

**Proceedings of
National Meeting of Tribal Women Gram Panchayat Presidents from Fifth Schedule
Areas
On
“Role of Women Gram Panchayat Presidents in the Development of the Fifth
Schedule Areas”
April 19, 2016 at Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh**

Delivering his welcome address, Hon'ble Minister of State for Panchayati Raj, Government of India, Shri Nihal Chand said that national meeting is an effort to bring Women Gram Panchayat Presidents of Fifth Schedule Areas (FSA) to a common platform who play a significant role in the society and development of the nation. He asserted that even after 70 years of independence tribal and FSA are low in most of the human development indicators. He further said that smaller Gram Sabhas in FSA provide better opportunities for the people to participate in every aspect of decision making in a Gram Panchayat. In planning, beneficiary selection, monitoring and certification of works taken up, etc., Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas play important role. He informed the participants that for the first time, the funds under the Fourteenth Finance Commission are being transferred to Gram Panchayats in such huge quantum. Gram Panchayats should also raise their own source revenues. Using these funds, the Fifth Schedule Areas can be properly developed. I congratulate States which have formulated their PESA Rules and appeal to other States to do so as soon as possible. The Government of India is committed for the development of the country and especially the poor and rural areas. Pradhanmantri AwasYojana, Pradhanmantri Jeevan Jyoti Yojana, FasalBeemaYojana, Beti Bachao and Beti Padhao are some of the important schemes which he mentioned. He advised the Gram Panchayat Presidents that every village should prepare its own development plan. With Gramoday will happen Bharat Uday. In the end Hon'ble MOS urged the participating women GP Presidents to educate each and every child of their Gram Panchayats.

In his address, Hon'ble Minister of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, Shri Jual Oram said that in the Fifth Schedule Areas, all posts of Chairpersons are reserved for STs and most of the States have reserved 50% of seats in Panchayats for women. This has created an enabling environment for tribal women to occupy leadership positions. However, malaise of Sarpanchpati is also there. He advised women GP Presidents to assert and use their powers as elected representatives. Even MPs/MLAs do not have power to draw and disburse public funds whereas a GP Presidents has. However, he cautioned that due to lack of education and awareness, many a times GP Secretary and Block Development Officer misguide the GP Presidents. He said that resolutions of Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayats are sacrosanct and must be followed. Generally speaking tribal women are shy and docile. He advised the present GP Presidents to change and assert themselves. He appreciated Hon'ble Prime Minister's resolve to change the face of rural India. He also appreciated the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh as a pioneer champion of rural development and advised the GP Presidents to visit and see how that is happening in Andhra Pradesh and also exchange experiences with participants from other States. Finally the Hon'ble Minister urged women GP Presidents to work for the development of the poor.

Delivering the Presidential speech, the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Shri Nara Chandrababu Naidu said that the Gram Panchayat Presidents should do justice to their positions by using their power for the development of villages. He opined that generally tribal areas are backward in comparison to other areas. There is inadequate access to health, education, nutrition and infrastructure facilities in these areas. He exhorted the participating GP Presidents to make use of MGNREGS funds. Informing about Andhra Pradesh government's initiatives for the development of tribals, he said that by producing 7000 MT of Araku coffee every household is being supported with additional income of Rs. 40,000/- per annum. Every Schedule Tribe child is being provided residential school education of high quality. These schools have digital classrooms, Wi-Fi and biometric attendance system. ST students are also provided grants for foreign education. Free electricity and mineral drinking water is provided to tribal villages. 33,000 km concrete cement roads have been constructed last year and this year the target is 5,000 km. Within next five years, all the villages will be connected with concrete cement roads. He also expressed his resolve to make all the villages ODF in next five years. Last year own source revenue of Gram Panchayats had increased from Rs.220 cr. to Rs. 600 cr. All Gram Panchayats have prepared their Gram Panchayat Development Plans. Various e-services such as issuance of birth and death certificates, caste certificates, etc., are being provided. State Government has decided to construct 8,50,000 farm ponds to conserve and recharge ground water. Mobile sprinklers will be used to prevent draught. River linking is another such initiative. Godavari has been linked with Krishna. Another river will be linked this year. The Chief Minister also expressed hope to receive central assistance for all these efforts. He exhorted women Gram Panchayat Presidents to utilise this national meeting to enhance knowledge and become best Presidents and resource persons and use that knowledge for the welfare of the people.

A dedicated portal related to PESA (<http://www.pesadarpan.gov.in>) launched by Hon'ble Minister of Rural Development, Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water & Sanitation, Government of India, Chaudhary Birender Singh with an aim to create awareness among all the Stakeholders about the various issues involved and action taken by the State Governments in implementation of PESA Act 1996 and dissemination of best practices by the Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas.

Delivering his inaugural speech, the Hon'ble Minister of Rural Development, Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water & Sanitation, Government of India, Chaudhary Birender Singh said that the Prime Minister himself has wished that the Government of India should go to villages and hence the Ministry has launched an Abhiyan from 14th April to 24th April starting with 125th birth anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and culminating on 24th April when approximately 2.48 lakh Gram Sabhas will be addressed by the Prime Minister directly from Jamshedpur. 73rd Amendment Act was brought to change the dominance of District Magistrates in the districts. This is possible only when Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas are able to take their own decisions. Instead, he said, he has seen GP Secretary and BDO together take major decisions on the affairs of Gram Panchayats. This needs to change. He shared that with more than Rupees two lakh crore grants under the Fourteenth Finance Commission and almost equal amount under MGNREGS even a smallest GP will get about Rs. 1.6 crore in next five years. How these funds will be spent needs to be decided in the meetings of Gram Sabha. Hon'ble Minister exhorted GP Presidents to prioritise the needs in consultation with Gram Sabha. With this the face of village will change in next five years. Provisions of

PESA, enacted nearly 20 years back, have not been implemented fully. In tribal areas electricity, roads, drinking water, education, health facilities are inadequate. This is also because GP Presidents and other elected representatives are not aware of and officials are not making use of the situation. The Prime Minister has advised to develop cluster of villages and provide urban services. Rurban Mission has been launched for this purpose. 300 clusters with 6,000 villages have been identified. 45 out of these 300 clusters will be in the Fifth Schedule Areas. In the past, corporates have acquired mines in these areas and benefits have not reached to the displaced people. This government has made arrangements that benefits of mines will go to that district and will be used for the development of that district where the mine is located. We have resolved to double the income of rural households in next 4-5 years. According to one economist, this may lead to growth of 3.5% in the GDP. All these are possible with the full cooperation and efforts of the State governments. Benefits of these schemes must reach the tribals. Inequality in socio-economic status must be eliminated. Hon'ble Minister expressed that tribal people and tribal areas must be provided with same facilities as in urban centres. He also appealed to one and all to listen to the Prime Minister's speech on 24th April.

In his opening remarks in the "*Experience sharing by Women Gram Panchayat Presidents*", the Secretary, Panchayati Raj Shri S.M. Vijayanand stressed on the need to prepare participatory GPDP by the GPs utilising all the resources available at the command of GP, the Gram Sabha in the FSA must utilise their powers and discharge their functions as envisaged under the PESA Act, utilise the services of the Gram Sabha Mobilisers and work with SHGs for development of the villages.

Suggestions of Thematic Session - Group Discussion 1: Implementation of PESA:

- (i) GP Presidents and other elected representatives are not aware of the provisions of PESA and an awareness campaign is required to be launched. .
- (ii) PESA may be translated into local languages and dialects.
- (iii) Federations of GP Presidents of FSA may be created to pressurise the State Governments to implement the provisions of PESA and make necessary amendments in State Laws and Rules.
- (iv) State Government must define and notify villages and Gram Sabhas along with their territorial jurisdiction.
- (v) Gram Panchayats must organise meetings of Gram Sabha on regular basis and at a convenient place and time to enhance participation of tribals.
- (vi) Gram Panchayat may create Gram Sabha Kosh.
- (vii) Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha should start asserting their powers in control of the institutions and functionaries.
- (viii) Gram Panchayat should facilitate Gram Sabha start using its power to approve plans and issue utilisation certificates.
- (ix) In LWE districts people need to be made aware of the provisions of PESA to counter false propaganda of extremists that government has usurped their rights over Jal, Jangal and Jameen.
- (x) Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabha should start asserting their ownership over minor forest produces and minor minerals.

Suggestions of Thematic Session - Group Discussion 2: Preparation of PESA specific GPDP

- (i) There is need to generate greater public awareness about the need to prepare GPDP with the active participation of members of Gram Sabha.
- (ii) Coordination between government officials and elected representatives is needed.
- (iii) Gram Sabha meetings should be held for discussing various themes like issues relating to children education, health, sanitation, etc. needs to be theme based.
- (iv) Participation of both male and female members is necessary in the meetings of Gram Sabha.
- (v) Grants to Gram Panchayats may be given in time.
- (vi) Honorarium and allowances of GP Presidents may be enhanced.

Thematic Session - Group Discussion 3: Listing of some “Women related Issues”

- (i) Women are subjected to harassment due to their ignorance.
- (ii) Illiteracy is a major hurdle for the women elected representatives to function optimally. Functional literacy of women elected representatives may be ensured.
- (iii) Participation of women in the village meetings and Gram Sabha is still very discouraging. Gram Panchayats should make special efforts to ensure participation of women in the meetings of Gram Sabhas.
- (iv) Addiction to liquor by males leads to violence both at household and community levels.
- (v) In tribal areas, adequate schools are not available for which girls are forced to drop out from high school and many boys also drop out. As a result of this, children resort to anti-social activities and addiction to liquor
- (vi) Health facilities are not adequate for women in tribal habitations as the service personnel cannot reach the villages on a regular basis due to inaccessible terrains.
- (vii) Communication facilities and connecting roads are not proper.
- (viii) In majority of the States, the tribal habitations have been provided with drinking water facilities, however, the supply is many a time irregular and inadequate
- (ix) Though some of the GP presidents have undergone training, they are not very much aware about their roles, responsibilities and power as a leader in the Gram Panchayat and their roles in Gram Sabha
- (x) Poverty coupled with forced migration is still a big challenge in many Panchayats

These discussion points and recommendations were presented in the plenary.

Concluding remarks by Hon’ble MOS (PR) Shri Nihal Chand

Responding to the presentations by the groups, the Hon’ble MOS (PR) Shri Nihal Chand observed that like Rajasthan and Haryana, other States should also make it mandatory requirement to be educated to become elected representatives of Panchayats. He further

said that if Gram Panchayats prepare their Gram Panchayat Development Plans in participatory manner, then BDO and GP Secretary will have to act according to the plan. He informed the participants that State share under the FFC has been increased from 32% to 42% and that he would request the State Governments to increase the honorarium and other facilities of the Gram Panchayat Presidents. He also informed that Government of India is considering to make rotation of reservation of seats and chairpersons mandatory for two terms. Empowerment of women is necessary for the development of the nation. Gram Panchayat must ensure participation of women while preparing Gram Panchayat Development Plans. He expressed his happiness that women GP Presidents have come to the meeting alone as Sarpanchpati phenomenon does not allow empowerment of women. Hon'ble MOS, PR also exhorted GP Presidents to ensure that their Gram Panchayats are Open Defecation Free (ODF) and development, of all takes place as per the Prime Minister's call for "Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas".

The National Meeting concluded at 1740 hours with a vote of thanks to all the dignitaries, participants and resource persons.