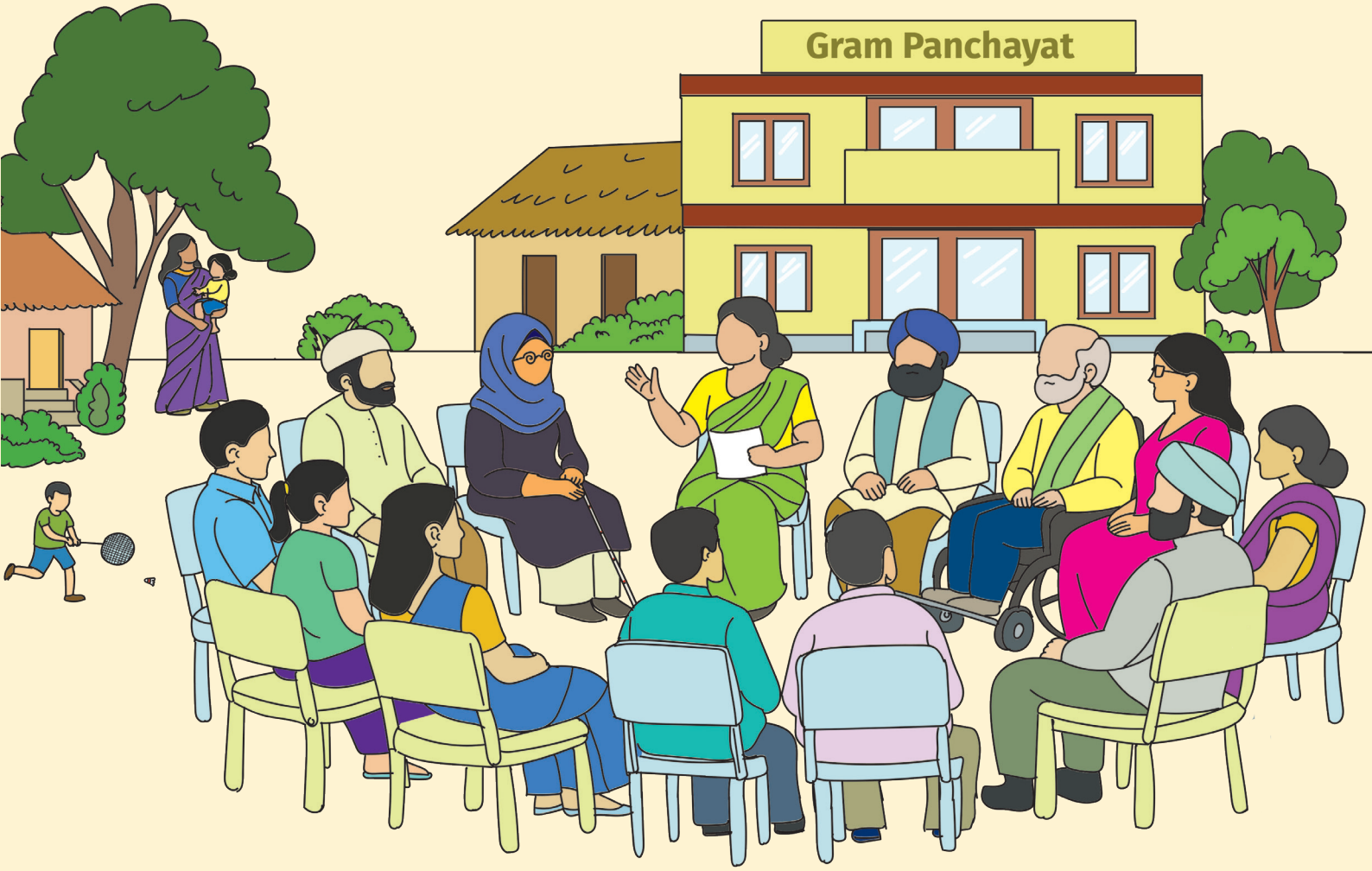
MODEL WOMEN-FRIENDLY GRAM PANCHAYATS

Showcasing Promising Practices for Inclusive and Transformative Local Governance



MINISTRY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

सशक्त पंचायत सतत विकास

UNFPA

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Preface

Local governance is a cornerstone of sustainable development, playing a critical role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Recognising this, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) has prioritised the localisation of SDGs through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) by promoting participatory planning, inclusive decision-making, and locally relevant implementation strategies.

The goal of localising SDGs is to ensure that development initiatives are context-specific, culturally relevant, and responsive to the needs, priorities, and lived realities of local communities. By empowering PRIs to adopt area-specific solutions, local governance can effectively address gaps in development, ensuring that no individual is left behind. To make SDG implementation more actionable at the grassroots level, the Ministry has aggregated the 17 SDGs into nine thematic areas, providing a practical framework for Panchayats to plan, implement and monitor developmental outcomes.

Theme 9 focuses on Creating Women-Friendly Panchayats–a transformative approach aimed at embedding gender equality and inclusiveness at the heart of local governance. The creation of Women-Friendly Gram Panchayats ensures that the voices, concerns and lived experiences of women, girls and other vulnerable groups are represented in Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs), making governance more responsive and participatory.

The key objectives of Women-Friendly Gram Panchayats include:

- **Mainstreaming Gender in Governance:** Integrating a gender perspective across all development programmes to address discrimination, gender-based violence (GVB), and tackle harmful practices such as child marriage and gender-biased sex selection.
- **Empowering Women Leaders:** Supporting women leaders at the grassroots to strengthen inclusive decision-making, equity in governance, and local accountability.
- **Transforming Community Norms:** Women -Friendly Panchayats help change family and community perceptions regarding the value and role of women and girls, increasing their visibility in local development initiatives.
- **Responsive Development Planning:** Inclusion of women's and girls' priorities in GPDPs ensures targeted investments in areas such as health, education, skill development, economic empowerment, safety, and protection against violence.

MoPR partnered with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to pilot the Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat initiative in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Based on the initial experience of rolling out the initiative in these pilot States, and its impact on challenging discriminatory norms, promoting gender equality, and enhancing community responsiveness, the Ministry decided to scale up the initiative to one Gram Panchayat in every district of the country ensuring that the benefits of inclusive governance reach a broader population. On International Women's Day 2025, 770 Gram Panchayats resolved to work on the Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat initiative. After a year of the initiative's rollout across districts, the Ministry decided to compile a good practices compendium to document emerging

innovations and replicable models from Women-Friendly Gram Panchayats across the country. The compendium seeks to showcase the transformative impact of Women and Girl-Friendly Panchayats across key domains:

- **Governance:** Strengthening women's participation in decision-making and planning processes.
- **Health and Nutrition:** Enhancing access to preventive care, maternal health services, and nutrition initiatives.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Promoting entrepreneurship, skill development, and livelihood opportunities for women.
- **Education and Skill Development:** Facilitating equitable access to learning and vocational training.
- **Safety and Security:** Preventing and responding to gender-based violence, harmful practices, and ensuring safe public and private spaces.

By highlighting best practices, tangible outcomes, and innovative approaches, the compendium aims to inspire and guide Panchayats, policymakers, and development practitioners in creating local governance systems that are inclusive, gender-sensitive, and truly transformative.

A Panchayat for Her: The Kishorinagar Model of Inclusive Governance

Kishorinagar Gram Panchayat, Union Territory: Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Integrated Model of Governance

Gram Panchayat
Kishorinagar

Block
Diglipur

District
North and Middle Andaman

Population
3,027

Sarpanch
Smt. Rita Dhali

Challenges

The Gram Panchayat of Kishorinagar faced several structural and contextual challenges before initiating the rollout of the Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat initiative. Some of these included:

- **Restrictive social norms:** Deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes and discriminatory norms limited women's participation in public forums, with many hesitant to discuss sensitive issues such as menstrual health and hygiene, and domestic safety in the presence of men and male leaders.
- **Operational challenges in healthcare and education:** Continuous monitoring of pregnant women and children across scattered habitations required intensive manual coordination. Ensuring complete immunisation coverage, school enrolment and retention was particularly challenging in remote and dispersed communities.
- **Coordination gaps:** Limited coordination between line departments and limited control over line department staff had weakened effective convergence and consistent service delivery.
- **Geographical remoteness:** Located in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, the Panchayat struggled with connectivity and logistical constraints, affecting access to online government services, digital banking for Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and consistent supply of medical resources.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

The Panchayat under the leadership of the sarpanch Smt. Rita Dhali and ward members adopted the following integrated, community-driven strategies to overcome the above-mentioned challenges:

- **Regular conduct of Mahila Sabhas:** Regular Mahila Sabhas were organised for women to voice their needs and concerns, and openly speak about issues that they could not voice during Gram Sabhas. These issues were then integrated in Gram Sabha meetings.
- **Household mobilisation:** The Sarpanch and ward members systematically reviewed school attendance registers and maternal–child health records to identify gaps. Based on this analysis, they conducted targeted door-to-door outreach to promote the re-enrolment of out-of-school girls and encourage the active participation of women and girls in health camps and immunisation drives.
- **Awareness programmes on sanitation and hygiene:** Programmes on menstrual health and hygiene were conducted to address myths around the issue and promote dignity. Similarly, programmes were organised to make the Gram Panchayat Open Defecation Free (ODF).
- **Strengthening convergence with line departments:** Collaboration with Health and Education departments facilitated coordinated service delivery.
- **Empowering women through SHGs:** By leveraging the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), the Panchayat promoted women-led SHGs not only as financial inclusion platforms but also as mechanisms for community vigilance and social accountability. SHGs played key roles in sustaining Open Defecation Free (ODF) status and monitoring Mid-Day Meal quality in schools.

Outcomes Achieved

The Panchayat's focused, inclusive approach produced measurable social development outcomes:

- **Data-driven accountability:** Regular review of immunisation records and school attendance registers enabled timely identification of vulnerable households and prompt corrective action.
- **Improved maternal and child health:** Regular conduct of health camps resulted in universal immunisation coverage and 100% institutional deliveries leading to zero maternal and infant mortality in the Gram Panchayat.
- **Improved retention of children in schools:** Systematic tracking of school dropouts and monitoring of quality of mid-day meals ensured retention of children, especially girls in schools. This helped to effectively eliminate child labour within the Panchayat.
- **Improved sanitation and hygiene practices:** Active women's participation in planning and implementing sanitation

initiatives led to 100% toilet usage, getting the Gram Panchayat Open Defecation Free (ODF) status and improved hygiene and dignity for women.

- **Community empowerment:** Mahila Sabhas created safe spaces for women to voice concerns, leading to increased participation in decision-making and strengthening inclusive governance.

Attributes of the Sarpanch

The emergence of Kishorinagar as a Model Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat is credited to the leadership of Smt Rita Dhali, that enabled:

- Gender-inclusive vision
- Proactive, field-oriented leadership
- Cross-departmental convergence.

Reflections from the Sarpanch

Retaining every girl in school is not just an educational goal—it is an investment in dignity and opportunity that brings lasting social change. When governance is inclusive and compassionate, a Panchayat can transform from a mere governing body into a truly responsive, women-friendly institution.

Digital Outreach
(Scan to watch the MWFGP Best Practice video)

From Fields to Markets: Empowering Women Entrepreneurs in Jorhat Gram Panchayat

Jorhat Gram Panchayat, State: Assam

Economic Empowerment

Gram Panchayat
Jorhat

Block
Central Jorhat

District
Jorhat

Population
8,881

Sarpanch
Smt. Rumi Chetia

Challenges

Women in the Gram Panchayat faced multiple barriers that limited their participation in economic activities. Some of these barriers included:

- Financial instability and dependence on male family members that restricted women's autonomy.
- Limited access to markets due to inadequate transportation and communication infrastructure.
- Deep rooted patriarchal norms discouraged women from pursuing livelihood activities.
- Weak collaboration between SHGs and Cluster Level Federations (CLFs) limited the scale and sustainability of women-led initiatives.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

To overcome these challenges, the Gram Panchayat implemented targeted measures to strengthen livelihoods and empower women economically. Key initiatives included:

- **"Own Farm–Own Market" initiative:** Women were encouraged to not only produce goods but also directly connect with markets. This approach ensured they had ownership over the entire value chain, from cultivation/production to selling—reducing the dependency on middlemen and increasing income.

- **Market-driven production decisions:** Detailed market surveys and analysis were conducted to understand demand, pricing, and potential buyers. Women were trained to align their production with market needs, improving sales prospects and profitability.

- **Capacity-building through Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission (ASRLM):** collaboration was established with ASRLM to provide women with training in production techniques, quality control, business management, and financial literacy. This strengthened women's skills across the entire value chain, enhancing confidence and professional capacity.

- **Infrastructure improvements via CFC grants:** Investments were made in transportation and communication infrastructure, such as improved roads, warehouse storage facilities, and mobile/communication access. This allowed women to transport goods efficiently, access market information, and coordinate with buyers and suppliers.

- **Strengthening SHG and bank linkages:** The Gram Panchayat facilitated stronger collaboration among SHGs and linked them to banks, enabling women to access credit, plan investments, and scale their enterprises sustainably.

- **Mentorship and handholding support:** Women entrepreneurs received ongoing guidance from the Panchayat and local mentors, helping them navigate challenges, troubleshoot issues, and build leadership skills.

Outcomes

The targeted initiatives of the Gram Panchayat have delivered tangible and transformative impacts for women and the wider community:

- **Economic empowerment and financial independence:** Many women have established enterprises directly benefiting from the "Own Farm–Own Market" initiative. (A case in point is Ms. Minima Borpatra who established a flourishing enterprise -*Minima Production*). By

controlling the production-to-market process, women achieved greater income stability and financial autonomy.

- **Market access and sustainable growth:** Market-driven production decisions and improved transportation and communication infrastructure through CFC grants ensured women gained access to local and regional markets. This enabled them to expand their customer base, integrate into supply chains, and scale their businesses sustainably.

- **Skill development and confidence building:** Capacity-building support from ASRLM strengthened women's skills in production, quality control, business management, and financial literacy. This not only improved the profitability of their enterprises but also fostered leadership, problem-solving, and professional confidence.

- **Collective action and financial support:** Strengthened SHG and bank linkages provided women with credit access and collective bargaining power, enabling investment in inputs, expansion of production, and long-term enterprise growth.

- **Community transformation and leadership emergence:** Mentorship and handholding support helped women navigate challenges, develop resilience, and take on leadership roles. This catalysed a broader transformation in the Gram Panchayat, inspiring more women to become entrepreneurs and creating a culture of women-driven enterprise.

- **Employment generation:** The growth of women-led enterprises created local employment opportunities, strengthening livelihoods across the community and contributing to inclusive economic development.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

Rumi Chetia demonstrates visionary and empathetic leadership, proactively addressing systemic barriers that limit women's economic participation. Her hands-on approach, strengthening SHGs, facilitating bank linkages, and improving market-connected infrastructure reflects her commitment to empowering women and fostering sustainable community development.

Reflections from the Sarpanch

Strong SHG networks, combined with bank support, skill-building, and market-linked infrastructure, are key to unlocking women's economic potential. With these, women gain confidence, develop leadership, and build sustainable livelihoods that transform entire communities.

Digital Outreach
(Scan to watch the MWFGP Best Practice video)

Building Dreams through Girls' Education and Freedom

Nongarh Gram Panchayat, State: Bihar

Addressing GBV and Harmful Practices

Gram Panchayat
Nongarh

Block
Ramgarh Chowk

District
Lakhisarai

Population
11,977

Sarpanch
Smt. Juli Devi

Challenges

The Gram Panchayat faced substantial challenges in safeguarding the rights and well-being of girls and young women. Prevalence of child marriages was high and efforts to counsel families to stop child marriages were often met with difficulties. Safety concerns made many parents hesitant to send their daughters to school, restricting educational opportunities. Furthermore, deeply entrenched social norms and traditional beliefs discouraged girls from participating in sports and outdoor activities, limiting their confidence and holistic development.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

To address these challenges, the Gram Panchayat under the leadership of Smt. Juli Devi, implemented targeted, community-driven initiatives:

- **Child Marriage Prevention Drive:** Door-to-door awareness campaigns, parental counselling, coordination with teachers and outreach through Anganwadi workers were used to prevent early marriages.
- **Promotion of girls' education and safety:** Measures included organised group travel to school, consistent monitoring of attendance, and strengthening local safety networks to encourage regular school participation.
- **Sports and empowerment programmes:** The Panchayat created playground spaces, organised competitions, and promoted activities like yoga to foster confidence, teamwork, and physical development among girls.

Outcomes

These sustained efforts have produced measurable, transformative results:

- **Eradication of child marriage:** The Panchayat has successfully eliminated child marriage, ensuring the safety and rights of girls.
- **Increased educational participation:** Girls now attend school regularly, with many pursuing higher education, reflecting a positive shift in community attitudes toward female education.
- **Enhanced confidence and opportunities:** Girls have begun to actively participate in sports, with several reaching district and state-level competitions, showcasing their talent, resilience and self-assurance.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

Smt. Juli Devi is an empathetic, inclusive and visionary leader working towards empowering women, championing education, fostering transparency, and advocating for social change. Her efforts have helped build a community rooted in trust and lasting change.

Reflections from the Sarpanch

I firmly believe that women and girls deserve equal rights and opportunities in every sphere of life. The true progress of our Panchayat depends on treating daughters and sons equally. Empowering girls today will ensure a stronger, more equitable community tomorrow.

Digital Outreach
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Driving Rural Transformation through Digital Governance

Moraiya Gram Panchayat, State: Gujarat

Integrated Model of Governance

Gram Panchayat
Moraiya

Block
Moraiya

District
Ahmedabad

Population
6,783

Sarpanch
Jayshree Ben Bikhabhai Dayma

Challenges

The Gram Panchayat faced multiple developmental and governance challenges. Some of these included:

- Limited awareness of government schemes and digital services, particularly among women, which restricted access to welfare benefits and reinforced social vulnerabilities.
- Low revenue collection, as the manual tax payment system was time-consuming, non-transparent and inconvenient for citizens.
- Poor health-seeking behaviour among women, resulting in inadequate maternal care and low preventive health coverage.
- Serious safety concerns for women, due to insufficient street lighting and inadequate public infrastructure.

These challenges collectively hindered inclusive development and effective local governance.

Initiatives Undertaken

Under the visionary leadership of Sarpanch Smt. Jayshree Ben Bikhabhai Dayma, the Gram Panchayat implemented a series of targeted and strategic interventions:

- **Strengthening governance and revenue systems:** To address low revenue collection and improve transparency, the Gram Panchayat, developed and operationalised an **online tax payment portal**, enabling citizens to pay taxes

conveniently and on time. Digital awareness was promoted to ensure citizens could access and use online services effectively.

- **Women's empowerment and livelihood promotion:** To tackle social and economic challenges faced by women, the Gram Panchayat facilitated the formation of Women SHGs, provided support for small enterprises and home-based livelihood activities, and organised digital literacy and vocational training programmes for women and youth.

- **Improving health outcomes:** To improve health-seeking behaviour among women, regular health check-up camps, particularly for women and children, were organised. Maternal healthcare services were strengthened through early Antenatal Care (ANC) registration and awareness campaigns on nutrition, sanitation and preventive healthcare were conducted.

- **Enhancing safety:** To address security concerns, street lights were installed in public areas and community-based emergency support systems were established to assist women during crises.

Outcomes

The initiatives undertaken by the Gram Panchayat have resulted in measurable and transformative outcomes:

- **Improved transparency and efficiency in governance**, due to the digital tax payment system.

- **Increased revenue collection**, as citizens can now pay taxes in a timely and hassle-free manner.

- **Improved health indicators**, including better maternal care uptake.

- **Enhanced safety and mobility for women**, owing to improved street lighting and community support mechanisms.

- **Higher community participation**, especially increased involvement of women in local development processes.

Overall, the Gram Panchayat has evolved into a more responsive, inclusive and accountable local governance institution.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

The strong leadership and forward-looking vision of Smt. Jayshree Ben Bikhabhai Dayma have been central to these achievements. Her key attributes include:

- Commitment to women's empowerment and inclusive governance
- Transparent and accountable administrative practices
- Promotion of participatory decision-making
- Proactive engagement with community needs
- Focus on sustainable and technology-driven development.

Reflections from the Sarpanch

The Sarpanch has the following advise for other local leaders:

- Encourage active participation of women in governance and decision-making.
- Adopt digital systems to enhance transparency and service delivery.
- Prioritise education, health awareness and skill development.
- Promote self-reliance and economic empowerment among women.
- Maintain continuous dialogue with the community to ensure responsive governance.

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Women-Led Entrepreneurial Transformation through She Haat

Bag Pashog Gram Panchayat, State: Himachal Pradesh

Economic Empowerment

Gram Panchayat
Bag Pashog

Block
Pachhad

District
Sirmaur

Population
1,966

Sarpanch
Rajeshwari Sharma

Challenges

Women in the Gram Panchayat faced deep rooted structural and socio-cultural barriers that restricted their entrepreneurial potential and leadership participation, resulting in widespread financial dependency. Despite their significant contribution to unpaid household and agricultural labour, very few women had access to structured employment, entrepreneurship opportunities or market-linked enterprises. Key constraints included:

- Low confidence and limited leadership exposure, resulting in minimal participation in governance and economic decision-making
- Social norms restricting mobility and engagement in commercial activities
- Limited access to skill development and markets
- Lack of institutional support and credit linkages for women-led enterprises
- Absence of safe and supportive workspaces within the Gram Panchayat.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

Under the visionary leadership of Smt. Rajeshwari Sharma, the Gram Panchayat adopted a women-led development strategy that positioned entrepreneurship as a pathway to empowerment. This was done through vocational training, capacity building and establishing linkages across departments to strengthen the ***She Haat*** Project (a woman led initiative featuring rural haats/markets).

Through concerted efforts, the *She Haat* amenities project was transformed into a sustainable women-led business ecosystem. Instead of being just a roadside facility, *She Haat* became a structured entrepreneurial platform managed by Women SHGs. Key components included:

- Women-managed retail shops showcasing local products
- Community kitchens generating daily revenue streams
- Guest house facilities operated and maintained by women entrepreneurs
- Market-oriented production aligned with tourism demand.

The initiative was professionally managed by SHG women trained in business management and financial literacy, and implemented through convergence with NABARD, MGNREGA, SBM, and the Tourism Department, ensuring financial, technical and institutional backing.

Outcomes

The women-centred entrepreneurial model delivered measurable and transformative results, ensuring women were not mere beneficiaries but became managers and revenue generators.

- The total sales of She Haat reached Rs.1.3 Crores, demonstrating the financial viability of women-managed rural enterprises.
- Women entrepreneurs now earn sustainable incomes through shops, kitchens and guest house operations.
- Enhanced financial independence, reduced dependency on male family members and increased household decision-making power.
- Greater participation of women in governance forums reflecting improved confidence and public presence.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

The visionary leadership of Smt. Rajeshwari Sharma has been instrumental in transforming the Gram Panchayat into a women-friendly and inclusive governance model. Her key leadership attributes include:

- Strong commitment to women's empowerment and inclusive growth
- Effective promotion and strengthening of SHGs
- Ensuring convergence of multiple government schemes for maximum impact
- Supporting women entrepreneurship and creating sustainable livelihood ecosystems
- Encouraging women's participation in governance.

Her leadership has paved the way for institutionalising a Model Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat.

Reflections from the Sarpanch

Sarpanch Smt. Rajeshwari Sharma's advice for other local leaders is:

- Women should be actively encouraged to participate in SHGs, skill development programmes, governance, and income-generating activities.
- Flexible working hours and family-supportive work environments must be promoted to ensure inclusive growth.
- Convergence of schemes and community participation are essential for sustainable rural development.

Digital Outreach
(Scan to watch the MWFGP Best Practice video)

Educate, Empower, Elevate: A Gram Panchayat's Journey of Change

Silway Gram Panchayat, State: Jharkhand

Education and Skill Development

Gram Panchayat
Silway

Block
Namkom

District
Ranchi

Population
7,695

Sarpanch
Smt. Nutan Pahan

Challenges

Before launching the Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat initiative, the women and girls of Silway Gram Panchayat faced three significant barriers—each closely linked to gaps in education and opportunity:

- **High dropout rates among girls:** Inadequate school infrastructure, lack of essential facilities, and safety concerns led to frequent school dropouts, limiting girls' access to continued education and future opportunities.
- **Limited economic independence:** Restricted access to skill development and sustainable livelihood opportunities prevented women from achieving financial autonomy and investing in their own and their children's education.
- **Gaps in health and social security:** Limited access to maternal healthcare, institutional deliveries, immunisation, and social welfare schemes—such as old-age pensions—negatively affected the well-being of women, children and vulnerable groups.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

Under the leadership of Sarpanch Ms. Nutan Pahan, the Gram Panchayat adopted a multi-sectoral, education-centred approach to empower women and strengthen community development.

Education and safety

- Upgraded infrastructure across seven schools, including construction of

boundary walls, improved drinking water and toilet facilities to create a safe and conducive learning environment.

- School Management Committees conducted regular enrolment drives and monitored the Mid-Day Meal programme to improve attendance and reduce dropout rates.

- Installed over 40 solar streetlights to enhance safety and mobility for women and girls, and initiated community monitoring of public spaces to ensure secure access to schools and community institutions.

Livelihood promotion

- Facilitated skill development training of SHG members in jute products, bamboo handicrafts, sohari painting, stitching, and other trades, with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) support from Usha Martin Foundation. Women were supported to establish small businesses or secure factory employment.

- Promoted agriculture and livestock initiatives, including cow distribution under *Mukhyamantri Pashudhan Yojana*, goat and duck rearing, and poultry farming.

- Assisted women in setting up ration shops under the governments Public Distribution System.

Health, nutrition and social security

- Ensured early ANC registration, regular health check-ups, institutional deliveries, and immunisation coverage.

- Provided nutritional support to pregnant women and lactating mothers to promote maternal and child well-being.

- Facilitated geriatric care services, including cataract surgeries for the elderly.

- Streamlined access to old-age pensions and other social security schemes, strengthening family stability and enabling continued educational participation.

Outcomes

The Panchayat's sustained and education-focused interventions yielded lasting and measurable results:

- **Improved educational attainment:** Enhanced infrastructure and active School Management Committees significantly reduced dropout rates among girls, ensuring continuity in education.

- **Safer learning environment:** Solar streetlights and community monitoring improved safety and mobility, encouraging girls' school attendance and women's participation in public life.

- **Economic empowerment:** Skill training, entrepreneurship, livestock initiatives and factory employment increased

women's incomes, enabling them to invest in their families' education and overall well-being.

- **Improved maternal and child health:** Early health registration, institutional deliveries, and nutrition programmes contributed to healthier mothers and children.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

Smt. Nutan Pahan's leadership reflects determination, vision and empathy:

- **A personal journey shaped by education:** Married at a young age after matriculation, she pursued graduation while raising three children—demonstrating the transformative power of continued education.
- **Commitment to women's advancement:** She prioritises girls' education, women's employment and long-term empowerment as pillars of development.
- **Strategic partnerships:** She promoted institutional convergence and collaborated with corporate partners such as Usha Martin Foundation to generate sustainable livelihood opportunities.
- **Participatory leadership:** Through capacity-building initiatives and close engagement with village women, she fostered active participation in local governance.

Reflections from the Sarpanch

Smt. Pahan has the following advice for other women leaders:

- Prioritise people-centred development with a strong emphasis on investing in girls' and women's education.
- Link women to sustainable livelihood opportunities to ensure financial independence.
- Recognise that women's economic empowerment strengthens the health, nutrition and education of the entire community.
- Promote preventive safety measures to ensure women and girls can confidently access education and participate fully in community life.

Digital Outreach
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Hallikheda's Integrated Model: Empowering Women through Governance, Infrastructure and Opportunity

Hallikeda Gram Panchayat, State: Karnataka

Integrated Model of Governance

Gram Panchayat
Hallikheda

Block
Humnabad

District
Bidar

Population
10,484

Sarpanch
Shivkumar Patil

Challenges

- **Limited participation of women in governance:** Women's participation in Gram Sabha meetings was low and they did not have a platform to voice their needs and concerns or influence decision-making at the Panchayat level.
- **Weak grievance redressal systems:** Community members, especially women, lacked accessible and effective mechanisms to report issues.
- **Limited economic opportunities for women:** Women had very few livelihood options and restricted access to financial resources.
- **Infrastructure gaps:** The Gram Panchayat lacked safe community spaces, childcare facilities, public toilets, and digital literacy access for women and girls.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

Mr. Shivkumar Patil, the Sarpanch adopted an integrated approach to empower women and work towards making Hallikheda a model Women-Friendly Panchayat:

- **Strengthening women's voice in governance:** This was done by institutionalising the organisation of regular Mahila Sabhas to ensure women's participation in decision-making.

- **Instituting a grievance redressal system:** "Voice Box", a grievance redressal mechanism was initiated to provide a structured platform to community members, especially women, to raise their needs and concerns.

- **Investing in social infrastructure:** The Panchayat invested in women-friendly infrastructure - digital libraries (Arivu Kendra) to promote digital literacy and access to information; creches (Kusina Mane) to support working women; community toilets to ensure dignity, safety and improved sanitation.

- **Strengthening economic empowerment:** SHGs were mobilised under the Sanjeevani initiative to promote savings, financial inclusion and livelihood activities.

- **Institutional coordination:** Collaboration was established with staff of line departments and district administration for effective implementation of relevant schemes and programmes.

Outcomes

- **Enhanced women's participation in governance:** Mahila Sabhas were regularly organised and women started actively participating in Gram Sabha discussions and contributing to administrative decisions.

- **Greater economic participation:** Strengthening SHGs and financial literacy initiatives increased women's access to income-generating opportunities.

- **Improved digital access:** Digital libraries enhanced digital literacy and workforce readiness among women and girls.

- **Reduced caregiving barriers:** Creches enabled women to engage in livelihoods and community leadership roles.

- **Improved access to Government programmes and schemes:** Collaboration across line departments enabled community members to get information and access to government schemes and programmes.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

The Sarpanch demonstrated a forward-thinking approach by engaging multiple stakeholders through convergence. His innovative strategies are evident in linking investments in social infrastructure with women's empowerment and economic participation, while effectively integrating gender perspectives into programme design.

Reflections from the Sarpanch

> ***Investing in social infrastructure, such as libraries, creches and safe public spaces not only provides essential services, but also removes structural barriers, empowers women to participate fully in governance and economic life, and strengthens the social and economic fabric of the entire community.***

Digital Outreach
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Budgeting for Equality: Advancing Women-Friendly Governance through Gender-Responsive Planning

Edavanna Gram Panchayat, State: Kerala

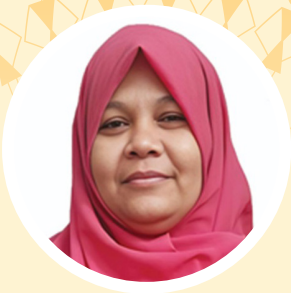
Integrated Model of Governance

Gram Panchayat
Edavanna

Block
Areakode

District
Malappuram

Population
26,432



Sarpanch
Suneera Samad

Challenges

Women in the Gram Panchayat faced several social, economic and cultural barriers that limited their participation, agency and independence.

- **Restrictive gender norms and social expectations:** Deep-rooted patriarchal norms limited women's participation in Gram Sabha meetings, community decision-making processes, and local governance forums, reducing their voice in shaping development priorities.
- **Economic dependence and limited livelihood opportunities:** Restricted access to income-generation opportunities reinforced women's financial dependence on male family members, thereby limiting their decision-making power and economic autonomy.
- **Limited awareness of rights and entitlements:** Many women had inadequate awareness of their legal rights, government welfare schemes, and institutional mechanisms, which constrained their ability to access social protection and development benefits.

Collectively, these challenges undermined women's ability to exercise leadership, agency and meaningful participation in local governance, thereby limiting the inclusiveness and responsiveness of development processes at the Gram Panchayat level.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

Under the visionary leadership of Sarpanch Smt. Suneera Samad, the Gram Panchayat implemented a series of gender-responsive governance initiatives aimed at transforming the Panchayat into a Model Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat.

- **Gender-responsive planning and budgeting:** The Panchayat institutionalised gender considerations within its planning and budgeting processes. Development funds were aligned with women's needs related to safety, mobility, health and access to public services. This gender-responsive approach enabled more equitable resource allocation and ensured that women's priorities were systematically integrated into local development plans.

- **Strengthening women's safety and security:** Women's safety was recognised as a critical governance priority. The Panchayat introduced infrastructure improvements and community-based vigilance mechanisms to create safer and more accessible public spaces for women and girls.

- **Community awareness and gender sensitisation:** The Panchayat conducted community-wide awareness and sensitisation initiatives to challenge discriminatory gender norms, promote women's rights, and encourage positive behaviour change. These programmes aimed to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for women's participation in public life.

- **Gender-responsive infrastructure and welfare interventions:** Targeted investments were made in infrastructure and service delivery to address women's practical needs. These included the installation of streetlights, construction of women-friendly sanitation facilities, and strengthening grievance redressal mechanisms to ensure responsive and accessible governance.

Outcomes

The interventions resulted in measurable improvements in women's safety, empowerment and participation, while demonstrating a scalable model for gender-responsive local governance.

- **Enhanced safety and public mobility:** Improved lighting and community monitoring mechanisms contributed to safer public spaces for women.
- **Strengthened grievance redressal and access to justice:** Improved reporting mechanisms encouraged women to raise concerns related to safety, rights violations and service delivery issues.
- **Increased awareness and agency:** Awareness initiatives improved women's knowledge of rights, entitlements and government schemes, enabling greater social and economic participation.
- **Equitable resource allocation:** Gender-responsive planning and budgeting ensured that Panchayat resources were allocated in ways that addressed women's specific needs and priorities.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

The leadership of Smt. Suneera Samad has been instrumental in advancing gender-responsive governance in the Gram Panchayat. Her leadership:

- Demonstrates visionary and gender-transformative leadership in addressing systemic barriers faced by women.
- Possesses strong decision-making and communication skills that support effective mobilisation of community participation and resources.
- Actively promotes the institutionalisation of gender-responsive planning and budgeting within Panchayat governance systems.
- Creates an enabling environment that encourages women's participation, leadership and collective action within local governance processes.

Reflections from the Sarpanch

> ***Building a women-friendly Gram Panchayat requires a clear vision for gender equality, prioritising women's safety and dignity, integrating gender-responsive planning and budgeting, and continuously engaging the community to challenge social barriers and empower women.***

Digital Outreach
(Scan to watch the MWFGP Best Practice video)

Journey of Ishanagar to Women-Centred Governance

Ishanagar Gram Panchayat, State: Madhya Pradesh

Education and Skill Development

Gram Panchayat
Ishanagar

Block
Chhatarpur

District
Chhatarpur

Population
9,275

Sarpanch
Mrs. Nidhi Mishra

Challenges

Prior to its transformation into a Model Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat, Ishanagar faced entrenched social norms that limited inclusive participation and equitable access to services.

- **Limited civic participation:** Women rarely engaged in local governance due to low awareness of government schemes and the absence of platforms that encouraged their participation in planning and decision-making.
- **Weak infrastructure:** Inadequate sanitation and drainage, restricted access to safe drinking water, and poor internal road connectivity disproportionately affected women and girls, impacting their safety, health and dignity.
- **Barriers to safety and education:** Safety concerns and the lack of gender-sensitive facilities discouraged girls from continuing their education, reinforcing cycles of inequality.
- **Resistance to women's leadership:** Traditional norms often questioned women's roles in leadership. In addition, coordination gaps across departments created administrative hurdles for inclusive governance.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

As a Model Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat, Ishanagar Gram Panchayat introduced a series of integrated, gender-responsive initiatives aimed at strengthening inclusive governance and community development:

- **Strengthening participation and transparency:** Regular Gram Sabha meetings were organised with active participation from women, creating spaces for dialogue, collective decision-making, and greater accountability.

- **Improving health and sanitation:** Primary Health Centre (PHC) services were strengthened, sanitation awareness campaigns were conducted, and gender-sensitive facilities were introduced to promote safety and dignity.

- **Supporting girls' education:** The construction of toilets for girls in school, establishment of a community library, and targeted community outreach increased girls' enrolment, attendance and retention in schools.

- **Promoting economic inclusion:** Expanded access to welfare schemes, improved road connectivity, and reliable drinking water infrastructure enhanced both women's economic opportunities and overall community well-being.

- **Ensuring safety and grievance redressal:** Street lighting, secure sanitation facilities and strengthened community grievance mechanisms helped ensure safety, dignity and timely resolution of concerns.

Together, these initiatives laid the foundation for a participatory, accountable and women-centred governance model.

Outcomes

These focused interventions led to measurable social, institutional and gender-related progress.

- **Social outcomes:** Women emerged as active contributors to local governance, fostering stronger community ownership, unity and pride in development initiatives.

- **Institutional outcomes:** Public service delivery improved and coordination among departments got strengthened.

- **Gender outcomes:** Women's leadership gained wider acceptance, girls' school enrolment and retention increased significantly, and awareness around safety and dignity grew across the community.

As a result, Ishanagar is now widely recognised within the district as a "Symbol of Women's Empowerment".

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

The transformation of Ishanagar has been driven by the leadership of Smt. Nidhi Mishra, whose approach combines administrative efficiency with deep community engagement.

- **Inclusive and participatory leadership:** She promotes open dialogue, encourages community involvement, and prioritises collective decision-making.

- **Strong administrative coordination:** By overcoming social resistance and

strengthening inter-departmental collaboration, she has ensured timely and accountable service delivery.

- **Empathetic governance:** Her leadership balances firm administration with sensitivity to community needs, helping reshape governance while empowering women.

Reflections from the Sarpanch

The transformation of a Panchayat is not only about building infrastructure; it is about changing mindsets and creating a sense of shared ownership within the community.

Digital Outreach
(Scan to watch the MWFGP Best Practice video)

A Panchayat's Commitment to Women's Dignity and Empowerment

Arjuni Gram Panchayat, State: Maharashtra

Integrated Model of Governance

Gram Panchayat
Arjuni

Block
Kagal

District
Kolhapur

Population
2,217

Sarpanch
Shri. Bapu Rama Yadav

Challenges

Transforming Arjuni into a Model Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat required undertaking work on health, nutrition, and safety of women and girls. Key challenges faced included:

- **Non-availability of women-friendly infrastructure in public spaces and government offices:** Women lacked safe, private spaces to address needs like breastfeeding within public institutions, highlighting a gap in gender-sensitive governance.
- **Poor maternal health indicators:** Limited awareness about institutional healthcare and traditional practices often led families to prefer home births, increasing health risks for both mothers and infants.
- **Limited awareness regarding nutrition:** This hindered the effective implementation of "Anaemia-Free" campaign. Long-standing dietary habits and limited awareness about balanced nutrition made it difficult to address anaemia among women and adolescents.
- **Limited economic opportunities for women:** Women lacked platforms for collective enterprise, restricting their financial independence and participation in local economy.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

To address these interconnected challenges, the Gram Panchayat implemented several forward-looking initiatives that focused on dignity, health, safety and economic empowerment.

- **Infrastructure for Dignity:** To address the gap in gender-sensitive infrastructure, the Gram Panchayat established dedicated spaces within Panchayat Bhawan - The "Pink Room" (a safe space for women to meet and share concerns) and "Hirkani Kaksh" (room for breastfeeding). These facilities provide women with safe and private spaces where they could meet, attend to personal needs, and access services with dignity. This initiative reinforced the Panchayat's commitment to making public institutions more inclusive and responsive to women's needs.

- **Maternal Health Incentives:** To improve maternal health outcomes and reduce home deliveries, the Gram Panchayat launched a "Baby Kit" programme. Under this initiative, every mother who delivered at the local health sub-centre was felicitated and provided with a kit for the newborn. This recognition was not only a way of welcoming the newborn but also acted as an incentive, encouraging institutional deliveries and promoting safer childbirth practices.

- **Entrepreneurial Initiatives through SHGs:** Women's empowerment was advanced through the formation of 29 SHGs. These groups provided a platform for savings, skill development and small-scale enterprises, enabling women to become economically independent.

- **Digital Safety Monitoring:** To ensure safety of women and girls, especially girls pursuing education, the Panchayat installed a village-wide CCTV network. Strategically installed CCTV cameras monitored key public areas, discouraging harassment and improving safety and security. The initiative not only acted as a deterrent to misconduct but also reassured families about the safety of public spaces.

Outcomes

The combination of inclusive planning and community participation has produced significant and measurable results:

- **Increased participation of women in Panchayat activities:** Women's presence and participation in Panchayat activities increased because of availability of women friendly infrastructure, fostering a more inclusive local governance environment while ensuring that women could access public services without hesitation or discomfort.

- **Improved maternal health status:** Institutional deliveries increased, reducing the risks associated with home births. The presence of a resident midwife further strengthened maternal healthcare services, ensuring safer deliveries and improved care for both mothers and newborns.

- **Improved economic independence for women:** Women's economic participation increased significantly through skills training. The SHGs created a strong network of financially active women, fostering entrepreneurship and strengthening the village economy while enhancing women's financial independence.

- **Increased confidence for girls to pursue education:** Parents reported increased confidence in allowing their daughters to travel to school and participate in community activities, contributing to a safer and more supportive environment for girls' education.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

The Sarpanch had a clear vision of transforming Arjuni into a women-friendly Gram Panchayat. Instead of addressing issues in isolation, the leadership focused on a holistic approach covering health, safety, dignity and economic empowerment. By establishing women friendly infrastructure, especially a room for breastfeeding mothers, the Sarpanch showed a deep understanding of women's everyday needs and dignity, ensuring governance structures were inclusive and responsive. Innovative initiatives such as the baby kit programme and digital safety monitoring reflect the Sarpanch's ability to design practical, locally relevant solutions to address maternal health and safety concerns.

Reflections from the Sarpanch

> ***A truly developed village is one where public spaces, services and opportunities are designed with women in focus. Arjuni will continue to move in that direction.***

Digital Outreach
(Scan to watch the MWFGP Best Practice video)

From Barriers to Breakthroughs: Building a Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat

Pehlawn Gram Panchayat, State: Mizoram

Integrated Model of Governance

Gram Panchayat
Pehlawn

Block
Darlawn

District
Aizawl

Population
900

Sarpanch
Smt. Lalsiamthari

Challenges

The Gram Panchayat faced a range of institutional and systemic barriers while implementing the Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat initiative:

- **Limited institutional capacity:** Elected representatives, especially women, had minimal access to structured training and formal orientation, restricting their understanding of governance procedures and undermining their confidence to perform their roles effectively.
- **Entrenched patriarchal norms:** Deep-rooted social attitudes continued to shape community dynamics, limiting women's participation in decision-making and discouraging them from speaking openly during Gram Sabha deliberations.
- **Severe financial constraints:** Low Own Source Revenue (OSR) and limited fiscal autonomy constrained the Panchayat's ability to design and sustain gender-responsive development initiatives.
- **Hesitation to assume leadership roles:** Many elected women representatives were reluctant to assume public leadership roles due to limited exposure to administrative processes and public forums.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

To address these challenges, Smt. Lalsiamthari, the Gram Panchayat Sarpanch, led a series of institutional and community-level interventions:

- **Institutionalising inclusive Gram Sabhas:** Regular Gram Sabha meetings were convened to discuss development priorities, with deliberate efforts to ensure meaningful participation of women and marginalised groups.

- **Strengthening leadership capacity:** Training and capacity-building programmes designed to enhance leadership skills and governance competencies among elected women representatives were organised.

- **Mobilising financial resources:** The Panchayat intensified efforts to strengthen Own Source Revenue (OSR) and leveraged convergence with government schemes to mobilise additional resources for priority interventions such as improving sanitation facilities and the village water supply system.

- **Building inter-departmental partnerships:** Close coordination with line departments and community stakeholders helped align Panchayat initiatives with broader development programmes.

Outcomes

These interventions resulted in tangible improvements in governance, participation and service delivery:

- **Increased women's participation and voice:** Regular Gram Sabha meetings, combined with leadership training and institutional support, significantly strengthened women's confidence and participation. Women representatives increasingly articulated their perspectives in public forums, enabling them to influence deliberations and contribute more actively to Panchayat decision-making.

- **Gender-responsive infrastructure improvements:** Enhanced financial mobilisation and convergence strategies expanded the Panchayat's resource base and enabled it to address critical infrastructure gaps. In collaboration with line departments, the Panchayat constructed separate toilets for girls and boys in the local school and upgraded the village water supply system—interventions that directly support gender-sensitive service delivery.

- **Strengthened institutional credibility:** Visible improvements in governance practices and local infrastructure enhanced community trust and reinforced the Panchayat's reputation as an emerging Model Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

The Sarpanch's leadership played a pivotal role in driving transformation. Her leadership is characterised by:

- A visionary and reform-oriented outlook
- Strong commitment to women's empowerment and inclusive governance
- Ability to mobilise resources through convergence and community engagement
- Consistent encouragement of women's leadership within Panchayat institutions.

These attributes created an enabling environment for women to participate meaningfully in governance and laid the foundation for a more gender-responsive Panchayat system.

Reflections from the Sarpanch

> ***When women participate actively in Gram Sabhas and engage directly with government departments, their voices begin to shape Panchayat decisions. Inclusion is not symbolic—it transforms governance.***

Digital Outreach
(Scan to watch the MWFGP Best Practice video)

When Women Lead, Communities Rise: The Power of Mahila Sabhas in Transforming Governance

Namanguda Gram Panchayat, State: Odisha

Governance

Gram Panchayat
Namanguda

Block
Gumma

District
Gajapati

Population
4,883

Sarpanch
Smt. Puspanjali Bhuyan

Challenges

Before adopting the Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat initiative, the Gram Panchayat saw limited participation of women and youth in governance and community engagement, because of the perception that Gram Sabha meetings are routine formalities rather than dynamic spaces for decision-making and local development. This weakened collective ownership reduced their influence in shaping community priorities.

Recognising that sustainable change must emerge from within the community, the Sarpanch strengthened the organisation of Mahila Sabhas and ensured women's participation in Gram Sabhas, so that they became effective spaces for women's collective voice and leadership. Namanguda is a classic example of how women's active participation in governance became the foundation for addressing long-standing social issue like gender-based violence and gender disparities in education.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

- **Regular conduct of Mahila Sabhas:** Mahila Sabhas were organised on a regular basis and became preparatory forums where women articulated concerns, built consensus and brought unified proposals to the Gram Sabha.

- **Mobilising participation of women and young people in Gram Sabhas:** Interactive activities, discussions, games and competitions were organised prior to Gram Sabha meetings to encourage women and girls to attend, speak and take ownership of development initiatives.

- **Revitalising Gram Sabhas as inclusive decision-making platforms:** Women's issues discussed during the Mahila Sabha were raised as part of the Gram Sabha. As part of these discussions, the Panchayat passed a "Zero Tolerance" resolution against domestic violence. It was also decided to initiate a dedicated Women's Help Desk to provide accessible, community-based support, ensuring safety, security and timely redressal of women's concerns. Similarly, concerns about high school dropout rates amongst girls led to the Panchayat undertaking focused interventions like awareness campaigns, family counselling and community mobilisation to ensure girls are retained in school.

Outcomes

Women's meaningful participation in governance through Mahila Sabhas and Gram Sabhas produced transformative results:

- **Enhanced democratic engagement:** Women and youth began viewing Gram Sabhas as vibrant platforms for shaping policies and development agendas rather than routine gatherings. This helped to increase their participation and involvement in governance processes.

- **Improved safety and justice mechanisms:** Women-led decision-making in Gram Sabha meetings transformed the Panchayat into a secure, inclusive and responsive community. The adoption of the Zero Tolerance resolution, along with the establishment of a Women's Help Desk, strengthened reporting systems and created a safer environment, effectively addressing gender-based violence.

- **Educational equity and inclusion:** Sustained participation in governance and Gram Sabhas ensured universal retention of girls in schools, reducing gender disparities in education and promoting long-term empowerment.

Through the above-mentioned initiatives, the Gram Panchayat emerged as a Model Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat, demonstrating how

empowering women in governance directly advances safety, justice and equality.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

Sarpanch Puspanjali Bhuyan exemplifies inclusive, empathetic and justice-oriented leadership through:

- A strong grassroots participatory approach
- A firm commitment to women's safety and security
- Persistent promotion of gender equity in education.

Her visionary leadership successfully integrated women's voices and youth engagement into governance processes, reinforcing the Panchayat's identity as a women-friendly institution.

Reflection of the Sarpanch

> ***Panchayats can create lasting impact by promoting inclusion, protecting women's rights, encouraging youth participation, and amplifying the voices of women and vulnerable community members.***

Digital Outreach
(Scan to watch the MWFGP Best Practice video)

Empowering Women through Integrated Development Initiatives

Rurka Kalan Gram Panchayat, State: Punjab

Economic Empowerment

Gram Panchayat
Rurka Kalan

Block
RurkaKalan

District
Jalandhar

Population
7,467

Sarpanch
Akwinder Kaur

Challenges

Gram Panchayat Rurka Kalan confronted significant challenges in advancing women's empowerment through sustainable livelihoods and economic inclusion. A primary concern was the limited access to structured skill development and income-generating opportunities for women, which restricted their financial independence. Strengthening self-reliance through market-relevant training, expanding avenues for dignified employment, and ensuring that women could actively participate in local economic activities also emerged as key issues.

In addition, improving access to nutrition, healthcare and social awareness remained essential to building a strong foundation for women's overall development. Creating a supportive and secure environment that encouraged women to confidently step into entrepreneurship and skill-based occupations was a key priority for the Panchayat.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

Under the dynamic leadership of Sarpanch Akwinder Kaur, Gram Panchayat Rurka Kalan adopted a focused and structured approach centred on skilling and economic empowerment.

- **Skill Development Programmes introduced:** The Panchayat introduced targeted skill development programmes, including training in sewing, knitting, embroidery, beauty and wellness services, enabling women to pursue self-employment and micro-enterprises.
- **Digital Literacy initiated:** To further diversify employment opportunities, trainings in computer literacy were

promoted through schools and community centres. These programmes were designed not only to enhance employability but also to promote financial inclusion, build confidence and improve access to information.

- **Health and well-being promoted:** Recognising that economic empowerment must be supported by well-being, the Panchayat organised regular health camps, eye check-up camps and yoga sessions. Nutritional support was strengthened through Anganwadi centres to ensure that women and girls could actively participate in education and skill-building activities.

- **Waste Management initiatives undertaken:** The Panchayat worked towards improving living conditions through household waste management initiatives, including the construction of waste pits, contributing to a healthier and cleaner environment.

- **Village Defence Committee established:** To strengthen women's confidence and public participation, a Village Defence Committee chaired by the Sarpanch was established, and female police officers conducted safety and emergency response training sessions for committee members to enable them support others in distress.

Outcomes

The structured skill development programmes have translated directly into income generation for over 150 women. Many beneficiaries have started home-based enterprises or secured local employment, contributing to household earnings and strengthening their financial independence. These initiatives have expanded women's participation in the village economy and promoted micro-entrepreneurship at the grassroots level.

The introduction of digital literacy training has enhanced women's employability and financial inclusion. Women are now better equipped to use digital platforms for accessing government schemes, managing digital payments, seeking employment

opportunities, and promoting their products and services. This has increased their confidence, improved access to information, and enabled greater independence in economic decision-making.

Health camps and strengthened nutritional support through Anganwadi centres have improved overall health and well-being among women and girls. This has enabled consistent participation in skill training, education and income-generating activities, thereby reinforcing the importance of integrated programmes.

Waste management initiatives, including the construction of household waste pits, have created a cleaner and healthier living environment. Improved sanitation has contributed to better public health outcomes, reduced vulnerability to illness, and enhanced overall quality of life, supporting women's productivity and active community engagement.

The formation of the Village Defence Committee and safety training have strengthened women's sense of security and collective responsibility. Increased awareness of emergency response mechanisms has enhanced women's confidence to participate in public and economic spaces without hesitation.

Overall, the convergence of skilling, digital inclusion, health, environmental improvement, and safety measures has created an enabling ecosystem in Rurka Kalan. The Panchayat's integrated approach has ensured that women's empowerment is not limited to training alone but is reinforced through sustained economic participation, improved well-being and strengthened community confidence.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

Akwinder Kaur is a proactive and visionary leader, deeply committed to economic empowerment of women and children. Her leadership style is participatory and community-driven, encouraging active engagement of women in economic, social and decision-making spaces. She demonstrates strong dedication to inclusive growth, with a clear focus on skill development, self-reliance and sustainable livelihood creation.

Reflections from the Sarpanch

Every girl must be educated, skilled and financially independent. Our collective responsibility should be to equip them with the opportunities and the support they need to achieve their aspirations.

Digital Outreach
(Scan to watch the MWFGP Best Practice video)

From Intent to Impact: Building a Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat

Merta Gram Panchayat, State: Rajasthan

Governance

Gram Panchayat
Merta

Block
Mavli

District
Udaipur

Population
2,391

Sarpanch
Shri Bhagwati Lal Bhil

Challenges

Despite strong intent, the journey towards creating a women-friendly Gram Panchayat faced several structural and operational barriers:

- Frontline workers and PRI members had a limited understanding of gender issues, the concept of women-friendly governance, and their specific roles in advancing it.
- Coordination gaps persisted among PRIs, representatives of line departments and community members—particularly on matters concerning women's empowerment.
- Many frontline workers and PRI members lacked clarity regarding departmental mandates, activities and responsibilities related to women's and girls' development.

These challenges underscored the need for structured convergence, clearer accountability and sustained gender sensitisation.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

To address these gaps, the Panchayat under the leadership of Shri Bhil adopted a systematic and inclusive approach centred around convergence, capacity building and community participation. Critical initiatives included:

- **Formation of a convergence platform:** A multi-stakeholder platform was established to promote holistic development of women and girls. This

forum brought together frontline workers, PRI members, government officials, teachers and community representatives to collectively plan and act for the welfare of women.

- **Creation of a Core Group:** A Core Group was constituted within the Panchayat, comprising of the Sarpanch, Ward Panchs, Village Development Officer, Frontline Workers (Sathin, ASHA, Anganwadi workers, teachers) active women and men, and community leaders. This group became the driving force behind gender-responsive planning and implementation.

- **Gender orientation and role clarity:** Core Group members were sensitised on gender issues and were trained to understand their responsibilities in developing a women-friendly Panchayat. This strengthened both awareness and accountability.

- **Institutionalised monthly meetings:** The Core Group began holding regular monthly meetings. Issues raised in Mahila Sabhas and Gram Sabhas were reviewed, prioritised and translated into concrete actions. These activities were systematically incorporated into the Gram Panchayat Development Plan, ensuring institutional backing and resource allocation.

- **Safety audit and corrective action:** The Core Group led a Safety Audit to identify unsafe public spaces for women and girls. Based on the findings, corrective measures were implemented to create a safer and more inclusive community environment.

- **Multi-departmental empowerment efforts:** The Core Group in collaboration with line departments facilitated a wide range of initiatives, including organisation of health camps for women and adolescent girls, ensuring functional and separate toilets for girls in schools and public areas, installation of streetlights and CCTV cameras at vulnerable public locations, removal of roadside bushes to enhance safe mobility for girls, provision of life-skills education for adolescent girls and linking girls with skill development and livelihood training programmes. These interventions collectively promoted social, educational, health and economic empowerment of women and girls.

Outcomes

The sustained efforts of the Core Group resulted in measurable improvements:

- Strengthened convergence and accountability among PRIs, frontline workers and line departments.

- Improved information sharing on women's development indicators and related initiatives.

- Increased participation of women in Mahila Sabha meetings, reflecting stronger institutional inclusion.

- Installation of CCTV cameras and streetlights significantly enhanced public safety and community confidence.

- Construction of separate toilets for girls in the school and in public places improved dignity and access.

- Girls who had dropped out of school were enrolled in state open school system, while some others were enrolled in skill development courses.

These outcomes demonstrate a clear shift from fragmented action to coordinated, gender-responsive local governance.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

The Sarpanch demonstrated the following leadership attributes:

- **Visionary commitment:** Demonstrated a clear and sustained commitment to transforming the Panchayat into a women-friendly and inclusive institution.
- **Accountability-oriented:** Ensured that PRI members, frontline workers and departmental officials fulfilled their roles and responsibilities effectively.
- **Collaborative leadership:** Fostered convergence among multiple stakeholders, encouraging coordinated planning and collective action.
- **Gender-sensitive approach:** Prioritised the safety, education, health and economic empowerment of women and girls in all development initiatives.
- **Proactive problem-solving:** Actively addressed issues identified through Mahila Sabhas, Gram Sabhas and Safety Audits by facilitating timely solutions.
- **Institutional strengthening:** Promoted the integration of women-centric priorities into the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP).

Reflections from the Sarpanch

> ***A women-friendly Panchayat is built through collective responsibility, inclusive planning and committed leadership.***

Digital Outreach
(Scan to watch the MWFGP Best Practice video)

Empowering Women through Integrated Development Initiatives

Rarah Gram Panchayat, State: Rajasthan

Safety and Security

Gram Panchayat
Rarah

Block
Kumher

District
Deeg

Population
6,973

Sarpanch
Kusum Singh

Challenges

Rarah's transformation into a Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat began with confronting long-standing social norms and safety concerns that limited women's presence in public spaces. The first and most significant challenge was encouraging women and girls to step out of their homes and participate in public life. Social norms and family restrictions often prevented girls from attending Gram Sabha meetings or engaging in community programmes. Safety in public spaces was another pressing concern. For women to move freely and participate in village activities, they needed an environment where they felt secure and protected. Equally important was the challenge of building confidence among women to speak openly and participate in governance processes. Many women were hesitant to voice their opinions in Gram Sabha discussions. Overcoming this required sustained awareness efforts, trust-building and creating platforms where women felt heard and respected.

Initiatives

To address the above-mentioned challenges, Gram Panchayat Rarah implemented a series of focused initiatives aimed at creating a safer, more inclusive, and empowering environment for women and girls.

- **Empowering girls through early awareness:** Self-defence training and awareness sessions on "Good Touch and Bad Touch" were introduced at the school level. These programmes helped young girls build confidence, understand personal safety, and develop the courage to participate more actively in community life from an early age. In addition, the

Panchayat initiated an e-library, an online collection of reference books and reading material for girls.

- **Strengthening safety infrastructure:** The Panchayat enhanced public safety by installing CCTV surveillance systems, improving street lighting and developing quality roads. These infrastructure improvements made public spaces safer and encouraged women to move freely within the village.

- **Awareness on rights and entitlements:** The Panchayat conducted awareness campaigns to educate women on their rights, government schemes and social entitlements. Access to this information enabled women to make informed decisions and benefit from development initiatives.

- **Creating dedicated platforms for women's voices:** Mahila Sabhas and exclusive Gram Sabhas were organised for women and girls. These forums provided a safe and supportive environment where women could discuss their concerns and share ideas. These platforms helped to gradually build the confidence of women to participate actively in broader governance processes and their participation in the Gram Sabha increased.

Outcomes

The targeted initiatives undertaken by Gram Panchayat Rarah have led to tangible social, educational and economic outcomes for women and girls in the village.

- **Increased participation in Local governance:** As a result of special Mahila Sabhas and women-focused Gram Sabhas, women now participate actively in community decision-making processes. They confidently raise issues related to safety, welfare and development, marking a significant shift from earlier hesitations around speaking in public forums.

- **Greater sense of safety in public spaces:** The installation of CCTV surveillance systems, improved street lighting and better road infrastructure has improved safety across the village. Women and girls now feel more secure while moving around the Panchayat, enabling them to access education, community spaces and public meetings more freely.

- **Improved educational aspirations and opportunities:** Initiatives such as self-defence training, school-based awareness sessions and the Panchayat's E-library and learning facilities have encouraged girls to pursue education with greater

confidence. Young women from the village have secured jobs in various government departments, reflecting rising aspirations and improved learning opportunities.

- **Growing economic independence among women:** Through awareness programmes on rights, entitlements and government schemes, women have become more informed about livelihood opportunities and support systems. As a result, several women have started their own small businesses, demonstrating increasing financial independence and entrepreneurial confidence.

- **A stronger culture of empowerment and dignity:** Collectively, these initiatives have transformed the social environment of Rarah. Women are now more visible, confident and engaged in public life, positioning the Panchayat as a model of safety, dignity and empowerment for women.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

The leadership of **Sarpanch Kusum Singh** has been the driving force behind Rarah's transformation into a Model Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat. With a clear vision for women's empowerment, she has championed initiatives that prioritise safety, participation and opportunity for women and girls. Her empathetic and responsive leadership style, combined with decisive action and a results-oriented approach, has enabled the Panchayat to translate ideas into tangible change on the ground. By fostering community trust, encouraging women's voices in governance and ensuring that development initiatives remain inclusive and gender-sensitive, she has set a powerful example of transformative grassroots leadership.

Reflections from the Sarpanch

> ***True development begins when women feel safe to step forward, speak up and lead. When women progress, the whole village moves forward.***

Digital Outreach
(Scan to watch the MWFGP Best Practice video)

Driving Educational Excellence through Participatory Governance

Thamal Gram Panchayat, State: Tamil Nadu

Education and Skill Development

Gram Panchayat
Thamal

Block
Kanchipuram

District
Kanchipuram

Population
8,332

Sarpanch
S.Shanmugam

Challenges

Before rolling out the Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat initiative, the Gram Panchayat faced several challenges that impeded the delivery of quality education.

- **Inadequate infrastructure:** Panchayat schools lacked proper classrooms and laboratory facilities, limiting students' learning opportunities.
- **High student dropouts:** Weak parent-school engagement and non-functional school management committees contributed to high dropout rates.
- **Limited participation of women in panchayat activities:** Limited organisation of Bal Sabhas and Mahila Sabhas restricting the participation of women and young people in planning and local problem-solving.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

To overcome these challenges, the Panchayat under the able leadership of Sarpanch Shanmugam, implemented a multi-faceted approach comprising the following initiatives:

- **Enhanced community engagement:** Bal Sabhas and Mahila Sabhas were conducted to involve children, youth and women in planning and decision-making, ensuring development initiatives were locally responsive and inclusive.
- **Resource mobilisation for school infrastructure:** Funds were secured through MLA and ministerial support,

convergence with government schemes, and CSR contributions to improve school infrastructure and learning resources.

- **Strengthening governance platforms:** Institutional mechanisms, including Parent-Teacher Associations, School Management Committees, alumni associations, and student bodies, were activated to enhance accountability and participation.

- **Student and parent outreach:** Regular follow-ups, parent meetings, and student counselling strengthened engagement, reduced dropouts, and fostered a culture of learning.

Outcomes

These combined efforts produced transformative results for education and community participation:

- **Sustained community engagement:** Active participation of community members in Bal Sabhas, Mahila Sabhas and other governance platforms strengthened collective decision-making and accountability.

- **Upgraded infrastructure:** Schools renovated classrooms, set up a laboratory, prayer hall and installed RO facilities for safe drinking water.

- **Improved student retention:** All Panchayat schools reported zero dropouts in the last couple of years, ensuring continuous access to education for every child.

- **Skill development for women and girls:** Based on decisions taken in the Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas, vocational and skill-training programmes were introduced for young people, expanding opportunities and promoting empowerment alongside education.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

The Sarpanch demonstrated visionary, solution-oriented leadership through:

- **Consistent engagement:** Ensuring regular conduct of Bal Sabhas and Mahila Sabhas to foster community involvement.
- **Systematic problem-solving:** Converting community issues into formal resolutions and mobilising funds from multiple schemes for effective implementation.

Reflection from the Sarpanch

> ***Success is built on collaboration, not isolation, and thrives when citizens, officials, representatives and NGOs act together.***

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From Vulnerability to Voice: A Panchayat's Journey towards Women's Safety and Empowerment

Kanchanbari Gram Panchayat, State: Tripura

Safety and Security

Gram Panchayat
Kanchanbari

Block
Kumarghat RD Block

District
Unakoti

Population
2,581

Sarpanch
Smt. Shelly Bhattacherjee (Choudhury)

Challenges

The Gram Panchayat encountered several critical challenges in its efforts to ensure women's safety and empowerment:

- **Unsafe public spaces:** The absence of secure and well-monitored areas left women and girls vulnerable to harassment and violence.
- **Weak community protection systems:** Limited community mechanisms built on collective vigilance, shared responsibility, and coordinated action to ensure safety and dignity of women, girls and individuals in vulnerable situations.
- **Limited awareness of rights:** Many women lacked awareness of their legal rights, entitlements, protective laws and grievance redressal mechanisms, making it difficult for survivors to seek justice and access support services.
- **Restrictive social norms:** Deep-rooted traditional practices restricted women's mobility and limited their participation in public life and decision-making processes.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

To address these challenges, the Panchayat, under the leadership of Smt. Shelly Bhattacherjee, implemented a comprehensive, rights-based governance programme focused on women's safety and empowerment:

- **Rights awareness campaigns:** Conducted

educational drives to inform women about their legal rights, government schemes and available support services.

- **Strengthening community institutions:** Established Village Women Safety Committees (VWSCs) and activated Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs) and Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committees (VHSNCs) to enhance community monitoring and shared responsibility.

- **Collaboration with law enforcement:** Developed strong coordination mechanisms with law enforcement authorities to ensure timely reporting, protection and swift action in cases of violence.

- **Encouraging women's participation in local governance:** To ensure their needs and concerns around safety found a place in the Gram Panchayat Development Plan.

- **Improving safety infrastructure:** Carried out safety audits to identify vulnerable areas and safety risks and improve infrastructure based on findings.

Outcomes

The Panchayat's focused interventions led to measurable improvements:

- **Enhanced safety and security:** Installation of safety measures and active community monitoring created safer public spaces for women and girls.

- **Increased reporting and responsiveness:** Village community safety committees encouraged women to report incidents, resulting in more timely and effective action by authorities.

- **Greater awareness and confidence:** Awareness campaigns strengthened women's understanding of their rights, enabling them to gain confidence to access services, challenge discrimination, leading to greater empowerment and improved social outcomes.

- **Inclusive governance:** Women's active engagement in Panchayat affairs fostered a culture of accountability and collective responsibility towards women's safety.

- **Improved infrastructure:** Based on findings of the safety audits, key safety risks were addressed including the installation of tubelights and CCTV cameras in high-risk locations.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

The Sarpanch demonstrates empathetic and inclusive leadership through:

- **Community-oriented approach:** Commitment to prioritising welfare and safety of community members, especially women and marginalised groups.

- **Empowerment focus:** Demonstrates focus on empowerment by enabling women to participate actively in decision-making, amplifying voices that are often unheard.

- **Proactive engagement:** Commitment to strengthen institutional and community mechanisms to ensure rights, safety and dignity for all citizens.

Reflections from the Sarpanch

> ***Safety and dignity of women are key to building a prosperous and equitable community.***

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Powering Change through Women's Leadership

Rajpur Gram Panchayat, State: Uttar Pradesh

Integrated Model of Governance

Gram Panchayat
Rajpur

Block
Hathras

District
Hathras

Population
1,963 *(Census 2001)*

Sarpanch
Ms. Priyanka Tiwari

Challenges

Rajpur Gram Panchayat's journey towards becoming a Women-Friendly Panchayat required addressing deep rooted structural, administrative and socio-cultural barriers. Some of these included:

- **Low participation of women in governance:** Traditional social norms restricted women's active participation in Panchayat decision-making processes. Women's voices were often underrepresented in planning forums, limiting the ability to design policies and programmes that directly addressed their needs.

- **Health, Nutrition, and Livelihood Gaps:** Improving maternal and child health coverage, strengthening nutrition services, and expanding sustainable livelihood opportunities for women were critical challenges that needed focused intervention.

- **Resource Constraints and Infrastructure Gaps:** The Panchayat faced constraints in mobilising adequate financial resources for critical infrastructure such as sanitation systems, renewable energy, roads and safety infrastructure. Delays in fund release and limited local resources often slowed implementation of development projects aimed at improving women's safety, mobility and access to services.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

To overcome the above-mentioned challenges, Rajpur Gram Panchayat implemented a set of innovative, inclusive and convergent initiatives that addressed governance, health, education, livelihoods, safety and environmental sustainability.

- **Participation in governance:** The Panchayat institutionalised Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas as regular platforms for participatory planning and inclusive governance. These forums created structured opportunities for women, adolescents and children to voice their concerns, contribute to village development plans, and participate in decision-making processes.

- **Health and nutrition:** Anganwadi services were strengthened and universal registration under the Poshan Tracker was ensured. The Panchayat facilitated complete maternal healthcare coverage through early registration of pregnant women, antenatal check-ups, institutional deliveries, and regular conduct of Village Health and Nutrition Days (VHNDs). Improvements in sanitation and hygiene practices were also promoted to support better health outcomes.

- **Education and skill development:** To empower youth, especially young girls, the Panchayat established digital learning facilities, computer education programmes, library support systems and mentorship initiatives. Awareness campaigns were conducted to address social issues such as child marriage and gender discrimination, encouraging greater educational participation among girls.

- **Access to economic opportunities:** Women's economic empowerment was strengthened through the promotion of skill development programmes for SHG women. Access to employment opportunities under MGNREGA for women was encouraged. Innovative waste-to-wealth initiatives like a plastic waste management unit construction of compost pits, plastic banks and an e-rickshaw based waste collection system created livelihood opportunities for women, while also contributing to environmental sustainability.

- **Safety and security:** To enhance safety and mobility, particularly for women and

children, the Panchayat installed solar street lights and CCTV cameras across key public locations. Programmes to create awareness regarding the women's helplines and One Stop Centres were organised.

Outcomes

The integrated and participatory approach adopted by the Sarpanch, Ms. Priyanka Tiwari, led to significant and measurable outcomes across multiple sectors:

- Women's participation in governance increased substantially through institutionalised Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas, leading to more inclusive decision-making and participatory planning.
- Maternal and child health indicators have improved due to strengthened Anganwadi services, comprehensive ANC coverage and improved sanitation practices.
- Education and awareness initiatives have encouraged greater participation of girls in learning and have helped address harmful practices like child marriage.
- Systematic waste management through waste to wealth initiatives have made the village cleaner and greener and also increased women's economic opportunities.
- Enhanced safety infrastructure, through installation of 60 solar street lights and 44 CCTV cameras, have significantly improved safety and mobility for women and girls.

Overall, Rajpur has emerged as a progressive and replicable model of a Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat, demonstrating how community participation, innovation and strong leadership can transform rural governance.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

Ms. Priyanka Tiwari has demonstrated visionary leadership, strong community mobilisation skills and a deep commitment to women's empowerment and inclusive development. Her leadership approach emphasises transparency, convergence of government schemes and participatory governance.

Reflections from the Sarpanch

Regular Mahila Sabhas and the active participation of women in planning are the foundation of inclusive grassroots governance. Panchayats must also prioritise sustainability, digital empowerment and livelihood opportunities to build resilient and truly women-friendly communities.

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Empowering Women, Transforming Health and Creating a Zero-Waste Future

Tackling Gram Panchayat: State West Bengal

Health and Nutrition

Gram Panchayat
Tackling I

Block
Rangli Rangliot

District
Darjeeling

Population
3,466

Sarpanch
Smt. Chandni Tamang

Challenges

Takling Gram Panchayat faced several critical issues affecting women's health and the environment. Maternal and child health was a concern due to irregular antenatal check-ups, low institutional delivery rates, nutritional deficiencies and widespread anaemia among adolescent girls and women. Emergency support for pregnant women was limited and awareness about maternal care was low. The community also grappled with unmanaged plastic waste, leading to environmental and health concerns.

Key Initiatives Undertaken

To address these challenges, Smt. Tamang, Sarpanch of the Takling Gram Panchayat, implemented comprehensive measures:

- **Maternal health programmes:** Timely ANC registration and ANC check-ups, regular monitoring of pregnant women including provision of nutrition supplementation and promotion of institutional deliveries.
- **Emergency support:** Provision of the "Matrijaan" ambulance exclusively for pregnant women.
- **Anaemia prevention:** Iron supplementation in schools and community awareness on nutrition.
- **Health camps and awareness:** Regular screening, check-ups and educational campaigns for women and children.
- **Sustainable waste management:** Active involvement of women SHGs in door-to-door plastic collection, segregation

and transport to the plastic waste management centre at Takdah.

In addition to this, the Sarpanch initiated programmes in tailoring, handicrafts, food processing and other income-generating activities to promote self-reliance among women and young girls. The Gram Panchayat sought support from Sayog Sangha Women Multipurpose Cooperative Society to guide Women SHGs, provide technical support, innovative livelihood ideas, and financial assistance to promote sustainable women-led enterprises.

Outcomes

The Panchayat's focused initiatives led to significant improvements:

- **Zero maternal mortality:** A key health milestone, reflecting safer pregnancies and deliveries.
- **Improved maternal and child health:** Enhanced nutrition, regular check-ups and better overall well-being.
- **Environmental sustainability:** Recognition as a "Zero Waste Gram Panchayat" due to effective plastic waste management led by empowered women.

Through coordinated efforts, Takling Gram Panchayat turned challenges into achievements, creating a healthy, safe, and sustainable community.

Leadership Attributes of the Sarpanch

The Sarpanch's leadership has been critical in shaping Takling as a women-centric Panchayat. Her key leadership attributes include:

- Prioritisation of women's economic independence, health and nutrition
- Promotion of self-reliance and economic empowerment
- Ability to ensure that initiatives are community-driven and responsive to local needs.

Reflections from the Sarpanch

> ***Investing in women's health—especially reproductive health—strengthens families, reduces maternal and child mortality, boosts economic productivity, and builds healthier, more resilient communities for generations to come.***

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