

SUGRAMA – GRAMA PANCHAYAT CHUNAYITHA MAHILA PRATHINIDHIGALA SANGHA – KARNATAKA

BRIEF ACCOUNT OF ACTIVITIES DURING THE PERIOD

AUGUST TO DECEMBER 2013



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ACCOUNT FOR ACTIVITIES DURING THE PERIOD AUGUST TO DECEMBER 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUGRAMA – Grama Panchayat Chunayitha Mahila Prathinidhigala Sangha – Karnataka is a federation representing the rights and interests of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) of Grama Panchayats of Karnataka. SUGRAMA is a collective platform wherein women representatives advocate and lobby with the government for better policies of the Government.

The period August – December 2013 have been very fruitful to SUGRAMA. SUGRAMA was successful in conducting two major events – one in Bangalore and the other in Tumkur. Following were the activities conducted during this period:

1. Interaction Meeting between APWLD and Philippine delegates between December 10 and 12, 2013
2. Workshop on awareness on electricity bills and enable SUGRAMA to advocate on issues pertaining to electricity bills of Grama Panchayats – November 29, 2013
3. SUGRAMA members actively participated in the 16-day campaign between November 25 and December 10, 2013
4. Press meet conducted on December 11, 2013 as part of VAW campaign and introduction of Philippine and Thailand delegates

SUGRAMA also found a niche at the state level in the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department, Government of Karnataka. An article on SUGRAMA has been published in December 2013 the journal of the department – Karnataka Vikasa. The journal is being sent to all the GPs in Karnataka by the Department. This is a great success for SUGRAMA as this shall mean that it shall have more impetus to widen its horizons in other taluks and districts.

Renewals of membership are in progress. While some members have been successful in getting their memberships renewed on time on a yearly basis, some still lag behind. But the major respite has been the transfer of membership fees. During this period, an amount of Rs. 36,635/- (*50% membership fees of 16 taluks*) was transferred to the state level.

The success of SUGRAMA has been widespread. The members have been successful in garnering support from their fellow members – both men and women in resolving issues of the Grama Panchayats. The members not only were successful in resolving the issue of non payment of honorarium and sitting fees in some GPs (self interest) but solved community related issues. Today, SUGRAMA has found a niche at the taluk, district and state level government departments.

PROGRAMMATIC ACTIVITIES:

STATE LEVEL ACTIVITIES:

Interaction meeting with Philippine and Thailand Delegation:

In the month of December, state SUGRAMA conducted an interaction meeting with the visiting 4-member delegation from Philippines and Thailand to meet SUGRAMA members. The visit was an outcome of the visit by the Director and Steering Committee member to Kathmandu to attend the 3-day training programme conducted by Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), Thailand.

The success of SUGRAMA was shared widely at the training programme. This resulted in discussions on the possibilities of exchange programme between Thailand and India. This yielded results and under the aegis of APWLD, 3 delegates from Philippines along with the Programme Officer of APWLD visited Bangalore between December 10 and 12, 2013.

The objectives of the visit were:

- 1) To share experiences among women local council leaders on the following factors and aspects of women's participation in politics and governance:
 - a. obstacles and challenges met in increasing women's roles in various levels of decision-making
 - b. strategies and methods, especially in women's movement-building, employed by women in overcoming and confronting these challenges
- 2) To establish and strengthen cooperation of women in politics and governance
- 3) To harness the mutual support, cooperation and linkages of elected women local council leaders to address the issues of women and their communities.
- 4) Introduction and promotion of feminist perspectives and agenda in political processes through the sharing of experiences and strategies.
- 5) Establishing the commonalities of women's issues in different countries and initiate relations between women leaders between these two countries for continuous collaboration and response to emerging issues between and in the two countries.

The 3-day visit of the delegates started with a field visit to Chamarajanagar on December 10, 2013, interactions with SUGRAMA Steering Committee members on December 11, 2013 and interactions with academician and activist working on rural and urban governance respectively.

The first day of the three day visit of the delegation was a field visit to Chamarajanagar to interact with members of Gundlupet and Chamarajanagar taluk SUGRAMA members. The day also coincided to end the 16-day campaign on Violence against Women. Organization for the Development

of People (ODP) had organized a district level programme at Chamarajanagar to conclude the 16-day campaign carried out between November 25 and December 10.

A press meet was conducted on the second day followed by the interactions of the delegates with SUGRAMA Steering Committee members.

The third day resumed with interactions with the SUGRAMA Steering Committee members. Post lunch session saw a presentation on rural governance by Dr. N. Shivanna, Professor, Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore followed by a presentation on urban governance by Ms. Kathyayini Chamaraj, Executive Trustee, CIVIC, Bangalore.

The expenses of the three day visit of the delegates were borne by APWLD. Further, SUGRAMA was paid \$350 for logistical arrangements.

Press meet at Bangalore – December 11, 2013

SUGRAMA conducted a Press Meet on December 11, 2013 to submit the demands of SUGRAMA upon the completion of the 16-day campaign. The press meet was also held to introduce the visiting delegates from Philippines and Thailand.

The press meet was well received. About 15 press persons attended the press meet. SUGRAMA presented the following demands at the press meet:

1. There is an urgent need to **appoint Protection Officers and Child Marriage Prohibition Officers** as per Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 and Child Marriage Prohibition Act 2006 at the taluk level.
2. Cases pertaining to Domestic Violence/Violence against Women needs to be **addressed within 2 months**.
3. Ensure **Sexual Harassment complaints committee** is set up at the G P level as mandated under Vishaka Judgment of Supreme Court of India.
4. There is a need to **sensitize police personnel** on gender aspects and women's rights against exploitation.
5. Ensure that state Government opens a **toll-free help line for Panchayat women at the district & taluk levels** to attend to emergent needs (adverse or otherwise) of elected women functionaries of PRIs in terms of police assistance, information dissemination, legal assistance, counseling etc., with a view to strengthen women's participation in local governance.
6. Implementation of the **Women's Component Plan** through Panchayats. There is also a need to ensure that **Gender Budget Cells** are set up in the Government departments at the taluk and district levels.
7. Provide for **stringent provisions in law to deal with those committing violence against women candidates** during and after elections.
8. There is an urgent need for **Legal awareness and Educational Programmes** for women on their rights. Men and children to be sensitized on women's human rights to enable a gender just Karnataka.
9. Make **State Women's Commission** more approachable for women from rural areas by appointing member representatives at the taluk/district level. There is also a need to ensure that the Commission fulfills its mandate through proper mechanisms and policies as mandated under Karnataka State Commission for Women Act 1995.

10. Ensure **separate toilets** for women in Grama Panchayat offices across the state.
11. There is a need to **set up a monitoring group at the taluk level** which shall comprise of representatives of civil society organizations, women's groups and panchayat members to address issues of women.
12. Ensure automatic disqualification of **Members of Parliament and Legislative Assembly** who is found guilty of sexual offences by trial courts.

The visiting dignitaries were also introduced with the purpose of their visit. The press personnel interacted with the women council leaders about the structure in Philippines and Thailand. The press meet was also covered in Deccan Herald dated December 13, 2013 and in the local Kannada news channel.

ACTIVITIES AT THE TALUK LEVEL:

Workshop on awareness on Electricity Bills to Grama Panchayat members and officials – November 29, 2013

In the month of October 2013, CIVIC, Bangalore had organized a workshop on awareness generation on electricity in Bangalore. SUGRAMA was represented by Director and 5 taluk members at the workshop. Discussions were held on the 60% deduction in the Grama Panchayat grants for paying of GP electricity bills. This needed detailed discussions with the officials of the department. Further, CIVIC approached SUGRAMA to convene a one day workshop at taluk level, wherein the officials of the department (BESCOM) shall be invited for discussions with Grama Panchayat members and officials.

Accordingly, SUGRAMA in collaboration with CIVIC conducted a workshop on November 29, 2013 at Koratagere, Tumkur. The workshop was primarily to create awareness amongst the representatives and Grama Panchayat officials on the electricity bills. The workshop saw fruitful interactions between the officials/representatives of the Grama Panchayats and that of BESCOM.

VAW Campaign:

Violence against women is a consequence of discrimination against women, in law and also in practice, and of persisting inequalities between men and women. Violence against women continues to be a global pandemic. Up to 70 per cent of women experience violence in their lifetime.

Women's activists have marked 25 November as a day against violence since 1981. This date came from the brutal assassination in 1960, of the three Mirabal sisters, political activists in the Dominican Republic, on orders of Dominican ruler Rafael Trujillo (1930-1961).

"I welcome the chorus of voices calling for an end to the violence that affects an estimated one in three women in her lifetime. I applaud leaders who are helping to enact and enforce laws and change mindsets. And I pay tribute to all those heroes around the world who help victims to heal and to become agents of change ."

Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary General

The Hunger Project has been conducting programmes at the district/taluk level to mark the 16-day campaign on Violence against Women. This year too, The Hunger Project, Karnataka organized the 16-day campaign on Violence against Women through its partner organizations.

SUGRAMA members representing their districts and taluks actively participated in the programmes. Some of the activities conducted during the campaign were:

1. Interaction meets with officials of Women and Child Development Department, Santhwana – Counseling centers, advocates and activists
2. Jatha at the taluk level with women EWRs, SHG members and school children
3. Cycle Rally by school children
4. Vehicle campaign with participation of EWRs, SHG members and school children
5. Submission of memorandum
6. Signature Campaign
7. Press meets at the district level
8. District level interaction meeting to conclude the 16-day campaign
9. Distribution of posters and pamphlets/handouts
10. Slogans

The 16-day campaign started with press meets at the district level. SUGRAMA members took active lead in spearheading the programme towards success. The members brought in interest amongst the SHG members also to participate and involve in bringing a change in the lives of women through awareness on the need to curb violence against women.

The Director also attended the programmes of ASEDA, ODP, SUMANA, SAMARASA and Kolar and participated in the VAW campaigns conducted in 6 Grama Panchayats, 1 taluk programme and 1 district level programme by the partner organizations.

Demanding Accountability and Promoting Good Governance:

The taluk federation members of SUGRAMA apart from conducting the above programmes undertook other initiatives at the taluk level. These initiatives had an impact in the functioning of the local self government and resulted in great visibility to SUGRAMA.

Following have been the initiatives/activities of the members of taluk level:

- Members of Aurad Taluk were successful in removing two PDOs of their GPs as he was remaining absent to his duties. The case was brought to the notice of CEO and thus was successful. Besides, they are also advocating on nonpayment of honorarium and conducting of monthly meetings. Members of Bidar taluk have got support from all members of the taluk to resolve the issue of harassment meted out to two members of the taluk.
- Members of Hunsur taluk were successful in banning sale of arrack completely in their village. The taluks - Tarikere, Koppa, H.D. Kote and Madhugiri also followed suit in banning sale of arrack in their GPs/villages.

- Members of Gauribidanur taluk were successful in seeking government intervention for the tragic death of a child who had fallen in the boiling curry vessel in D.K. Palya, Gauribidanur taluk. The local administration immediately took action and compensatory benefits were given to the aggrieved parents.
- Members of Gauribidanur taluk were successful in resolving the issue of domestic violence meted out to a woman by her husband and in-laws. Counseling was done to the couple but they parted ways. The woman is now living independently and has got a job for her living.
- Members of Pandavapura taluk submitted a memorandum to their MLA seeking his intervention in resolving issues such as nonpayment of honorarium, sitting fees, conducting monthly meetings, delay in reimbursement of bills, etc.
- The members of Somawarapet taluk participated actively in the Jagruthi Vedike meetings conducted at Kodlipete and Tholur Settihalli during the month and discussed about MGNREGA, VAW, PDS, Grama Sabha, Ward Sabhas and participation of women in G/S and W/S, etc.
- The SUGRAMA members of 11 blocks of ODP area and 8 blocks of ASED A undertook letter campaigns to seek releasing of honorarium and sitting fees of members. Members of some GPs of Gundlupet and K.R. Nagar were successful in obtaining their honorarium and sitting fees.
- The members are also constantly submitting letters regarding the issues of the community follow it up and review in their next meetings. This way, this has found that they can resolve their issues. While some have found resolutions, some are still in the loop.
- Members of Udupi, Mangalore and Bantwala have been conducting monthly meetings of SUGRAMA at the Grama Panchayat Level.
- They have also looked at programmes such as 'Aati Koota' 'Vanamahotsava' and other programmes and highlighted the need for special nutritional programmes of such type to give attention to malnutrition of children.
- Members of SUGRAMA have also participated actively in the Parliamentary programmes in their respective districts. The event was also utilized to submit memorandums to the MLAs.
- SUGRAMA members took active participation in the mass awareness programmes conducted by partner organizations related to malnutrition.
- SUGRAMA members took keen interest in enrolling school drop outs back to schools.
- SUGRAMA members of Chickballapur taluk were successful in stalling the intent of GP secretary/PDO in selecting beneficiaries under housing scheme in the GP meetings. The selection was later done in the Grama Sabha.
- SUGRAMA members of Kadur taluk were successful in bringing to light the malpractices of the officials in implementation of the schemes of the Government.
- The members are also advocating towards taking action on NREGA ombudsman who also was part of the misappropriation of funds under NREGA scheme.
- The members of Shidlaghatta made a surprise visit to a PDS outlet and seeing the discrepancies in distribution of provisions, demanded proper distribution. This garnered the support of women from the neighboring villages who also vent in their anger. The officials promised to resolve the issue immediately.

RAISING THE ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE OF SUGRAMA:

In order to increase the visibility of SUGRAMA and also to build alliances with other network organizations and NGOs, SUGRAMA members including the President and the Director attended meetings of other network organizations and NGOs. Some of the meetings attended are as follows:

- a. People's Participation in Good Governance by CIVIC, Bangalore on September 2, 2013
- b. Food Security and its implications by University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore – September and October 2013

INTERACTION WITH MINISTER, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND PANCHAYAT RAJ DEPARTMENT, GOVERNMENT OF KARNATAKA:

SUGRAMA represented by Director, President and SC Member Mani and taluk members along with Ms. Yamuna, Ms. Shilpa and Ms. Sowbhagya participated in the Seminar on **'People's Participation for Good Governance'** organized by CIVIC, Bangalore. Shri. H.K. Patil, Minister, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department, Government of Karnataka, presided over the meeting. The members interacted with the RDPR minister in the open discussion and later met him at the meeting. The Minister was introduced to SUGRAMA and its activities. The Minister applauded SUGRAMA for working towards bringing in good governance. He added that he would also want to interact with other SUGRAMA members too at Vidhana Soudha, Bangalore.

VISITS TO TALUKS

The President, Renuka and the members have been making occasional visits to taluks to attend the meetings of the Partner Organisation. In addition to attending these meetings, they have also successfully organized meetings of SUGRAMA at the taluk level. During this period, the Director visited 10 taluks and attended the meetings organized by the partner organizations. Besides, she also participated in 6 Grama Panchayats, 1 taluk programme and 1 district level meet as part of the 16-day campaign on VAW. Further, she also participated in the Parliamentary Programmes of ODP and ASEDA at Mandya and Koratagere taluk on September 17, 2013 and October 28, 2013 respectively.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS:

During the period, though Steering Committee meeting was not held, yet the Steering Committee members participated in the interaction meeting between the Philippine and Thailand delegation in the month of December 2013.

TALUK LEVEL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

During the taluk level meetings conducted by SUGRAMA and the programmes of the partner organizations, it was found that not all office bearers of the taluk level federations were participating in the programmes. Either they were found to be absent continuously or paying no attention to their duties. Hence, it was decided that such office bearers who remained inactive pave way for active members. In this manner, changes were made in taluks of Kolar, Bangarapet, Shidlaghatta, Hunsur, H.D. Kote, Bidar, Basavakalyana and Aurad.

SUSTAINABILITY OF SUGRAMA

SUGRAMA has been making efforts to obtain financial assistance from other donors apart from The Hunger Project and its membership. In this regard, a meeting was conducted with Ms. Nisha Purushotam, Founder and Principal Consultant, Think Strategic who gave us major insights on raising funds from corporate and individuals.

NETWORKING WITH ORGANISATIONS:

SUGRAMA has been able to engage with other civil society organisations in realizing its goals and objectives. SUGRAMA has networked with several organisations over the period. During this period, SUGRAMA networked with CIVIC, Bangalore, to undertake a workshop to raise awareness on electricity bills of the Grama Panchayats. The workshop threw more light on the increasing bills and the efforts to be made to reduce the bills.

Further, during this period, ITforChange, a NGO working for bringing in information technology in the field of governance visited the office and interacted for possible network with SUGRAMA. Ms. Nandini from ITforChange interacted with Justin and Padmini regarding their interest to collaborate with SUGRAMA for their project being undertaken in Mysore.

FINANCIAL STATUS OF SUGRAMA:

During the period, SUGRAMA continued its activities through the funds obtained from The Hunger Project. In the process of funding support to SUGRAMA, due to technical difficulties between The Hunger Project and SUGRAMA especially due to non-availability of FCRA by SUGRAMA, it was decided that the funds shall be reverted to The Hunger Project office, Karnataka and The Hunger Project shall continue to support SUGRAMA to continue its activities. The Director shall henceforth be paid directly by The Hunger Project and shall be designated as THP – Consultant in charge of the activities of SUGRAMA.

AUDIT OF ACCOUNTS

M. S. Kamath and Associates, a Chartered Accountant firm was commissioned to audit the accounts of SUGRAMA State Federation. The accounts of financial year 2012 – 2013 have been audited. Based on the requirements of the Registrar's office, a 'NIL' report for the period 2009-10 was also

prepared and signed accordingly by the office bearers, Director and the Auditor. The report was sought as SUGRAMA was registered on March 19, 2010, the financial year for the period 2009-10.

CONTRACT BETWEEN APWLD AND SUGRAMA

SUGRAMA entered into an agreement with Asia Pacific Forum for Women, Law and Development (APWLD), Thailand to facilitate an exposure visit for women members of Parliament. The agreement facilitated the visit of 2 women local council leaders from the Philippines, 1 representative of the Integrated Gender and Development Division of Davao City and 1 APWLD staff to Bangalore, Karnataka. APWLD in addition to bearing the costs of the visit of the delegation in Bangalore also paid **USD 350** to cover coordination costs and any direct costs incurred by SUGRAMA while making the arrangements for the delegation visit between December 10 and 12, 2013.

RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP – REVENUE RAISING

This has been the backbone of SUGRAMA considering its financial sustainability. Being a membership based organization; renewal of membership was the prime activity of SUGRAMA. Besides, SUGRAMA also looked at new memberships in the taluks.

Membership renewals: Renewals of membership is in progress. The taluks - Chickballapur, Gauribidanur, Koppal, Somawarapet, Virajpet, Hunsur, Periyapatna and K.R. Nagara under membership drive and were successful in collecting membership fees.

Membership transfers to State: The 50% membership fees of the taluks are being transferred to the state level.

CHALLENGES

- Revenue raising especially renewals has been challenging. Members have been trying to defer their payments and the office bearers are not effective in collecting membership renewals. Instead, they are mostly looking at new members.
- SUGRAMA found it challenging to conduct an interaction meeting between Philippine and Thailand delegation with that of SUGRAMA members at the state level. This brought a new facet to SUGRAMA, as its success has widespread.
- Communication and coordination between the state and taluk level has been challenging. Though the newsletter serves as a media for members to voice their concerns, there has been a considerable delay by the members (including SC members) in sending in their reports.
- Though women members reiterate the need for collective platform, yet with their dual responsibilities at home and politics as well as agriculture, they have been finding it difficult to lend more space and time for SUGRAMA. Hence, there is lack of participation.
- SUGRAMA finds it challenging to keep up the pace of continuity in Gulbarga. Efforts are on to look at a partnership with MSK for organizing meetings of SUGRAMA in Gulbarga and Bijapur.

LEARNINGS

- Regular advocacy at the state level is necessary to keep SUGRAMA visible.
- Regular taluk federation meetings and steering committee meetings are necessary to keep members motivated and action oriented.
- Building linkages with CBOs, NGOs and government officials were deterrent to keep SUGRAMA visible.
- Effective participation of SC members especially office bearers is vital for the smooth functioning of SUGRAMA, though they are experienced to undertake it, their dual role and increased responsibilities at home have hampered their effective functioning. This needs to be counseled to get their effective participation. Attitudinal changes of members through interactions will help in their effective participation.

WAY FORWARD:

- Sustaining the finances of SUGRAMA by obtaining funds and grants from other sources & Government agencies
- Advocacy and Lobbying - supporting members thus being change agents
- Advocate with the Government for implementation of 50% reservation to women in Grama Panchayat elections slated to be held in 2015
- Exposure visit of EWRs within the state and outside, to facilitate cross-learning.
- Ensure smooth flow of information from Taluk federation to state and state to taluk
- Conducting jathas and other programmes at the taluk level to keep the momentum of SUGRAMA members and make SUGRAMA visible across all platforms.
- Spearhead the members to face elections to Grama Panchayats in 2015.

GLIMPSES OF THE PROGRAMMES:



SUGRAMA MEMBERS IN PRESS:

Sexual harassment complaints panel sought at Gram Panchayat level

BANGALORE, DHNS: Sugrama Grama Panchayat Churnayitha Mahila Pratinidhi-gala Sangha, a committee of elected women members of Gram Panchayats (GP) in Karnataka, has stressed the need to set up a sexual harassment complaints committee at the GP level.

Accompanied by four foreign delegates from Thailand and the Philippines, representatives from Sugrama on Wednesday spoke about measures that need to be taken by the State considering the increasing number of incidences of violence against women.

Addressing reporters here at a press conference, Padmini Ananth, director of the committee, said that: "The complaint committee needs to be set up at the GP level as mandated under the Vishakha judgement of Supreme Court of India, but the State government is yet to do it. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had talked

about setting up fast-track courts to tackle atrocities faced by women, but the concept is yet to come into existence. Counselling centres and helplines set up for women are also inefficient in serving their purpose."

Members of the committee maintained that they carried out protests, awareness rallies and signature campaigns at various districts in the last two weeks to draw the attention of the government.

"We have around 3,600 elected women members and have formed 51 taluk associations in 17 districts. We will continue to intensify our struggle to provide justice for women in the coming days," Diyana Yaha, a staff member from Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, Thailand, said. There is a need for strong pieces of legislation and laws to curb issues of women, not just in India but in other Asian countries also, she added.



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