

SUGRAMA – GRAMA PANCHAYAT CHUNAYITHA MAHILA PRATHINIDHIGALA SANGHA – KARNATAKA

CLOSING REPORT

Swedish
Association of Local
Authorities and
Regions, Sweden



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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	4
SUGRAMA – AN INTRODUCTION.....	4
PROJECT CONTEXT.....	5
ACCOUNT FOR ACTIVITIES.....	6
ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AT STATE/TALUK LEVEL.....	6
Interaction meet with Government Officials:.....	6
Interaction meet with the Chief Minister, Government of Karnataka:.....	7
Press Meets:.....	7
Election Campaign.....	7
Charter of Demands.....	8
STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS AT STATE LEVEL.....	9
TALUK LEVEL FEDERATION MEETINGS AT TALUK LEVEL.....	9
DEMANDING ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROMOTING GOOD GOVERNANCE.....	9
DISTRICT LEVEL MEETING OF OFFICE BEARERS.....	11
INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SUGRAMA – STATE LEVEL.....	11
WEBSITE:.....	11
RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP – REVENUE RAISING.....	12
CHANGES IN OFFICE BEARERS.....	12
FINANCES:.....	12
RAISING THE ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE OF SUGRAMA:.....	12
GENDER TRAINING PROGRAMME AT KATHMANDU, NEPAL:.....	13
EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES BETWEEN SUGRAMA AND PHILLIPINES:.....	13
SUMMARY OF RESULTS.....	13
ANNEXURE:.....	15
SUGRAMA IN PRESS.....	15
SUBMISSIONS OF MEMORANDUMS TO DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS.....	15
SUGRAMA MEETINGS AT TALUK/DISTRICT LEVEL:.....	15

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The period from January to July 2013 has been crucial for SUGRAMA. A major breakthrough has been that SUGRAMA has found a niche as the only federation of Elected Women Representatives and has garnered support and visibility amongst the government platforms at taluk/district and state level.

During this period, Karnataka saw the conduct of elections to the Legislative Assembly forming the new Government. SUGRAMA played a pivotal role prior to the elections by creating mass awareness on the importance of voting, selection of proper candidates and ensure free and fair elections take place.

SUGRAMA also stressed the need for reserving seats for women in the Legislative Assembly. It laid out several of its demands, of which some have found success.

SUGRAMA was successful in conducting three Steering Committee meetings as envisaged during the period. The first Steering Committee meeting also saw the conduct of the meeting with the Advisory Panel and Advisory Committee members.

SUGRAMA also conducted two press meets at the state level and laid out its demands to the Government.

The members of SUGRAMA have met several times through meetings and interactions with the Government officials and Parliamentarians.

Furthermore, SUGRAMA has taken several important steps to advocate for policy changes thereby keeping up with its objective of representing the rights and interests of all elected women representatives in Karnataka. They have also collaborated with other associations and networks to ensure proper implementation of schemes and programmes at the grassroot level.

The most path breaking success for SUGRAMA was the meeting with the Chief Minister of Karnataka. This meeting was very fruitful for SUGRAMA.

SUGRAMA members were successful in advocating and resolving issues at their Grama Panchayats thereby overcoming the hurdles of historical subjugation of women in politics.

INTRODUCTION

SUGRAMA was formed as a result of Swedish-Indian Cooperation to strengthen local governance in partnership with The Hunger Project and in cooperation with SKL International and SIPU International.

This facilitated the exposure visit of SALAR – Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions to meet the Steering Committee members. Thereafter, SUGRAMA obtained financial support from SALAR.

SUGRAMA – AN INTRODUCTION

SUGRAMA – Grama Panchayat Chunayitha Mahila Prathinidhigala Sangha, Karnataka (SUGRAMA) is a state federation representing the interest and rights of Grama Panchayat elected women representatives (EWRs) in Karnataka. It was formed with the technical and financial support of The Hunger Project and other donors. SUGRAMA was registered under the Societies Registration Act of Karnataka 1960 in March 2010.

A membership based organization, all incumbent and one term previous EWRs can be members of SUGRAMA. At present reaches out to 17 (out of 30) Districts¹, has a 2 tier structure – taluk federations and state federation, is supported by 51 Taluk federations in these 17 Districts and enjoys a membership base of more than 3000 elected women representatives.

It is a platform where members come together in solidarity and support each other to promote good governance, deepen democracy and move beyond representation to participate as effective leaders. SUGRAMA represents the united strength of elected women in Karnataka. It is also a platform for co- learning and sharing of experiences. The process of establishing SUGRAMA has been participatory, democratic and based on the principles of inclusion.

SUGRAMA members have a sense of ownership, are motivated, eager and willing to build SUGRAMA into a vibrant state federation. Their reasons for joining SUGRAMA are centered on addressing issues of social and gender justice, accessing development for their Panchayats and advocating for their rights as elected political representatives. Issues have ranged from the need to address caste and gender discrimination, deal with male domination and atrocity, remove corruption, advocate for basic infrastructure in the villages and support women's leadership.

¹ Karnataka state is divided into District or Zilla Panchayats, Taluk or Block Panchayats and Gram Panchayats

PROJECT CONTEXT

The Swedish Indian Co-operation to strengthen local self government in Karnataka, India, a project supported by SKL International, SIPU and SALAIDA was initiated in 2008. The objectives of the project was to establish a federation of elected women representatives from the Grama Panchayat level in the state of Karnataka and build a Karnataka Platform to Promote Decentralization.

This resulted in the formation of SUGRAMA – Grama Panchayat Chunayitha Mahila Prathinidhigala Sangha - Karnataka. SUGRAMA eventually was registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1960. With its independent identity, SUGRAMA has successfully advocated for better policies at the grass root level.

The experiences and success of SUGRAMA spread far and wide. SUGRAMA pioneered in tackling issues of gender and governance thus ensuring good governance and decentralization at the local self government structure.



The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) undertook a visit to New Delhi and Bangalore and met the Steering Committee members of SUGRAMA in September and November 2012. The first delegation of SALAR comprising 40 local council leaders under the leadership of Mr. Anders Knape, President, SALAR visited Bangalore on September 13, 2012 and interacted with the members.

The second visit of 12 local council leaders from SALAR visited Bangalore on November 2, 2012 and interacted with the members. The interactions and success of SUGRAMA resulted in obtaining financial support from SALAR, Sweden.

SALAR donated an amount of 5000 US \$ to SUGRAMA through The Hunger Project, New Delhi. This amount was utilized to conduct the following activities during the period January to July 2013 so as to enable SUGRAMA to sustain its operational platform. The activities were as follows:

1. Advocacy and lobbying with government officials at state level
2. Conduct Steering Committee meetings at State level
3. Conduct taluk level federation meetings at Taluk level

4. Institutionalization of SUGRAMA – State level

ACCOUNT FOR ACTIVITIES

The activities of SUGRAMA have been successful in bringing in more visibility across all platforms of the government both at the state as well as at the district/taluk level.

During this period, the following activities were taken at the State level and Taluk level:

ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AT STATE/TALUK LEVEL

Interaction meet with Government Officials:

SUGRAMA Steering Committee members interacted with Ms. Rashmi, Secretary of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department, Government of Karnataka. The interaction paved way for EWRs to interact with the Secretary, RDPR, Government of Karnataka. The members discussed issues affecting them as EWRs and also of the Grama Panchayats.

The following are some of the issues taken up:

1. Video recordings of Grama Sabha/Ward Sabha and GP monthly meetings
2. Proper allocation of funds to GPs
3. Timely disbursement of funds so as to enable beneficiaries to get their dues.
4. Passing an order to conduct jamabhandi mandatorily
5. Passing of an order to conduct Mahila Grama Sabhas.
6. Setting up of Sexual Harassment Committee as per Vishaka Judgment in the Grama Panchayats



Interaction meet with the Chief Minister, Government of Karnataka:



The Steering Committee members of SUGRAMA met Shri. Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister of Karnataka and interacted with him about the schemes of the government especially the new schemes catering to food security to below poverty line families and under nourished children. The members affirmed that there was a need for the Government to ensure that the schemes reaches everybody household thus looking at eradicating malnutrition.

Press Meets:



As part of advocacy initiatives, two press meets were conducted in this period. The first press meet was held in March 2013 while the second press meet was conducted in June 2013. The first press meet conducted on the eve of International Women's Day celebrations stressed on the demands of SUGRAMA with respect to women and Panchayats.

The second press meet emphasized more on the policy changes that the Government of Karnataka aimed to bring to with respect to Panchayat Raj Institutions. The Government of Karnataka brought in an amendment which looked at termination of panchayat heads, members and officials failing to hold two consecutive meetings of ward/grama sabhas.

Election Campaign

In the reporting period, SUGRAMA emphasized more on generating awareness to the community on 'free and fair elections' of the Legislative Assembly. Karnataka saw elections during the month of May 2013. The members also being the local women politicians participated very effectively in the election campaigns and emphasized on increasing the allocation of seats for women in political participation. Further, there was a need to look at 'violence-free' elections and hence women collectively motivated the community and the contestants and were

successful in 'violence-free' elections. They also raised awareness on the need for curbing money laundering thus giving more stress to clean and fair elections.

SUGRAMA also joined hands with other NGOs and Civil Society Organisations especially Grama Panchayat Hakkotaya Andolana (GPHA) through '*Chokka Chunavana Abhiyana*' (Clean Election Campaign) and undertook mass awareness programmes. They also participated actively in the rallies and awareness programmes of GPHA. SUGRAMA also obtained the pamphlets of Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) which was used extensively in the awareness programmes. The pamphlet highlighted on the need for conducting fair elections and choosing rightful candidates.

Charter of Demands

At the state level, SUGRAMA submitted a charter of demands to the political parties to include the demands in their manifestos and bring in policy level changes upon formation of Government. This effort of SUGRAMA with other NGOs provided major impetus to the political parties to look at good governance at the state level. The charter of demands laid emphasis on the political parties to include policy level changes regarding:

1. Devolution of 3 Fs – Funds, Functions and Functionaries to the local self government
2. Bringing in 5 year tenure to the post of Grama Panchayat President and Vice President
3. Conducting direct elections to the post of President in Grama Panchayats
4. Increasing government grants to the three tiers of local self governance structures
5. Bring transparency, accountability and credibility to the functioning of Panchayat Raj Institutions through the wider usage of e-technologies and thus making the panchayats e-panchayats and enabling the community to get all the information and access the facilities through them.
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. Ensure Sexual Harassment complaints committee is set up at the G P level as mandated under Vishaka Judgment of Supreme Court of India.
8. Need to strengthen the planning processes at the Grama Panchayat level. The State Government should take necessary steps to enable GPs to formulate Village Development Plans/Activity Mapping.

9. Urge the Government to make suitable amendments to the act to ensure 50% reservation for women at Grama Panchayat level.
10. Advocate for increasing honorarium of President, Vice President and members to Rs. 5000/-, Rs. 3000/- and Rs. 2500/- respectively.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS AT STATE LEVEL

During the period – January to July 2013, three Steering Committee meetings were conducted during February, March and July.

The Steering Committee members discussed with the Advisory Panel and Advisory Committee members about the advocacy initiatives and sustainability of SUGRAMA. The discussions enabled SUGRAMA to shift its paradigm to emphasize on issues such as maternal mortality rate, infant mortality rate, child marriage, domestic violence apart from providing good governance and decentralization.

The members also met at the State level regularly for undertaking advocacy initiatives with the state level officials and government departments. This created great visibility to SUGRAMA.

TALUK LEVEL FEDERATION MEETINGS AT TALUK LEVEL

SUGRAMA conducted 11 taluk federation meetings at the taluk level. The meetings primarily were conducted to assess the current status of the federations, document its success stories and lay out a concretized plan for further advocacy initiatives. The meetings reaped good results and members collectively advocated for resolving the issues.

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:

- ✓ The members of Kolar were successful in stopping the conduct of Grama Sabha as there was lesser participation. The grama sabha was conducted after 15 days and this saw the presence of 175 people including women.
- ✓ Members of Kolar and Gauribidanur participated in the workshop on Capacity building of EWRs conducted by Mahila Samakhya Karnataka
- ✓ Members of SUGRAMA of Gauribidanur were successful in raising their

voices against atrocities on women and tried to resolve an issue of harassment of a woman.

- ✓ Members of SUGRAMA have been successful in helping the community in availing benefits through their GPs and also in submitting applications.
- ✓ Members of Sindhgi and Muddebihal attended the programme on felicitating newly elected Presidents of GPs. At the occasion, the presidents of SUGRAMA federations were also felicitated.
- ✓ Members of Tumkur and Gauribidanur participated in the workshop on RTI conducted by NCPRI.
- ✓ Members of SUGRAMA also participated actively in women's day celebrations in their taluks.
- ✓ Members of Mandya were successful in resolving the issue of absence of PDOs by getting them appointed in their GPs. Similar issue was also solved in Nagamangala taluk.
- ✓ Press-meet at Belur to condemn the assault on a woman member, direct elections and tenure of GP President. The culprit has been imprisoned.
- ✓ Monitoring the functioning of anganawadi and the distribution of food to pregnant woman, lactating mothers and children, thus emphasizing more on malnourished children.
- ✓ The President of Shikaripura taluk along with SUGRAMA members was successful in stopping a child marriage. Similarly, members of Kadur taluk were also successful in stopping a child marriage in Vakkalagere GP
- ✓ The President of Kadur taluk has petitioned the Government on the functioning of MGNREGA officials and Ombudsman of Kadur.
- ✓ Members of Aurad taluk have been advocating on proper allocation of funds and the functioning of MGNREGA officials. The members have also brought to light the corruptive practices of the PDO and Secretary.
- ✓ SUGRAMA members of Somawarapet taluk were successful in resolving the issue of nonpayment of honorarium in 16 GPs.
- ✓ **Closing arrack shops:** SUGRAMA members of Mandya taluk staged a protest with the Excise department to shut down arrack shops in 8 GPs.
- ✓ Campaigning on violence free/fair elections – distributing pamphlets raising awareness on the importance of elections and voting
- ✓ SUGRAMA members of Srirangapatna taluk have been lobbying with the Government on proper housing facilities (re-settlement) to the community.

DISTRICT LEVEL MEETING OF OFFICE BEARERS

SUGRAMA has been conducting taluk level meetings with office bearers and members in their respective taluks. But there was a felt need for district level meetings with office bearers so that there shall be scope for more advocacy initiatives. The meetings would widen the scope of sharing of experiences and bring in new insights to SUGRAMA. Accordingly, district level meetings were conducted in 8 districts with members of 25 taluks participating in the meetings.

The members shared their achievements and success stories and raised macro issues which need the intervention of State SUGRAMA. Following were the issues prioritized by members for advocacy at taluk and state level:

1. Proper allocation of funds to Grama Panchayats – 13th Finance Commission – the members felt that the guidelines of the government need to re-looked and should be made through 'bottoms up approach' and give more space to GPs to plan their priorities and utilize the funds accordingly.
2. Lobby with the Government in waiving of the arrears of Electricity bills of the GPs – proper information on the arrears and usage.
3. Issues of malnutrition to be tackled by proper strategization and advocacy by SUGRAMA
4. Monitoring and working on complex issues such as Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR)
5. Nonpayment of honorarium and increasing honorarium

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SUGRAMA – STATE LEVEL

WEBSITE:

During this period, the website of SUGRAMA – www.sugrama.org was launched. The website – www.sugrama.org comprises the brief history of the journey of SUGRAMA unto the current status. The website also highlights the success stories and achievements of SUGRAMA. Besides, it also gives information about the activities of SUGRAMA.

Documentation of video recordings of select SUGRAMA members were also conducted. Each member speaks about her background, her journey with SUGRAMA, the attitudinal changes over the period since her joining SUGRAMA and the successes she has achieved upon joining SUGRAMA. The video recordings are of 3-5 minute duration.

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. The widespread success of SUGRAMA helped in increasing the memberships through inducting new members into SUGRAMA.

CHANGES IN OFFICE BEARERS

The taluk level federation consists of 8 office bearers comprising of President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and three Directors. Over the period of time, there was a need to change office bearers in some taluks either due to their absence or other reasons. In this manner, changes were made in 5 taluks during this period.

FINANCES:

SUGRAMA has been received the financial support of The Hunger Project apart from its memberships. SUGRAMA follows a transparent accounting system and is systematically auditing its accounts through an external auditor. This facilitates the objective of SUGRAMA being transparent and accountable.

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.

Further, in addition to the programmes and trainings conducted by The Hunger Project through its partner organizations, SUGRAMA members have also joined other networks and platforms and have participated actively in their programmes and meetings. Further, they have participated in the programmes of Grama Panchayat Hakkotaya Andolana, SWARAJ, Date Charitable Society, Mahila Samakhya Karnataka and other civil society organizations and NGOs.

GENDER TRAINING PROGRAMME AT KATHMANDU, NEPAL:

SUGRAMA was invited to participate in the three day **South Asia Sub-Regional Gender & Politics Level 1 Training** held at Kathmandu, Nepal from 17-19 July, 2013. The Director and Ms. Jayanthi Viraj, Member, Steering Committee attended the training programme. The training helped to understand more on the political systems of the South Asian countries, gender mainstreaming, gender & Patriarchy, laws and legislations, lobbying and advocacy with the Government. SUGRAMA obtained a larger space in sharing its success stories.



EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES BETWEEN SUGRAMA AND PHILLIPINES:

The success of SUGRAMA was well appreciated in the Training Programme at Kathmandu. This resulted in planning for an exposure visit of women council leaders of Kyrgyzstan led by Ms. Nurgul Dzhanava, trainer to visit India to learn more about SUGRAMA. While the discussions are on, another exchange programme is shortly to be made by Philippines women council leaders for an interaction with SUGRAMA members.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The last seven months have been critical for SUGRAMA. Despite political pressure, the members have played an important role in conducting the pre-election campaign in the state, motivating themselves and other potential women to vote as well as contest in the legislative elections.

SUGRAMA has formed taluk level federations in 51 taluks of which 36 taluks have been forming in a vibrant manner. SUGRAMA has taken several important steps to advocate for policy changes thereby keeping up with its objective of representing the rights and interests of all elected women representatives in Karnataka.

SUGRAMA spearheaded advocacy campaigns in forcing the then Government to stall the amendments to Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 which otherwise would have been detrimental to the effective functioning of the local self

government especially Grama Panchayats. The meetings at the taluk/district level paved way for EWRs to respond to the recent amendment to Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act. SUGRAMA members could discuss and deliberate successfully with the department officials.

SUGRAMA successfully campaigned against sale of liquor/arrack in the villages and were successful in closing down shops in 5 taluks. SUGRAMA members played a pivotal role in closing down the shops. In spite of political pressure and pressure from men in closing down the shops, the women with the support of self help groups and other groups and NGOs along with the villagers seized the liquor bottles, set it on fire, ransacked the arrack shops and with the help of police personnel and the district administration, SUGRAMA members closed down the arrack shops. The community is now heaving a sigh of relief.

SUGRAMA members keeping up with the objectives of SUGRAMA have also successfully advocated with the Government towards nonpayment of honorarium and sitting fees for their attendance in the monthly meetings of the Grama Panchayats. Seeing the success of SUGRAMA, men representatives have also come forward to support women in bringing in good governance in the local self government. This has created a niche for SUGRAMA across the government departments.

The change that SUGRAMA has brought in the lives of women members is motivational to other women members. The SUGRAMA members are now respected and given due attention in all the departments, including their own Grama Panchayats. The collective strength of SUGRAMA has proved again that collectivization can lead to good decentralization and administration.

SUGRAMA members are now looking at expanding their horizons towards macro issues such as Infant Mortality Rate/Maternal Mortality Rate, Female Feticide, child marriage and other issues that are unfavorable for empowerment of women.

ANNEXURE:

SUGRAMA IN PRESS

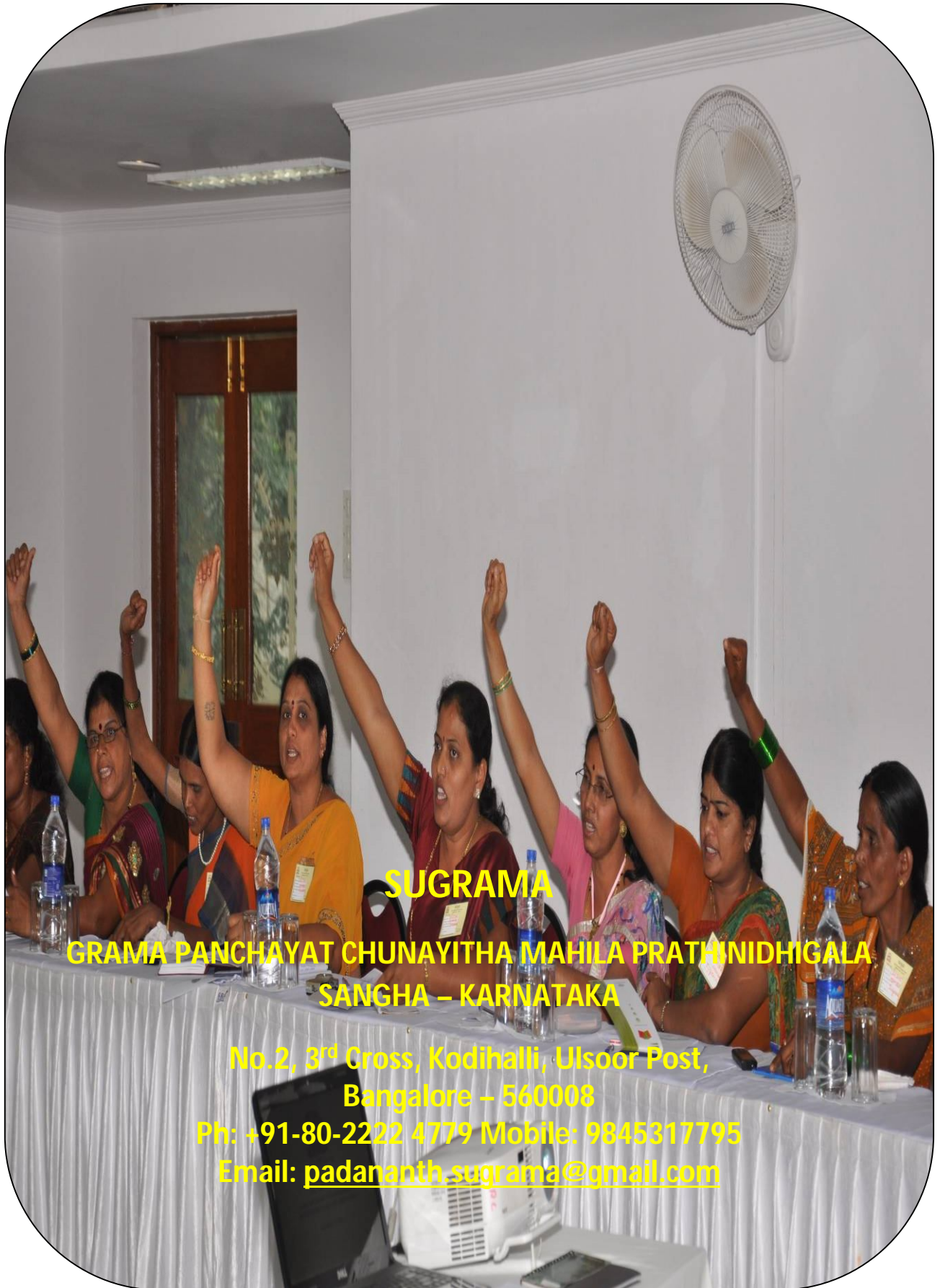


1 SUGRAMA members submitting memorandum seeking proper implementation of schemes SUBMISSIONS OF MEMORANDUMS TO DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS



SUGRAMA MEETINGS AT TALUK/DISTRICT LEVEL:





SUGRAMA

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