats, the locals demanded that there be three representatives from each Panchayat. As a result, there were fifteen members (5 Panchayats * 3 representatives). IDF also nominated around five vocal and vibrant women from each Panchayat in the forum, thus making the average membership in each forum around 20-25.

c) District - level: No clusters or forums were formed at the district-level.

Civil Society Activism at the Grassroots level

The interventions of IDF resulted in the emergence of grassroots activism on the part of the empowered women. The activism mainly took the form of countering the might of the state where there was perceived corruption, inefficiency or callousness as displayed by the state. There was also social activism in which these women got together to prevent practices that were socially regressive and which tended to exploit women such as the lack of emphasis on educating the girl child, the practices of dowry and marrying off of young girls.

In this section, I elaborate the experiences of two women’s forums, the Jyoti Mahila Sangh and the Roshan Mahila Sangh. The reason why these two have been selected is that they are a good sample in terms of the impact of IDF’s intervention in terms of creating and strengthening women’s networks at the Block level. In both these forums, women have, after initial apprehensions, been steadily empowered in terms of their knowledge of Panchayati Raj, Right to Information, government programmes and schemes and most importantly, the relevance of coming together in these networks. The description of the experiences of these two forums below will help to understand the impact of IDF’s intervention on the local women.
**Jyoti Mahila Sangh:**

The Jyoti Mahila Sangh was formed from various SHGs on 31 January 2007 and consists of women who are members of the different self help groups that are present in Patan Block of Palamau district. There are a total of 370 self help groups in Palamau district.

The women explained how their various self-help groups were formed. In the cases where IDF field workers were responsible for forming the self help group (SHG), they suggested to the forum members to begin saving money. Initially, the forum members weren't sure why they should save any money and what would be the advantage in doing so. The IDF workers explained to them that they would be financially independent if they began to save money.

SHG members invest between Rs. 10 and Rs. 50 per month during the two meetings held every month. In some SHGs, they manage to save Rs. 20 per month and provide an interest of 3% per month to other women who require a loan and loans range from anywhere between Rs. 100-1000. These loans have to be returned within a period of 2-3 months. In another SHG formed in the year 2003, Rs. 25,000 was loaned and Rs. 3000-4000 was saved. In every SHG, every member has to deposit money at the same time. Sometimes some women leave the SHGs for various reasons including the fact that their husband has to migrate to the city for a better livelihood and domestic pressures.

**Rationale behind Forming the Jyoti Mahila Sangh:**

The women explained that the reason they formed this Forum of women drawn from various SHGs in Patan Block is to help these women go forward, for women to understand their rights in governance and their role within the Panchayati Raj structure. They are also keen to stand for elections in a more confident fashion, as empowered women who know their rights. They are keen to field two women candidates for the post of Mukhia and support them during elections. According to them, the Forum gives them a lot of strength and they are also backed by men who are supportive. After elections, whenever they occur, these women would play the role of monitoring the work of the elected representatives to ensure that they are doing their work properly.
The women explained that they were initially afraid of the administration, especially the police. However, now with the Forum behind them, they have gained confidence. They believe that they have come a long way from the days when they weren’t allowed to even sit in the Gram Sabha to the period now, when they participate in Gram Sabhas and even go up to the Gram Pradhan (who was selected by the villagers) to discuss their issues.

Knowledge about Panchayati Raj:
The members of the Jyoti Mahila Sangh displayed satisfactory knowledge about Panchayati Raj and its laws, particularly those related to elections. These include knowledge about who can stand for elections and reserved seats. They are also aware about how a Gram Sabha should be conducted, that villagers must be informed in advance about a Gram Sabha and what sort of issues must be discussed within a Gram Sabha (government programs and schemes such as IAY, NREGA, women issues etc.)

They were also of the opinion that it is fine for an illiterate woman to stand for elections as long as she is aware about her rights and the role of women within governance, i.e. the Panchayati Raj structure.

Preparation for Elections:
The members are very confident that women can win elections. The women explained that they would help their chosen candidate file the nomination papers, help during campaigning vocally and by going from village to village requesting support for the candidate, raise slogans and highlight corrupt practices of the other candidates (if any). They want to emerge as winners by being a united force against the opposing candidate.

The members also explained that when elections are announced, they will sit together and decide which member would fight from which seat – in case there is just one reserved seat and two or three Forum members who can contest. They said that this would be a necessary strategy since more than one Forum member fighting for a seat would mean that the votes would get divided and this would enhance the chance of another candidate.
winning. Therefore, the members explained that it is necessary to ensure that different members fight from different seats.

**Awareness and Understanding of Government Programmes and Schemes:**
The Forum members know about the various schemes and programs of the government such as *Indira Awas Yojana*, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan*, roads construction, construction of wells, pond, drain etc.

They are also aware about the Right to Information Act and that under it they can access government information - as a result of their membership in the Forum.

**Issues Dealt with by the Jyoti Mahila Forum:**
The Jyoti Mahila Forum has mainly dealt with social issues such as prevention of child marriage and dowry by sensitizing the parents about the rights of girls and their role in society and therefore, of the need to educate them. The members mentioned that they prefer to solve issues at the village-level itself rather than take it to the police. The daughters of the Forum members attend school. Those going to high school have been gifted a cycle, as per a government scheme.

**Success Stories of Women Empowerment through the Jyoti Mahila Sangh:**

**CASE STUDY 1: Implementing the Right to Education from Below**

As narrated by Neelam Devi, Jaipur Village, Muhulia Panchayat, Patan Block

The village School Master did not have a proper room to teach students. He used to conduct private tuitions out of a room in his house. However, the owner of the house was requesting a high amount as rent.

The women from Jyoti Mahila Sangh or forum then got together and discussed the issue with the Panchayat. They suggested that different persons can bring the required material to construct the room. Thus, the room was built.
Now, under the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, a school is under construction. The room will now be used as a meeting hall.

**CASE STUDY 2: Confronting the Contractor Lobby**

As narrated by Neelam Devi, Jaipur Village, Muhulia Panchayat, Patan Block

The contractor had taken money from the villagers to construct a road. However, the fact that he did not construct a good road and had instead, siphoned off the money, was obvious when, after one rain, the road was destroyed.

The women from Jyoti Mahila Sangh showed the contractor a sample of the material used to construct the road. He apologized and said that he would begin work on a new road.

**CASE STUDY 3: Countering an Authoritarian State for the Release of Innocent Youth**

As narrated by Salma Biwi, Mohalia Village, Mohalia Panchayat, Patan Block

Some innocent young men were mistaken for naxalites and rounded up by the local police. The Jyoti Mahila Sangh members went to the District Collector's office to request that these innocent men be released. They also wanted to suggest that the police investigate first and then decide if the men are guilty or not. Though they found it difficult to meet with the DC, when he finally met them, he assured them that he would get them released.

They also met with the SP. In the meantime, the case was lodged against the young men. The time to process the case and prove the men innocent took three months.

The men were finally released.

**CASE STUDY 4: Checking Corruption in Government Programmes and Schemes**

After having learnt about the programs and schemes being implemented by the government, around 10-20 members of Jyoti Mahila Sangh identified those areas where
the work wasn’t being done properly, and where they suspected that corrupt practices were underway.

They informed the MLA of this and he said that this must be stopped.

However, those influential persons against whom the women complained threatened to take them to court. The case is still going on. However, the women are clear that they are fighting for their rights – it is not about life or money for them. According to them, notwithstanding how much money they have to spend or the threats to their life, they will continue to fight for their rights.

**Roshan Mahila Sangh:**
The following is the summary of a focused group discussion that was underway on 22 September 2007 between the UNDP team comprising Ms. Juthika Banerjee and Ms. Renu Vinod and members of *Roshan Mahila Sangh*, a block-level Women Forum comprised of women from various SHGs in Daltonganj block.

Members from Roshan Mahila Sangh present at the focused group discussion:
1. Tanju Devi – Bakhari village, Kaudia Panchayat, Daltonganj Sadar block
2. Saraswati Devi – Bakhari village, Kaudia Panchayat, Daltonganj Sadar block,
3. Jairun Nisha – Tailyaban village, Kaudia Panchayat, Daltonganj Sadar block,
4. Rajpati Devi – Kaudia village, Kaudia Panchayat, Daltonganj Sadar block,
5. Bimla Devi – Chando village, Chando Panchayat, Chempur block

**Rationale behind Forming the Roshan Mahila Sangh:**
The women present at the discussion were part of various SHGs. Recently IDF went on a door-to-door campaign to raise awareness about the relevance of forming a women forum and to contribute a sum of money to that end. Initially, the women were skeptical of the outsiders. However, when the IDF workers explained to them that they wouldn’t take their money and go away, and that they would keep a register for the forum, containing
the database of the members, the amount invested etc., the women agreed to unite to establish a forum.

SHGs from the Kaudia Panchayat decided to form a cluster. However, they faced a lot of pressure from their families who were against their joining the cluster. This resistance was overcome by the women with active support from other potential members of the forum.

 Knowledge about Panchayati Raj, Gram Sabha and the Electoral Process:
Panchayati Raj: The members are disappointed that elections to the Panchayati Raj have not yet happened in their village. They are very keen to contest in the reserved and open seats and are confident of winning the elections as well.

The women felt that it would be in their benefit to get the Panchayat elected since they can discuss their problems in the Panchayat and they wouldn’t need to go to the block level to discuss any issue or solve every problem. Electing a Panchayat would make it easier and more convenient to do this work.

Gram Sabha: According to the women, the Gram Sabha meeting in their villages is conducted by the Panchayat Sevak. The Gram Sevak, Rajasva Karamchari and Extension Officers also attend the Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha is conducted once in six months. According to some women, they were first informed of the Gram Sabha meeting by their school-going children who would go back home and tell them. The women explained that for different programs and schemes, different persons preside over the Gram Sabha.

According to one of the members in whose village a female Gram Pradhan has been selected, if there are issues to be discussed, the Gram Pradhan disseminates this information to the rest of the village and calls for a meeting, giving information about the date, time and venue for this meeting.
Elections: With regard to the elections, Tanju Devi explained that a potential candidate’s name should be on the relevant voter’s list in order for her to contest. She also explained that their candidate cannot just contest from any seat, but, only from the concerned ward. She stated that in some places, only women belonging to the SC category can fight elections or those belonging to the ST category. Even a woman who has no membership in any women forum should be allowed to stand for elections, since that is her right as well.

The women raised some concerns with regard to reservation especially their fear that some castes may get more seats and others less. The IDF and UNDP team explained that this is the job of the government and that the government would ensure that everybody gets an equal chance by rotation.

The UNDP team explained to IDF that it would need to take specific steps to ensure that this threat perception does not lead to fights amongst the women forum members since they belong to various castes.

*Training by Integrated Development Foundation:*
The members mentioned that they were trained by IDF at *Satkar Bhawan* in 2005. As a result of the training, they are now aware about the criteria for contesting elections at the Panchayat and wards, who can contest, the population for which a Ward Member election would be held, the population for which a *Panchayat Samiti* election would be held etc. The members also explained that not only did IDF help in setting up SHGs, but, they also helped the women members realize through training that they too have rights, and can occupy the public space just as well as their male counterparts. They were also informed that they have the right to access government information on its various programs and schemes intended for the development of their villages.

*Linking the SHGs to Government Schemes and Programmes:*
Saraswati Devi explained that the women of her SHG have attended Gram Sabha meetings to raise important issues.
Success stories of women empowerment through the Roshan Mahila Sangh:

CASE STUDY 1: Demanding Information about Indira Awas Yojana

As narrated by Saraswati Devi – Bakhari village, Kaudia Panchayat, Daltonganj Sadar block

At one Gram Sabha meeting, the Sangh members asked for details about the Indira Awas Yojana being implemented in the village. However, this upset the Block Development Officer, who adopted an aggressive attitude towards the women. However, with the training received from IDF, the women were aware about their rights, including their right to get work under the IAY, which they explained to the BDO. He understood and apologized for his aggressive stance.

CASE STUDY 2: Supervising the Implementation of the NREGA

As narrated by Saraswati Devi – Bakhari village, Kaudia Panchayat, Daltonganj Sadar block

The elected representatives of the village SHG received money to implement the works under the IAY such as building a well. Other work that they have gotten done include obtaining job cards and building a well under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. SHG members supervised the implementation of the work. The SHG did this by getting the material, such as cement, for the work and also getting the human resource required to complete the work. The SHG divided the money received amongst the beneficiaries.

The SHG paid equal wages to both men and women.

CASE STUDY 3: Securing Infrastructural Facilities for the Village

Saraswati Devi – Bakhari village, Kaudia Panchayat, Daltonganj Sadar block
The work to for a PVC pipe required to be built under a government scheme had not begun despite promises. The SHG members took up the matter with the Kshetriya Panchayat member by taking him to the spot where the pipe should have been built. They demanded to know why the pipe was not yet ready.

The Kshetriya Panchayat member agreed to build the pipe. Additionally, he also got lift irrigation done and the village now has fertile fields.

Members' Learnings:
The women explained that if they become elected women representatives, they would ensure that benefits of various government programs and schemes go to the weakest and most backward. They have even raised the issue of wrong beneficiaries in the Gram Sabha whenever they felt that the wrong person has been identified for the benefits of a government program or scheme.

They were also aware about the process to be followed to avail of the benefits. For example, to obtain widow pension, one would have to ensure that the woman’s name is on the voter’s list, then take a photocopy of this, fill up the relevant form and then show all these details to the concerned government functionary. The women have availed of widow pension for 13 widows in this manner. The same method is followed to obtain the old age pension as well. The women made the entire list of IAY beneficiaries and got work done under this scheme for 18 persons from the MLA quota. They have also gotten a drinking water well constructed from a MLA funds.

They have also intervened in several social issues such as raising awareness about child marriage by getting incentives under ICDS for families that have not given away their young or adolescent children in marriage. The SHGs have also pooled money to get daughters of very poor families married off by conducting community marriages.

In addition to the above-mentioned strategies, IDF also made some special interventions to raise the awareness about the community about various government programmes and
schemes so that they can demand their entitlements in respect of these programmes and schemes. The two main programmes that they raised the community’s awareness were the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the Right to Information Act. They conducted an NREGA Rath, a RTI Rath and Suchna Mela, in addition to placing hoardings at strategic locations such as RTI Block offices and in public places.

In addition to building capacities and generating awareness at the community level, IDF also liaised with government officials in order to make them more involved and collectively responsible for the success of this project. IDF did this by conducting Block – level and district – level workshops where they invited government officials to participate and share their knowledge and experiences with the target group of women and other community members.

Challenges for IDF:
No elections and therefore, the lack of a target group: The absence of elections to the Panchayati Raj system has not only ensured that there is no system or structure related to Panchayati Raj in the village, but there is also no target group for whom IDF can provide training to build their capacity to effectuate their role as elected women representatives. As a result of uncertainty over Panchayat elections, there are chances that the momentum generated in the community is likely to weaken.

Difficult geographical terrain: The Palamau area has a difficult terrain. Additionally, the villages are scattered. Therefore, it is very difficult to gather the community for meetings and other forms of interaction.

Unsympathetic bureaucracy: Government officials are not very supportive even though IDF attempted to make some headway in this regard. There haven’t been many positive responses, a case being the lack of support from the bureaucracy to form a steering committee for the project. Thus, there is a gap between the bureaucracy and the NGO as far as project implementation goes.
There is no State Steering Committee, which was an integral part of the project as conceived by the UNDP. IDF fixed 2 or 3 meetings with the government and tried to meet Director and Secretary of the Panchayati Raj department. In the agreement between the UNDP, IDF, the Government of India and the Government of Jharkhand, there is a reference to the setting up of a State Steering Committee, there was no positive reaction from the government. The only reaction was why there should be such a committee. This matter could be looked into once the funds go directly to the government rather than the NGO (IDF).

Secondly, the government officials were not in favour of having a representative from the NGO (IDF) as a member of the steering committee. According to them, it is the duty of the government to monitor the implementation of the project. Thus, the committee must contain only government officials.

Trouble from extremists: Extremists pose a serious challenge since they threaten the potential women candidates. In such cases, IDF has to slow down its interventions. There aren’t any direct interactions between IDF and the extremists.

However, the naxalites would threaten people from the interiors who were interested in contesting elections. They even wanted IDF’s wall paintings down. This issue has been raised during the Gram Sabha. It will be a problem during the elections.

Huge turnover: There is a high turnover in terms of personnel power especially at the Project Coordinator level. The IDF team is now led by its third Project Coordinator in as many years. The reason for this is better opportunities elsewhere, outside Palamau which is the focus area. Even tying potential Project Coordinators to a one or two year contract or bond is not a good strategy since there is a great demand for specialists on community processes and the number of such specialists is less. Therefore, opportunities to leave the IDF team for greener pastures would always be there.
Major Successes of the Project:

Mr. Manoj Verma, Director, Integrated Development Foundation:
The mock polling method has worked well. People are taking an interest in this strategy to increase their understanding about the Panchayati Raj elections. Moreover, the Panchayati Raj elections are complicated. There are several candidates and there is a need to ensure that the right candidate is selected on the ballot paper. The target population, i.e. the potential women candidates who have been trained on the electoral process have gained a much better understanding of how elections work. Thus, this has been a successful confidence-building strategy.

Ms. Mini Kurup, District-level Staff Member, Integrated Development Foundation:
Capacity building, i.e. both institution building and capacity building (there is no point in forming a forum unless the capacity of its members has been built to take it forward). After joining the clusters, women are more interested in knowing about Panchayati Raj elections and the electoral process.

Major Failure of the Project:
IDF is making several interventions to increase knowledge about the Panchayati Raj system, its rules and laws, the electoral process and the significance of involving women in the political and electoral processes and eventually contesting elections. However, if elections are not conducted, it would be a major setback. As has been mentioned earlier, if training is not conducted regularly, then people, in this context, women, tend to forget what has been imparted to them. This is a possibility if the elections are not conducted, in which case, people can even lose interest in IDF’s intervention. Therefore, even though there won’t be a visible impact on the ground in terms of vocal and empowered women representatives, what could be seen is a greater understanding of the Panchayati Raj system and its structure.

In other words, training potential elected women representatives at this early stage may not yield the desired results.
Other Lessons Learnt:

Some of the other important lessons learnt include the fact that creation of institutional platforms such as self help groups, women’s clusters and women’s forums to bring women together on a single platform to voice their issues and concerns in a united manner, are effective means to ensure women’s participation in the forthcoming PRI system.

Additionally, IDF also realized that without the support of male counterparts in the community through creation of institutional set ups such as local resource groups where they can play a prominent role, ensuring women’s participation in local self governance is very difficult. With regard to the methodology used to motivate males to join the training program, Ms. Mini Kurup mentioned that IDF identified opinion leaders in every Panchayat and trained them on women and PRI. The husbands of women members of SHGs also know about the clusters, and SHGs, so IDF increased their interaction with them. In several villages, ID formed local resource groups, which had influential leaders, including males. Therefore, mobilization of male counterparts in favour of women is an imperative.

Also, during the implementation of the project, the project team got clarity on the concept and structure of Panchayati Raj. Additionally, it also learnt valuable lessons on how to liaison with the government and what relationship to develop with the government.

There were lots of changes in strategy since IDF didn’t know when elections would be held. Therefore, the action plan and focus of the team had to be flexible and shift. In the beginning, the focus was on capacity building of potential elected women representatives. Now, it is about institution building without elected women representatives, it is also about generating more awareness about government schemes and programs.

IDF is using its learnings in the other projects it implements such as the PACS program of DFID and the Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health program of the National Foundation of India.
This is the first type of contract for a project as huge as this, in the Palamau region. Therefore, this project adds value to the organization. The association with UNDP increases the credibility of IDF. This project has also helped IDF create a strong platform so that whenever elections are held, IDF would play a strong role.

If IDF were to design a similar project, then it would strengthen the whole forum approach to make people from the community understand the Panchayati Raj system and structure. Such forums would also ensure that women issues are discussed and women-to-women campaigns strengthened. The reason for prioritizing women issues is that once women become elected representatives, the issues they focus on also have a huge social component such as immunization of children, building PHCs, primary schools and widow pension apart from issues dealing with physical infrastructure. Much of the PRI budget is today tilted in favour of physical infrastructure at the expense of relevant social sector spending. However, if there are elections, IDF would change its strategy.

According to IDF, this is a huge project compared to the other two projects above-mentioned being implemented by IDF. In terms of sheer scope and reach, it is one of the best projects.

Formation of Citizenship Typologies
Marshall (1992) defines citizenship as “a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed”. In addition to this, citizenship can be fulfilled only when an individual has access to civil, political and social rights.

As we can see from the Indian case, several segments of the population, especially women and particularly those from the weaker class and status groups, and people belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are not full citizens in the sense in which Marshall defined the term. This is true even in spite of the fact that the welfare state has made provisions for the betterment of these very sections. Unfortunately, bad
planning and implementation by an inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy have resulted in these provisions not reaching the intended beneficiaries.

Thus, many vulnerable and subaltern groups have lived as subjects of the Indian state and as second class citizens vis-à-vis the elite section who are so because they inherit privileges at birth, which gains them easy access to the modern rational – legal institutions, to use Beteille's coinage (1999) such as good quality and expensive public school education and the benefits of the same.

It is pertinent to pause here to remind ourselves once again what Oommen (2005) noted about the failure of the Indian welfare state to fulfill its commitment to protect the social rights of all its citizens. Oommen (2005) pointed out that despite the best of intentions, the Indian state did not have the material resources to fulfill its citizenship duties towards all its citizens. Only those who already were privileged and therefore had access to the state and its resources truly benefited. This resulted in excluded a vast section of the Indian population from being active citizens, who could have contributed not only to the country's economy, society and polity, but also have received their due privileges from the state.

Sheth (80: 2004) blames this on the lack of sufficient emphasis for grassroots movements by the state. Instead, it is the "institutions of representation", particularly the political parties and their sustenance that fully occupies the Indian leadership. Such an attitude limits the extent to which participation of citizens is conceived. In India, particularly, participation is conceived as the contribution of citizens in elections, political parties, and pressure groups. Sheth (82: 2004) explains this as the problem of party vs. people, in which the party functionaries become more important since they have access to power. So within parties factions emerge, and each faction has one or two leaders, which makes the political party a semi-feudal set up and who commands the party commands the state and therefore the society (Ibid.).
Thus, power no longer rests with the people, who become passive as a result. It is in this context that Sheth (83: 2004) noted that between the party and the people, a bridge is created and that bridge is civil society.

The Indian situation typifies the claims made by Sheth (2004) and today we see civil society, especially NGOs, playing a bigger role in creating active citizens out of groups that have undergone marginalisation by the state. In this thesis, it comes out that the Integrated Development Foundation has played a sterling role in making women belonging to Scheduled Castes, who have been subjected to oppression at three levels at least: in the private sphere in the hands of their male counterparts, in the hands of society where they have been discriminated at two levels, one, as a result of the subjugation and stereotypes they faced in their homes being extended, and as members of the traditionally stigmatized Scheduled Caste group and finally in the hands of the state that chose to ignore them at the expense of the better off sections within their community, and by believing that a weak and passive group of women would never have the courage to stand up against the might of the state.

Women are crucial to the development process in any region. This holds true when the region under consideration is a rural one. Women contribute largely to the rural economy, whose base is agriculture. However, despite the efforts of the government to empower them politically, economically and socially, their lifestyle in many cases, continues to reflect their situation at the time of and before independence – that of low income, inadequate access to health facilities, education, political participation and general economic, social and political empowerment. Even where women have come forward to join active politics at the grassroots level, it is mainly women who have political connections that get to avail of the required opportunities23.

Though the government has played an important role by providing statutory empowerment of women, this can become a reality only when special constitutional

provisions and laws are supplemented by creating a favourable environment for women’s participation in the political process. Rural India is characterized by male-dominated power structures, social prejudices that uphold the social and economic subjugation of women, lack of education and a myriad other obstacles to a woman’s holistic development.

Thus, the efforts of the state have to be supplemented by those of individuals and organizations who have a wider acceptance within the local community, who have a better understanding of local realities and a genuine commitment to the empowerment of the people who inhabit these communities.

Rural women, for example, suffer from centuries of suppression that require the special efforts of these individuals and organizations to encourage them to come forward and occupy the public space to play a larger role in society. Such encouragement encompasses a variety of issues, which include helping women overcome the awkwardness they feel in sitting with and discuss political and development issues with their male counterparts to encouraging oppressed caste women to participate in Gram Sabha with people from general categories. Women also need to be convinced that simply by participating in politics, they cannot be accused of neglecting their household duties. Rather, their political empowerment would contribute to their social and economic empowerment and that of their families, and in this process, help their families lead more fulfilled lives.

It is in this context that the role of NGOs in India needs to be viewed. It requires volunteer efforts that are supported by credible funding agencies and positive backing by the government to encourage traditionally suppressed sections of society such as rural women to come forward to assume larger responsibilities. As is seen from the case study, NGOs have been playing an active role in creating a favourable environment for women’s participation in the political process. This also includes their work to draw women from marginalized sections such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as well as from marginalized regions in rural India into the governance process in not just a
participatory capacity, but also a decision-making one. It is no wonder that international
donors are also queuing up to aid these NGOs, many of whom are starved of funds, to
promote Indian women’s political empowerment.

The work of NGOs such as IDF to mobilize the community would indeed go a long way
in pressurizing the government to govern from below rather than from a centralized unit
at the state or central level. As was seen in the preceding pages, IDF has not limited its
training and capacity building activities on PRIs to workshops and awareness campaigns.
It has also tried to make the women more involved and collective stakeholders of the
local self governance process while simultaneously sensitising their men folk as well, to
encourage more and more women come forward and assume larger responsibilities in
public life.

Certain citizen typologies emerge from this case study of IDF’s intervention in Palamau
district. These may be divided into citizenship typologies that are formed on the basis of:

1. Status group
2. Class
3. Caste

Citizen typology based on status group: Though Weber agreed with Marx on the
fundamentals of class, however, in his essay titled “Class, Status, Power”, he notes that
stratification is essentially a function of group formation in which certain conditions exist
that bring people together into solidarity groups. So, in addition to class, there existed
two more bases for group formations and divisions in society: status and power.

Weber defined status groups as communities whose situation in society is determined by
a “social estimation of honour” in which the high prestige does not necessarily belong to
the group that is the wealthiest or vice versa. Whereas class refers to the unequal
distribution of economic rewards, status refers to the unequal distribution of “social
honour”. Examples of status groups are those formed by race, gender, caste and religion
amongst others. For Weber, status groups can be seen in their most crystallised form in
the traditional caste system of Hindu society in India where castes and sub-castes are divided as per social honour. Weber also sees status distinctions as a basis for the formation of groups in class societies.

How can the target group in Palamau be categorized as a citizen typology that was formed on the basis of a status group? Simply by virtue of the fact that the core groups formed to participate in the future local governance process as empowered and informed citizens were formed on the basis of the identity of members as women. The core groups were mainly the SHGs at the village level, the clusters at the Block level and the forum at the Panchayat level. While the SHGs were used to bring women together with the primary purpose of saving a minimum amount from their meagre wages, they were also used as a platform to identify the more vocal and active women, who could be trained and whose capacity built to play a more active role in local politics. Moreover, the identified women were made members of the clusters at the Block level and in the Forum at the Panchayat level so that they can represent the issues and concerns of their village and Block at the higher levels in an informed manner.

Citizen typology based on class: Marx outlines in "The Communist Manifesto" that class comprises of a collectivity of individuals who perform the same type of function in the capitalist society.

For Marx, class was not determined by the occupation or the income of an individual but the position he or she occupies and the function he or she performance in the production process. It is significant to note that the ruling class gains at the expense of the working or subject class and this results in a conflict of interest between them. It is important also to highlight here that in Marx’s opinion, class consciousness is an important factor for the future of class, as it brings amongst members an awareness of shared interest and the realization that they need to support other struggling classes against the ruling classes.

In a the case of Palamau, the most fundamental grouping of women began in the form of SHGs, where women who could be classified as belonging to the “subject class”, by
virute of them being landless labourers, earning a paltry sum of approximately Rs. 200—
Rs. 300 per month were brought together to save a minimum amount, of even Rs. 1 or
Rs. 2 on a monthly basis. Thus, the basis of the formation of these women into a SHG
was not only the fact that they were women, but equally important was the criterion that
they should be willing to save at least Rs. 1 to Rs. 2 per month in order to accumulate
some savings. Clearly, these were women who could be categorised as not only earning
meagre amounts but also usually as landless labourers, and those whose family members
have migrated to other areas, outside the district, in search of a better occupation.

Citizen typology based on caste: Mention may also be made here of the concept of
‘Sanskritisation’ developed by M. N. Srinivas, who is his work “Caste in Modern India”
denoted the process by which the lower castes attempt to imitate the lifestyles of the
upper castes in order to raise their social status. Thus, it is a process of upward mobility,
of a long—term duration, since a caste group cannot increase its position in a year or two,
but within one or two generations. Some of the factors relevant to Sanskritisation include
the acquisition of political power by a lower caste group, education, leadership and a
desire for social and economic mobility. According to Srinivas, Sanskritisation can be
understood as a protest against the caste system which has provided a low ascribed status.
It results in disillusionment amongst those who are considered to be the lower caste
groups and thus want to go up the caste hierarchy, thereby going against the very
principle of the caste system.

The SHGs were formed mainly from women who belonged to the Scheduled Caste and
Scheduled Tribe communities of the region, though a few SHGs incorporated women
from the General Category as well. Palamau not being a tribal belt, the SHGs were
dominated by women belonging to the SC community. Therefore, it may not be
unrealistic to presume that empowerment for these women was not just a means to get
access to power through active political participation, but also in terms of standing up to
the might of the upper castes who have traditionally held sway over the others in terms of
occupying all the important posts, as is common practice in rural areas all over the
country. Though the Palamau case study might not exactly conform to the definition of Sanskritisation in terms of attempting to attain a higher ritual status, one does witness a coming together for the sake of empowerment, of women of lower classes and "lower" castes.

Summary
It is seen clearly that IDF empowered the women of Palamau district in three important senses: in the economic sense, these women, who were dependent on subsistence agriculture and who had very little or no control over the conditions in which they would work, were brought together in the first stage, i.e. into Self Help Groups, where they could collectively save at least Re. 1 or Rs. 2, per month and use it for joint and/or individual purposes by means of collective decision-making.

In the social sense, women belonging to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes formed the weakest and most vulnerable section of Palamau society. They faced prejudicial and unfair treatment both in their homes and in the public sphere. By bringing women together into SHGs at the village level and Sanghs or forums at the Block level (formed by representatives of SHGs from each village in the Block and some more women who were nominated to become members), these women were trained to and realized the advantages of being a united force to target social injustices and women's issues such as the practice of dowry and giving away girls in marriage at a young age, to malpractices in government works and corrupt contractors.

In the political sense, these women had very little or no voice in the decision-making process, neither in the home nor in the public domain, by virtue of the prejudices in the home spilling over into the public and political domain. Thus, women's forums not only comprised of women trained on issues of Panchayati Raj, Right to Information and various government schemes, but these forums could act as pressure groups not only to dispense justice locally, as is seen in the case of the women confronting the police to secure the release of innocent local youth suspected of naxal links, but also in their watchdog roles of monitoring corruption in government programmes and schemes.
Though Panchayati Raj elections have not yet been conducted in the state, IDF officials believe that sustained training and orientation of these women can result in them acting as pressure groups, which demand that the speedy implementation of the Panchayati Raj elections. For now, the women’s groups focus on women’s issues and the economic, social and political empowerment of women.

There are several examples of successful initiatives of NGOs in various parts of the country where these NGOs have partnered with the government and funding agencies, or with the local people and the government, to effectuate sustainable development at the village level (NHDR 129: 2001). An important consequence of such initiatives is the feeling of “ownership” and “responsibility” towards development paths that would not have been possible otherwise. It is no wonder then that public policy experts agree that the problems of chronic poverty and ignorance can be met by decentralizing the process of governance, which includes the active participation of the locals and voluntary organizations such as NGOs with the government. Funding agencies can also play a crucial role here by managing the resource crunch effectively and setting in place effective monitoring and evaluating infrastructure to ensure a greater degree of effectiveness of such projects.