

PESA in Action

Stories of Strength and Self-governance

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Strength and
Self-governance

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और मत्स्यपालन, पशुपालन एवं डेयरी मंत्री
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Minister of Panchayati Raj and
Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying
Government of India

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Message

It gives me a great pleasure to present this compendium titled **“PESA in Action - Stories of Strength and Self Governance”**, a valuable repository of grassroots innovations and community-led initiatives that exemplify the effective implementation of *The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA Act)*.

PESA is a landmark legislation that restores and protects the rights of tribal communities over their land, water, forests resources and their culture and traditional governance systems. It reinforces the spirit of decentralized democracy by empowering Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas to function as institutions of self-governance.

This compendium showcases a diverse range of initiatives from PESA areas across the country where tribal communities have emerged as effective change agents, using the provisions of PESA to uphold their rights, strengthen accountability, and promote inclusive development. These best practices reflect how culturally sensitive and community-driven governance initiatives can lead to sustainable outcomes when supported by appropriate legal and institutional frameworks.

As we continue to advance the goals of social justice and equitable development, it is essential that the spirit of PESA is upheld in every aspect of governance in Fifth Schedule Areas. I urge all stakeholders—State Governments, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Gram Sabha members and civil society organizations—to draw inspiration from these practices and work collaboratively to strengthen tribal self-rule and grassroots democracy.

(Rajiv Ranjan Singh)

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MESSAGE

"The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996" (PESA Act) is a historic enactment that recognizes the unique socio-cultural fabric, traditional governance systems, and developmental needs of the tribal communities. By extending the spirit of participatory democracy to the Fifth Schedule Areas, PESA upholds the constitutional vision of inclusive and empowered self-governance.

The success stories documented in this volume here reflect not only the strength of community institutions but also the growing synergy between constitutional mandates and local action in Fifth Schedule Areas. It offers a compelling account of how tribal communities, through empowered Gram Sabhas and traditional institutions, are asserting their constitutional rights and shaping development that is rooted in their culture, knowledge, and aspirations. These practices highlight the critical importance of capacity building, institutional support, and responsive governance in realizing the full potential of PESA.

I extend my appreciation to all the individuals and institutions—community leaders, field practitioners, state authorities, and Ministry officials—who contributed to this meaningful exercise. I hope this publication will serve as a source of knowledge and inspiration for all stakeholders working towards inclusive and empowered governance in the Fifth Schedule Areas.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'एस.पी. सिंह बघेल' (S.P. Singh Baghel).

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MESSAGE

I am delighted to present this compendium, which showcases best practices in the implementation of "The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996" (PESA Act), across Fifth Schedule Areas in ten States. These best practices were documented during the "National Write-shop on Best Practices in PESA Geographies", held on 13–14 May 2025, in Pune, Maharashtra.

The PESA Act, 1996, is a landmark piece of legislation aimed at empowering tribal communities in Fifth Schedule Areas by strengthening the authority of the Gram Sabha. Exercising their powers under the Act, Gram Sabhas are asserting control over key resources such as land, minor forest produce, minor minerals, minor water bodies and also actively engaging in local planning, resource management, regulation of intoxicants, and customary dispute resolution. These initiatives have not only strengthened grassroots democratic institutions but also revealed the immense potential that exists within PESA villages.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring the effective implementation of PESA by empowering Gram Sabhas in Fifth Schedule Areas. These stories are not isolated successes; they form the foundation of a future in which tribal communities are empowered, resilient and self-determined.

I extend my sincere gratitude to all the writers, contributors, and state authorities who came forward to share these stories. These success stories are expected to inspire and guide other PESA villages across the country on their journey towards self-governance and empowerment.

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Contents

Introduction.....	13
-------------------	----

Theme 1 Strengthening & Empowerment of Gram Sabha

1.1. HP > Market in Our Hands: Kaza Panchayat Asserts PESA Rights.....	16
1.2. MP > The power of PESA-law brought liberation to the bonded labourers.....	20
1.3. CG > Gram Sabha manages community resources (Jal, Jungle and Jameen) through PESA.....	22
1.4. OD > Badaalubadi's Rural Haat: A Story of Collective Will, Self-Reliance and Pesa in Action.....	27
1.5. GJ > PESA in Action: Dolara's Tribal Market.....	29
1.6. AP > Conserving tradition through community inclusion.....	32
1.7. MH > Khoksa Bazaar: Apna Gaon, Apna Bazaar.....	34
1.8. MH > Devichapada's Model of self empowerment through PESA.....	37
1.9. AP > Voices of the Khonds: Governance from Within.....	39
1.10. CG > Gram Sabha generating revenue through tourism.....	41
1.11. TG > Strengthening Farmer Livelihoods via Accessible Village Shandies.....	43

Theme 2 Minor Forest Produce

2.1. HP > Participatory Distribution System of Minor Forest Produce.....	46
2.2. RJ > Sweet Revolution - Story of Paba's Honey.....	49
2.3. MP > Tendu Leafs transformed lives.....	51
2.4. AP > Fair Price, Fair Life: Gram Sabha owns minor forest produce.....	53
2.5. MH > The Zinganur Story: Empowering Communities Through Tendu Leaf Management.....	55
2.6. OD > Strengthening Tribal Livelihoods through PESA-Enabled Forest Based Enterprise.....	58

Theme 3 Minor Minerals

3.1. HP > Kaza's Community-Led Mineral Use Regulation.....	62
3.2. JH > Gram Sabhas takes charge of minor minerals.....	65
3.3. TG > Assured Income to Tribal Communities through Sand Mining.....	67

Theme 4 Management of Minor Water Bodies

4.1. HP > Flowing Together: Participatory Water Management in Powari.....	70
4.2. MH > Water resource development gained momentum with PESA.....	73
4.3. RJ > PESA Gram Sabha became a precedent of community water management.....	75

Theme 5 Prevention of Alienation of Land

5.1. JH >	PESA: Safeguarding Tribal Land Rights.....	78
5.2. MP >	PESA Act became helpful in resolving complex disputes.....	80
5.3. RJ >	Fighting displacement with PESA.....	82
5.4. TG >	Our village-our Norms.....	84
5.5. MP >	PESA Gram Sabha granted land entitlement.....	85

Theme 6 Regulating/Restricting the Sale and Consumption of Intoxicants

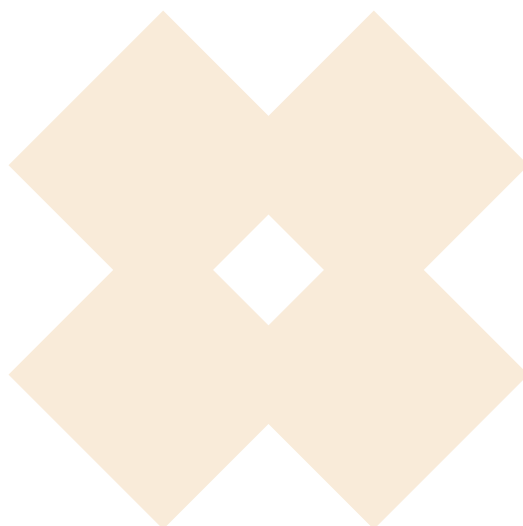
6.1. AP >	PESA enters, Intoxicants exits in Tadagiri.....	88
6.2. MP >	Towards Social Transformation in Tribal Society – Mission D3 (Dowry, Daru, DJ).....	90
6.3. MP >	Upholding Tribal Rights: Sonkhedi Gram Sabha Shuts Down Unauthorized Liquor Shop...	92

Theme 7 Planning and Management of Local Resources, including TSP

7.1. JH >	Jungle Suraksha thorough Kulhadi (axe) ban: Tundahuli leads the way.....	95
7.2. MH >	Maharashtra's 5% Direct Fund Scheme: Empowering the Roots.....	97
7.3. MH >	Pendharshet: A Symphony of Self-Governance and Cultural Harmony.....	100
7.4. OD >	Strengthening Tribal Self Governance - Customary Boundary Mapping through PESA & FRA.....	104
7.5. RJ >	Animal husbandry got momentum due to the Right to minor forest produce.....	107

Theme 8 Customary Mode of Dispute Resolution

8.1. JH >	Saving Villages from becoming city: PESA leads the way.....	110
8.2. TG >	Justice at Home With Zero Cost.....	112
8.3. MP >	Non-tribal Person Made to Return Transferred Land by Gram Sabha.....	114
8.4. OD >	Community Justice in Tribal Villages - PESA in Action.....	116



INTRODUCTION

The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act 1996 popularly known as PESA Act was legislated to keep the self-governance system prevalent in fifth-schedule areas aligned with the Panchayati Raj system introduced through the 73rd amendment of the Constitution. To do so the Gram Sabhas and Panchayats at the appropriate level were given additional powers and authority through PESA so as to maintain the continuity of powers and authority which they enjoyed under their traditional governance system.

To enable Gram Sabhas exercise these additional powers and authority, most of the states have framed their PESA Rules in last 15 years and are also in the process of implementing them. Some of the Gram Sabhas and Panchayats have also started exercising these powers and authority according to the rules. The exercise of these traditional powers in accordance with the PESA rules by Gram Sabhas and Panchayats sometimes go unnoticed because of lack of documentation.

Therefore, to highlight the exemplary works being done by several PESA Gram Sabhas and also to motivate other Gram Sabhas of PESA areas to learn from those who are exercising their powers and authority in accordance with PESA, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, with support from Transform Rural India, decided to bring together these best practices from the states with Fifth-Schedule Areas. Thus, a National Write-shop on Documenting Best Practices in PESA Geographies was held on 13-14 May 2025 at YASHADA, Pune, which saw participation from all 10 PESA states. The representatives of the states who participated in the write-shop were oriented on how to structure the best practices from their states and document them in a format which other Gram Sabhas could understand.

As an output of this effort, more than 30 best practices were received on various PESA themes such as strengthening and empowerment of Gram Sabha, management of community resources, minor minerals, minor forest produce, minor water bodies, regulating the sale and consumption of intoxicants, land acquisition, prevention of land alienation, and customary mode of dispute resolution. These best practices were further refined by a team of editors and made visually appealing by a team of illustrators and is now present before you as a compendium of best practices.

The aim of the compendium is to ensure knowledge exchange among Gram Sabhas and the states and guide future implementation of the PESA Act. It also aims to ensure that the state policies are informed by local knowledge and experiences.

This compendium has become a reality due to relentless efforts by community leaders of PESA areas, state governments, team of MoPR and technical support of TRI team, list of which is attached at the end of this compendium.

The aim of the compendium is to ensure knowledge exchange among Gram Sabhas and the states and guide future implementation of the PESA Act. It also aims to ensure that the state policies are informed by local knowledge and experiences.

STRENGTHENING & EMPOWERMENT OF GRAM SABHA

PESA Act Section 4 (d): Every Gram Sabha shall be competent to safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of the people, their cultural identity, community resources and the customary mode of dispute resolution.

PESA Act Section 4(e): Every Gram Sabha shall—

- (i) approve the plans, programmes and projects for social and economic development before such plans, programmes and projects are taken up for implementation by the Panchayat at the village level;
- (ii) be responsible for the identification or selection of persons as beneficiaries under the poverty alleviation and other programmes;

PESA Act Section 4(m)(iv): Panchayats at the appropriate level and the Gram Sabha are endowed specifically with the power to manage village markets by whatever name called.

MARKET IN OUR HANDS: KAZA PANCHAYAT ASSERTS PESA RIGHTS

The Gram Panchayat Kaza, has taken a proactive and structured step towards improving the functioning and governance of the local market. Recognizing the growing tourism in Spiti Valley and the need to streamline market operation, it has taken a proactive and structured step towards achieving this.

Introduction

This story belongs to the Gram Panchayat Kaza, located at an altitude of 3,625 meters in the Spiti Block, Lahaul-Spiti district, Himachal Pradesh. This Gram Panchayat falls under the PESA (The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996) Kaza Gram Panchayat lies in a geographically challenging region where temperatures can drop to as low as -30°C during winters, while the summers are quite pleasant. Due to this favorable summer weather, tourism-related activities have seen significant

growth in recent times. As more tourists began to visit, the size and scope of the local market also expanded.

Background

The arrival of non-Scheduled Tribe individuals has also influenced the local culture, for instance, shops staying open late into the night and an increase in noise levels

are now common. Considering all these factors, the members of the Kaza Gram Sabha saw a ray of hope in the provisions provided under the Himachal Pradesh PESA Rules, 2011 specifically, the provisions laid down under Section 97-m of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, and Rule 19(2) of the Himachal Pradesh (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Rules, 2011.

These provisions allow for the formation of a Market Regulation Committee by the Gram Sabha. In the interest of effective local governance and participatory resource management, the Gram Panchayat Kaza hereby notifies the constitution of the Market Regulating Committee (MRC). The MRC consists of 23 members (including the Gram Panchayat Pradhan being the Chairperson of the MRC), in which 8 members are women (1/3rd) nominated by Gram Sabha.



View of Kaza Gram Panchayat

Members of the Kaza Gram Sabha saw a ray of hope in the provisions provided under the Himachal Pradesh PESA Rules

The core objectives behind this initiative are:



To improve market discipline and management.



To enhance livelihood opportunities for local vendors and entrepreneurs.



To ensure that the market functions in a manner that respects local traditions, environmental constraints, and economic needs.

Pursuant to the resolution, the Market Regulating Committee (MRC) has been constituted to oversee and guide the functioning of the Kaza Market. The committee will serve as a dedicated body responsible for:

- » Ensuring transparent and fair practices in market operations.
- » Regulating stall allocations and maintaining records of vendors.
- » Monitoring pricing and preventing exploitation or monopolies.
- » Promoting hygienic and sustainable practices within the market premises.
- » Addressing grievances of vendors and consumers alike.

In past, Gram Panchayat Kaza has a long history since 2014, of working closely with a local NGO based at Kaza, which has helped the Panchayat in many fronts and gave their opinion and advice from time to time. Considering the above duties, the local Mahila Mandal also joined the MRC and on dated: 20th April 2025, Time: 11:00 AM, Venue: Panchayat Ghar, Kaza, a review meeting of Market Regulating Committee was organized under the Chairperson: Mrs. Sonam Dolma, Chairperson of the Market Regulating Committee-cum-Gram Panchayat Pardhan, Kaza.

Key Proceedings and Decisions were taken by majority of the members present and voted

- » **Registration of Shops:** Market Regulating Committee will carry out the registration of all shops in Kaza village.
- » **Registration of Skilled Labourers:** The Committee will also register all skilled labourers including painters, carpenters (furniture workers), tile workers, plumbers, and electricians etc.
- » **Rate Declaration:** All registered labourers must submit their standard rates for services, which will be reviewed and fixed to ensure fair pricing across the village.
- » **Conduct Near Cafés:** Café owners are strictly instructed to prohibit smoking and consumption of liquor nearby their premises, to help maintain cleanliness and discipline in public areas.
- » **Dustbin Placement:** Every shop in the Kaza market area is required to place two dustbins outside their shop — one for dry waste and one for wet waste, promoting proper waste segregation and cleanliness.
- » **No Obstruction on Roads:** Shopkeepers are prohibited from displaying their items on the roads, in order to keep pathways clear for public movement and ensure pedestrian safety. One-hour curfew will be enforced on a trial basis Vehicle Entry Restriction (7:00 PM to 8:00 PM).



PM): Market entry will be closed to all types of vehicles from 7:00 PM to 8:00 PM, except for emergency vehicles, water tankers, and SADA vehicles. This decision aims to reduce congestion and enhance safety during these peak hours.

- » **Display of Rate Lists:** All shops must clearly display their rate lists outside, with pricing as fixed and approved by the Mahila Mandal, Kaza. The display should be visible, clear, and easy to read for all customers.
- » **Enforcement of Rules:** If any individual or shop is found violating the above rules, strict action will be taken jointly by the Market Regulating Committee and the Gram Panchayat. Compliance with these decisions is mandatory for all concerned.

Challenges Faced by the Market Regulating Committee of Kaza Panchayat

The Market Regulating Committee of the Kaza Panchayat, located in the tribal and remote region of Lahaul and Spiti in Himachal Pradesh, encounters several challenges in fulfilling its duties effectively. These challenges include:

Earlier, the District Administration, along with the Vyapar Mandal and other departments, used to plan and manage local market affairs and collect revenue in the form of fees and taxes. However, after the constitution of the Market Regulating Committee (MRC), the local Vyapar Mandal has shown reluctance to cooperate with the MRC. Additionally, due to limited awareness of the PESA Act and Rules, district officials often do not acknowledge the legal authority of the MRC in matters related to market regulation.

The committee often operates with **limited staff of panchayat, and financial resources**, which restricts effective monitoring, enforcement of pricing policies, and conflict resolution among traders and consumers. Due to the traditional and informal nature of local trade, there is often resistance to regulation, lack of proper licensing, and irregular price controls, posing additional hurdles for the MRC.

In Kaza area, there is **shortage of proper legal staff to assist the MRC to control and manage the market** like Excise inspectors, food inspectors, weigh and standard officers. The panchayat secretaries are reluctant to implement the MRC's rules and recommendations in ground as they seek prior approval from the district administration. In times of organising a local festival, the district administration overtook full control over the market and other sectors and bypass local bodies. Addressing these challenges requires infrastructural development, enhanced logistical support, capacity-building of local officials to ensure a fair and efficient marketplace in Kaza.



Gram Sabha Meeting on 20th April 2025 regarding Formation of Market Regulating Committee

Impact

In Kaza, the Gram Sabha directly exercised this power under Section 97-m of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 and Rule 19(2) of the Himachal Pradesh (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Rules, 2011, to form a Market Regulating Committee (MRC) a structure envisioned and legitimized under PESA. PESA recognizes the Gram Sabha's authority to manage and regulate markets in Scheduled Areas. The formation of the MRC by Kaza Gram Panchayat is a direct application of this power. The registration

of shops and skilled laborers, price regulation, and enforcement of conduct rules for shopkeepers and café owners are all regulatory functions that the PESA Act enables. One of PESA's goals is to ensure that development respects local culture and traditions.

The decision to limit late-night activity, restrict smoking and liquor near cafés, and mandate waste segregation reflects the community's intent to preserve local culture, peace, and environmental sanctity, in line with PESA's vision of culturally consonant governance.

The locals and other stakeholders have started to acknowledge the power of PESA

Broader Implications under PESA: *The Kaza Gram Panchayat's success is not just local reform, but a demonstration of tribal empowerment through constitutional rights. It shows how scheduled area governance can be localized to reflect the aspirations, ethics, and environmental concerns of the indigenous population which is exactly what PESA seeks to achieve. It also sets a replicable model for other Gram Panchayats in Scheduled Areas across India to take charge of local markets and community development.*



Tenzin Lhamo, Local Vendor "The Market Regulating Committee has brought fairness to our market. Before, prices were inconsistent, and tourists often complained. Now, with clear rate lists and rules, my small shop is doing better, and customers trust us more. The MRC's efforts to keep the market clean also make Kaza more appealing to visitors."

Rinchen Dorje, Community Member "As a resident, I feel proud of our Gram Panchayat's work. The MRC has made our market safer and more organized. The vehicle curfew in the evening has reduced noise, and the dustbin rule keeps our village clean. It's a step towards preserving our Spiti culture while welcoming tourism."

Sonam Dolma, Chairperson, MRC "Leading the MRC is challenging but rewarding. We are empowering our community to take control of our market under the PESA Act. Despite resistance from some non-tribal traders and limited resources, we are committed to fair governance and protecting our traditions."

Takpa Tenzin President, Spiti Civil Society Representative "Our NGO has supported the Gram Panchayat since 2014, and the MRC is a milestone in local self-governance. It's inspiring to see the community use PESA provisions to regulate the market. However, we need more support from the district administration to overcome resistance and strengthen enforcement."

The Kaza Panchayat's story is a practical embodiment of the PESA Act's spirit. Through local institution-building, grassroots participation, and cultural safeguarding, it showcases how Scheduled Area governance can be transformed from top-down administration to people-led, rights-based self-rule. At the same time, it highlights the structural resistance that PESA faces and the urgent need for state-level recognition and support to make tribal self-governance a reality.



THE POWER OF PESA-LAW BROUGHT LIBERATION TO THE BONDED LABOURERS

Introduction

The Gram Panchayat of Pindrai Kala Gram Panchayat (Choumau Gram) and Chikatbarri Gram Panchayat (Chiktabarri Gram) of Junardev Block Panchayat of Chhindwara district of Madhya Pradesh took a laudable initiative together. These Gram Sabhas took decisive steps to liberate about 40 bonded labourers from contract exploitation.

Background

Every hand in the villages needs work, but due to limited availability of employment, not everyone is able to get work locally. In such a situation, people migrate to other places for labour.

In November 2023, the Gram Sabhas of Pindrai Kala and Chikatbarri Gram Panchayats of Junardev district of Chhindwara district were contacted by

Ajay Kumar Chauhan, a contractor from Sangli, Maharashtra. He told about the need of labourers for sugarcane harvesting and road construction in Kolhapur. He promised to pay Rs 400-450 per day as wages to the tribal families.

PESA law has emerged as a powerful tool to protect the rights of workers.



(Image Source: State Government)

40 workers, including Sohan Darsham, Maniya Darsham, Toomman Kayda, Sandeep Baithe and Amarchand Kayda, fell for the contractor's offer and

went to Kolhapur in Maharashtra. The Peace and Dispute Resolution Committee of the Gram Sabha had already registered them in its migrant worker register and had made the contractor aware of his responsibilities.

Initially food and work were arranged for a few days. But when the contractor demanded wages, he kept on avoiding and then started threatening and beating him. Wages were not paid for about one and a half months. Ultimately Sohan Darshama contacted his village and informed about the incident.

Gram Sabha proceedings for the return of bonded labourers

A meeting of the Gram Sabha and Peace and Dispute Redressal Committee was convened. Proceedings were initiated as per Rule 24 (2) (a) & (b)

A resolution was passed to lodge an FIR against Ajay Contractor and the case along with the labour register was sent to Damua police station. Since the case was related to another state, CEO of Junnardev district Rashmi Chauhan coordinated with the Kolhapur police.

After FIRs were lodged in both the states, the local MLA was contacted. After a stern warning from the police, the contractor released the workers. With the help of the administration, 40 workers returned safely to their villages by train. Currently the case is registered and legal action is underway.

Gram Sabha liberated bonded labourers

After nearly two months of suffering and exploitation, the alertness of the Gram Sabha and the power of the PESA Act made it possible for 40 workers to return home. This example shows that if the Gram Sabha is aware, no exploitation can last for long.

Now awareness has increased among the villagers- the understanding of ensuring registration and contract before going out for wages is growing. PESA law has emerged as a powerful tool to protect the rights of workers.



(Image Source: State Government)



(Image Source: State Government)

GRAM SABHA MANAGES COMMUNITY RESOURCES (JAL, JUNGLE AND JAMEEN) THROUGH PESA

In tribal areas, PESA (The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996) and rules play a vital role in the development of villages in accordance with the basic concept of progress along with nature. By utilizing the social, economic, political and cultural rights provided under this Act, village Khamdhodgi has become a centre of inspiration for other Gram Panchayats of the state by achieving new dimensions of continuous development.

Background

Khamdhodgi, a village in Gram Panchayat Kokpur of North Bastar Kanker district, located in the Fifth Schedule area of Chhattisgarh state, is situated 11 KM away from the District Headquarters. Its area is 413 hectares. The population here is 443, of which 231 are women and 212 are men and its literacy rate is 52%.



(Image Source: State Government)

Here, in order to preserve and manage the overall development and traditions of the village, a Gram Sabha has been formed under the PESA Act 1996 and Chhattisgarh PESARules 2022. In accordance with the PESA rules, decisions related to natural conservation along with developmental works were taken by the members and chairman of the Gram Sabha, which is also being supported by the district administration.

Under clauses 19 and 20 of Chhattisgarh PESA Rules 2022, committees have been constituted in village Khamdhodgi. In which the first is – Resource, Planning and Management Committee (Resource, Planning and Management Committee, RPMC) which is preparing, implementing, supervising and managing the plan for the overall development of the village. The second committee is - Peace and Justice Committee, which resolves disputes in the village through mutual coordination and consultation.

If peace is disturbed by anyone at the village level and unethical act is done by anti-social elements, then a penalty amount has been provisioned against him at the village level.

After investigating incidents that disturb peace in the village, appropriate action is taken, and a report is presented to the Gram Sabha. If peace is disturbed by anyone at the village level or an unethical act is committed by anti-social elements, a penalty is imposed on them at the village level. As a result, a healthy and peaceful environment is maintained in the village.

In addition to these, under the Forest Rights Act, a Community Forest Resource Management Committee has been constituted through the Gram Sabha, which protects and manages the community forest resources located in the village. This committee manages the community management of forest located in the village to prevent illegal felling and fire, plantation work, collection of forest produce such as - Mahua flower, seeds (tori), Harra, Behra, Chironji, lac production, safflower seeds, tendu leaves etc. Under the Recognition of Forest Rights Act, 2006, many important forest related works are being conducted in the village.

Challenges

Due to being located in a remote forest area, there was lack of awareness and knowledge of prevailing laws among the people of the village, on account of which the participation of people in collective activities was negligible. Very few villagers were present in the Gram Sabha as well. Due to lack of technical knowledge, there was dependence on traditional means of livelihood. Due to lack of literacy, they were also unaware of innovations. Being bound by traditional customs, most of the people lived below the poverty line.

Organizing training on the rules made under PESA and Forest Rights Act at the Gram Panchayat level brought awareness among the people. Presence of one man and one woman from each house was made mandatory for taking decisions through community participation in the Gram Sabha. Different families of the village were linked to forest produce collection, fisheries, bamboo rafting and other economic livelihood activities by which the engagement of the people was ensured.

To develop the village, many rules have been made in the village through the Gram Sabha. For example, the forest has been divided into 4 parts at the village level, which includes grazing area, disposal area and 2 protected areas, in which tree plantation and water conservation work has been done.



SHGs involved in Fish Rearing



Google Map of Village Khamdhodgi PC Google

- » Rules were made to protect the forest from fire and provision for punishment was also made.
- » One person is put on duty from each house every day in turn to protect the forest.
- » Permission of the Gram Sabha is taken for cutting wood.
- » There is no theft of any kind in the village, if a person is found stealing, he will be punished.
- » Selling liquor is prohibited in the village. If found selling, punishment is given.
- » Killing wild animals is prohibited. If anybody is found hunting, punishment is imposed.
- » It is mandatory for at least one woman and one man from each family to attend the Gram Sabha.

- » The decision of the Gram Sabha will be applicable to all those people who remain absent in the Gram Sabha.
- » Important works are being done for water conservation and preservation in the village. Under this, 50 private and community ponds have been constructed. Structures like contour bunds, loose boulder structures, gabion, percolation tank have been built through schemes under MGNREGA, forest department, watershed and other supportive organizations. Along with this, people are also being motivated by the Gram Sabha for water conservation.

Eco Tourism

Bamboo rafting has been started in Khamdhodigi reservoir located in the village. Its complete monitoring is being done through RPMC of Gram Sabha, due to this, the people of the village have got employment. This reservoir is surrounded by mountains on all sides. Due to which this place has emerged as a tourist center and people from the country and abroad are coming here to enjoy bamboo rafting.



Bamboo Rafting of tourist



Inauguration of Bamboo Rafting by Chief Guest

Livelihood Promotion

50 community and private ponds have been constructed in the village, in which, fish farming is done by the Gram Sabha, self-help groups and individual farmers. 50 community and private ponds have been constructed in the village. In which Sitafal production is being done by the Gram Sabha, self-help groups and individual farmers.



Custard Apple Pulp processing



Community Fishing



Fishing Activity by Villagers

The sisters of the self-help group have planted trees on the banks of all the community ponds. Fish are caught from the ponds through the fishermen's group in the village. The amount received from fish farming is deposited in the Gram Sabha Kosh. Fish seed is purchased from the said amount for the next financial year.

Apart from this, ice cream is prepared from the pulp of custard apple and sold by the self-help groups, the profit of which is received by the self-help groups. Along with this, minor forest produce is also purchased by the self-help groups, which increases their income.

Information about Sitafal Pulp Production

Sl. No.	Self Help Group	Financial year 2020&21	Financial year 2021&22	Financial year 2022&23	Financial year 2023&24	Total amount
1	Jai Maa Mawali	30000-00	108000-00	135000-00	144000-00	417000-00

Sources: Primary Data

Information about total income from fish farming

Sl. No.	Name of the Self Help Group	Financial year 2021&22	Financial year 2022&23	Financial year 2023&24	Total income from fish farming
1	Jai Maa Mawali Mata	6800-00	15000-00	17200-00	39000-00
2	Nav yuvak Mandal	8165-00	7685-00	26685-00	42535-00
3	Gram Sabha Committee	35600-00	47260-00	55000-00	137860-00
Total income		50565-00	69945-00	98885-00	219395-00

Sources: Primary Data

Godri (Baadi) Development and Environmental Protection

Earlier, the villagers used to produce vegetables by bringing Dhekra (bushy tree) from the forest, which resulted in cutting of more trees, but now vegetable production is done by scaffolding method, which leads to cutting of branches of trees.



Members Plucking Vegetables from the farm



Members Plucking Vegetables from the farm

Conclusion

The work done by the Scheduled Tribes in village Khamdodki after obtaining community forest rights under the Forest Rights Act and PESA Act is not only an example of conservation and promotion of local resources, but also a proof of the effectiveness of community-based governance. The villagers have promoted water conservation, soil conservation, biodiversity conservation and conservation of traditional knowledge by wisely using their rights over water, forest and land, which has not only strengthened their livelihood but has also ensured environmental sustainability. This success story can serve as an inspiration for other PESA Gram Panchayats in the country.



(Image Source: State Government)



(Image Source: State Government)

Odisha

BADAAALUBADI'S RURAL HAAT:

A STORY OF COLLECTIVE WILL, SELF-RELIANCE AND PESA IN ACTION

The PESA Act, 1996 endows the Gram Sabhas with the power to manage village markets. The Rural Haat, a community – managed market by and for the people was established in Badaalubadi Gram Panchayat of the Rayagada district in Odisha under this provision successfully. The weekly Rural Haat sees active participation of over 85% of the community including farmers, artisan, forest-produce collectors and women vendors who are also the beneficiaries of this initiative.

Background

Badaalubadi Gram Panchayat is remote, rich with natural resources, vibrant tribal culture and largely dependant on agriculture and forest-based livelihoods. Despite its abundant natural resources and cultural wealth, the community faced several socio-economic challenges. It had limited access to markets which led to the villagers travelling long distances to buy or sell goods. This also led to the exploitation of producers at the hands of the middlemen, which significantly reduced their earnings. Additionally, there was a lack of formal spaces for tribal artisans, women vendors, and farmers to sell their produce and products.



Local Haats for better access

In early 2024, conceptualisation and planning for a Rural Haat began with the Gram Sabha consultations and resource mobilisation. The Sarpanch of Badaalubadi Gram Panchayat lead efforts to mobilise community establish institutional linkages. Technical and financial assistance was given by the government and financial institutions.

The impact of the Rural Haat has been transformative for the community. The Haat has over 60 local and urban vendors including women, enhancing income for 300 families.

The Rural Haat was constructed using funds from the 5th State Finance Commission. Additionally, NABARD provided support through the construction of a permanent market shed. It was inaugurated on 5th October 2024 and operates every Wednesday. Along with vending space, there are toilets and parking space. Monitoring is done by the Gram Panchayat and the community representatives to ensure sustainability and continuous improvement.



(Image Source: State Government)

Outcome

The impact of the Rural Haat has been transformative for the community. The Haat has over 60 local and urban vendors including women, enhancing income for 300 families. The Gram Panchayat generates revenue from vendor fees which is being reinvested into community services. The availability of consumer goods locally has reduced travel and associated costs, improving quality of life. The Gram Panchayat is planning to construct more as well as a godown to store commodities.

The success of the Haat has fostered community ownership and pride, strengthening the Gram Sabha as a decision-making body. The project enabled direct linkage between producers and consumers, eliminating middlemen and enhancing economic returns for tribal households. It led to the revival of traditional crafts and sale of forest produce, offering a platform for tribal artisans and Self-Help Group members to showcase and monetize their skills. The model is replicable and scalable across other Scheduled Areas seeking to integrate livelihood promotion with local governance.



(Image Source: State Government)



(Image Source: State Government)



PESA IN ACTION: DOLARA'S TRIBAL MARKET

The weekly Haat Bazaar has always been a privilege for the citizens living in tribal areas. Most of their cultural activities, festivals and their weekly plans are based on the day of the Haat Bazaar. Women who are more dependent on the day and place of these local markets as they must prepare and purchase the list of household necessities with the weekly market and hence the location of these markets is very important for the citizens. Dolara Gram Panchayat of Tapi district has set an example in this regard by not only mobilizing people for the weekly market but also organizing it in their village by passing a resolution jointly in the Gram Sabha. It was not easy because there was a need for space and the necessary constructions for the market were needed and for that people needed to be mobilized. The provision of PESA Act Sec 4(m)(iv) specifically supported the Panchayat in taking this decision and provided the Gram Sabha with the power to take such decisions.

Background



(Image Source: State Government)

idle and increasing the income of the village. The work done by the Gram Sabha under the PESA Act-1996 has brought about positive changes in the areas of livelihood, education, health, traditions and customs, etc. among the villagers of Dolara Ta. Vyara, Dist. Tapi.

Dolara village Gram Panchayat Dolara, Ta. Vyara, District Tapi of Gujarat state, which falls entirely under the PESA area and the economic condition of the villagers is very poor. The Panchayat in its regular Gram Sabha meeting discussed the people are facing the hardship of travelling to the city markets for their regular purchases. In the Gram Sabha, women also raised their demands for in-house market facilities to save their time and resources and to provide the Panchayat with an opportunity to generate their income.

The work done by the Gram Sabha under the PESA Act-1996 has brought about positive changes in the areas of livelihood, education, health, traditions and customs, etc. among the villagers of Dolara

The village sarpanch discussed the need for a local market in the village areas with the women's group. After reaching an agreement, they took it to the Gram Sabha. Since the Dolara villages are completely tribal, the PESA law is applicable here in the Scheduled Areas and hence the Gram Sabha is empowered to take decisions regarding the village haat as they have complete control over it. As per the state PESA Rules Sec 17 (a-d), the Gram Sabha has the power to look after the village haat in their area and provide water, sheds and other facilities for the shopkeepers and local customers, in addition they can levy taxes etc. on it. The people discussed together and decided on a location which is accessible to all the citizens, especially the women member who wanted it to be near the villages which was agreed upon by all the members of the Gram Sabha. Using the provision, the Gram Sabha decided to organize a weekly haat market in their village area.



(Image Source: State Government)

The Gram Sabha while approving their annual plan further prioritized the Haat Bazaar and related activities under TSP funds as they cannot afford permanent concrete structures including shops, sheds and roofs, hence they set up their vending systems in the open. Due to which they face many difficulties.

To modernize the Haat Bazaar, they have taken advantage of the Birsa Munda Haat Bazaar Scheme of the state government and provided modern facilities like stage, parking, water, electricity, toilets etc. in the Haat Bazaar. So that people get a platform to sell and buy agricultural produce, vegetables, forest produce, related items and handicrafts in the local rural market. Separate toilets have been built especially for women and electricity facilities have been provided.

Birsa Munda Haat Bazaar (Dolara Village)

A Gram Sabha resolution led to the launch of a weekly market in Dolara village. This not only created employment opportunities in Dolara but also benefited surrounding villages like Medhapur, Saraiya, Karanjavel, Sanki, Chindia, Raniamba, Chichbardi, Pervad, Mirpur, and Madav. Now, villagers no longer need to travel to urban centers for daily necessities.

Haat bazaars are deeply woven into the tribal way of life, offering more than just trade. They influence social, cultural, and economic aspects of the community. These markets create local employment by enabling



(Image Source: State Government)



(Image Source: State Government)

people to sell produce like vegetables, pulses, fruits, herbs, rice, handicrafts, and daily-use items, becoming vital income sources for families.

Conclusion

The strength of these markets lies in their simplicity and accessibility. No major capital is needed, making them ideal platforms for tribal entrepreneurship. They also attract traders from outside, connecting tribal goods to wider markets. Importantly, they support mutual cooperation, help preserve cultural traditions and serve as spaces for community interaction.



(Image Source: State Government)



Women's participation has been especially impactful. Many haats have stalls run by women, boosting their confidence and income, and advancing social equity. Overall, haat bazaars empower tribal communities economically, socially, and culturally. With support from the Gram Panchayat and government, these can be better managed for holistic tribal development.



The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) recognizes tribal communities' rights to self-governance, traditional practices, and natural resources. It empowers the Gram Sabha to take decisions on village matters, including land use, forest management, and local customs. Under PESA, Gram Sabhas has legal authority to protect their land and culture. They must give consent for development projects in their areas, ensuring transparency and community participation. This law prevents forced land transfers and promotes sustainable use of local resources. Overall, the PESA Act enables tribal communities to manage their resources, preserve their identity, and shape their own development. When implemented effectively, it becomes a powerful tool for local empowerment and sustainable progress.



Andhra Pradesh

CONSERVING TRADITION THROUGH COMMUNITY INCLUSION

Tribal communities uphold vibrant cultural traditions through collective celebration of festivals and fairs. Rampachodavaram division is rich in tribal heritage and cultural traditions. Using provisions under the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA Act), the Gram Sabhas of Rampachodavaram have created a community led revival of local festivals, enhancing cultural identity and a sense of pride amongst local tribals.

Background

Rampachodavaram division of Andhra Pradesh is rich in tribal heritage and cultural traditions. Home to Konda Reddy, Koya, Konda Dora, Valmiki, and Savara tribes, its festivals celebrate nature, agriculture and community life.



Rituals of Tribal Festivals. (Image Source: traveltriangle.com/blog/festivals-in-andhra-pradesh)

Chaitra Festival, Itikala Panduga, Bhudevi Puja/ Gramadevatha Panduga, Pus Kolupu (Worship of Ancestors and Spirits) and Gonduru Panduga (Jatara) etc are celebrated with fervor.

Preservation and collective celebration of traditions and customs, cultural identity is supported by Section 4 (d) of The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA Act) and are within the rights of the Gram Sabha. Collective organization of festivals under the guidance of the Gram Sabhas in Rampachodavaram has led to preserving age old traditions and enhancing cultural pride.

Rampachodavaram has shown that enhanced cooperation between Panchayat and traditional village leadership is a sustainable and harmonious method to preserve and encourage traditional cultural practices

Keeping traditions alive through community inclusion

In Rampachodavaram, village elders and tribal leaders gather to fix dates, venues (often near sacred groves or hills), and responsibilities for such festivals. Forest areas, village outskirts, or hill shrines (called Konda Devathalu) are cleaned and sanctified collectively.

Food is prepared collectively and shared in the village. Alcohol brewed from Mahua flowers or Toddy is commonly served. Elders narrate folklore, myths, and stories of past festivals to the younger generations, transmitting culture orally.

Every tribal family contributes in kind (rice, pulses, firewood, chickens) or cash. Contributions are usually fixed per household by the village elders. Youth volunteer build huts, dig fire pits, and carry materials without expecting wages (Shram Daan). Local committees like Festival Committees (Panduga Sangham) collect all offerings and maintain accounts. In some cases, rights like toddy tree tapping or cattle grazing are also auctioned.

Local tribal markets (Santhas) see extra footfall during festivals and small traders donate a portion of their earnings. Migrant workers who return to the village during the festival contribute as part of their cultural duty.

The Gram Sabhas oversees all these activities. They also sanction local holidays for major tribal festivals, approve the use of community land or forest area for festival purposes. The Sabhas coordinate with Forest Department for access to sacred groves or minor forest produce. Gram Panchayats occasionally allocate small funds from their annual budget (under cultural or heritage head) if there's a surplus. Gram Panchayat also provides water tanks, temporary toilets, lighting arrangements and loudspeakers or tents etc.



*New Palm Tree Hut of Goddess Dubalamma
(Image Source: Sarpanch, Gram Panchayat Jaddangi)*



*Offerings to Goddess Dubalamma (Image Source: Sarpanch,
Gram Panchayat Jaddangi) (clips from video)*

Conclusion

Rampachodavaram has shown that enhanced cooperation between Panchayat and traditional village leadership is a sustainable and harmonious method to preserve and encourage traditional cultural practices.

Bringing the community elders, youth and women into the decision making and organizing process ensures ownership. Community resource pooling reduces dependency on external funds for traditional celebrations and helping in revival and preservation of indigenous rituals, dances, and art forms. Formal institutions can harmoniously coexist with tribal customs when mutual respect exists.

KHOKSA BAZAAR: APNA GAON, APNA BAZAAR

In Khoksa village, deep in Nandurbar's hilly terrain, Tuesdays have transformed from routine to remarkable. The village now comes alive with Khoksa's PESA Bazaar—a weekly market filled with fresh produce, local goods, and community spirit. It has sparked self-reliance and revived the local economy, showing how empowered villagers can drive real change under the PESA Act.

Background

Located in remote Navapur Taluka near the Gujarat border, Khoksa Gram Panchayat includes tribal villages like Kotkhamb, Tekdi Pada, and Kothwad-Phalipada. Despite poor roads and limited connectivity, Khoksa became the first Panchayat in the district to launch and manage its own market under Section 4(m)(iv) of the PESA Act.



The Gram Panchayat struggled to collect basic taxes like house and water tax, as villagers claimed they lacked money until they sold their farm produce. Distant markets drained their earnings due to travel, porter fees, and food costs. Some even lost money to gambling. To break this cycle, Gram Sevak Shri. Kailas Sonawane proposed a local solution: starting

Khoksa Bazaar, a weekly market. He cited the PESA Act, which empowers Gram Sabhas to set up village markets. This would help villagers sell locally, save more, and pay taxes. The idea was welcomed and approved in the Gram Sabha on May 1, 2017.

The establishment and operation of the Khoksa market is rooted in the legal framework provided by the PESA Act, 1996. PESA empowers Gram Sabhas to manage their local affairs, including the management of village markets. Section 4(m)(iv) of the PESA Act mandates that State Legislatures shall endow Panchayats and Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas with the power to manage village markets. In line with this, Maharashtra state has amended its 'Maharashtra Gram Panchayat Act, 1958' and the 'Markets and Fairs Act, 1862' in consonance with the provisions of PESA Act. The Maharashtra PESA Rules, 2014, Rule 43, provides the operational details for the management of village markets by Gram Sabhas. These legal provisions enable Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas to exercise control over their village markets, promoting socio-economic development and self-governance.

Despite poor roads and limited connectivity, Khoksa became the first Panchayat in the district to launch and manage its own market under Section 4(m)(iv) of the PESA Act.

Setting Up Khoksa Market: A Step-by-Step Journey



- » **Choosing the Right Day:** After much discussion in the Gram Sabha, villagers chose Tuesday for the weekly market—avoiding clashes with nearby bazaars to make Khoksa Bazaar the main draw.



- » **A Humble Start:** On June 13, 2017, Khoksa Bazaar began quietly. The first stalls opened early, but few buyers came. Sales were minimal, and by noon most vendors had packed up. The market's first day was a clear failure.



- » **Spreading the Word:** Despite the poor start, the Panchayat didn't give up. They launched a full-scale outreach—using loudspeakers, leaflets, and social media to promote the market across 20 nearby villages and into Dhule district. Letters were also sent to local leaders and officials, seeking support and visibility for the new PESA Bazaar.

The real turnaround came on August 8, 2017. Backed by community prayers and continuous promotion, the market began to grow steadily. More shops opened, customer footfall increased, and hoteliers started sourcing fresh produce. The once-quiet square turned vibrant with villagers of all ages, and business picked up. Vehicles filled the space, marking the market's success.



Community Hub: Affordable Goods, Stronger Ties.
Image Source: Shri.Sandip Wadile (District PESA Manager)

Why Khoksa Bazaar Stands Out

All Essentials in One Place: From groceries to clothes, villagers could find everything they needed.

- » Goods were fairly priced, easing household expenses.
- » Tuesdays became a day for families to meet and connect.
- » Weekly updates in goods kept interest high.
- » Young villagers promoted the market via social media.
- » Special area for livestock and poultry trading.

Market Rules and Oversight

To run the market fairly, the Gram Sabha, empowered by the PESA Act and Maharashtra PESA Rules, 2014 (Rule 43), set clear guidelines:

- » Managed by the Gram Panchayat, Gram Sabha, and Market Committee.
- » Ensures genuine products, fair weights, and safe goods.
- » Prevents overcharging; fair prices fixed by the Gram Sabha.
- » Fake, defective, or unsafe items are not allowed.
- » Buyers can't pay less than the set minimum price.
- » Outsiders can sell at lower rates—if quality is high.
- » All rules were passed on October 2, 2017, and shared with relevant authorities for accountability.

The Gram Panchayat Khoksa along with Gram Sabhas formed a Market Management Committee, made up of local representatives. This committee kept peace, order, and cleanliness, relying on village volunteers to carry out Gram Sabha decisions. The Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha formed a Market Management Committee to maintain order, hygiene, and cleanliness. With Gram Sabha approval, they collected fees under the Maharashtra Gram Panchayat Act, 1958, using the revenue to improve market facilities.



Khoksa's Market Committee: Vibrant, Safe, Orderly.

Key steps included:

-  Designated parking with tax collection.
-  Separate toilets for men and women
-  Drinking water arranged by the Panchayat
-  Market avoided flood-prone land
-  Wiring supervised, Electricity Board informed
-  Restricted large vehicles & animals in busy zones
-  Taxes under Section 124 and 1960 Rules funded improvements
-  Local volunteers ensured rules and decisions were followed



Letter to BDO: Official Outreach for Progress

The Khoksa PESA Bazaar faced key challenges

Limited funds for infrastructure, overcrowding that led to stall disputes, and a temporary closure during COVID-19. Still, it delivered strong results—earning ₹48,600/year in own revenue, creating local jobs, reducing migration, and boosting the village economy. It improved tax collection and curbed gambling, leading to better family incomes and stronger social ties.

The Khoksa Village Market is a strong example of the PESA Act in action. By empowering the Gram Sabha to run its own market, it boosted local economy and self-governance. Despite early setbacks and the pandemic, the market succeeded through active community effort. This case shows how PESA helps tribal communities manage their resources and drive lasting development—offering a model for others to follow.

DEVICHAPADA'S MODEL OF SELF EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PESA

This is a story of how PESA Act can help a determined community transform itself from a remote outpost into a beacon of self-governance and resource management. Once disconnected, with voice unheard, needs unmet and seasonal migration a reality, Devicha Pada, a small hamlet made use of PESA Act to set on a journey to reclaim its rights and shape its own vibrant future.

Background

Located in the serene, hilly Scheduled Area of Jawhar tehsil in Palghar district of Maharashtra, Devicha Pada once felt disconnected from its own destiny. For years, its residents were a distant part of the Kasatwadi Gram Panchayat, having limited participation in local governance and decision-making. That led to challenges like seasonal migration in search of livelihoods. It was clear that to truly thrive, Devicha Pada needed its own empowered platform for self-governance.



(Image Source: State Government)

PESA – The Path to Empowerment

The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) came as the instrument of transformation for villagers of Devicha Pada, the effectiveness of which was boosted

by the specific rules enacted by the state of Maharashtra. PESA was designed to extend the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution relating to Panchayats to Scheduled Areas, with modifications and exceptions, to enable tribal self-rule.

Devicha Pada's journey vividly demonstrates the transformative potential of the PESA Act in empowering marginalized communities within Scheduled Areas

Legal Framework of PESA



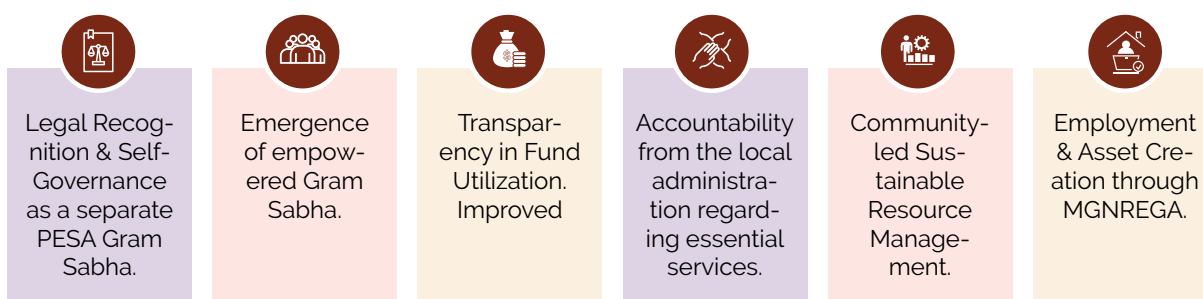
- » Section 4(b) was crucial in recognizing Devicha Pada hamlet as a distinct community unit, enabling it to form its own Gram Sabha and manage its affairs.
- » Section 4(d) unequivocally recognizes the Gram Sabha's competence to safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of the people, their cultural identity, community resources, and customary modes of dispute resolution.
- » Maharashtra PESA Rules, 2014, and Hon. Governor's Notifications (2014 & 2015) are the specific rules enacted by Maharashtra. These rules enabled the community to get at least 5% of Tribal Component Schemes allocated to Gram Panchayats. The subsequent 2015 guidelines of the Tribal Development Department (TDD) directed these funds, empowering Devicha Pada to prioritize and utilize these funds for their specific development needs.

The Journey to Self-Governance

Equipped with knowledge about Maharashtra PESA Rules thanks to a local Civil Society Organisation, Devicha Pada successfully achieved notification as an independent PESA Village in 2017, a monumental shift towards self-rule. With decision making through regular Gram Sabha meetings, meticulous record-keeping, adherence to PESA principles of transparency & accountability, Devicha Pada could take charge of some important functions during 2017-22.

- » Management of common resources such as Minor Forest Produce (MFP), minor minerals, grasslands, and water bodies.
- » Improvement & Maintenance of basic amenities.
- » Ensured utilization of '5% Direct Fund Scheme' funds for community-identified priorities.
- » Generating employment and creating valuable assets through works under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Outcomes and Benefits



Conclusion

Devicha Pada's journey vividly demonstrates the transformative potential of the PESA Act in empowering marginalized communities within Scheduled Areas. By asserting their rights under the Act and Maharashtra PESA Rules, the communities can achieve significant progress in self-governance, resource management, and overall development.



VOICES OF THE KHONDS: GOVERNANCE FROM WITHIN

Introduction

The Khonds of Andhra Pradesh, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) living in the remote and rugged terrain of the Eastern Ghats are a marginalized and isolated community. They are beset by low literacy levels, language differences, lack of awareness about democratic rights and have little exposure to mainstream governance systems.

Background

In Minumuluru Gram Panchayat (Paderu Mandal of Alluri Seetha Ramaraju district), revitalizing Gram Sabha participation is crucial for inclusive development for the Khonds.

The community had limited participation in Gram Sabha meetings. This affected their understanding of the Gram Sabha's role in improving their socio-economic development. Many Khonds see the Gram Sabha

as a formal meeting, not as a platform where they can share their problems and participate in decision making processes.



Awareness camps organised at Minumuluru Gram Panchayat (Image Source: Panchayat Secretary, Minumuluru Gram Panchayat)

Initiatives and Impacts created

There was lack of culturally sensitive communication and poor sharing of information for Khonds due to which they missed out on benefits from government schemes.

Strengthening the role of the Gram Sabha not only empowers the community to make informed decisions but also ensures that local governance reflects the true needs and voices of the people.

The PESA Rules issued by Andhra Pradesh Government endows power to Gram Sabha to prepare and approve socio-economic profile of each family for their upliftment. Strengthening the role of the Gram Sabha not only empowers the community to make informed decisions but also ensures that local governance reflects the true needs and voices of the people. This aspect is supported by the provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996.

In Minumuluru Gram Panchayat, innovative efforts have been made to improve tribal participation in PESA Gram Sabhas. Local facilitators and NGOs have launched awareness campaigns in tribal dialects to educate communities on PESA Act and their constitutional rights.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools were used to help villagers identify needs and set priorities together. Culturally relevant communication tools— visual aids, storytelling, and folk media— were used to explain governance in simple and relatable ways. Village Resource Persons (VRPs) and tribal leaders got training to act as a link between the villagers and government offices, making procedures and documents easier to understand.

To increase community participation, Gram Sabha meetings were held at convenient times and easily accessible locations within the villages.

Empowered Voices: The Positive Impact

As a result, the attendance of Gram Sabha Members of Minumuluru Gram Panchayats increased from 1.20% to 8.89% of voters i.e. Gram Sabha Members. According to the attendance register the attendance of Gram Sabha increased from 14 members to 103 members i.e. a 600% increase.

This engagement has strengthened community cohesion, boosted self-confidence, and encouraged collective decision-making. As a result, the Khonds and other PVTGs are experiencing greater inclusion, improved socio-economic conditions, and a stronger sense of ownership over their development journey.



Gram Sabha at Minumuluru Gram Panchayat
(Image Source: Panchayat Secretary, Minumuluru Gram Panchayat)



Organizing baby shower for a PVTG women
(Image Source: Panchayat Secretary, Minumuluru Gram Panchayat)



Conducted Awareness Rallies for PVTGs Inclusion
(Image Source: Panchayat Secretary, Minumuluru Gram Panchayat)

GRAM SABHA GENERATING REVENUE THROUGH TOURISM

Effective participation of Gram Sabhas and implementation of the provisions of PESA (Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act) can boost the potential for rural development. A village in Chhattisgarh named Satrenga, has presented such an excellent example. In the meetings held under PESA Act, the villagers saw the potential of tourism development inherent in their situation and by utilizing the available provisions, they not only developed their village into a lively tourist destination, but also contributed immensely to the social and economic development scenario of their area.

Background

Satrenga Gram Panchayat is located on the banks of the Bango Dam catchment area, 30 km from Korba district headquarters of Chhattisgarh state. The livelihood of the people of this tribal dominated Gram Sabha with a population of about 1500 is mainly dependent on agriculture, forest produce and tourism.



Satrenga Garden (Image Source: Village Secretary)

Tourism from traditional livelihood

In the year 2019-20, on the initiative of the district administration and the Gram Panchayat and recognizing the immense potential of tourism in the village, work was started towards developing Satrenga as a tourist destination, but the activities were

slackened during the Corona epidemic. PESA rules were implemented on 8 August 2022, under which legal rights have been given to the Gram Sabhas, so that they are able to take decisions in their area, manage resources and strengthen the traditional governance system. Satrenga is a suitable place from the point of view of natural beauty and tourism. In view of this, in the meeting of the Gram Sabha under the PESA Act, it was decided to develop tourism as a strong means of livelihood.

The Gram Sabha is the highest decision point under the PESA Act, which can identify the real issues of the community and take concrete steps.

Tourism development related activities

- » Villagers were given priority in all type of works.
- » Keeping participation and self-reliance at the centre of development, youth and women groups were given the responsibility of running hotel operations, grocery shops, maintaining garden and running boat sailing operations, parking, etc.
- » Training the youth as tourist guides and involving them in boat operation work.
- » Resource Planning and Management Committee (RPMC) was constituted and given the responsibility of implementing the decisions of the Gram Sabha.

Changes due to tourism



Local people started getting employment opportunities. The assets of the families increased due to availability of different sources of business.



With the establishment of the tourist destination, social and economic changes began in Satrenga village.



Self-confidence increased in the villagers and people started understanding their rights.



Satrenga was recognized as a major tourist area in the entire state. About 300-400 tourists started coming here for a visit every day.



The villagers got an opportunity to meet and learn about different communities and people. They became aware of education and health and ensured that their children were regularly sent to school.



Community participation and regular meetings of the Gram Sabha started. Earlier, where 20-30 people used to attend the Gram Sabha, now the presence of at least one person from every family of the village was ensured.



Participation of rural women in Gram Sabhas started increasing. Women started raising their issues openly before the Gram Sabha.



Boating platform at Satrenga (Image Source: Gram Sachiv)



Hotel Operation (Image Source: Village Secretary)

Conclusion

As is clear from this story, the Gram Sabha is the highest decision making body under the PESA Act, which can identify the real issues of the community and take concrete steps. Self-governance, participation, transparency and social inclusion are important in it. Based on these principles, Gram Sabhas can become a medium of development by using the provisions of PESA Act, just like Satrenga Gram Sabha established which established itself as a tourist destination for its economic and social development.

STRENGTHENING FARMER LIVELIHOODS VIA ACCESSIBLE VILLAGE SHANDIES

Grampanchayat Chinnaboinapally of Eturunagaram Mandal, Mulugu District, Telangana State has established a weekly shandy (temporary market) to farmers of surrounding 7 Gramapanchayats to sale their Agriculture and agri allied products.

This has been established as per provision in PESA rule IV Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Department (MDL.I) GOM's No. 66, dt 24.03.2011 .

Background

Chinnaboinapally Grampanchayat is a small village in Eturunagaram Mandal of Mulugu District, Telangana State. Farmers in this area grow Paddy, Pulses, Cereals, Vegetables and also engage in Agri allied activities like milk production, sheep and goat rearing and poultry related activities. The nearest market is Warangal almost 100 Km from this village.



Shandy Inaugurated by the Grampanchayat Elected Representatives

This required private vehicles to transport / shift the products to Warangal market where products were sold via middlemen at less than market prices sometimes.

To avoid all these difficulties and loses, the Grampanchayat established a shandy under the guidance of Panchayat Raj Officials by passing a resolution in Gram Sabha in 2021. The aim was to provide a easy to access market to farmers from Grampanchayats of Shivapur, Shappelli, Kondai and Eturunagaram which are within a 10 Km radius. The Grampanchayat publicized the market in their village and as well as in surrounding villages via "Tom-Tom". The Agriculture department also informed the farmers about this sandy through their field functionaries. This helped grow the engagement levels and at present nearly 60 shops have been established by local & surrounding farmers.

PESA Grama Sabha empowered the Grampanchayat to manage local resources and Gramapanchayats can make plan for community needs. It is evident from this case that this can help people improve their life significantly.

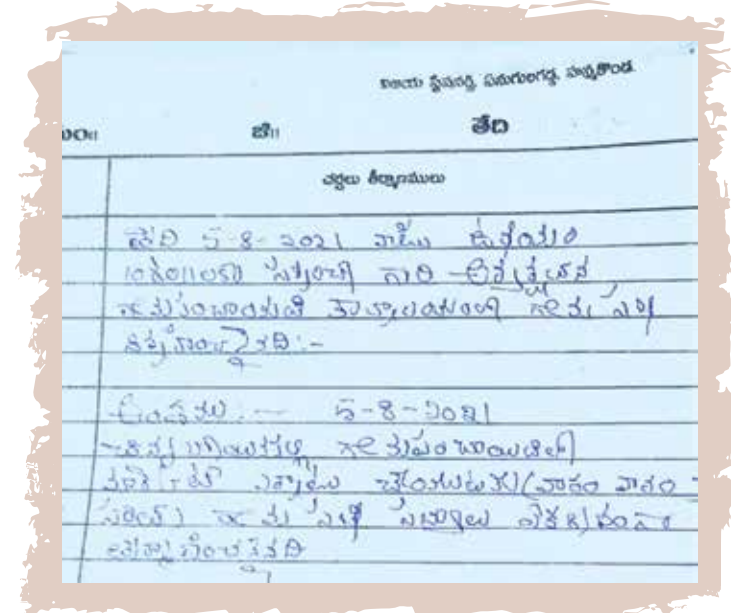
As an outcome of these efforts the Grampanchayat gets an income of Rs.1.5 lakh per annum via rentals. This is used for providing civic amenities like sanitation and street lights in the Grampanchayat.

It minimized the transportation risk and as well as reduced the transportation charges near about Rs.30,000/- per farmer per annum. More than 1200 farmers from 7 villages sourrounding Chinnaboinapally have benefitted from the weekly market. Fair prices have been maintained with the facilitation of immediate payments. Some farmers have now become traders and transport vendors. The market has also become the go to for local communities to purchase fresh produce.

PESA Gram Sabha empowered the Gram Panchayat to manage local resources, and Gram panchayats can make plan based on community needs.



Grampanchayat Present status of sandy



Resolution passed by the Gramapanchayat Chinnaboinapally to establish sandy

THEME 2

MINOR FOREST PRODUCE

PESA Act Section 4(m)(ii): Panchayats at the appropriate level and the Gram Sabha are endowed specifically with the ownership of minor forest produce. MFP includes all non-timber forest produce of plant origin including bamboo, brush wood, stumps, cane, tussar, cocoons, honey, wax, lac, tendu or kendu leaves, medicinal plants and herbs, roots, tubers and the like.

PARTICIPATORY DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM OF MINOR FOREST PRODUCE

Background

Rarang Gram Panchayat, located in the Pooh block of Kinnaur district in Himachal Pradesh, is a shining example of how traditional knowledge systems and democratic processes can be harmoniously blended to manage natural resources effectively. Situated about 30 kilometers from the district headquarters at Recong Peo, Rarang is known not only for its scenic beauty and cultural richness but also for its sustainable and inclusive management of minor forest produce, particularly the highly valued Chilgoza pine nuts.

Provisions of PESA Act & H.P. PESA Rules 2011

The success of Rarang lies in its strong community institutions and the deep-rooted cultural practices that guide the collection

and distribution of forest resources. In particular, the village has developed a unique participatory distribution system for Chilgoza that aligns closely with the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, and the Forest

The success of Rarang lies in its strong community institutions and the deep-rooted cultural practices that guide the collection and distribution of forest resources.



Chilgoza Pine in Gram Panchayat Rarang

Rights Act, 2006. These laws recognize the rights of tribal and forest-dwelling communities to manage, access, and control the forest resources they have traditionally depended upon.

Under the Himachal Pradesh PESA Rules 2011 particularly rule 15, the Forest Department is required to consult the Gram Sabha before preparing any plan for the exploitation of forest produce. The department must ensure that such activities are in line with forest laws, community consent, and the protection of plants and trees that are important to local people. Moreover, the rules assert that communities have the right to manage and dispose of minor forest produce, even beyond their immediate village boundaries, as per their traditional practices.

» **Success story:** Rarang Gram Panchayat has translated PESA act provisions into an effective ground reality through its customary laws and practices, namely Wazib-ul-Arz and Naksha Bartan. These traditional frameworks ensure that the benefits of Chilgoza harvesting are shared equitably among the villagers. There are three primary methods through which Chilgoza is distributed in the village.



Chilgoza Harvesting Process in G.P Rarang

- » **The first method** involves selling the produce through contracts with traders. In such cases, the income from the sale is equally divided among all households, without considering family size or the level of individual contribution. This model is based on the principle of equal entitlement and helps maintain social harmony and shared ownership of the resource.
- » **The second method** is used when villagers harvest the Chilgoza cones collectively. In this case, the distribution of cones takes into account the labor contributed by each household. Every family is expected to provide a fixed number of workers. If a household is unable to do so, its share is reduced accordingly, unless it provides a replacement laborer. This system incentivizes participation while remaining sensitive to the capacities of different families.
- » **The third method** involves pre-allocation of forest plots to individual households. Here, families harvest Chilgoza from their designated areas and have complete control over its use, whether for personal consumption or commercial sale. This approach fosters a sense of responsibility and autonomy in resource use.

What stands out in all these methods is the principle of equity and collective benefit. The system is designed to be inclusive, ensuring that even resourceless and economically weaker families have access to the forest produce. The Gram Sabha plays a central role in planning and monitoring the entire process, embodying the spirit of participatory democracy envisioned under PESA

Testimonial



Sh. Ranjeet Negi, Vice President of Gram panchayat Rarang *Rarang's model is a benchmark for sustainable forest management. The community's adherence to forest laws, combined with their customary practices, ensures Chilgoza is harvested responsibly. The Gram Sabha's oversight prevents over-exploitation, and our department values their partnership in conserving Kinnaur's forests.*

Sh. Chewang Negi, Gram Panchayat Secretary *notes as part of the Gram Sabha, I've seen how our Wazib-ul-Arz and Naksha Bartan guide us to manage Chilgoza sustainably. PESA has given us the power to protect our forests and ensure no one exploits our resources, keeping the benefits within Rarang."*



Sh. Bhagat Singh Negi, a tribal elder, *Adds Our ancestors taught us to respect the forest, and PESA has given us the authority to continue this. The Chilgoza system honors our traditions while ensuring no one is left behind, keeping our community strong.*

Laleet Negi, a youth member of the community, *shares, As a young person, I've learned so much by joining the collective Chilgoza harvest. It's not just about the income it's about working together and understanding our responsibility to protect our forests for the future.*

Ravinder Kumar Negi, a local trader *who regularly engages with the Gram Sabha, remarks, "Working with Rarang's community is a pleasure. Their transparent system ensures fair deals, and I know the Chilgoza I buy supports every household equally. It's a model that builds trust between traders and the village.*

Suman Devi, a village household member, *shares, The Chilgoza distribution system in Rarang has changed how we view our forests. Every family, including mine, gets a fair share, whether we sell to traders or harvest ourselves. Even though I'm from a small household with no extra laborers, the Gram Sabha ensures I'm not left out. This fairness has brought us closer as a community and made us proud of our traditions.*

Conclusion

In conclusion, the participatory distribution system of Chilgoza in Rarang Gram Panchayat is a remarkable example of how traditional knowledge, community engagement, and constitutional rights can come together to create a model of sustainable forest governance. It showcases the potential of PESA in empowering local communities to manage their natural resources in a just, democratic, and ecologically responsible manner. The success of Rarang serves as a blueprint for other tribal and forested regions of India, highlighting the importance of local leadership, inclusive decision-making, and respect for customary practices in building a sustainable future.

Positive Outcomes

- » **Strengthening Equity and Inclusion:** Every household, rich or poor, large or small, has access to the benefits of the forest produce. This prevents elite capture or marginalization of weaker sections.
- » **Strengthening Community Institutions:** The system is built on village-level rules and collective decision-making, reinforcing the strength and importance of local self-governance.
- » **Sustainable Resource Management:** Since the villagers have a direct stake in the produce, they are incentivized to protect the forests and ensure sustainable harvesting.
- » **Cultural Preservation:** Traditional systems like Wazib-ul-Arz are respected and upheld, blending modern governance principles with local culture.

SWEET REVOLUTION- STORY OF PABA'S HONEY

Due to lack of awareness about rights, organization, technical knowledge and cooperation from the forest department, the people of Paba Gram Panchayat were not able to exploit the valuable resources available in their forests. As a result of the rights given to the villagers on minor forest produce under the PESA Act and the initiative of the Gram Panchayat, the lives of the people here have totally changed.

Background

Paba Gram Panchayat of Abu Road in Sirohi district of Rajasthan is a remote hilly area. Here, the people had to struggle hard for their livelihood. However, the hilly pastures and forest department land near the village are full of bees for honey containing Neem, Jamun and herbs. But despite the abundant possibility of honey collection in the forest and hilly land near Gram Panchayat Paba, there was a hindrance in exploiting it due to lack of cooperation from the officials of the forest department.



Paba honey ready for sale (Image Source: State Government)

An Idea got from PESA - 'Desi Honey Mission'

Under the PESA Act, the villagers understood that the natural resources of honey could become a permanent source of income for the villagers through the Gram Sabha. On the initiative of the Gram Panchayat, it was decided to form a cooperative society in the Gram Sabha. On the other hand, by coordinating with the officials of the

Forest Department, assurance of cooperation was obtained from them. There was already an abundance of native bees in the area, but they could not be used systematically. Under the supervision of the Gram Panchayat, the villagers were taught the techniques of beekeeping, pure and scientific honey collection and safe storage. A part of the village was converted into a honey collection centre, where temperature-controlled environment and cleanliness were taken care of. The quality and taste of honey purified by the traditional method remain the same. Therefore, due to its medicinal properties, the demand is high and the price is also good. That is why the villagers use the traditional method for purification of honey.

An awareness about rights related to natural resources, mutual cooperation, coordination with related departments and technical information can prove to be very helpful for the villagers in their struggle for livelihood

Today, the honey here has become famous in the nearby cities and towns by the name of 'Paba Desi Honey'. Different varieties of honey prepared from flowers of Neem, Jamun and other herbs are now being supplied in the market with branding.



Paba villagers passing the proposal for the constitution of a Cooperative Society in the village assembly (Image Source: State Government)

Outcomes

Currently more than 50 families are engaged in this work. They have got employment along with regular income. Each family is earning about ₹50000 annually by selling honey. The biggest thing is that this has made the people of the village self-reliant and their sense of working together with mutual cooperation has strengthened. Apart from this, awareness and confidence towards their rights has increased. Also, they have started looking at minor forest produce from the point of view of livelihood.



Women receiving information regarding purity (Image Source: State Government)

Conclusion

An awareness about rights related to natural resources, mutual cooperation, coordination with related departments and technical information can prove to be very helpful for the villagers in their struggle for livelihood. Paba Honey Mission is a shining example of this.



TENDU LEAFS TRANSFORMED LIVES

Seven Gram Sabhas of five Gram Panchayats under Tamia Janpad Panchayat of Chhindwara district of Madhya Pradesh took a collective decision to collect and market tendu leaves. This decision became a strong example of the use of the rights of PESA Act.

Background

Chhindwara district, with its green and rich forests, is a major tribal area of Madhya Pradesh. The Gram Sabha of Pratapgarh and Chargaon Gram Panchayats of Tamia development block of the same district decided to do community collection and marketing of tendu leaves under the PESA Act in the year 2022.

The Gram Sabha planned to pass the resolution before December 15, as per Rule 25 and 26 of the PESA Rules 2022. But when the local

beat guard of the forest department came to know about this, he misled some villagers—like Ramesh and Chhotelal—by telling them that the Gram Sabha would not be able to do this work, and if it is done, the bonus would not be given and the contractor could also harm them.



(Image Source: State Government)

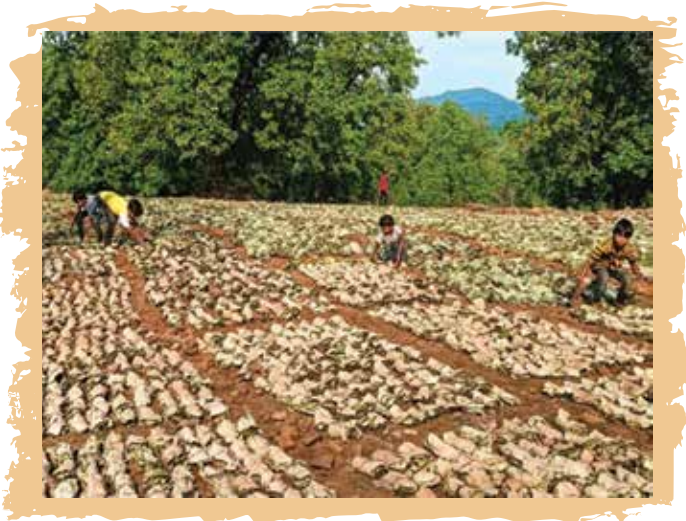
That same night, Ramesh and Chhotelal met the leader Hira Singh at the Betel (Paan) shop. When the topic of collection of Tendu leaves came up in the conversation, the Mukhiya (Head) told them in detail that this work is under the authority of the Gram Sabha, and everyone will get the marketing bonus only with the collective consent of the Gram Sabha.

After this, the next day the “Dhoondhi” of the Gram Sabha was beaten and on the seventh day it was decided to organize a Gram Sabha on the platform of Budhadev. As soon as this information was received, the beat guard again tried to mislead the villagers, but the people had already understood by then.

The unity of the Gram Sabha and the power of PESA Act have opened new doors of economic stability and prosperity in the lives of the villagers

Secretary Lalmani read out the proposal in the Gram Sabha held on Sunday. Villager Ramlal expressed happiness, but expressed concern about the distribution of bonus. The village head clarified that the amount left after deducting the wages will go to the fund account of the Gram Sabha, and from that the bonus will be distributed to everyone as per their requirement. The remaining amount will be kept safe in the Gram Sabha fund, the use of which will be decided by all the villagers together.

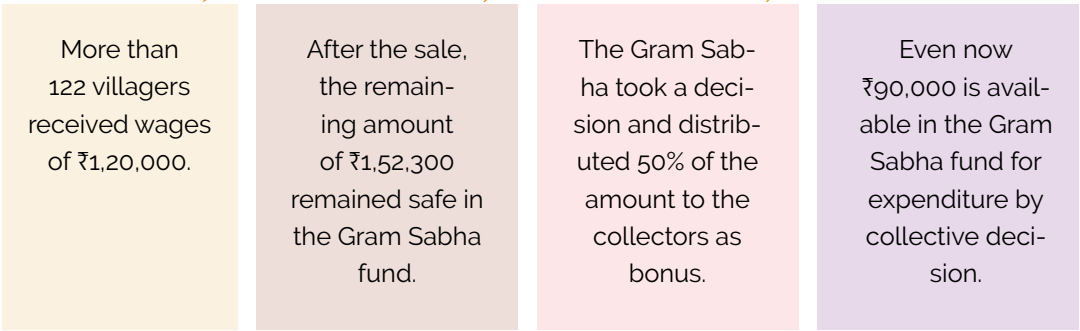
This proposal was passed unanimously. The application and proposal were sent to the Forest Department, which was approved and received by the Gram Sabha within 15–20 days.



(Image Source: State Government)



Achievements



Conclusion

This initiative not only provided employment to the villagers but also developed a spirit of collective decision-making, transparency and self-reliance. This model has become an inspiration in the surrounding villages as well. The unity of the Gram Sabha and the power of PESA Act have opened new doors of economic stability and prosperity in the lives of the villagers.

FAIR PRICE, FAIR LIFE: GRAM SABHA OWNS MINOR FOREST PRODUCE

For tribal communities, land is not merely a resource for production—it's sacred. Cultivation is a part of their harmonious coexistence with nature and is often a collective endeavour.

Background

Kadeli, Gurupalle, and Varthanapalle are part of the tribal-dominated Paderu Mandal, located in the Alluri Sitharama Raju district of Andhra Pradesh. In Gurupalle farmers cultivate high-value commercial crops such as coffee and pepper. But with limited access to formal markets and infrastructure, they depend on intermediaries who offer prices far below market value.

The Andhra Pradesh PESA Rules, 2011 empowers the Gram Panchayat to act as a village market committee and to regulate certain matters related to the markets including pricing etc. The committee in Gurupalle analysed input costs, market trends, and seasonal variations to propose a fair minimum support price. All the issues were discussed in the Gram Sabha for suggestions and feedback.



PESA Grama Sabha - Gurupalle (Image Source: Panchayat Secretary, Kadeli Gram Panchayat)

Community mobilization and awareness campaigns ensured inclusive participation and understanding of fair pricing and local governance. Once participation of the farmers was secured, the Gram

Sabha addressed issues of exploitation by middlemen and inadequate prices. This led to the formation of a *price fixation committee* with village representatives, experienced farmers, and market experts.

Traders were informed, monitoring groups were formed, and support systems like cooperative marketing, storage, and government linkages were strengthened. Agriculture officers, NGOs, and experienced farmers informed everyone of pricing decisions.

The Gram Sabha-led price fixation in Gurupalle resulted in fair pricing, increased incomes and economic stability for tribal farmers. It reduced middlemen exploitation and enhanced farmers' bargaining power.

Community mobilization and awareness campaigns ensured inclusive participation and understanding of fair pricing and local governance.

S. No.	Crop	Area	No. of Farmers	Rate 2023-24	Rate 2024-25	Yield	Additional Benefit Generated
1	COFFEE	55 Acres	25	Rs.150	Rs.425	7050 Kgs	19,38,750.00
2	PEPPER	55 Acres	25	Rs.500	Rs.680	6625 kgs	11,92,500.00
						Total	31,31,250.00

Small businesses were supported leading to self-sufficiency and reduction of dependence on external markets. Skill Development Training programs were also conducted to equip tribal farmers to meet their needs and reduce dependency on external resources.

The PESA Gram Sabha of Gurupalli of Kadeli GP remains dedicated to its mission of comprehensive development, rooted in traditional values and knowledge. Gurupalli has become a model for decentralized, people-led rural development.



Price Fixation Committee Discussions
(Image Source: Panchayat Secretary, Kadeli Gram Panchayat)



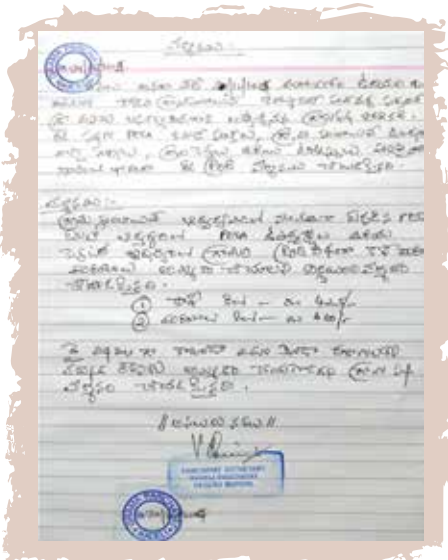
Coffee & Pepper Plantation (Image Source: Panchayat Secretary, Kadeli Gram Panchayat)



Coffee Crop
(Images Source: Panchayat Secretary, Kadeli Gram Panchayat)



Pepper Crop



Extract of Gram Sabha Minutes (Image Source: Panchayat Secretary, Kadeli Gram Panchayat)



THE ZINGANUR STORY: EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH TENDU LEAF MANAGEMENT

In Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district, a powerful story of self-determination is unfolding. Here, the Tendu (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) leaves from the forest, is not just a minor forest produce, it is a symbol of people's strength and unity.

Background

In Zinganur Gram Panchayat of the district, seven PESA villages—Pulligudam, Zinganur Mal, Zinganur Check 1, Zinganur Check 2, Vadadeli, Yedsili and Mangigudam—are changing their future. Its 2,885 residents, out of which 2,152 belongs to the Scheduled Tribes, are not just collecting Tendu leaves, they are writing a new story of improving their economy.



Map of Gadchiroli District: Fully covered (Green) & partially covered (Yellow) PESA BLOCKS

For generations, Tendu leaves, used for making Bidis (Handmade Tendu Cigarettes), have been an important part of the village economy. However, the villagers didn't have full control over the trade. Hence, through PESA the Gram Sabhas under Zinganur Gram Panchayat took control of their own Tendu leaves trade. They took the lead in organizing, collection, drying and sale of tendu leaves. The Joint Gram Sabha of Zinganur became the driving force behind this change.

The Zinganur Gram Panchayat provided essential support to the Gram Sabhas in handling the administrative and logistical details that made this whole process work. The Gram Sabhas also independently managed the sale and auction of tendu

leaves. Higher-level government bodies, like the Panchayat Samiti, Sironcha and the Zilla Parishad, Gadchiroli also played a role through oversight and support. The Forest Department provided the villagers with the technical expertise needed to harvest the Tendu leaves sustainably. Finally, the contractors who purchase the Tendu leaves at the auction helped generate the revenue that fuelled the community's progress.

The Zinganur story is a powerful example of how the PESA Act, when combined with strong community action, can lead to meaningful social and economic change

How Zinganur Took Charge

This well-planned process had several connected steps:

- » **Collective Action:** The villages held joint Gram Sabha meetings to plan the collection and sale. Rule number 13 of Maharashtra PESA Rules 2014 enables Gram Sabhas to hold a joint meeting, ensuring that every villager has a voice and the whole community moves forward together.
- » **Transparent Exchange:** A common public auction was held, attracting buyers for the Tendu leaves. The joint Gram Sabha, with the Gram Panchayat's help, got better bids, ensuring good wage pay to the tendu leaves collectors. This transparent process made sure that the villagers were fairly remunerated for their valuable natural resource.
- » **Sustainable Harmony:** Guided by the Forest Department, villagers performed coppicing, in order to ensure growth of new leaves.
- » **Collective Endeavor:** As the harvest season approached villagers went to the forest for collecting leaves. To make this easier, "Tendu Phadi" (collection centres) were set up in each of the seven PESA villages, allowing for collection and management of tendu leaves at the village level.
- » **Community Prosperity:** The total revenue earned through common auction was noteworthy. The Gram Sabhas and Panchayat used the royalty income for village development projects, addressing the community's needs and goals.



Breaking Barriers: A New Era of Community-Led Tendu Leaves Auctions! - an Advertisement



Hands of Autonomy: Zinganur villagers selecting Tendu leaves. Image Credit Mr. Pramod Bhoyar (District PESA Manager, Gadchiroli)

The following figures highlight the significant income generated through the sale of Tendu leaves:

Revenue collected in 2022-23	₹2,28,28,500.00
Revenue collected in 2023-24	₹1,84,19,605.00
Revenue collected in 2024-25	₹1,42,79,890.00
Total Revenue 2022-2025	₹5,55,27,995.00

Accountable Transit Pass: To maintain openness and accountability, according to Maharashtra PESA Rule No 41(6), the Gram Sabha controls the transport of tendu leaves by issuing Transit Passes (TPs). These passes are given to buyers only after they pay the auction money to the Gram Panchayat, protecting the collector's earnings.



Tendu Leaves Harvesting. (Image Credit Mr. Pramod Bhojar, District Manager (PESA), Gadchiroli)

The results of this initiative are significant

Enriched Lives:
Selling the leaves together has generated good income for all the PESA Gram Sabhas in Zinganur Gram Panchayat. This has funded various local development projects, improving village infrastructure, education and overall well-being.

Self-Determination achieved:
The Gram Sabhas have not only gained control over the Tendu leaf trade but have also increased their self-governance and decision-making ability.

Trust and Integrity:
The carefully organized system of collection, storage, auction and transport has brought transparency and accountability to every part of the process. This has reduced the potential for exploitation and built trust and stronger relationships within the community.

Conclusion

The Zinganur story is a powerful example of how the PESA Act, when combined with strong community action, can lead to meaningful social and economic change. By taking control of the Tendu leaves trade, the Gram Sabha has not only boosted village income but also empowered villagers, strengthened local governance, and ensured sustainable use of forest resources. This success story shows that similar models can be adopted by other Gram Sabhas, encouraging self-reliance and prosperity while protecting natural resources. The Zinganur model clearly illustrates the vital role of empowered PESA Gram Sabhas in achieving the objectives of the Act and promoting inclusive, sustainable development.

STRENGTHENING TRIBAL LIVELIHOODS THROUGH PESA-ENABLED FOREST BASED ENTERPRISE

The Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA), along with the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), plays a transformative role in empowering tribal communities in India. These laws recognize the rights of forest dwellers over Minor Forest Produce (MFP), which includes non-timber forest products like bamboo, tendu/kendu leaves, honey, roots, herbs, and other plant-based resources.

Level of Implementation: In Odisha, the government has adopted several regulations like

- » Orissa Gram Panchayat (Minor Forest Produce Administration) Rules, 2002
- » Orissa Forest Produce (Control of Trade) Act, 1981



Conducting Gram Sabha by tribal communities

These laws empower Gram Panchayats to regulate procurement, issue trade licenses, and maintain sustainability in MFP collection. The Odisha government has approved trade in 69 types of MFP, making it a major grassroots enterprise for tribal and Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).

The initiative in Mayurbhanj shows how tribal communities, empowered by FRA and PESA, can turn forest resources into sustainable livelihoods

Background

In the Mayurbhanj district, a Scheduled Area under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, the trading of MFP has taken a structured and community-driven form since early 2022. Supported by departments like Panchayati Raj, Forest, ITDA, Mission Shakti, and the Odisha Livelihood Mission, tribal communities have organized into Producer Groups (PGs). Six such PGs operate under the Sulabha Green Shakti Producer Company Ltd, which functions as a collective tribal-owned enterprise.

Sulabha Green Shakti facilitates organized collection, value addition, and trading of various MFP like sal seeds & leaves, mahua flowers, wild honey, and medicinal fruits. With technical and financial support from the Indian School of Business (ISB) and in partnership with AAK Kamani Pvt. Ltd, the enterprise ensures transparent market linkages and inclusive financial practices.

This shift from informal, exploitative trade to a formal, community-owned, market-oriented system is a significant step toward economic empowerment, legal legitimacy, and environmental sustainability. It is a model of how tribal communities can turn forest wealth into lasting prosperity.

The initiative is implemented through a multi-structure model involving:

Community Stakeholder:	Institutional Patterned:	Government Support:	Marketing Linkage:
1583 shareholders organised into six Producer Groups.	The Indian School of Business (ISB) provides technical and strategic support and Gram Panchayat provides administrative support.	Department of Forest & Environment, Department of Panchayati Raj, Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), Department of Mission Shakti & Women Empowerment and Odisha Livelihood Mission promoting community, individuals and women-led livelihood collectives.	AAK Kamani Pvt. Ltd, a private Sector firm is offering end-to-end support for procurement, processing, and sales as well as the Gram Panchayat is also supporting local market linkage by providing infrastructure and local marketplaces.

Further, the initiative has created a network of tribal women entrepreneurs, encouraged financial inclusion through digital payments and established a community -led storage, sorting and processing eco-system using Gram Panchayats Market Complex, Mission Shakti Gruha, Local Community Halls. It showcases how forest-based economy can be revitalised.

Positive Outcome



1. Strengthened Tribal Livelihoods

- » Organised collection and aggregation, reducing wastage and improving bargaining power.
- » Decreasing migration of labours, who are moved to nearby towns and metropolitan cities in search of employment, and they are getting allied activities throughout the years.



2. Women Economic Empowerment

- » Women Self Help Groups are not only collectors but also shareholders and decision making in the enterprises.
- » Exposure to financial systems, enterprise management and digital tools.



3. Improved Market Access

- » Direct linkage with buyers ensures better prices and eliminates middlemen.
- » Products now qualify standard due to better sorting and packaging infrastructure.



4. Gram Panchayat Empowerment

- » Every step from member selection to market operation is sanctioned by the Gram Panchayat through conducting Gram Sabha or Palli reinforcing community who hold the control over local resources.



5. Financial Literacy

- » All payments to members are cashless routed through Bank accounts.
- » Members have been more informed about saving, credits and digital banking.

Conclusion

The initiative in Mayurbhanj shows how tribal communities, empowered by FRA and PESA, can turn forest resources into sustainable livelihoods. With strong Gram Panchayat support, women-led groups now earn fair incomes, reduce migration, and manage trade through transparent, community-owned systems—creating a model for inclusive tribal development.



Drying Sal Seeds

THEME

3

MINOR MINERALS

PESA Act Section 4(k) / Section 4(l): Recommendations of the Gram Sabha or the Panchayats at the appropriate level is mandatory for grant of concession for the exploitation of minor minerals by auction, prior to grant of prospecting license or mining lease for minor minerals in the Scheduled Areas.



Himachal Pradesh

KAZA'S COMMUNITY-LED MINERAL USE REGULATION

Background

In the remote town of Kaza, nestled in the Spiti Valley, a growing population and increasing development needs have brought long-standing tensions between local communities and government departments to the forefront. Previously, locals faced penalties for using minor minerals without formal permissions—often due to a lack of awareness on both sides about legal provisions like PESA, Forest Rights, and Customary Laws. In response, the Kaza Panchayat has taken a proactive step by launching an initiative that not only protects community rights but also promotes responsible use of natural resources, blending traditional practices with legal empowerment and environmental sustainability. The Gram Panchayat at Kaza, Block Spiti has taken a significant step by passing a resolution on dated: 08/04/2022 at Gram Sabha in the chairmanship of Smt. Sonam Dolma, Pradhan towards regulating the use of minor minerals by using the power under Section 97-H of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj

Act, 1996, and Rule 13 of the Himachal Pradesh (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Rules, 2011. The rule clearly empowers Gram Sabha to plan for minor minerals.

Kaza is the main and the biggest town of Spiti Block, it has a population of approx. 1,200 of locals and it is growing further because of growing

tourism in the valley. This initiative has provided a lot of relief to the locals of Kaza Panchayat, as earlier different departments the General Administration, Police deptt., Forest deptt., and Mining deptt., all these Govt. agencies used to impose challan and penalty on our locals who were using the minor minerals without any legalities and process, because at that time the Panchayat bodies were not aware of their powers and laws. On the other hand, the officials were also not aware of the special laws like PESA, Forest Rights & Customary laws which empowers the local bodies to issue special permissions/permits to use minor minerals for the individual needs under domestic purposes.



(Image Source: State Government)

The Gram Panchayat Kaza has taken a significant step by passing a resolution at Gram Sabha in the chairmanship of Smt. Sonam Dolma, Pradhan towards regulating the use of minor minerals



Initiative to tackle the problem

The primary aim of this initiative is to maintain a balance between the extraction of minor minerals and environmental conservation, ensuring that the community's traditional practices (Customary Laws: "Waji ul arj" & "Naksha hak bartan") are respected and sustained. This initiative also seeks to formalize the process, making it transparent and accountable. On the line of the customary laws, PESA enables and strengthened these norms by providing legal structure for such management practices as per the following clauses:

» Gram Sabha, under section 97-H, shall be competent to plan and control the excavation and use of all the minor minerals including Soil, stones, Sand, etc in the Sabha area. The decision of the Gram Sabha taken in this behalf shall be implemented by the Gram Panchayat concerned.

» The Sabha members may use minor minerals for their individual needs as per their traditional practice subject to the condition that,-

» The concerned department of the state Government may award mining lease for minor minerals only in consultation with Gram Sabha by incorporating additional conditions, if any, imposed by the Gram Sabha for protecting the environment, employment, etc for such leases.

» These legislative frameworks empower Panchayats to manage local natural resources effectively and ensure their sustainable use.

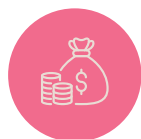
Impact

The effort is not just a testament to the power of PESA, but is also bringing the following benefits:



Environmental Conservation:

By regulating and monitoring the extraction of minor minerals, the initiative helps in preventing environmental degradation and promoting sustainable practices.



Revenue Generation:

The fee contributes to the Panchayat Nidhi, enhancing the financial resources available for local development projects.



Community Empowerment:

The initiative respects traditional practices/customary laws while incorporating modern regulatory mechanisms, empowering the local bodies/community to manage their resources effectively.

The locals and other stakeholders already acknowledging this change as a powerful move



Tenzin Norbu, Local Resident *"Before this initiative, we faced constant fines from government departments for using sand and stones for our homes, even though it's part of our traditional practices. Now, with the Panchayat's clear rules, we can access these resources legally and without fear. It's a huge relief for our community."*

Smt. Sonam Dolma, Pradhan, Gram Panchayat Kaza *"As the Pradhan, I'm proud of our Gram Sabha's resolution to regulate minor minerals. It has empowered our community to protect our environment while respecting our customs like 'Waji ul arj.' The funds generated are helping us improve local infrastructure, like our community center."*

Sh. Sonam Targey, Tribal Advisory Council Member (TAC) *"The Kaza Panchayat's initiative is a model for others. Their collaboration with the Gram Sabha ensures that mining leases respect local needs and environmental priorities. It's a transparent system that balances development and conservation."*

Lhamo Chodron, Local Farmer *"This initiative has made life easier for us farmers. We can now use minor minerals for small repairs or construction without worrying about penalties. It shows that our Panchayat listens to us and values our traditional ways."*

Conclusion

Gram Panchayat Kaza's initiative to regulate the use of minor minerals is a commendable effort in the direction of realizing the principle of "Gandhian ideology" under "Directive Principles of State Policy" enumerated in Part IV of the Constitution, which require the state to organize village panchayats and endow them with necessary powers and authority to enable them to function as units of self-government under Article 40. This effort has also blend traditional customary practices with contemporary governance frameworks. It ensures sustainable resource management, environmental conservation, and community development, setting a model for other Panchayats to emulate.



GRAM SABHAS TAKES CHARGE OF MINOR MINERALS

Introduction

When the law fails to curb exploitation, awareness and collective action by affected people can shift the balance. In Shikaripara block of Dumka, illegal stone mining thrived through political and departmental connivance, fueled by money and influence. It persisted even after the enactment of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996. Panchayat elections, rights education by a CBO, support from Manjhi Hadams, and a few sensitive officials empowered Gram Sabhas to halt the mining and assert rights under the PESA Act. As a result, proper Gram Sabhas are now mandatory before granting mining leases. Landowners are recognized as stakeholders, with many securing profit-sharing agreements of up to 50%.



Stone mines in Shikaripara (Courtesy: Wordpress)

were granted without prior approval of the Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha proceedings were often forged, denying villagers their constitutional rights over land and natural resources. Local officials and police, in several cases, were complicit in enabling these exploitative practices.

Turning Point

The 2010 Panchayat elections brought in a new wave of awareness. A community based organisation played an important role in institutionalisation of Gram Sabha meetings and educating the villagers. Newly elected PRI members began educating themselves and the community about the powers granted to the Gram Sabha under PESA Act.

Background

Illegal stone mining has been common in tribal villages of Shikaripara block in Dumka district of Jharkhand. Multiple leases were granted by the Mining Department bypassing due process. Even after the enactment of the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), mining leases

The Shikaripara case showcases a successful grass-roots model, where legal awareness, traditional leadership, administrative support and civic engagement converged to uphold constitutional rights

The Act was enacted to extend the provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment to the Scheduled Areas, recognizing the unique governance systems of tribal communities. PESA Section 4 (e) (i) (ii) empowers the Gram Sabha to:-

- ▶▶ Approve development plans
- ▶▶ Control local resources including minor water bodies, forests, and land
- ▶▶ Be consulted before land acquisition or leasing
- ▶▶ Prevent alienation of land and restore unlawfully alienated land
- ▶▶ Control social sectors, including health and education
- ▶▶ Prevent displacement, exploitation, and cultural erosion
- ▶▶ Promote conflict resolution through local participatory institutions



Stone mines in Shikaripara (Image Source: The Wire)



Villagers of Shikaripara agitating against lease without Gram Sabha approval (Photo: Habil Murmu, an activist)

Impacts



Proper Gram Sabha is now mandatory for granting any mining lease. Mining companies face penalties or closure if they bypass Gram Sabha decisions.



Landowners are recognized as stakeholders; many landowners now enjoy profit-sharing agreements (up to 50%).



Transparency and accountability increased in the mining sector.



It has also strengthened trust between administration and tribal communities.

Conclusion

The Shikaripara case exemplifies how PESA, when implemented in spirit, can restore tribal autonomy and dignity. It showcases a successful grassroots model, where legal awareness, traditional leadership, administrative support and civic engagement converged to uphold constitutional rights. This case provides a blueprint for other Scheduled Areas facing with similar challenges.



ASSURED INCOME TO TRIBAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH SAND MINING

Background

In the heart of Telangana, within the Fifth Schedule areas, a quiet revolution is underway. Taking advantage of the government provision to grant prospecting licenses for minor minerals, the tribal communities of Vadagudem village came together to form a Sand Mining Cooperative Society. This effort, backed by the powers of the PESA (Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act and the Grama Sabha, has created a sustainable model of self-reliance.

The objective was simple yet powerful — generate regular income through sand mining and provide employment opportunities to local tribal youth and families. In doing so, they have eliminated the role of middlemen and ensured that the benefits of local natural resources reach the rightful custodians — the people of the land. The Telangana government had taken a progressive step by authorizing tribal cooperative societies to undertake sand mining in the Godavari River basin. Seeing the opportunity, the Grama Sabha of Vadagudem village

— a PESA village — unanimously decided to promote a Tribal Sand Cooperative Society.



Initiative

The Grama Sabha gave its formal consent to mine sand from the river basin, with an estimated quantity of 1 lakh cubic metres per annum at the rate of ₹40 per cubic metre. This translates

to an annual revenue of ₹40 lakhs. These funds are being channelled back into the development of the village — in areas like infrastructure, education, healthcare, and livelihood support.

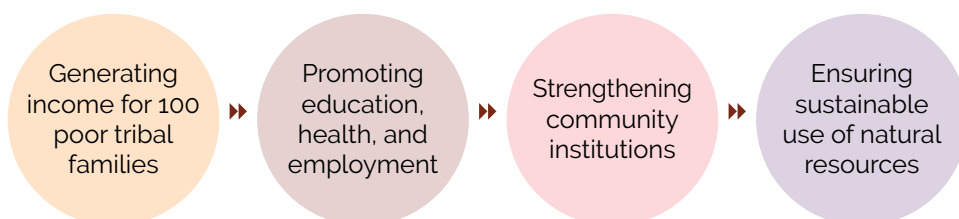
This initiative has empowered the tribal communities economically and socially. It is a true example of how constitutional provisions, when rightly implemented, can lead to grassroots transformation.

S. No.	Sand Bearing Area	Quantity (Per Annum)	Rate (₹/Cum)	Total Income (₹)
1	Vadagudem	1,00,000 Cum	₹40	₹40,00,000

The villagers of Vadagudem took a collective decision to form a Tribal Sand Cooperative Society, consisting of tribal families residing along the river basin. A total of 100 families became direct stakeholders in the society. Once established, the society began its sand mining operations in accordance with all legal and environmental guidelines, ensuring both economic benefit and ecological responsibility. The Grama Sabha played a crucial role in granting consent, monitoring the implementation, and ensuring transparency.

Outcome

This project is a shining example of tribal empowerment. It focuses on:



Today, the society earns nearly ₹40 lakhs per annum, and this income is being utilized not just for individual families but for the holistic development of the village. The Panchayat Raj Institutions also receive revenue in the form of seigniorage charges, which is used for the development of the panchayat, the village, and the society members.

Conclusion

Looking at the success of Vadagudem, there is immense potential to replicate this model across nearby river basin villages. It is estimated that over 150 villages across 5 mandals in the erstwhile Warangal district could benefit from similar initiatives. This could lead to a significant boost in tribal welfare, self-employment, and rural development. This initiative has empowered the tribal communities economically and socially. It is a true example of how constitutional provisions, when rightly implemented, can lead to grassroots transformation.



(Image Source: State Government)



(Image Source: State Government)

THEME 4

MANAGEMENT OF MINOR WATER BODIES

PESA Act Section 4 (j): Planning and management of minor water bodies in the Scheduled Areas shall be entrusted to Panchayats at the appropriate level.



FLOWING TOGETHER: PARTICIPATORY WATER MANAGEMENT IN POWARI

In Himachal Pradesh, managing water channels (Kuhls) faces challenges due to declining community participation and weakened traditional governance systems. Urbanization and shifting livelihoods have reduced local ownership and maintenance efforts. Additionally, climate variability affects water availability, while limited institutional support hinders long-term sustainability. These factors together threaten the resilience of this age-old irrigation system but there are practices which are giving a hope for rejuvenating these systems in a participatory approach.

Background

Powari Gram Panchayat, located in the Kalpa block of Kinnaur district, is situated approximately 8 km from the district headquarters. Renowned for its Kinnauri apples and Chilgoza pine, the Panchayat is celebrated for its



View of Gram Panchayat Powari

unique participatory management of water channels (Kuhls) to meet irrigation requirements. Comprising four villages Powari, Tanglagpi, Tangling, and Kegarang the Gram Panchayat has established a robust system for water management. In the village of Tanglagpi-Powari, the residents have come together to form the Kantiudhen Kuhl Water Distribution Committee, a community-led body that plays a vital role in both equitable water distribution and the regular maintenance of the Kuhl system. This collective effort reflects strong local ownership and highlights the importance of participatory management in sustaining traditional water channels.

In Powari there were customary laws to manage water bodies effectively, which are strengthened through the PESA. The Wazib-ul-arz of Powari up muhal clearly outlines rights over minor water bodies, which can be used for drinking, irrigation, or both. In Kinnaur District, where Minor Forest Produce (MFP) and horticulture form the backbone of the economy, farmers in the Gram Panchayat have relied on irrigation for generations.

The Powari Gram Panchayat initiative exemplifies community led participatory water management, equitable resource sharing, and the integration of modern tools with traditional wisdom

A strong traditional system of irrigation channels, known as Kuhls, is built along hill gradients to maintain proper gravity for irrigation in the cold desert areas of Kinnaur. This further strengthened by The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), which mandate that the planning and management of minor water bodies in Scheduled Areas be entrusted to Panchayats at the appropriate level [Section 4(j)]. In Himachal Pradesh, the H.P. Panchayati Raj Act specifies, "Planning

and management of minor water bodies in the scheduled areas shall be entrusted to Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, or Zila Parishads in such manner as may be prescribed" [Section 97-G]. The H.P. PESA Rules, 2011, define a Panchayat at the appropriate level as the lowest tier capable of performing a specific function within the area where a resource is located [Rule 2(g)]. Additionally, a minor water body is defined as "a water body used for fetching drinking water, whether a stream, rivulet, lake, or one on which check dams can be constructed, with a capacity to irrigate up to 5 hectares" [Rule 2(f)].

Such enabling policies under PESA are emphasizing on utilizing the traditional wisdom in a Panchayat and have institutionally supporter Powari panchayat to apply the village base management systems.



Irrigation Channel (Kuhl) in Powari GP

The provisions utilized by the Powari Gram Panchayat and has implemented an effective participatory management system for water distribution. Disputes related to water allocation through Kuhls are resolved amicably, ensuring uninterrupted access to water for all. The system operates on a rotational basis called "Palla," where nallas (small streams) passing through a village are harvested turn-by-turn. Temporary channels are dug by farmers to direct water to their fields. The community is divided based on the number of farm families, with each family allocated one full water day for irrigation. For instance, in a village with 20 farm families, a family's turn recurs every 20 days. However, two adjoining families may share water for half a day each, allowing them to irrigate their fields every 10 days instead of 20. This system ensures optimal water use and involves the entire community in the process.

Such enabling policies under PESA are emphasizing on utilizing the traditional wisdom in a Panchayat and have institutionally supporter Powari panchayat to apply the village base management systems. This model of empowered self-rule over natural resources aligns with the vision of the PESA Act, serving as an inspiring example for other Scheduled Areas.

Kuhls and nallas also power water mills, and their management is documented in the Wazib-ul- arz. Currently, the Village Development Society oversees Kuhl management. Water turn schedules (Palla) are maintained electronically, with printed schedules displaying family names and turn dates posted in public places and circulated via social media platforms like WhatsApp.

The locals and other stakeholders already acknowledging this change as a powerful move



Shri Bhupender Singh Negi, Pradhan, Powari Gram Panchayat *"Our participatory water management system reflects the true spirit of PESA. By empowering our Village Development Society and using tools like WhatsApp for communication, we've modernized our traditional practices while preserving our customary rights."*

Shri Tenzin Dorje, Farmer, Tanglagpi Village *"The Palla system has been a blessing for our village. Every family gets their fair share of water, and sharing half-day turns with my neighbor has made irrigation more frequent and manageable. This system keeps our fields green and our community united."*

Kamla Devi, Member, Kantiudhen Kuhal Water Distribution Committee: *"As a committee member, I've seen how our collective efforts ensure no one is left out. Disputes are rare, and when they arise, we resolve them together in the Gram Sabha. The shift to digital records has made our work transparent and accessible to all."*

Shri Bhupesh Kumar Negi *The Kuhls irrigate our fields & the fair distribution of water ensures my family's livelihood. The community's cooperation is our strength.*

The initiatives in Powari Gram Panchayat reflect strong positive outcomes for the local communities and building narratives of community led change which are also aligned with PESA principles and outcomes:

- » **Equitable Distribution:** The Palla system ensures fair and conflict-free water allocation.
- » **Community-Led Governance:** Disputes are resolved amicably within the community, respecting traditional self-governance practices.
- » **Efficient Resource Use:** Temporary channels and shared water turns maximize the use of limited water resources, ensuring agricultural and horticultural sustainability.
- » **Collective Responsibility:** Active participation by each farm family fosters ownership and accountability.
- » **Modernization with Tradition:** The transition to digital record-keeping and social media communication enhances transparency while preserving customary practices outlined in the Wazib-ul-arz.
- » **Decentralized Management:** The Village Development Society's role in managing Kuhls highlights community-led institutions, a core goal of PESA.

The Powari Gram Panchayat initiative exemplifies community led participatory water management, equitable resource sharing, and the integration of modern tools with traditional wisdom. The testimonials from farmers, committee members, and local leaders underscore the system's success in fostering community unity, transparency, and sustainability. This model of empowered self-rule over natural resources aligns with the vision of the PESA Act, serving as an inspiring example for other Scheduled Areas.



WATER RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT GAINED MOMENTUM WITH PESA

The timing of water availability is very crucial for any rural community. It becomes a double trouble when there is excessive rainfall during monsoon and often drought like conditions during summer months. The PESA Act came as a saviour for the villagers of Fadalewadi-Uglewadi. It enabled them to fill these ditches to meet their drinking water requirements and helped them get an assured additional harvest. This changed the livelihood scenario of the Gram Sabha to a great extent.

Background

It is Located in Ambegaon taluka of Pune district in the Sahyadri Hills of Maharashtra, the Gram Panchayat Fadalewadi-Uglewadi has a population of 1480 and has a high Scheduled Tribe population and falls under the PESA region. Being a part of the Sahyadri Hills, it receives heavy rainfall during monsoons. However, during the summer months, there was a severe shortage of drinking water as well as irrigation water. This prevented the villagers from achieving their potential to earn a livelihood.



After project completion

PESA Act as a Troubleshooter

The PESA Act 1996 and Maharashtra PESA Rules 2014 granted the panchayat the rights of the villagers over all small ponds within 100 hectares under Section 3(54)A j of the

Maharashtra Gram Panchayat Act. Taking advantage of these rules, in May 2024, the villagers decided to take up the pond deepening and widening project and completed it.

Achievements

The Panchayat got help to complete the work of widening and deepening of ponds with an amount of Rs 1.0 lakh from PESA 5% Nidhi Yojna and Rs 1.0 lakh received as CSR funds. As a result, the ponds were completely filled with water during the monsoon of June 2024. This improved the availability of water for several settlements of the Gram Sabha, including Talepathar, Dhamachiwadi, Pewadi, Shingadewadi, Umbarwadi (Malwadi).

The provisions of the PESA Act and the 5% Nidhi Yojna can effectively bridge this gap, leading to significant improvements in the availability of drinking water and irrigation water and livelihood opportunities.

Impacts of work done under PESA

The ponds developed by the villagers have had several positive outcomes.

Some of the important impacts are as under: -

- » Improved availability of drinking water. The water purification project funded by the Gross Relief Fund has complemented this, ensuring availability of clean drinking water to all households. This will address health problems related to water borne diseases.
- » As animal husbandry is an important livelihood activity for the villagers, the increased availability of water throughout the year for cattle, sheep and goats enabled them to keep more animals, which will improve their source of income.
- » Availability of water during summer months helped the community to get additional harvest, which was not certain earlier. This will be a major increase in the income of the owners of agricultural land and those who work as labourers in their fields.
- » The water level in wells improved significantly.
- » The assured availability of water throughout the year in the ponds has encouraged the Panchayat to plan fish farming from the coming monsoon season. This year there is a plan to purchase fish seed from PESA 5% Nidhi Yojana.
- » The increased public participation in collective work will help the community to achieve many more such objectives.



Before project completion

Conclusion

By bridging the small gaps between potential and achievement, the quality of life of rural and disadvantaged communities can be significantly improved. The provisions of the PESA Act and the 5% Nidhi Yojana can effectively bridge this gap, leading to significant improvements in the availability of drinking water and irrigation water and livelihood opportunities.



Glad to have the project completed (Image Source: Ganesh Karpe, Gram Panchayat Officer)



PESA GRAM SABHA BECAME A PRECEDENT OF COMMUNITY WATER MANAGEMENT

Despite the construction of the much-awaited Pada Khadra dam, the villagers of Mamer Gram Panchayat were not only facing the problem of water distribution for irrigation, but mutual differences among the villagers had become an everyday problem. In such a situation, the provisions of the PESA Act laid the foundation for an effective solution, which relieved the problem of water distribution and availability and restored an atmosphere of harmony among the villagers.

Background

Mamer Gram Panchayat of Kotada in Udaipur district of Rajasthan, located on the Gujarat border, is a tribal dominated village. The livelihood of the



(Image Source: State Government)

people here is mainly dependent on rain-fed agriculture. Due to the unavailability of irrigation water, the farmers here used to migrate to Gujarat for years and work as 'Bhagiya' farmers, where they did not get proper reward for their labour. After the construction of Pada Khadra Dam, the irrigation department started releasing water by making canals, but the time and quantity of water distribution was decided by the department. Due to this, sufficient water did not reach the distant farmers, which affected the yield and mutual disputes were also increasing.

Initiatives towards a solution

In this context, with the guidance and support of the voluntary organization working in the area, the villagers took recourse to PESA Act 1996 for effective management of local resources. Under this, it is mentioned in Chapter-IV of the Notification issued by the Panchayati Raj Department, Rajasthan on 01-11-2011 that PESA Gram Sabha will be able to play an active role in securing, preserving and managing the community resources of water, land and minerals of its area according to local tradition and consistent methods. Under this, the villagers formed PESA Gram Sabha and unanimously passed a resolution that the dam water should be managed by the local Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha formed a Water Management Committee of 24 members. The proposal of the Gram Sabha was accepted by the Irrigation Department.

The Gram Sabha formed a Water Management Committee of 24 members. The proposal of the Gram Sabha was accepted by the Irrigation Department.

Initiatives towards a solution

It has been mentioned in Chapter-IV of the notification issued on 01-11-2011 by the Panchayati Raj Department, Rajasthan under the PESA Act 1996, the tribal Bhil community of the village stated that the PESA Gram Sabha will be able to play an active role in protecting, preserving and managing the community

resources of water, land and minerals located in its area in accordance with local traditions and consistent methods. Using this provision, PESA Gram Sabha was formed by the villagers of Mamer and a unanimous resolution was passed in the Gram Sabha that the water of the dam should be managed by the local Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha formed a water management committee of 24 members. The Subdivision Officer, Tehsildar, Village Development Officer, Patwari and Irrigation Department officials were made aware of the resolution passed by the Gram Sabha through the Gram Sabha register by organizing a Gram Sabha meeting. The proposal of the Gram Sabha was accepted by the Irrigation Department. Thus, the Water Management Committee formed by PESA Gram Sabha started working towards streamlining the water distribution system for irrigation.



(Image Source: State Government)

Key proceedings & innovations

- » The right to water management was handed over to the village by informing the irrigation department about the decision of the Gram Sabha.
- » The water management committee started doing the work of cleaning and repairing the canal at the village level itself.
- » The time of releasing water was decided after consultation with all the members of the Gram Sabha.
- » The monitoring of water distribution was ensured by the committee, so that water reaches the last fields on time.



(Image Source: State Government)

Outcome

- » All farmers started getting water equally and on time.
- » Crop production increased, which improved the economic condition of farmers.
- » Migration from Gujarat decreased.
- » Water disputes ended and an environment of collective participation was created.

Conclusion

This initiative of Mamer village shows that if the community is granted their rights and ownership of resources with the support of provisions like PESA Act, they can successfully move towards self-reliance and sustainable development. This effective use of PESA Act can be a guiding step for other tribal areas.



(Image Source: State Government)

THEME 5

PREVENTION OF ALIENATION OF LAND

PESA Act Section 4 (m)(iii): Panchayats at the appropriate level and Gram Sabha are endowed specifically with the power to prevent alienation of land in the Scheduled Areas and to take appropriate action to restore any unlawfully alienated land of a Scheduled Tribe.



PESA: SAFEGUARDING TRIBAL LAND RIGHTS

The large scale illegal transfer of tribal land to non-tribals was happening in Jori Gram Panchayat of Lohardaga district, despite the Chota Nagpur Tenancy (CNT) Act, 1908. But the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, provided the instrument to Gram Sabha to exert their rights and stop these exploitative, illegal land transfers. It protected the tribals land against grabbing by non-tribals.

Background

The Chota Nagpur Tenancy (CNT) Act, 1908, is a land rights statute that was enacted to protect the land rights of Jharkhand's tribal population. The Act is notable for prohibiting the transfer of land to non-tribals. The Act bars the acquisition of tribal land by non-tribal people within their areas of Jurisdiction. However, the illegal transfer of tribals to non-tribals is common in Jharkhand and particularly in the Chota Nagpur area

of the state. Jori Gram Panchayat in Lohardaga district of Jharkhand faced massive problem of illegal transfers despite the Tenancy Act.

Proper knowledge of the laws & rights and a proactive leadership by Gram Panchayat through Gram Sabha are key to achieve the desirable objectives.



The Trigger

Bhagirathi Bhagat and Md. Hanif Khan, both non-tribal persons had illegally acquired tribal land (barren land) in 1939 and had mutation of the same land through illegal practices. The above mentioned tribal land was for common practices of the tribal people, particularly for Deshawali Puja. The issue got surfaced, when Hanif Khan tried to sell a portion of the land to the other non-tribal person, Bhagirathi Bhagat. The community called a Gram Sabha and a petition was submitted to the district authority. The District Commissioner gave the verdict in the favour of tribal community in reference to article 63(A) for barren land under CNT Act (copy Annexure - 1).

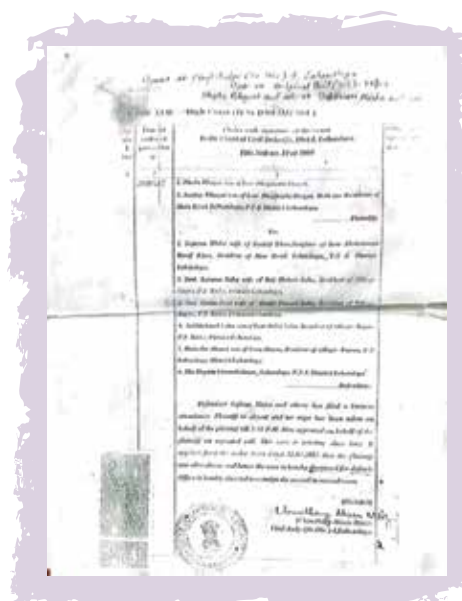
On 3rd April 2000, the Gram Panchayat of Jori passed a resolution in its Kurmu Gram Sabha, which recognizes the community rights under PESA Act and grants powers and functions related to the regulation of land transfer to the Gram Sabha. The chairman of Gram Sabha, Jaleshwar Oraon had taken several initiatives to prevent illegal transfer of land in their community. The district authority has also notified that the land transfer in the district should have approval of Gram Sabha, referring to the power provided to the Gram Sabha by PESA Act, c1996.

Activities undertaken by Gram Sabha under PESA Act

- » The Gram Sabha will ensure that agricultural land does not remain fallow and will establish proper arrangements for farming on the land of migrants, dependents, and minors.
- » Create arrangements so that the land of migrants can be farmed by landless or needy individuals, and establish conditions for such farming.
- » The selection of housing sites for the homeless of the village or providing housing sites under the village will be done by the Gram Sabha. The list of homeless individuals will be prepared in light of the recommendations of the Gram Sabha.
- » All matters related to the mortgaging of land will be brought to the attention of the Gram Sabha. Cases under the C.N.T Act / S.P.T Act / Wilkinson Rule / other customary laws will be valid.

Conclusion

It is evident from the story of Jori Gram Panchayat that a combination of suitable Acts, CNT and PESA Acts in this case, can help tribal community take control of their rights and protect themselves from exploitative practices. Proper knowledge of the laws & rights and a proactive leadership by Gram Panchayat through Gram Sabha are key to achieve the desirable objectives. It is a story for motivating communities living in similar conditions and exploited due to lack of knowledge of their rights.



Annexure - 1 (Image Source: State Government)



PESA ACT BECAME HELPFUL IN RESOLVING COMPLEX DISPUTES

Background

This incident of Tola “Dobandhana” of Village Chira under Gram Panchayat Batki of Betul district of Madhya Pradesh highlights a decades old land dispute. In the year 1970s, some tribal families started settling in their fields one Kilometer away from Village Chira and started living there permanently. In course of time, this settlement developed into “Dobandhana” Tola. The growing population and the need for modern facilities led to the demand for a road to connect the village to the main village. But the proposed road route passed through the private land of some farmers of Village Chira, which led to a dispute. This dispute continued for about 40 years.



(Image Source: State Government)

Initiatives to resolve

In the year 2022, after the implementation of PESA rules in Madhya Pradesh, Gram Sabhas got the right to resolve traditional disputes. In village Chira also, the Gram Sabha President was selected as per PESA rules. President Umrao Uike held continuous meetings and started dialogue with the agricultural families involved in the dispute like Milap Merscole, Dhanu/Ramu, Bhoota/Kalu, Jaisingh Uike etc. and obtained consent to bring a proposal in the Gram Sabha regarding road construction.

Influenced by the appeal of the Gram Sabha and the opinion of the elders, the farm families agreed before the Gram Sabha that they would allow the road to pass through their land.

A Gram Sabha was organized on 05 June 2023 in which both the parties along with the Sarpanch, Secretary, PESA Coordinator, Patwari and senior citizens of the village were present. The problem was discussed in front of everyone, the Gram Sabha President explained to both the parties that this road will not only be for development, but will be a symbol of convenience and mutual unity of the entire community.

After persuasion and collective discussions, the farm owners agreed in the Gram Sabha that the road can be built through their fields, provided there is no dispute in the future. After passing the proposal, the Panchayat Secretary prepared the Panchnama and sent it to the government.

Outcome

Influenced by the appeal of the Gram Sabha and the opinion of the elders, the farm families agreed before the Gram Sabha that they would allow the road to pass through their land. They also agreed that there would be no dispute on this issue in future. With this decision, the years-old dispute ended, and the process of road construction was started by the Panchayat.

- ▶▶ Acting on the proposal, a budget of **Rs 1.05 crore** was approved from the local **MLA fund** and the work of **gravel road and bridge construction** started in 2023–24.
- ▶▶ Now movement has become possible even **at night and in rainy season**.
- ▶▶ An **atmosphere of brotherhood and harmony** has developed between the two villages.
- ▶▶ **Awareness and trust** in the villages towards PESA rules has increased, due to which resolution of other disputes has also become possible at the local level.



(Image Source: State Government)

Conclusion

This story of Village Chira is not only an example of effective implementation of the PESA Rules 2022, but also shows that if Gram Sabhas are active, even decades-old complex disputes can be resolved, that too without any administrative order, by collective decision. This is a testimony to the self-reliance and community consciousness that the PESA Act empowers.

This story shows how Gram Sabhas can open the way for lasting solutions and development through traditional rights, even against deep-rooted old disputes.



FIGHTING DISPLACEMENT WITH PESA

The tribal Bhil community of Bhim Talai village, which has been living in coexistence with water, forest and land for centuries, had to face sudden displacement in 2014. But thanks to the knowledge of PESA Act, 1996, and Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act, the villagers opposed this situation and achieved success. This is a living example of PESA Act proving to be helpful in many ways for the communities of tribal dominated areas.

Background

Bhim Talai is a remote revenue village in Kotra Tehsil which is about 150 km from Udaipur district centre of Rajasthan, where about 300 Bhil families reside. They have never harmed the forest, nor the wildlife. Rather, they have always been complemented each other. The wealth of nature has been their means of livelihood. That is why there is a saying there -

**"If there are tribals, there are forests,
if there are forests, there are tribals."**

Today, the tribal community of Bhim Talai is living a safe life with its traditions, minor forest produce and cultural heritage.



Training and Awareness Programmes

The sound of displacement

In the year 2014, during a survey being conducted by the forest department in the village, these families came to know that they were being displaced from the village. This information became a cause of worry and confusion for them.

The forest department had included Bhim Talai and four other revenue villages in the 'Phulwari Ki Naal Wildlife Sanctuary'. This sanctuary is located on the Rajasthan-Gujarat border and is spread over an area of 511 square km. Despite being declared a sanctuary, the tribal community continued to live there as before, but suddenly the forest department started the process of displacing people by declaring the village as a critical habitat area.

Awareness became the basis of power

The villagers, troubled by this new problem, contacted a voluntary organization called 'Kotda Adivasi Sansthan'. The organization suggested for the formation of a PESA Gram Sabha under the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), which the villagers accepted and formed a Gram Sabha. Now there was a need for awareness and training. But there were two main challenges in this regard -

- » Lack of education level and legal awareness in the area.
- » Mistrust of outsiders and institutions.

Despite these challenges, the organization organized training and awareness meetings in the local dialect to provide information about PESA Act to the tribal Bhil community of Bhim Talai village. This created trust in the people and self-confidence in them.

Power of Decision: Role of Gram Sabha

The Gram Sabha held a special meeting and unanimously passed a resolution that the village will not be evacuated and the Forest Department survey should be postponed. This resolution was legally enabled as per Section 3(g) of the Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act, 1999 and the Notification dated 01.11.2011, which requires the approval of the Gram Sabha before any land acquisition. The resolution was sent to the Gram Panchayat Medi for approval, which approved the proposal and took steps to postpone the Forest Department survey and displacement process.



Gram Sabha passing the resolution

PESA Act: The path to self-reliance

The Bhil tribals of Bhim Talai protected their constitutional rights over water, forest and land by using the PESA Act. If this law was not there, the rehabilitation of the community would have been facing an uncertain future. Today, the tribal community of Bhim Talai is living a safe life with its traditions, minor forest produce and cultural heritage.

Conclusion

This struggle story of Bhim Talai proves that provisions like PESA Act, awareness of rights and community solidarity can achieve their rights and effectively face any kind of injustice. For this it can be said -

“Neither
Lok Sabha
nor Vidhan
Sabha;
Gram Sabha
is above all

”



OUR VILLAGE-OUR NORMS

Illegal land alienation is one of the major cause of conflict in Tribal areas, these land disputes are within the tribal community and also between tribal & Non-tribal community. The context for this story is the tribal villages of Adilabad District of Telangana State. The traditional dispute resolution mechanism was long existed among tribal communities, and these traditional mechanisms got legal framework after coming of PESA Act & PESA Rules of 2011. PESA Act helped in resolving the land dispute in Pendergudu Village.

Background

The Rai Sabha (Tribal traditional village council of Gond community) of Penderguda village and Gram Sabha of Pendurguda resolved such a land dispute through customary mode of dispute resolution of Gond community and prevented illegal land alienation duly utilizing the power under PESA Act & PESA Rules 2011.

In the case of Surpam Laxmibai of Penderguda in Adilabad District, land dispute was successfully resolved using the Rai system. Laxmibai had leased her 14 acre land to her cousin a few years ago. She discovered that the land

had been transferred into his cousin's name without her knowledge due to which she was not listed as beneficiary in Government agri- schemes.



1st Pendur guda Grama Sabha Meeting

present their case. The Patel and Panchs examined and concluded the case, due to which Laxmibai's cousin brother apologized and promised to return ownership back to her. The Tahsildar and Sub- Collector of Utnoor were brought in to change title back to Laxmibai, the land to be returned to her for cultivation within 15 Days. The revenue official of Utnoor mandal cross checked this process by conducting panchanama at field level.

Outcome

As shown in the case of Laxmibai, the traditional dispute resolutions systems like the Rai Sabhas provide a robust and credible alternative to legal avenues. These mechanism of dispute resolution are community led and therefore trusted. The PESA Act and the PESA Rules of 2011 provide space and powers to traditional tribal councils to resolve civil disputes based on their customary laws, and powers to the Gram Sabha for preventing land alienation. These provisions are convenient for local people, as decisions are made at the village level without any financial burden on tribal communities

The Gram Sabha's role in preventing land alienation is convenient for local people, as decisions are taken at the village level without any financial burden on tribal communities.



PESA GRAM SABHA GRANTED LAND ENTITLEMENT

Background

For the tribal community, ownership rights over their land not only gives them economic strength but also gives them respect and social empowerment in their community. So many times, the lands of these tribal communities are snatched by hook or crook and are taken over by threatening paperwork and legal proceedings, but after the implementation of PESA Act, there has been a great change in the situation. PESA i.e. " Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996" aims to provide real rights and decision-making power to the Gram Sabhas in the tribal-dominated areas of India. This Act recognizes traditional tribal self-governance and ensures community control over land, water and forest resources. The tribal community is fighting strongly against such cases by organizing Gram Sabhas through the PESA Act. When a similar incident happened in Domwada Panchayat of Sendhwa Block of Khargone District of Madhya Pradesh, through the Gram Sabha



PESA District Coordinator Manish Dudve and PESA Block Coordinator Karan Davar congratulating Radhibai on getting her land back

not only the encroached land was returned to the tribal woman farmer but legal action was also taken against the concerned person. Now people in that Panchayat and the surrounding area tell this success story to everyone with great enthusiasm.

In the year 2022, the Madhya Pradesh PESA Rules were notified by the state government in Madhya Pradesh, which clearly defined the role and powers of the Gram Sabhas. Under these rules, the Gram Sabhas got the statutory right to resolve land disputes, conserve village resources, ensure social justice and strengthen community self-governance.

Bhikarkhedi village of Khargone district, which comes in a scheduled area, has emerged as a living example of these changes. This village is situated in the Narmada Valley and comes in the 'Nimar' region of the state. The Nimar region is a dry and hot region and the main crops here are rain-fed crops, although Chilli, cotton and maize are the main crops and that is why now the agricultural sector is also expanding due to increased means of irrigation. By getting justice to the female tribal farmer Radhibai, the PESA Gram Sabha of this village showed that the Gram Sabha is not just a meeting, but the real guarantee of the rights of the marginalized people.

This story proves that Gram Sabha is not just a platform for decision making but is a live medium to provide justice and raise the voice of the marginalized people

Initiative

A brave initiative was seen in Bhikarkhed Pesa Gram Sabha under Gram Panchayat Domwada of village Janpad Panchayat of Khargone district. The land of tribal woman Radhibai wife of Verang belonging to Bhilala (ST) community was illegally occupied by non-tribal Mustafa father Munshi, resident of Segaoon. This land, identified as Khasra number 21/1/1 area 0.289 hectares, was not only occupied by Mustafa by calling it "his land" but also leased it to a brick-kiln businessman for five years.



This decision of the PESA Gram Sabha and the judicial process were prominently covered by the media

Radhibai and her family first made oral and written complaints against this injustice at Segaoon Chowki and Tehsil office, but no solution was found. Ultimately, he appealed to PESA Gram Sabha. The process of Gram Sabha was taken forward under the guidance of PESA district and block coordinators and action was initiated after understanding the seriousness of the matter on the basis of documents, testimony of elders and participation of the village community.

Outcome

Due to lack of quorum, the Gram Sabha meetings were adjourned twice, but the third meeting was duly held on 8 July 2024 in the presence of 25% of the voters. Passing a unanimous resolution under Rule 20(1) of PESA Rules 2022, a decision was taken in favour of Radhibai and the land was returned to her by taking back the possession of non-tribal Mustafa.

Even after the encroachment was removed, the encroacher and his family prevented Radhibai and her family from sowing maize on the same land and intimidated and even threatened to kill them. On this, the Gram Sabha lodged an FIR in the Oon police station, in which a case was registered under sections 296, 351(2) of BNS 2023 and SC/ST Act 3(2)(va).

During this process, two other non-tribals—Harish Pathak and Praveen Rathore—also sowed castor crop on Radhibai's land. The tribal community organised a PESA-Gram Sabha and sought a written explanation from them, but when no reply was received, a complaint was sent against them to the subdivision officer and they were removed from the land through official process.

Conclusion

Radhibai's story is a powerful example of how justice is possible when the Gram Sabha is active and the community works together under the PESA Act and can take action against powerful occupiers. The effective use of PESA Rules 2022 not only got the land back but also ensured legal action against the offenders.

This story proves that Gram Sabha is not just a platform for decision making but is a live medium to provide justice and raise the voice of the marginalized people.

THEME

6

REGULATING/ RESTRICTING THE SALE AND CONSUMPTION OF INTOXICANTS

PESA Act Section 4(m)(i): Panchayats at the appropriate level and Gram Sabha are endowed specifically with the power to enforce prohibition or to regulate or restrict the sale and consumption of any intoxicant.



PESA ENTERS, INTOXICANTS EXITS IN TADAGIRI

In the tribal village of Tadigiri, located in Hukumpeta Mandal of Alluri Sitarama Raju District (Andhra Pradesh), the widespread use and sale of ganja (cannabis) and natu sara (homemade alcohol) posed a serious social and health challenge. Despite earlier awareness campaigns, the situation remained largely unchanged.

In 2023, empowered by the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) and its associated rules, the Gram Sabha of Tadigiri initiated a bold, community-led campaign to eliminate intoxicants from the village. With collective action and strong local leadership, Tadigiri was officially declared "Intoxicant-Free" in April 2025.

Background



Gram Sabha with Health department officials & SHG members - Tadigiri Gram panchayat (Panchayat Secretary, Tadigiri Gram Panchayat)

Tadigiri Gram Panchayat is located in a Scheduled Area where PESA gives legal authority to Gram Sabhas to make decisions on matters affecting the community. In response to the persistent problem of intoxicant use and sale, the Gram Panchayat passed a resolution in 2023 banning the sale and consumption of intoxicants.

A dedicated team comprising Gram Panchayat members, Secretariat staff, and newly elected PESA Vice Presidents and Secretaries was formed under the leadership of the Sarpanch. As part of enforcement, Property Valuation Certificates were withheld from individuals involved in ganja-related cases.

To create awareness, campaigns like Kala Jatar, school and community events, and outreach through MGNREGA works were organized across villages. Monitoring groups made up of village elders, Self-Help Group (SHG) members (half of whom were women), and youth volunteers were established to ensure effective rule enforcement and foster community participation. With this community-led surveillance, there was no dependence on external agencies for enforcement.

The Gram Sabha of Tadigiri GP was declared Intoxicant-Free in April 2025. More than just a policy decision, this represents a community-wide transformation

Support mechanisms were also put in place to help those affected. Rehabilitation and counseling for addicted individuals were conducted in coordination with Village Secretariat staff, Health Department officials, and Excise Department personnel. Former youth offenders were given skill development training, encouraged to attend job fairs, and supported in finding alternative, sustainable livelihoods.

In cases where volunteers or officials faced threats, police protection was provided, and legal aid committees were formed. An anonymous reporting system was introduced, supported by SHG and youth surveillance groups to monitor offenders. Volunteers were recognized and rewarded, and anti-drug messages were integrated into local festivals like Spoorthi to promote awareness.

Outcome

In April 2025, Tadigiri Gram Sabha was officially declared Intoxicant-Free. More than just a policy move, this marked a community-wide transformation—a reflection of renewed faith in local governance, especially in the Gram Sabha and PESA institutions.

Families experienced financial relief as spending on intoxicants dropped. Public safety improved, and there was a noticeable decline in related crimes such as theft and domestic violence. This initiative stands as a powerful example of how local leadership and collective community action can drive lasting change and promote healthier, more sustainable living.



Awareness Programs during MGNREGA Work -Tadigiri Gram Panchayat (Image Source: Panchayat Secretary, Tadigiri Gram Panchayat)



Awareness program at Kambidimamidi Village (Image Source: Panchayat Secretary, Tadigiri Gram Panchayat)



Tracking offenders by Volunteers (Image Source: Panchayat Secretary, Tadigiri Gram Panchayat)



TOWARDS SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN TRIBAL SOCIETY – MISSION D3 (DOWRY, DARU, DJ)

Introduction

In a quiet yet determined corner of Madhya Pradesh, a powerful movement is taking root. Tribal communities have come together under the banner of Mission D3 – standing for Dahej (Dowry), Daru (Alcohol), and DJ (Loud music systems) – to fight deep-rooted social evils that have burdened their lives for generations.

With strong backing from the Grama Sabha, this mission aims to free the community from the clutches of dowry practices, addiction to alcohol, and the disruptive influence of loud DJ music during events. The District Collector, Dr. Bedekar, has regularly participated in D3 meetings, making public appeals for reform. The police administration too has lent its full support, and gradually, this mission is gaining momentum.

This is the beginning of a new era — a grassroots movement by the people, for the people — led by the tribal community, for the better future of their children, culture, and community.



(Image Source: State Government)

The community has taken this up as a social and economic necessity:

- » To reduce unnecessary expenses and debts,
- » To strengthen the local economy,
- » To stop distress migration,
- » And to preserve their age-old tribal culture and traditions.

Background

In Vaskel village of Alirajpur district, a historic Grama Sabha was held under the Panchayat framework, where Mission D3 was officially launched. Inspired by positive changes and empowered by the PESA Rules 2022 of Madhya Pradesh, the Grama Sabha invoked Chapter 1 (j) of the rules — granting them authority to safeguard traditions, customs, and tribal identity.

This became a call to action. Around 79 PESA Gram Sabhas across the district have started passing formal resolutions, spreading awareness, and launching ground-level campaigns to end social evils and bring about real, visible change.

At its heart, Mission D3 is an economic reform movement too. The objective is to stop excessive and wasteful spending — especially on dowry, alcohol, and loud DJs — and to save tribal families from debt traps. The mission, now a regional movement, was initiated by Nitesh Alava, a dedicated community organizer.



Nitesh explains:

"Our tribal people do farming, labour day and night, and make honest earnings. We have an abundance of natural produce like tadi, mahua, jamun, aam, sitafal, and more, which we sell in the market for extra income. But still, we end up with no savings. Why? Because we spend it all on dahej, daru, and DJs."

Initiative and Impact

Mission D3 has now grown into a regional revolution. Its main aim is to stop unnecessary spending and protect the tribal community from falling into the debt cycle. Here's how it works:

- Dowry (Dahej):** Earlier, huge amounts were spent on dowries during marriages. People took loans, mortgaged jewellery and land, and ended up in financial ruin.
- »
- Alcohol (Daru):** Addiction, especially to foreign liquor, caused fights, domestic violence, and declining health.
- »
- Loud DJs:** Playing DJ systems at full blast became the norm at functions, often leading to quarrels, police cases, and emotional distress.

To afford all this, tribal families took loans from moneylenders, mortgaging land or silver, and ultimately migrated to cities like Gujarat for low-wage labour. There, they faced economic, physical, and even sexual exploitation — especially women and young girls.

But Mission D3 is changing that narrative

- » People are cutting down on expenses, leading to less borrowing and reduced migration.
- » Savings are now going towards children's education, health, and nutrition.
- » Young boys and girls are being saved from bad habits like alcohol, smoking, and gambling.
- » Fewer disputes happen during weddings, leading to happier family and social environments.

Earlier, almost every wedding saw at least one or two disputes, mostly caused by alcohol consumption and noise. Going to courts and police stations was a common affair. But now, thanks to Mission D3, many such incidents have drastically reduced.

For decades, the tribal community suffered from social evils like:

- » Loud and uncontrolled DJs
- » Foreign liquor and addiction
- » Pressure of dowry...

...but all efforts to curb them had failed — until the PESA Rules 2022 empowered the Grama Sabhas. Now, for the first time, the tribal voice has legal backing, and they are using it to lead their own transformation.

Conclusion

Under Chapter 7 of the PESA Rules (on Narcotic Control), the Grama Sabhas are now taking charge of regulating or banning intoxicating substances. Mission is making people aware of their rights under the PESA Act, empowering Grama Sabhas, and creating a stronger, financially secure tribal society. This is the beginning of a new era — a grassroots movement by the people, for the people — led by the tribal community, for the better future of their children, culture, and community.



UPHOLDING TRIBAL RIGHTS: SONKHEDI GRAM SABHA SHUTS DOWN UNAUTHORIZED LIQUOR SHOP

The illegal sale of liquor and other intoxicants in society has numerous adverse effects, often undermining public order and weakening the social fabric. Such instances were reported in the Sonkhedi Gram Sabha area of Jhirnya Block, where a liquor shop was being operated without obtaining the mandatory approval of the PESA Gram Sabha.

Despite several oral and written complaints submitted by local villagers to higher authorities, no prompt action was initially taken. However, by invoking PESA Rules, the Gram Sabha formally brought the matter to the attention of the Collector of Khargone. This intervention subsequently led to the closure and prohibition of the liquor shop operating in violation of PESA provisions.

Background

The unauthorized opening of a liquor shop in Sonkhedi Gram Sabha, under Jhirnya Block Panchayat in Madhya Pradesh, posed a serious challenge

to the peaceful and orderly life of villagers. The shop began operations without the mandatory consent of the Gram Sabha, in clear violation of The Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA).

The location of the shop—at the junction of Chainpur and Abhapuri village roads—became a hotspot for public nuisance. Disorganized

parking, the constant presence of intoxicated individuals, and frequent altercations created a hazardous environment, especially for children and women. Local residents, particularly women, raised grave concerns about the deteriorating safety and hygiene in the area. Alcohol consumers often drank in nearby agricultural fields, leaving behind glass bottles, disposable plastic cups, and other waste, leading to severe environmental pollution and damage to crops.

This case stands as a powerful example of decentralized governance, where empowered Gram Sabhas, particularly with strong women's participation, play a proactive role in safeguarding the interests and welfare of tribal communities



The situation turned tragic when four young men from different families in Sonkhedi lost their lives in alcohol-related accidents. These incidents served as a painful wake-up call for the community, prompting decisive action. Recognizing the danger posed to public health, safety, and social order, the women of the village spearheaded a grassroots movement, urging the Gram Sabha to take firm steps under the provisions of the PESA Rules, 2022.

Invoking Rule 23(1)(a) and Rule 23(3)(a), which empower the Gram Sabha to regulate or prohibit the sale and consumption of intoxicants within their jurisdiction, the Gram Sabha convened a formal meeting and unanimously passed a resolution to ban liquor sales within its territory. This resolution was promptly forwarded to the Collector of Khargone district through a written complaint.

Acting upon the resolution and recognizing the illegality of the shop's operation, the Collector initiated immediate action, ordering the closure of the unauthorized liquor shop. This marked a significant victory for the Sonkhedi Gram Sabha, demonstrating the power of collective community action and the legal strength of PESA provisions when effectively implemented.

Outcome: Action and Resistance against Opening of Liquor Shops in the District

Under the PESA Rules, 2022, residents of several villages lodged complaints with local police stations to stop the illegal sale of liquor within their Gram Sabha areas. Additionally, Gram Sabhas formally rejected proposals to open liquor shops in their respective areas.

Specifically, a total of 11 proposals to open liquor shops were rejected under Rule 23(2)(a) of the PESA Rules—6 in Jhirnya Block and 5 in Bhagwanpura Block. Inspired by the anti-liquor resolutions of some Gram Sabhas, several other villages initiated de-addiction awareness campaigns through their Gram Sabhas.

Conclusion

This case stands as a powerful example of decentralized governance, where empowered Gram Sabhas, particularly with strong women's participation, play a proactive role in safeguarding the interests and welfare of tribal communities. Moreover, it serves as an inspiring model for other PESA regions across the country to take up local issues with constitutional authority and resolve them through lawful, participatory, and community-driven approaches.



(Image Source: State Government)

THEME

7

PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF LOCAL RESOURCES, INCLUDING TSP

PESA Act Section 4(a) and Section 4(d): State legislation on the Panchayats shall be in consonance with the traditional management practices of community resources and every Gram Sabha shall be competent to safeguard and preserve the community resources.



JUNGLE SURAKSHA THOROUGH KULHADI (AXE) BAN: TUNDAHULI LEADS THE WAY

In rainfed areas, poverty, malnutrition, and food insecurity are widespread. These regions are also highly vulnerable to land degradation, poor social and institutional infrastructure, and water scarcity. One effective way to address these interconnected issues is through the sustainable management of local resources with active community participation.

By utilizing the provisions of the PESA Act, Tundahuli Gram Panchayat is pioneering a new model of development—offering a replicable path for other rainfed regions in Jharkhand and across the country.



(Image Source: State Government)

harvested from forests. The village also struggled with water scarcity, employment-related migration, rainfed agriculture, mono-cropping, lack of fertile land, forest depletion, and social challenges such as child marriage, substance abuse, poor hygiene, and non-institutional child deliveries.

Background

Tundahuli Gram Panchayat is a tribal panchayat located in the foothills along the border of Ranchi and Ramgarh districts in Jharkhand. Until the year 2000, the area was marked by deep poverty. The only livelihood option for the tribal population was selling timber

An appropriate regulation of rights and resources under the provisions of favourable law can change the scenario of the village community and also provides an inspiration and model for other communities as well

Initiatives to Tackle the Problem

The PESA Act seeks to correct the imbalance in the control and regulation of natural resources in Scheduled Areas. It grants communities the right to manage minor forest produce, minor minerals, water bodies, and other local resources. Empowered by this legal framework, the Gram Panchayat of Tundahuli, located in Ormanjhi block, Ranchi, passed a landmark Gram Sabha resolution on June 1, 2015, asserting their right to resource governance under PESA.

Steps Taken

- » Gram Sabha took many steps under the provision of PESA Act to ensure Water, Soil and Forest Conservation. In the Gram Sabha, Village Forest Protection Committee (Gram Van Rakshak Samiti) was formed and timber cutting in the forest was completely banned. It was given the name of 'Kulhari Bandi' (Axe Ban).
- » A strict mechanism was put in place against any further destruction of forest accept minor forest produce, excluding- timber cutting.
- » Rainwater conservation is done through the construction of Dobha (pond-67), Tranches (3000), barriers, and loose boulder models (700) with the help of community labour (Shramdan) by Gram Sabha.
- » They have developed contour farming in the foothills of mountain and 90% of the agricultural area have drip irrigation system developed through different government schemes.
- » Community participation, particularly women participation in each of the initiatives and decision making is the key to success for the gram Panchayat.

Outcomes

Gram Panchayat Tundahuli follows an alternative development paradigm, where "Gram Uday" (development of villages) leads to "Jharkhand Uday" (development of Jharkhand). With 75.95% of the population residing in the foothills of the mountains, Gram Sabha policies over the past 5–10 years have specifically addressed challenges related to water, soil, and forest conservation to promote sustainable development.



Ramesh Bediya, Gram Pradhan "After learning about conservation of resources in this dry land, we decided to conserve water, soil and forest as a tool for holistic development for the entire village. Exhilarated by the benefits in the first phase, we decided to construct other water harvesting structures like TCB, loose boulder check Dam etc., adopting 'ridge to valley approach'. We also planted papaya, subabool, red gram, and hybrid napier on bunds of dobha to make it more efficient."

Conclusion

Proper regulation of rights and resources under favorable legal provisions can transform the situation of a village community and serve as an inspiration and model for others. The PESA Act provided a framework that the Tundahuli community effectively utilized, turning it into a valuable model for themselves and for others living in similarly challenging conditions.



MAHARASHTRA'S 5% DIRECT FUND SCHEME: EMPOWERING THE ROOTS

Introduction

Maharashtra's 5% Direct Fund Scheme stands as a testament to the power of grassroots empowerment, effectively placing the tools of development directly in the hands of local communities. This principle, deeply rooted within the PESA Act of 1996, has breathed new life into the Gram Sabhas of Maharashtra's Scheduled Areas, giving them direct control over financial resources and local development.

Background

Anchored in the legislative bedrock of Section 4(m)(vii) of the PESA Act, 1996 the scheme mandates for Panchayats and Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas to have control over local plans and resources, most notably tribal sub-plans, effectively deepening self-governance at the community level. To operationalize this Act, the Governor of Maharashtra, exercising

powers under paragraph 5(1) of Schedule 5 of the Constitution of India, issued a notification on October 30, 2014, amending Section 54-B of the Maharashtra Gram Panchayat Act. This amendment inserted clause (O), mandating the allocation of at least 5% of the total

The scheme has strengthened local democracy by promoting participatory planning processes at the Gram Sabha level. Community members are actively involved in identifying their needs, prioritizing projects, and overseeing implementation.



Tribal Component Schemes outlined in the Annual Financial Statement to the Gram Panchayats in Scheduled Areas. The allocation was to be proportional to the Scheduled Tribe population of each Gram Panchayat.

It was also stipulated that the Panchayat's utilization of these funds would be based on the recommendations and within the limits set by the Gram Sabha. The 5% Direct Fund Scheme presently covers 8,496 PESA villages, 3,006 Gram Panchayats, 59 blocks, and 13 districts of Maharashtra. The Tribal Development Department allocated ₹270.13 crore for the Year 2024-25. It is designed to achieve communities empowered, local democracy, greater control over financial resources. Maharashtra is the only state in India to have introduced a scheme of this nature, a pioneer in direct community empowerment.

How Funds are Utilized: Guiding Principles

To ensure that funds are used in a way that maximizes its impact, the scheme provides guidelines for their sector-wise utilization. As shown in the picture below, there are four categories of activities and 25% funds are allocated to each of these category.

Stories of two villages

1 In Tambadpada of Zari Village we see this empowerment in action as villagers build a lifeline to prosperity by constructing a Cement Nala Bandhara (C.N.B.). Their allocation of funds to basic infrastructure isn't just about construction; it's about envisioning a future with boundless opportunity. The 5% Direct Fund Scheme has enabled farmers to cultivate two crops a year, ensured a steady supply of drinking water for livestock, and helped to raise the groundwater level of the area. The discussions at Gram Sabha meetings are vibrant exchanges where community members passionately debate on best way to allocate resources, ensuring the preservation of their natural heritage for generations to come. The tangible results of this empowerment, like the Cement Nala Bandhara in Tambadpada of Zari Village, stand as testaments to their unwavering commitment to sustainable development.

Cement Nala Bandhara, Tambadpada, Zhari Panchayat, Block: Talasari, District: Palghar

2 Consider the weekly market of Boradi Gram Panchayat, a vital hub in Northern Maharashtra where small and large traders, shopkeepers, and vendors converge, and people and labourers from remote villages flock to buy essential household items. Through the 5% Direct Fund Scheme, the construction of nine platforms in this market, has significantly boosted the Gram Panchayat's revenue, amounting to ₹75,600 in the year 2021-22. This investment has not only improved the market infrastructure but has also empowered local commerce, turning it into a vibrant testament to the scheme's ability to ignite local economies and transform lives.

Platform construction in the weekly market of Boradi Gram Panchayat, Block: Shirpur, District: Dhule.

The Impact

The examples of Tambadpada of Zari Village and Boradi Gram Panchayat illustrate the 5% Direct Fund Scheme's profound impact:



Empowered Communities:

Gram Sabhas are now empowered to exercise self-governance and make informed decisions about their development.



Strengthened Participatory Local Democracy:

The scheme has strengthened local democracy by promoting participatory planning processes at the Gram Sabha level. Community members are actively involved in identifying their needs, prioritizing projects, and overseeing implementation.



Responsive Resource Allocation:

Resources are now allocated in a way that is more responsive to the specific needs and priorities identified by the tribal communities themselves. This ensures that development efforts are targeted, effective, and sustainable, maximizing their impact on the ground.

Challenges and the Way Forward

While the 5% Direct Fund Scheme has achieved significant milestones, some challenges remain. Aligning implementation policies with existing legal frameworks is an ongoing process that would keep throwing challenges for objectives of empowering tribal communities and promote self-determination through the direct devolution of financial resources and the enhancement of local control over development processes. Overcoming these challenges will require continued collaboration, innovation, and a steadfast commitment to the principles of PESA.



Conclusion

The 5% Direct Fund Scheme is a powerful tool for social transformation. This initiative is central to the core objectives of the PESA Act, enabling communities to exercise their constitutionally recognized powers and drive development initiatives that reflect their unique needs and priorities. By placing resources directly in the hands of Gram Sabhas, Maharashtra is fostering a new era of community self-rule. The transformative tales of villages like Tambadpada, Zari Village and the bustling marketplaces like Boradi serve as compelling evidence of this approach.



PENDHARSHET: A SYMPHONY OF SELF-GOVERNANCE AND CULTURAL HARMONY

The Awakening of a Community: From Awaiting to Acting

In the heart of Jawhar Taluka, within the Scheduled Area of Palghar District, Maharashtra, lies Pendharshet – a village poised between its deep-rooted traditions and an expanding desire for progress. For years, the community's aspirations for local upliftment and the safeguarding of its unique heritage often remained a distant dream, awaiting external support. Yet, a new dawn arrived when the villagers, empowered by a profound understanding of the PESA Act, embraced the opportunity to manage their own destiny. This is the inspiring chronicle of Pendharshet Gram Sabha, a story of how thoughtful planning and transparent action orchestrated a beautiful balance between vital developmental needs and the vibrant preservation of their cultural soul.

A Village Rooted in Tradition, Poised for Progress

Pendharshet is nestled within the Aptale Gram Panchayat, a part of the Scheduled Area of Jawhar Taluka, Palghar District, Maharashtra. This tribal village is rich with old traditions and feels a deep connection to its ancestral ways. However, the path to fulfilling local development goals – from enhancing basic amenities to nurturing their cultural expressions – often presented a complex challenge. This highlighted a clear and pressing need for greater autonomy and direct control over their community's affairs.



Map of Palghar District, highlighting Jawhar Tehsil

Pendharshet's journey stands as a powerful and inspiring testament to the profound effectiveness of the 5% Direct Fund Scheme, channelled directly through the Gram Sabha Kosh, precisely as intended by the PESA Act and subsequent state guidelines

Background

Before the transformative period of 2019-20, the Pendharshet Gram Sabha was already a hub of activity. With the persistent support of Vayam, a dedicated Civil Society Organization, the community actively engaged in village development, meticulously holding regular meetings and maintaining detailed records. Yet, a crucial piece of the puzzle was missing: the direct allocation of funds to their very own Gram Sabha Kosh. The villagers keenly understood that for their unique needs to be truly met

– whether it was improving the local school or ensuring the continuity of their cultural expressions – direct financial autonomy was not just beneficial, but paramount. This direct access to funds was the key that would unlock their ability to translate aspirations into concrete actions, allowing them to make decisions that directly shaped their daily lives and enriched their cultural fabric.



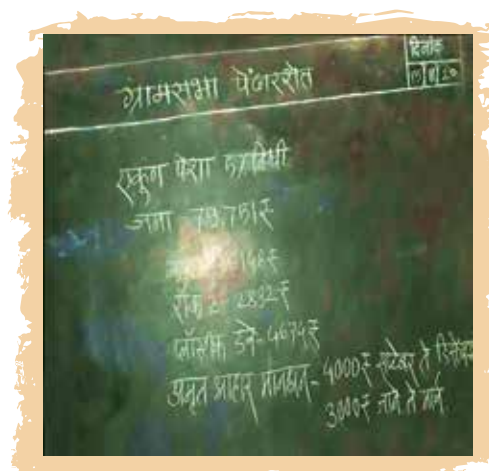
Legal Framework: PESA – The Foundation for Financial Autonomy

Pendharshet's remarkable journey in managing its own development was built upon the bedrock of the PESA Act, 1996, and the specific rules enacted by the state of Maharashtra. PESA was meticulously designed to extend the Panchayat system to Scheduled Areas, fundamentally enabling self-rule through carefully modified constitutional provisions.

- **Section 4(e) of PESA:** This specific provision proved to be profoundly instrumental. It unequivocally mandates that the Gram Sabha must be consulted in the planning and management of all social and economic developmental projects undertaken by the Panchayat in the village. In Pendharshet's substantial narrative, the Gram Sabha transcended mere consultation; it became the undisputed primary decision-making body for the utilization of the direct funds dedicated to its social and economic development projects. This empowerment allowed the community to truly chart its own course for progress, reflecting its unique priorities.
- **Maharashtra PESA Rules, 2014, and Hon. Governor's Notifications (2014 & 2015):** The specific rules enacted by Maharashtra in 2014, which laid the groundwork for establishing Gram Sabha Koshas (Gram Sabha Funds), were nothing short of pivotal. Furthermore, the 2015 guidelines issued by the Tribal Development Department (TDD) were truly transformative. These directives ensured that a minimum of 5% of Tribal Component Scheme funds, which had previously been allocated to Gram Panchayats, would now be channeled directly to these Gram Sabha Funds, in proportion to the Scheduled Tribe population of that Gram Panchayat. This direct and autonomous access to funds was the cornerstone of Pendharshet Gram Sabha's empowerment, allowing them to manage their development priorities with complete self-determination, fully embodying the spirit of self-governance enshrined in PESA. The unwavering emphasis on the Gram Sabha's central role in transparent decision-making was consistently reinforced by these State Rules and related directives.

Building the Future: How Pendharshet Made It Happen
Pendharshet's proactive and model management of its direct funds unfolded with a methodical precision, demonstrating true community stewardship:

- o **1997 & 2003:** Maharashtra thoughtfully amended its Panchayat Act and other pertinent laws, meticulously aligning them with PESA's vision, thereby laying the essential groundwork for the future direct allocation of funds.
- o **2015:** The Tribal Development Department issued clear and unambiguous guidelines, confirming that from the subsequent year (2016), funds would indeed be



Pendharshet Gram Sabha: Our funds, our decisions, transparently shown

provided directly to the Gram Sabha Kosh, marking a significant shift away from the previous system of routing through Gram Panchayats.

- **Pre-2019-20:** With the consistent and invaluable support from the local Civil Society Organization, Vayam, Pendharshet Gram Sabha diligently worked towards village development. They held regular, well-attended meetings and maintained meticulous records, all while eagerly anticipating the moment when direct fund allocation would finally empower their initiatives.
- **2019-20:** The long-awaited moment arrived. Pendharshet Gram Sabha proudly received its first installment of ₹84,000 under the 5% Direct Fund Scheme, deposited directly into their dedicated Gram Sabha Kosh.
- **Democratic Fund Utilization:** Through robust and inclusive community discussions, the Gram Sabha collectively and thoughtfully decided how to utilize these inaugural funds. Their decisions were a testament to their foresight: a significant portion was allocated for essential furniture for the primary school, directly enriching the learning environment for their children. Another crucial allocation was for roadside gutters, a vital step to improve the village's fundamental infrastructure. Community members were deeply involved in every step of this process, even participating directly in vendor selection, ensuring transparency and ownership.
- **Beyond Immediate Needs:** A Vision for Culture: Post-2019-20, the school furniture was successfully procured, bringing immediate benefits. While the gutter project initially faced some technical delays, it was diligently completed after the receipt of the second instalment of funds. Crucially, the Gram Sabha demonstrated foresight and cultural sensitivity by allocating the remaining funds to acquire a 'Sambal,' a cherished traditional musical instrument. This instrument was designated for communal use, and the Gram Sabha even established a clear system for its usage fees and meticulous record-keeping, ensuring the sustainable management and continuity of this invaluable cultural asset for generations to come.



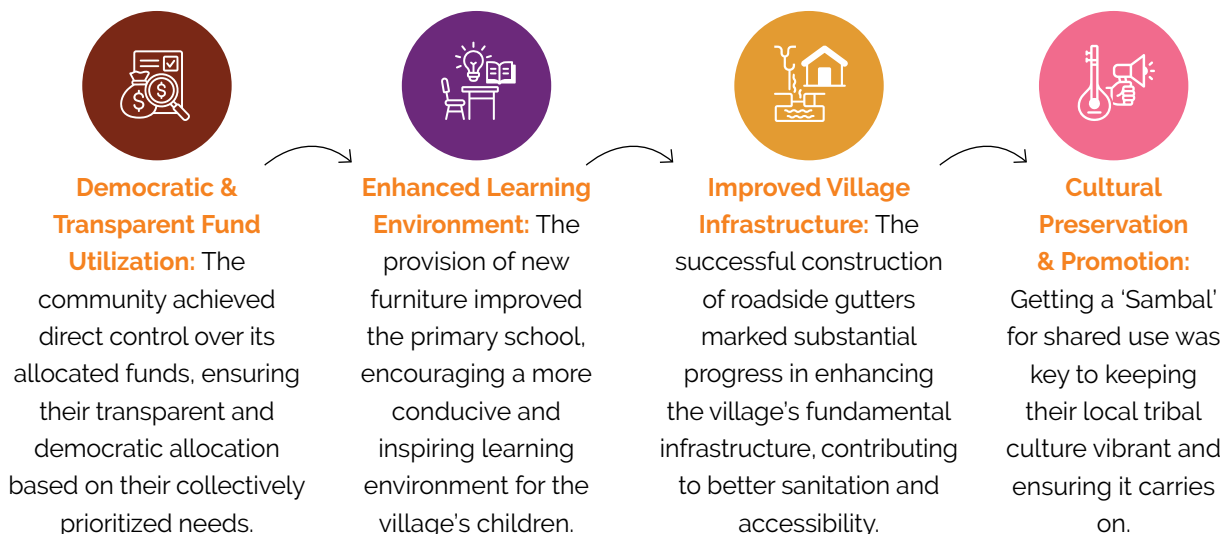
Preserving Tradition: Pendharshet's Sambal and Cultural Heritage

A Balanced Approach to Progress

Pendharshet's journey is truly exciting because it beautifully illustrates the empowering essence of the Direct Fund Scheme, channelled directly through the Gram Sabha Kosh under PESA. The Gram Sabha's commitment to democratic decision-making, paints a glowing picture of a holistic approach to development. By strategically allocating funds towards both essential infrastructures, such as school furniture and gutters, and the preservation of culture, exemplified by the acquisition of the Sambal, Pendharshet showcased a commendable balance. This blend of addressing immediate developmental needs while safeguarding its unique heritage makes Pendharshet a guiding light. The indispensable role of Vayam in supporting this entire journey, from demystifying legal provisions to facilitating transparent processes, deserves profound recognition and applause.

The Fruits of Labor: Outcomes and Benefits

Pendharshet's thoughtful and strategic utilization of direct funds yielded a multitude of tangible and impactful results, profoundly transforming the lives of its residents:



Conclusion: A Model for Holistic and Culturally Sensitive Development

Pendharshet's journey stands as a powerful and inspiring testament to the profound effectiveness of the 5% Direct Fund Scheme, channelled directly through the Gram Sabha Kosh, precisely as intended by the PESA Act and subsequent state guidelines. By confidently exercising their inherent authority to decide on fund utilization through a participatory and transparent approach, the community not only adeptly addressed critical developmental needs but also passionately and successfully preserved its cherished cultural heritage. This case intensely demonstrates how PESA, through direct resource allocation to truly empowered Gram Sabhas, can genuinely nurture holistic and culturally relevant development within Scheduled Areas, thereby setting an inspiring precedent for authentic self-governance and solid community control over their own resources.

Odisha

STRENGTHENING TRIBAL SELF GOVERNANCE - CUSTOMARY BOUNDARY MAPPING THROUGH PESA & FRA

Budaguda Gram Panchayat, in southern Odisha is predominantly inhabited by Kondh tribal communities. Between 2021 and 2024, Budaguda adopted a participatory approach to implement the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 and the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, (PESA). Budaguda's experience demonstrates how legal provisions under FRA and PESA, leads to improved livelihoods, dignity, and freedom for villagers, who can now cultivate their land without fear of eviction.

Background



Forest Committee Meeting

Budaguda Gram Panchayat, located in the Kalyansingpur Block of Rayagada District in southern Odisha, lies within the 5th Scheduled Area of India. Budaguda is one of the 17 Gram Panchayats under the Kalyansingpur Block in Rayagada district. The Budaguda Gram Sabha used provisions under the PESA Act and FRA to

ensure that local resources were mapped, claimed and subsequently managed by the tribal communities for sustainable livelihoods.

The PESA Act empowers Gram Sabhas to manage natural resources and safeguard traditional practices, customs, and cultural heritage.

The PESA Act empowers Gram Sabhas to manage natural resources and safeguard traditional practices, customs, and cultural heritage. The Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, reinforces community rights over forest lands through specific legal provisions. Section 3(1)(i) of the FRA recognizes the rights of communities over their traditional boundaries, while Section 3(1)(e) grants them the authority to protect, regenerate, and manage community forest resources.

Gram Sabha at the core

To begin with, the village secured land titles for 25 households under Individual Forest Rights (IFR) and for the community under (Community Forest Rights) CFR, covering 200 acres. The CFR rights empower the Gram Sabha to manage community-led conservation and sustainable use of resources. The village aligned the FRA with other development schemes, like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), for improved infrastructure and livelihood conditions.



Forest Committee Meeting

The initiative was led by the Gram Sabha, with support from civil society organizations and cooperation from district authorities. The process began in 2021, with community awareness campaigns and village-level meetings. From early 2022 to late 2023, community mobilization, mapping of customary boundaries, and submission of land claims was done. Verification of claims and issuance of titles took place between late 2023 and early 2024. As of mid-2024, the Gram Panchayat continues with forest protection planning and governance of minor forest produce (MFP) collection and use.

The Process

- » The process began with orienting villagers on the provisions of PESA and their rights related to mapping customary boundaries.
- » Mobilization was done through Palli Sabhas in each village. The mobilization process was carried out through a range of participatory and inclusive methods. Regular village-level meetings were organized to engage community members in discussions and decision-making.
- » Technical mapping was done using GPS technology to accurately demarcate customary forest boundaries. Based on this, the Gram Sabha passed, validated, and submitted formal resolutions for claim filing. The submitted claims were subsequently verified with the support of officials from the Revenue and Forest departments. Finally, legal recognition was granted to the mapped areas through the issuance of titles.
- » The Gram Sabha conducted awareness drives to educate community members about their rights and the significance of customary boundary mapping. Folk media and visual aids were effectively used. It also documented customary claims and resolved intra-community conflicts related to land and resource use through traditional mechanisms.
- » Village-level working groups were formed to coordinate activities and ensure local leadership. Special emphasis was placed on the inclusion of women and youth leaders, encouraging their active involvement in all stages of the initiative. Additionally, targeted training sessions were conducted to build community capacity on the provisions of PESA and FRA, as well as on the use of mapping tools and techniques.
- » To formalize forest governance, the Gram Sabha passed key resolutions and established the Forest Rights Management Committee, which is responsible for overseeing the implementation and management of community forest rights on an ongoing basis.

Other stakeholders strengthened the process

- » The Revenue and Forest Department played a supportive role in the implementation process. Officials from both departments facilitated the verification of claims and assisted in processing the documentation submitted by the Gram Sabhas. Sub Divisional level committee formally endorsed the resolutions passed by the Gram Sabha. The process occasionally faced bureaucratic delays and was affected by limited administrative capacity, slowing implementation.
- » Civil society organization like NIRMAN conducted legal literacy campaigns to educate community members about their, provided GPS tools and technical assistance for accurate mapping of customary boundaries. It facilitated capacity-building programs for Gram Sabha members and youth to strengthen local leadership and governance. The support extended to assisting with documentation, claim submission, and ongoing follow-up to ensure the process remained community-driven and legally sound.

Challenges faced

Initially, there was a lack of awareness among villagers about the provisions of PESA and FRA, requiring groundwork in legal literacy and community education. There was limited cooperation from local authorities at the early stages. Technical barriers—difficulties in GPS-based mapping and proper documentation, further complicated the initiative.

Additionally, conflicts arose between villages over overlapping land use and boundary claims. Even after title issuance, there remained a pressing need to establish effective post-title resource governance mechanisms to ensure sustainable management of the community forest areas. These were eventually resolved.

Outcomes

The initiative led to several significant results. Over 200 acres of customary forest land were successfully mapped and formally claimed by the community. The resolutions passed by the Gram Sabha have begun to influence and guide various government development schemes, including Mahatma Gandhi NREGS project selection and grievance redress under the Public Distribution System (PDS).

A Forest Rights Management Committee is functional to oversee conservation efforts and ensure sustainable use of forest resources. The community also initiated the regulation of minor forest produces (MFPs) collection to prevent exploitation and enhance community ownership. Notably, the process contributed to increased participation and leadership of women in local governance system.

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY GOT MOMENTUM DUE TO THE RIGHT TO MINOR FOREST PRODUCE

Animal husbandry is an important part of livelihood for the residents of Thamlaveri village, but availability of fodder was a major problem for them. Due to the rights of villagers on minor forest produce under the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, (PESA) initiative of Gram Sabha and united efforts of villagers, animal husbandry has become a strong pillar of livelihood for rural families and a source of revenue for the Gram Sabha.

Background



(Image Source: State Government)

Thamlaveri village is a tribal dominated revenue village of Ukhliyat Gram Panchayat of Kotra Tehsil of Udaipur. The main source of livelihood of the people here is farming and animal husbandry. Most of the tribals are marginal farmers. It was not possible for them to grow fodder for animals in their private fields. Therefore, the animals had to graze in the open area. There

is a forest department post in the village and a fine was imposed for grazing in the forest area. The villagers were very upset by this and their relations with the forest department were also not good.

Knowledge of rights, active role of Gram Sabha and positive attitude by the department can bring a big change in the lives of villagers.

Efforts made towards solving the problem

Regarding their problem, the villagers contacted 'Kotda Adivasi Sansthan', a voluntary organization working in the area. They informed the villagers about PESA Act 1996, State PESA Act 1999 and Rules 2011. Under this, the Gram Sabha has the right to protect and manage the minor forest produce. On the basis of this information, the Gram Sabha made a plan to work on this issue and on 9 November 2016, in the Gram Sabha meeting, a Management and Protection Committee was constituted for the grass of forest land, which is a part of the minor forest produce.

In which the following rules were made –

- » Grazing of animals will be done in the forest area where there is no plantation or closure.
- » Grass collection for the whole year will also be done according to the number of animals in the family.
- » Gram Sabha will do the work of cutting grass after the rains at the decided place in coordination with the forest department.
- » For cutting grass, the village family has to pay 50 rupees and the families of other villages have to pay 100 rupees for head load and 1100 rupees for carrying a full cart to the Gram Sabha.

As per this rule, the Gram Sabha is collecting fees from all the 64 families of the village. In this way, Rs 2250 is collected from the village every year, which the villagers use for the development of the village and public work as decided in the Gram Sabha. The Forest Department also recognized the committee. In this way, the Gram Sabha of Thamalaveri village took up the task of conservation and management of its resources through its PESA Act. Now preparations are underway to manage the entire forest. For this, the claim of community forest rights has been presented by the Gram Sabha. Along with this, a plan is also being prepared to manage the forest falling within the boundary of the village.

Conclusion

Knowledge of rights, active role of Gram Sabha and positive attitude by the department can bring a big change in the lives of villagers. It prepares villagers not only for one issue but also for many collective issues.

क्र.सं.	नाम	पद	सम्पर्क नम्बर
1.	लक्ष्मण नं. गजगा	सचिव	9184716239
2.	विनायक नं. गजगा	उपसचिव	9328147548
3.	रमेश नं. गजगा	उपसचिव	9829300685
4.	मोहन नं. गजगा	सदस्य	9166316787
5.	विनायक नं. गजगा	"	"
6.	विनायक नं. गजगा	"	9166489505
7.	मोहन नं. गजगा	"	"
8.	विनायक नं. गजगा	"	9329735889
9.	विनायक नं. गजगा	"	8870660852
10.	विनायक नं. गजगा	"	"
11.	विनायक नं. गजगा	"	"
12.	विनायक नं. गजगा	"	"
13.	विनायक नं. गजगा	"	"
14.	विनायक नं. गजगा	"	"
15.	विनायक नं. गजगा	"	"

(Image Source: State Government)

THEME

8

CUSTOMARY MODE OF DISPUTE RESOLUTION

PESA Act Section 4(d): Every Gram Sabha shall be competent to safeguard and preserve the...customary mode of dispute resolution.



SAVING VILLAGES FROM BECOMING CITY: PESA LEADS THE WAY

The tribal community of Chaibasa in West Singhbhum, like other communities living in tribal areas, used to resolve their individual and common issues through traditional systems. However, in 2013, they found their villages included in an urbanized area. This was not acceptable to them, as they feared it would threaten their identity and culture. While protesting against the decision, they discovered the power of the provisions under Section 4(d) of the PESA Act, which explicitly recognizes customary modes of dispute resolution. This not only helped them get their villages excluded from the urban boundary but also provided a head start for many more accomplishments.

Background

In the forests of the Chotanagpur Plateau and the Santhal Pargana region of Jharkhand, indigenous populations have forged unique social structures, customs, and traditions that reflect their deep connection to the land and their collective identity as Adivasis, or original inhabitants. Each tribal village had its own council, which served as the primary decision-making body. However, there remains a tension between traditional systems of self-rule and the externally imposed administrative structures.



(Image Source: State Government)

Gram Panchayat Chaibasa is located near the urban local body of West Singhbhum, Jharkhand. In 2013, the district authority, under the extension of Nagar Palika, attempted to include 13 of its villages within its boundary. During the protest, 13 individuals, including a prominent village head, were arrested. At the bail hearing in court, they discovered the judicial powers of the Gram Sabha. They held a meeting and passed a resolution and submitted it to the district authority referring the provisions under the PESA Act, 1996. The district authority considered it and accepted to proposal to exclude these villages from proposed extension of Nagar Palika.

The traditional systems often prioritize restorative justice over punitive approaches, focus on community harmony and involve community elders or traditional leaders in resolving disputes.

Additional Gains

Based upon the notification, traditional courts were set up for the tribal people at the block office, saving them from the inadequate formal legal system and neglect by government officials. Issues are now resolved through the inexpensive and prompt justice process of the Nyay Samiti of the Gram Sabhas. Training, along with a dialogue platform, can strengthen the self-governance system envisioned for the tribal people by Gandhiji.



A meeting of villagers and officials

To ensure self-governance, the community has also imposed specific rules and regulations for the police department to follow. Before making any arrests of its members, the police must obtain permission from the Gram Sabha and provide complete information regarding the arrest within 48 hours. If an arrest is made without prior permission, the police are required to provide detailed information about the case to the Gram Sabha within 15 days.

Conclusion

The PESA Act, 1996 enables the Gram Sabha to maintain a safety net over their rights and surroundings against external or internal conflicts. It further safeguards villagers from any illegal practices. It also establishes cost-effective legal mechanisms for tribal communities and promotes the practice of dispute resolution within a short span of time through dialogue. These traditional systems often prioritize restorative justice over punitive approaches, focus on community harmony, and involve community elders or traditional leaders in resolving disputes. All of this is protected under the provisions of the PESA Act.



(Image Source: State Government)

JUSTICE AT HOME WITH ZERO COST

In Telangana, traditional dispute resolutions systems exist amongst tribal communities. These have been given credibility under the PESA Act and PESA Rules of 2011. These systems have been successfully resolving civil disputes as in the case of Jugnaka Ramba at zero cost showcasing the effectiveness of traditional mechanisms.

Background

In Jamda village of Adilabad District of Telangana, traditional dispute system of Panchmutti (Patel) for Gonds consists of Village Councils, Rai Centre (Rai Sabha) and Zilla Rai Centre (Zilla Rai Sabha). Rai Sabha for cluster of villages (25-45 villages) and Zilla Rai Centre (Zilla Rai Sabha) for whole districts



Application to Grama Sabha

consisting of 120 plus Rai Centre. These traditional systems settled disputes of Family, Property, land boundaries, Community Forest (Except Criminal cases) disputes. But there was no legal sanctity to this old age traditional practices.

Under PESA Act and PESA Rules of 2011, all old traditional village

council systems are strengthened with PESA legal frame work. Via Grama Sabha intervention under Customary Mode of Dispute Resolution disputes except criminal cases are now settled at "ZERO COST" to disputing parties.

The Grama Sabha played key role in the process. It provided an opportunity for all members to participate irrespective of gender in decision making process.

PESA Gram Sabha resolves family disputes

In the case of Jugnuka Ram Bai, PESA Gram Sabha helped resolved a family dispute using traditional dispute resolution methods speedily and at no cost.

Jugnuka Ram Bai and her husband Jugnuka Yasvanth Rao often had quarrels. Jugnuka Ram Bai's father-in-law made a complaint to the Vice-President of PESA Gram Sabha to resolve the issue. The case was accepted by the Sabha and was allotted two days time for resolution. A Grama Sabha meeting was called by issuing notices to all village Patels and the people within the jurisdiction of Gram Sabha.

During the Grama Sabha meeting both wife and husband were allowed to present their case to arrive at a common and unanimous decision to resolve the issue. The issue was eventually resolved amicably among the applicants.

The process involved the whole family and everyone was satisfied with the resolution. Time taken to resolve the dispute was less and there was no cost involved. The Grama Sabha played key role in the process. It provided an opportunity for all members to participate irrespective of gender in decision making process.



Discussion by PESA Committee to issue notices

Scalability of traditional dispute resolution system

This case can be used as an example of using traditional dispute resolution systems recognised under PESA for speedy and cost effective settlement of non criminal cases in tribal communities.



NON-TRIBAL PERSON MADE TO RETURN TRANSFERRED LAND BY GRAM SABHA

Background

In the village of Girala, located just 3 kilometres from the district of Alirajpur, a farmer named Gulsingh used to support his family through farming and labor. He had two sons – Gumansingh and Naresh. After the death of their father, the responsibility of the family fell on the two brothers. They came to know that their ancestral land, located next to the State Highway, had been fraudulently transferred to a trader from the general category by deceiving their father. Due to illiteracy and lack of awareness about their rights, they had been running from police stations to courts for years in the hope of justice. After facing repeated setbacks and disappointments, they lost all hope and began to feel completely cheated and helpless, believing justice would never come.



Tribal family standing in their own land

Initiative

One day, during a meeting held in their own hamlet, they learned from PESA Mobilizer Ms. Noori Bhide (in the local dialect) that a new rule had come into effect in Madhya Pradesh on November 15, 2022. The rule stated that if land belonging to a Scheduled Tribe person had been transferred to

This decision by the Gram Sabha has encouraged other Gram Sabhas in nearby areas to identify tribal lands that may have been fraudulently transferred to non-tribals

a non-tribal through fraud or deceit, it could be reclaimed by submitting a proposal to the PESA Gram Sabha. Immediately, an application for land restoration was prepared and submitted during the mandatory Gram Sabha meeting on August 15, 2023, and handed over to the Gram Sabha President.

In the same meeting, PESA Act Block Coordinator Mr. Kailash Jamra explained in detail the rights granted under the 2022 PESA Act. Based on the application, the Block Coordinator asked the Panchayat Secretary to draft a proposal. A very important resolution was passed by the Gram Sabha, declaring that tribal land had been fraudulently transferred to a non-tribal. Once the resolution was passed, the Tehsildar and the Tehsil Court in Alirajpur issued an order to return the land from the non-tribal person to the original tribal owner.

Taking cognizance of the application, the Gram Sabha submitted it to the SDM and the District Collector. The investigation found that the ancestral land was first transferred from a Scheduled Tribe person to a Scheduled Caste individual, and then again sold to a person from the general category. This indicated a planned and systematic misuse of legal loopholes to deprive the tribal owner of their land.

The case was referred by the Sub-Divisional Officer to the Collector of Alirajpur for re-examination. After a detailed inquiry, the Collector and District Magistrate Dr. Abhay Arvind Bedekar, on September 2, 2023, issued a directive stating that the case be resolved based on the relevant provisions of the Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code, 1959, ensuring the protection of the land rights of the Scheduled Tribe individual.

Outcome

The Tehsildar of Alirajpur Tehsil Court found that land in survey numbers 135/1 (0.53 hectares) and 135/2 (0.54 hectares) had been illegally transferred and fraudulently moved from a Scheduled Tribe to a non-Scheduled Tribe person. This transfer violated government rules and principles of justice. As a result, the Tehsildar restored the names of the original landowners and co-holders – Walsingh, Raisingh, and Gulsingh, sons of Mohansingh, of the Bhil community (Scheduled Tribe), residents of Girala. Orders were also given to the Halka Patwari of Girala to update the land records and submit a compliance report within 3 days.

Subsequently, the applicants were handed over possession of the land by the Revenue and Panchayat Departments. They have now ploughed the land and plan to cultivate crops once the monsoon begins. They have also installed a public notice board on the land displaying all the details of the case and their ownership.

Conclusion

This decision by the Gram Sabha has encouraged other Gram Sabhas in nearby areas to identify tribal lands that may have been fraudulently transferred to non-tribals. As a result, public trust in the Gram Sabha has increased significantly.



(Image Source: State Government)



(Image Source: State Government)



COMMUNITY JUSTICE IN TRIBAL VILLAGES- PESA IN ACTION

Overview: Tribal communities, with their strong traditions of self-governance and customary dispute resolution, find recognition and empowerment through Section 4 (d) of the PESA Act, 1996, which allows Gram Sabhas to resolve disputes through traditional methods. In the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha, in the Fifth Schedule area where tribes like Santhal, Ho, Munda, Kolha, Bathudi, Bhuyan, and Bhumija have actively revived and documented these practices since 2015. With support from community leaders, NGOs, and officials, these customary systems offer accessible, community-driven alternatives through mediation and compromise.

Background

The nature of disputes among the different tribal communities varies from mild quarrels to criminal cases based on the diverse cultures, traditions, livelihoods, social life, religion, land ownership patterns, and historical contexts of different tribes.

Type of disputes	Nature of disputes
Socio-Cultural Disputes	Inheritance, leadership succession, Community roles in Fairs and Festival, Marriage and other rituals
Common Resources Disputes	Conflict on Water, Forest, Grazing Land. Disputes over land ownership, boundaries, or usage rights can arise due to conflicting claims, encroachment by outsiders, undecided land titles, or government interventions such as land acquisition for development projects, Conservation initiatives, displacement, environmental degradation, and loss of livelihoods.
Disputes related to loss or damage to property	Grazing rights, crop damage caused by animals, water access for irrigation, or conflicts between sedentary and nomadic communities over land usage. Floods, droughts, or forest fires, which result in the loss or damage of property, including homes, crops, and infrastructure. Disputes arise over relief and rehabilitation efforts, allocation of resources, or compensation for losses. Livestock promotion or destruction of property by elephants or other large mammals are common issues like theft, vandalism, or property damage.

Brief Description of the Intervention

In Mayurbhanj, tribal communities continue to uphold a community-led justice system to resolve day-to-day disputes. This system is a live example of tribal jurisprudence functioning parallel to the formal legal framework, maintaining its legitimacy through community trust. This system ensures inclusive participation with every villager having a say, which strengthens social cohesion.

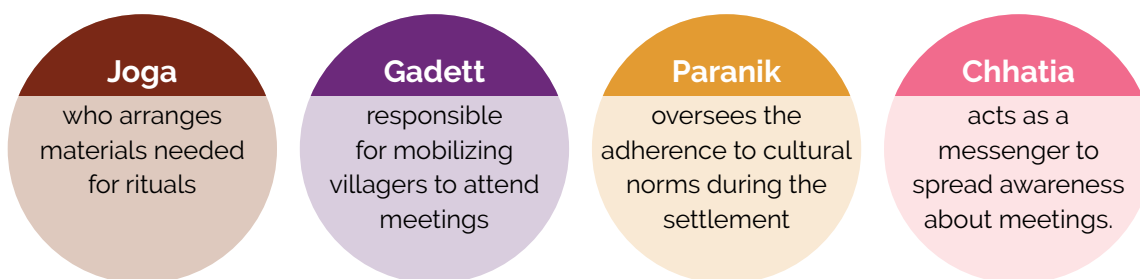
The traditional justice process is led by village elders and spiritual heads known as MAJHIA (village Head) and NAIKI (ritual & cultural guide) and other functionaries, involved in the process for ensuring that justice is not only delivered but also socially accepted by the community.

In many villages, both positions (MAJHIA & NAIKI) operate jointly, ensuring both customary decision-making and ritual sanctity.



(Image Source: State Government)

Supporting functionaries are:



Process of Dispute Resolution

The decision-making process of customary dispute resolution typically follows a set of steps that prioritize consensus-building, mediation, and reconciliation. While specific practices may vary across cultures and communities, there are common elements that characterize this process:

- 1 While resolving a dispute, the committee constituted by Gram Sabha takes action as per its tradition, keeping in mind the principles of natural justice.
- 2 The hearing of any dispute takes place only in public. Before arriving at the final decision, persons from both the parties and other people involved in the proceedings, if any, will be given ample opportunity to express their views.
- 3 After hearing both parties, the Committee appraises the matter to Gram Sabha for further action.
- 4 All the members of the Gram Sabha have an opportunity to give their views on the conclusions and proposals of the Committee.

- 5

After getting the response of the Gram Sabha, the Committee, with amendments, if necessary, present its conclusion and proposal. These will be accepted as the decision of the Gram Sabha on the basis of consensus or a majority vote as the case may be.
- 6

(6) The main objective of resolving any dispute will be to eliminate the dispute completely and create an atmosphere of harmony in the village

Outcome				
» Speedy and low-cost justice delivery that avoids prolonged litigation in distant courts.	» Preservation of tribal identity and governance systems, giving confidence and autonomy to communities.	» Strengthening of internal conflict resolution capacity, reducing dependency on external actors.	» Disputes are resolved in a way that leads to greater social reconciliation rather than a legal victory for one party.	» This system also fosters transparency, as decisions are made in open meetings with broad community participation.

Conclusion

Overall, the harmonization of customary practices and statutory laws is essential for promoting legal pluralism, access to justice, cultural diversity, and sustainable development.

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