

Are Reservations Enough to Empower Women in Local Governance?

*An Analysis of the Performance of Women Village Heads
in Karnal District of Haryana*

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ABSTRACT

The 73rd amendment in the Indian Constitution mandates reservation for women candidates in local governance. The amendment directed the state governments to reserve a minimum of 33 per cent seats at all levels, village, block, and district, in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. This was done to improve women's involvement and provide them with an opportunity to be decision makers in a traditionally patriarchal society. The objective of this research study is to understand the involvement of women sarpanches in the working of panchayat and compare it to the involvement of sarpanch patis (husbands)/pratinidhis (representatives), i.e., the husband or other male relatives of the women sarpanches, who often work as proxy members in the reserved gram panchayats. The research is conducted in the Karnal district of Haryana using a sample of 30 gram panchayats. The sarpanch, sarpanch pati/pratinidhi, and the gram sachiv (village secretary) of the selected gram panchayats were interviewed to understand their involvement in different job roles according to the State Panchayati Raj Act. Low involvement of the women sarpanches was observed in job roles related to monitoring of physical development works, implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), handling of panchayat's funds, and other responsibilities. The gram sachivs were interviewed to understand their perception on performance of women sarpanches. It was found that in majority of cases the gram sachivs were interacting with the sarpanch patis/pratinidhis for their work related to the panchayat and their interaction with the women sarpanches was limited and only through the sarpanch's male relatives. The study discusses the challenges faced by the women sarpanches and possible interventions which can be undertaken by the government to improve their involvement in the panchayat works.

I INTRODUCTION

The 73rd amendment in the India constitution in 1992 granted constitutional status to the traditional *Panchayati Raj* institutions (PRIs) in India. This helped decentralise system of governance and gave legal power to local authorities to manage village-level affairs and improve public service delivery. Today, the *gram panchayat* is the primary unit of administration at the village-level. In order to protect the interests of weaker sections of society, the 73rd amendment made provisions for reserving seats for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and women at all levels in the PRIs. The amendment is a first of its kind in India to ensure the participation of women in political positions by reserving seats for them. This has paved the way for women to take up leadership roles in the historically male-dominated field of politics.

Article 243D of the Indian constitution mandates the state governments to include a provision in the respective state acts for reserving a minimum of one third of seats for women at all levels in PRIs. Post the 73rd amendment, states passed their respective acts to establish the three-tier system. Some states ensured one-third reservations for women, which is the minimum percentage defined in the constitution, whereas, some like Bihar, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh follow 50 per cent reservation for women in PRIs.

In Haryana, the Panchayati Raj Act was enacted in 1994 which reserved one third seats for women at all levels—*zila parishad*, *block samiti*, and *gram panchayat*. Every election year, 33 per cent of the *gram panchayats* at the district-level are reserved for women, which means that only women candidates can contest elections from those *gram panchayats*. Each election year, this list changes so that every *gram panchayat* is represented by a woman at some point in time. Currently, Haryana has 41 per cent elected women representatives as *sarpanch* (Sangwan 2016), which is much greater than the required mandate of 33 per cent. At 41 per cent, the gender balance looks impressive, but available research suggests that increased participation of women representatives does not necessarily translate into higher involvement of women in decision-making in the *panchayat's* affairs and performance (Dabas 2016). Considering this the question that arises then is who is holding the reins of authority and coordinating the work on behalf of the elected women candidates?

The issue of proxy women *sarpanches* is still a big challenge in Haryana, which is not being addressed by the government as a priority issue. It has been alleged that in most cases women act as proxies for male members of their family. It is the male members who campaign for the elections and work in the village post the elections. In some cases, men and other male family members are the real candidates, but since their

gram panchayat is reserved for a woman candidate, they put forth a female candidate from their family or community on their behalf to contest elections. In such cases the elected woman *sarpanch* serves as a proxy for a male member who is the real *sarpanch*. So much so that they even have a name for men serving in place of elected women. They are referred to as the *sarpanch pratinidhi* (*sarpanch's* representative) or *sarpanch pati* (*sarpanch's* Husband), in case they are the husband of the female *sarpanch*.

Karnal has 382 *gram panchayats* with 175 (45 per cent)¹ women *sarpanches*. A baseline assessment of their knowledge about the *Panchayati Raj* Act and their participation in the working of the panchayat was conducted in Karnal by the District Administration in collaboration with the Haryana Institute of Rural Development (HIRD). It was observed that out of the 95 women *sarpanches* who responded, 16 never called a *gram sabha* (village meeting), which has to be conducted every quarter, and it was the male members of her families who had called the meetings. Twenty women *sarpanches* informed that meetings were called both by them and their husbands from time to time².

The research conducted in the past has focused on analysing the performance of elected women representatives by creating a performance index based on the roles and responsibilities of *sarpanches* mentioned in the state panchayati raj acts.

The purpose of this research is to assess the extent of involvement of the women *sarpanches* in the functioning of the *panchayat's* work and to conduct a comparative analysis of their involvement with the *sarpanch* representatives/husband. Additionally, the research will focus on:

1. Analysis of the various aspects that affect the performance of women *sarpanches*, such as political affiliations, training, family support, motivation behind standing for elections, etc.
2. Perception of government officials working with women *sarpanches* regarding their involvement in the *panchayat* work.
3. Documenting the challenges faced by the women *sarpanches* while performing their roles and responsibilities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Karnal district was chosen to conduct the study because of geographical convenience for the researcher. The district is divided into eight development blocks, out of which two have been created recently. At the time of formulation of the methodology and selection of the sample, Karnal had only 6 blocks, namely, Nissing, Indri, Nilokheri, Assandh, Gharaunda, and Karnal. Therefore, for the purpose of the study, six blocks were considered.

Karnal has a total of 382 *gram panchayats*, out of which 175 are headed by a woman *sarpanch*.

Table 1 summarises the number of women *sarpanches* at a block-level:

Block name	Total number of <i>gram panchayats</i>	Number of women <i>sarpanch</i> (per cent)
Gharaunda	52	20 (38.46)
Nissing	50	26 (52)
Assandh	56	25 (44.64)
Indri	85	36 (42.35)
Karnal	66	29 (43.94)
Nilokheri	73	39 (53.42)
Total	382	175 (45.81)

Table 1

1. Sampling Technique

The technique of random sampling was adopted to select a sample of 36 *gram panchayats* out of 175 *gram panchayats*. In each of these *gram panchayats*, the *sarpanch*, the *sarpanch* representative/husband and the *gram sachiv* were selected for in-depth personal interviews.

1.1. Selection of Woman *Sarpanch* and the *Sarpanch* Representative

Six *gram panchayats* from each block were selected randomly. The women *sarpanches* and the *sarpanch* representatives, if applicable³, of the selected *gram panchayats* were interviewed to assess their involvement in the working of the *panchayat* and analyse the factors affecting their performance. Thus, a total of 36 women *sarpanches* and 36 *sarpanch* representatives were selected for the interview via a random sampling method.

1.2. Selection of Government Officials

Gram sachivs of the selected *gram panchayats* were interviewed to understand their perception of the woman *sarpanch's* involvement in the working of the *panchayat*. One *gram sachiv* typically has a charge of four to five *gram panchayats*, therefore, a total of 23 *gram sachivs* were interviewed from the selected *gram panchayats*.

1.3. Data collection Instrument

In-depth personal interviews were conducted with the *sarpanch*, the *sarpanch* representatives/husbands, and the *gram sachivs* to collect the data. The questionnaires were designed in consultation with the officers from the Development and Panchayat Department and officials from the various line departments such as education, health, Women and Child Development Department, etc. Discussions with a few high performing male *sarpanches* in Karnal were held to understand their work and extent

of involvement of the *sarpanch* in implementation of various schemes and policies. A questionnaire was prepared and was tested in a *gram panchayat* selected for the pilot study. The feedback from the pilot study was incorporated and changes were made to the questionnaire to finalise it.

2. Limitations

Due to time constraint, interviews were conducted only in five blocks of Karnal, which include, Nilokheri, Indri, Karnal, Gharaunda, and Nissing. Assandh block wasn't covered as it is geographically the farthest and time for data collection was limited. Therefore, the *sarpanch*, *sarpanch* representative, and the *gram sachivs* from 30 *gram panchayats* were interviewed.

II RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The results and findings section is divided into the following sub-sections:

1. Profile characteristics of the *sarpanch*
2. Factors potentially affecting the performance of the *sarpanch*
3. Comparative analysis of involvement of *sarpanch* and *sarpanch* representatives/ husbands in the working of the *panchayat*
4. Perception of government officials about involvement of *sarpanch* in the working of the *panchayat*

1. Profile characteristics of the *sarpanch*:

1.1. Age

Out of the 30 *sarpanches* who were interviewed, the minimum age was 24 years and maximum age was 52 years. The average age of the sample was 33.64 years and the 90th percentile is 42.3 years. Table 2 summarises the age groups of the sample.

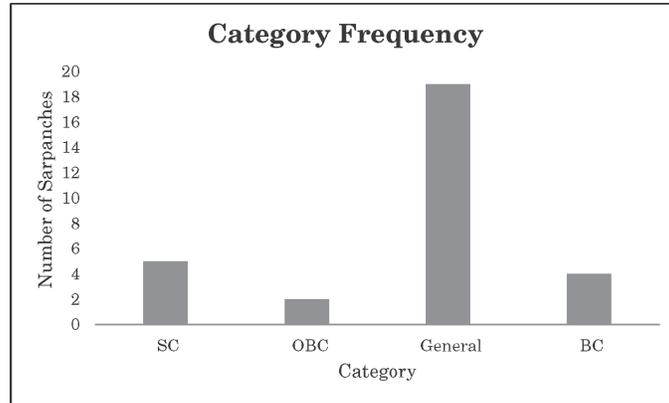
Age range	Number of <i>sarpanches</i>
20-25	3
26-30	8
31-35	11
36-40	3
41-45	3
46-50	1
51-55	1

Table 2

1.2. Category

16.67 per cent women *sarpanches* belonged to the SC category, whereas 6.67 and 13.34 per cent of women belonged to the OBC and BC (Backward Class) categories, respectively. The remaining 63.34 per cent women who were interviewed were from the general category.

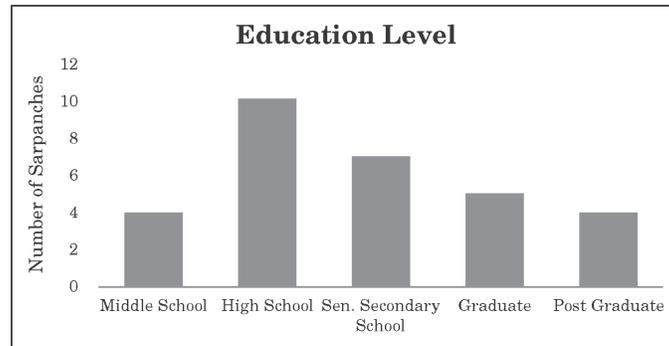
Graph 2 explains the category distribution:



Graph 2

1.3. Educational Qualification

33.33 per cent of the respondents claimed that they had completed high school, 16.67 per cent were graduates and 13.33 per cent respondents were post graduates, respectively. Graph 3 explains the education qualification of the respondents:



Graph 3

1.4. Occupation

Two (6.67 per cent) respondents were working other than holding the post of the *sarpanch* of the village. One of them worked as a social worker and taught children in her village, while the other did sewing work. Three (10 per cent) respondents mentioned that they worked before, but were not working at the time when the interviews were taken. Two of them worked as teachers and one of them was a lecturer in a university.

83.34 per cent of the respondents said that they were never engaged in any occupation other than being the *sarpanch*.

1.5. Family Size

All the respondents were married and on an average the family size of the respondents was eight members with a minimum of four members and maximum of 14 members. For the purpose of this research three categories of family size were developed: small,

medium, and large. Table 3 summarises the frequency distribution of the category of the interviewed women *sarpanches*:

Family size	No. of respondents
Small (4-7)	13
Medium (8-11)	12
Large (12-15)	5

Table 3

1.6. Children

96.67 per cent respondents had children and only one *sarpanch* out of the 30, who were interviewed, did not have a child. 17.24 per cent of the *sarpanches* had one child, 72.41 per cent had two children, and 10.34 per cent had three children (out of the 29 respondents who had children). One of the respondents who had three children had one child living with her aunt in another village.

The age of the youngest child was recorded if it was less than five years. This was done to understand the support the *sarpanch* got from her family in case she had a young child. Out of the 29 respondents who had children, 37.93 per cent had a child below five years of age. Out of the 37.93 per cent *sarpanches*, 45.45 per cent had a child aged one or less than one year. The *panchayat* came into power in January 2016, which meant 45.45 per cent of the respondents who had a child aged one or under one year were pregnant during the first year of their tenure (the interviews were conducted between March 2018 to May 2018). This can potentially be a parameter impacting their performance.

2. Factors Potentially Affecting the Performance of the *Sarpanch*:

2.1. Political Awareness and Affiliations

Local governance in Haryana is influenced by political affiliations of the *sarpanch* and the *panch*. The members of legislative assembly (MLA) and the members of parliament (MP) have the power to grant funds to *gram panchayats* for development projects. Hence, building a relationship with them and their affiliates becomes important. These funds are sometimes granted based on party inclination of the *sarpanch* and not the needs of the village. If the *sarpanch* is well connected he/she can get the funds. For the MLAs and the MPs, the *sarpanch* acts as an agent of mobilisation in the *gram panchayat*. Hence, their relationship becomes important for the potential political benefits it can reap.

To understand the awareness about politics of the *sarpanches*, questions related to voting, voting eligibility, and knowledge about the ruling party in the state and the center were asked. Ten per cent of the respondents wrongly answered the question on minimum voting age in India. A *sarpanch* highlighted that she did not know the correct answer, which is 18, because her voter ID was made only after she got married and she

had not start voting until she started residing in her husband's village. During discussions with the *sarpanches*, many described this situation and explained that the "daughters of the village" generally did not cast vote in their own village. Usually their voter ID is made once they are married and the address used is of their husband's village. When asked whether a woman can vote in our country, 100 per cent respondents answered affirmatively. One of the respondents mentioned that a woman can only vote after she is married. This view was not surprising considering a woman's voter ID is often made after she gets married.

When the *sarpanches* were asked whether they voted in the 2014 general elections, 93.34 per cent answered affirmatively, while the remaining 6.67 per cent did not remember clearly. Ninety per cent of the respondents said that they voted in the last state elections. 6.67 per cent did not vote and 3.34 per cent were not sure whether they voted. 100 per cent respondents voted in the *gram panchayat* elections held in late 2015.

To understand their awareness about the various political parties in power they were asked to name the party that is in majority in the State and the Center. 73.34 per cent of the respondents correctly named the party at the Center and 26.64 per cent *sarpanches* either did not know the answer or answered after giving a few hints during the conversation. Eighty per cent *sarpanches* could correctly name the ruling party in Haryana, whereas 20 per cent of the respondents did not know. One of the *sarpanches* mentioned that they were familiar with Narendra Modi, but did not know the name of the party he belonged to.

To understand the political affiliations of the *sarpanch* they were asked questions related to their involvement with political parties. Twenty per cent of the respondents answered affirmatively on being asked whether they were affiliated to any political party. On being probed further about their affiliations and how they were involved with the political party, two respondents mentioned that they interacted with the MLA's wife during party meetings in the village or during any special meeting where the MLA's wife was present. One of the *sarpanches* mentioned that she was personally motivated by the prime minister's initiatives on sanitation and that explains her affiliation with the party. All the six respondents said that they were affiliated with BJP. Eighty per cent of the women *sarpanches* said that they were not affiliated to any party. A few also mentioned that they appreciated "Modi ji" and his schemes, but it was the other members of the family who were involved with the party and not them.

The *sarpanches* were also questioned about the involvement of family members with any political party. The rationale behind this was to understand the family's political background and identify the family member who is politically connected. 53.34 per cent of the respondents replied affirmatively when asked if anyone from their family had political affiliations. Two respondents mentioned that they did not know whether anyone from their family was affiliated to any political party. Out of two, one *sarpanch* expressed "*Mere jeth ko hi pata hoga*" (My brother-in-law would only know). Among those who responded affirmatively about the political affiliation of their family members, more than 50 per cent mentioned that their husbands had political affiliations.

Family member	Number of respondents
Husband	8
All the members of the family	1
Father-in-law	1
Brother-in-law	1
Husband and Father-in-law	2
Husband and Brother-in-law	1
Uncle	2

Table 4: Family members with political affiliations

2.2. Previous Experience of Public Office

56.67 per cent of the *sarpanches* responded affirmatively when asked about family members having held political posts in the past. One of the respondents was prodded by her husband – who, in this case, insisted to sit through the interview—to say that his father was a *panch* in the past. The *sarpanch* was not aware and therefore, it was not included in the affirmative responses section. Another *sarpanch* mentioned that her uncle from her maternal village was the *sarpanch*. Since her uncle was not the *sarpanch* in the same village as her, the response was not included.

Relationship	Elected position
Uncle	<i>Sarpanch</i>
Husband	<i>Sarpanch</i>
Father-in-law	<i>Panch</i>
Mother-in-law	<i>Panch</i>
Various family members	<i>Sarpanches</i> have been from the family since the last 55 years
Grandfather (in law)	<i>Sarpanch</i>
Aunt	<i>Panch</i>
Husband	<i>Panch</i>
Father-in-law and Brother-in-law	<i>Sarpanch</i>
Husband	<i>Sarpanch</i>
Great Grandfather (in law)	<i>Sarpanch</i>
Father-in-law and Husband	Chairman of Haryana Federation and ZP Member respectively
Father-in-law	<i>Panch</i>
Uncle	<i>Panch</i>
Father-in-law	<i>Panch</i>
Aunt	<i>Sarpanch</i>
Uncle	<i>Panch</i>

Table 5: Relation to the *sarpanch* and the elected position of the family member

Out of the 17 responses, only three responses reveal female family members holding political posts in the past.

When the respondents were asked whether they had held any political position in the past, only 6.67 per cent responded affirmatively as they were either the *sarpanch* or *panch* in the past. Therefore, a vast majority of the *sarpanches* were first time political office holders and they never stood for elections in the past.

2.3. Involvement of *Sarpanch* in the Campaigning for her own Election

Ninety per cent of the *sarpanches* responded affirmatively on being asked whether they campaigned for their candidature at the time of the elections. Out of the remaining 10 per cent, two respondents said that they did not campaign for their candidature and that the other members of their family did the campaigning on their behalf. One *sarpanch* mentioned that she did not feel the need to campaign because she got the *sarpanchi* (the position of village head) on consensus of the villagers. She also added that the villagers wanted her husband to become the *sarpanch*.

When the women were asked who all supported them in their campaign, the most common response was their family. A few women mentioned that they also campaigned with a group of women from their village, community, or *Mohalla* (locality). As far as the strategies they adopted for their campaigns was concerned, a vast majority of them explained that they went door-to-door and interacted with each household in their village, shared their manifesto, and appealed for votes. Some of them also mentioned that they conducted meetings with the people in public places like the *chaupal*⁴, *panchayat ghar* (*panchayat's* office), and the *anganwadi* centers.

A few *sarpanches* also shared that they were usually accompanied by the women of the village and they went in groups. One of the respondents mentioned that men and women of the village made separate groups and went for rallies or door-to-door campaigning. Another respondent shared that she only went for campaigning towards the end of the campaign and initially only “*sarpanch sahib*”, by which she meant her husband, went.

2.4. Motivation for Standing for Elections

A pertinent question was why women stood for elections in the first place. 46.67 per cent said that their family members asked them to stand for elections. Some mentioned that either their husband or father-in-law had wanted to do something for the village and hence they asked the women to contest in the elections because it was a reserved seat. Only two respondents mentioned that they were self-motivated to participate and therefore they stood for elections. During the interview with one of the two respondents, the *sarpanch's* mother-in-law and husband insisted to join. So, there is a fair chance that their presence affected the *sarpanch's* response.

Forty per cent women mentioned that they participated in the elections because their family asked them to and they were self-motivated. Two respondents also shared reasons

that were not mentioned in the answer key. Take for example the view that the villagers asked her to stand for the elections.

The respondents who mentioned that their family asked them to participate or gave other responses were further probed regarding their family members insistence on their participation. 40.74 per cent *sarpanches* said that the seat was reserved for a woman candidate and therefore their families wanted them to stand for elections. 18.51 per cent women pointed out that the minimum education criterion was the main reason and 33.34 per cent said that both, seat reserved for a woman and education criteria, were the reasons behind the family's insistence. Remaining two respondents did not give any specific reason for their participation in the elections.

A few *sarpanches* shared that if the seat was not reserved, their husband, brother-in-law, or father-in-law would have stood for the elections. Some also expressed that their husband or brother-in-law did not qualify to stand for elections. A respondent mentioned that her mother-in-law could not stand because she did not possess the required education qualifications. The family members had wanted the mother-in-law as the candidate because the seat was reserved for women.

2.5. Family Support

To analyse the kind of support the women *sarpanches* had from their families to perform household chores, take care of children, and look after the cattle of the house, the *sarpanches* were asked questions regarding availability of domestic help, support in performing household chores from other family members and taking care of the children.

On asking the *sarpanches* whether they had any domestic help at home, 53.34 per cent said they did not have any domestic help, while 30 per cent had domestic help at home. The remaining 16.67 per cent said that they had partial help for taking care of the cattle, working in the farm or just doing a little bit of household work like making tea for the people who come to visit. When the respondents were asked whether they performed household chores, all of them responded affirmatively, even the ones who had domestic help at home.

When asked how they managed their *panchayat* meetings and monitoring work alongside the household duties, there were four common responses. First, for *sarpanches* who had joint families there was an advantage since their relatives did work on their behalf whenever they had to attend meetings. Second, in some cases the domestic help did some part of the work and supported them. Third, women *sarpanches* prioritised their household work. They would wake up early and complete their household duties before leaving for meetings. Fourth, in cases where the *sarpanch* lived close to her relatives they would support her when need be.

Out of the sample selected for the study, 12 women *sarpanches* had a child aged five or less than five years old. Since their children were young, they would need support to take care of the children when they were at work. Therefore, the *sarpanches* were asked who took care of the child in case they had to work. Fifty per cent of the respondents said that their mother-in-law takes care of the child. 33.34 per cent

answered that other family members along with the mother-in-law took care of the child. One of them mentioned that her elder child took care of the younger child and another said that she hardly went outside her house and in case she left for more than an hour she took her children with her.

2.6. Communication with Government Officials

Since the *panchayat* is an elected body, their role is to serve the people of the *gram panchayat*. There is a need for a communication channel with the villagers as well as the government officials. For the villagers it is sometimes easier to contact the *sarpanch* since they can directly go to their house, but for a government official at the block-level, district-level or for the assigned *gram sachiv*, who is the secretary of the *panchayat*, it is necessary to have the contact number of the *sarpanches*. In order to understand whether the women *sarpanches* communicated directly with the government officials, the respondents were asked questions about owning a phone and receiving official calls on it.

83.34 per cent respondents had a phone and the remaining 16.67 per cent did not. The *sarpanches* who did not have a phone were further asked whose number had they given for official communication. All the respondents except one, who had shared her brother-in-law's number, had given their husband's number for official communication. One of them mentioned that the husband attended the calls and then informed her, while another respondent said that the husband only spoke to the government officials.

The respondents who had a phone with them were asked whether they had shared their number with the officials in case they had to be contacted for any work. 52 per cent respondents had shared their number with the officials, whereas the rest preferred giving their husband's or any other male relative's number. According to some *sarpanches*, the husband or other male relatives knew better about the work or would inform them about the conversation. Out of the 13 respondents who claimed that they had shared their number, 84.61 per cent said that the phone number of the husband, father-in-law, or brother-in-law was also given to the officials.

One of the *sarpanches* who did not share her number with the officials said that all the officials were male and therefore her husband shared his number instead of her number. She also mentioned that she had shared her number with a female block coordinator. A few respondents mentioned that they shared their male relative's (*sarpanch* husband/representatives) number because they did the work. Two women *sarpanches* also mentioned that they were pregnant, so they shared their relatives—father-in-law, husband or brother-in-law—number only.

2.7. Training and Capacity Building

In January 2016, after the *panchayat* elections, Haryana Institute of Rural Development (HIRD)⁵, conducted a statewide five-day residential training for all the *sarpanches* on the *Panchayati Raj Act*, their roles, responsibilities and their rights. Apart from this, multiple ad hoc block-level training programs and meetings are held to create awareness about new schemes and policies and how the *panchayat* can assist in implementation.

The *sarpanch* has to attend the training program and attendance is recorded. To understand the perception of women *sarpanches* about the training programs, they were asked questions regarding the number of training sessions they had attended, the key learnings from them and their views on how they could be improved.

Out of the sample of 30 respondents, only three said that they did not attend any training or could not remember clearly if they did. The remaining 90 per cent attended a minimum of one training session in the two years since they had become the *sarpanch*. They were further asked whether they were satisfied with the training. 88.89 per cent respondents claimed that they were satisfied while the remaining were either not convinced with what was said during the training or did not like the fact that they had to wait for a long time for it to start.

The women who were satisfied with the training highlighted that they learnt new things about their work. The *sarpanches* were also asked whether they were interested in attending an all women training session. Only two women said that they would prefer all women sessions and the rest did not mind attending trainings in mixed groups.

3. Comparative Analysis of Involvement of *Sarpanch* and *Sarpanch* Representatives/Husband in the Working of the *Panchayat*:

The extent of the involvement in the working of the *panchayat* of *sarpanch pratinidhi/pati* was not known. It was imperative to analyse what kind of work and how much of that work the women *sarpanches* were doing and how much work was being handled by the *sarpanch pratinidhi/pati*.

The first step to understand the extent of involvement was to get information about the *gram panchayats* that had a *sarpanch pratinidhi/pati*. This was done by interacting with the block officials and the village secretaries. It was found that the *sarpanch pratinidhi/pati* culture existed in all the *gram panchayats* in the sample. The *sarpanch pratinidhi/pati* of the selected *gram panchayats* were interviewed for the purpose of the research. Since it is not an official position, their contact details were not easily available. The block officers helped me get in touch with them. Both the *sarpanch* and their *pratinidhi/pati* were interviewed separately using a similar questionnaire to make a comparative analysis.

3.1. Knowledge About the Departments

The *panchayat* has to coordinate with multiple departments to ensure that the services and schemes of all the relevant departments reach the people of their *gram panchayat*. Some of the government departments with which the *panchayat* works are:

- Education
- Health
- Electricity
- Forest
- Women and Child Development
- Police
- Engineering
- Revenue

- Rural Development
- Social Welfare
- Agriculture
- Public Works Department
- Food and Supplies
- Animal Husbandry Department
- Sports
- Irrigation
- Public Health
- Soil Research and Conservation (Research Institution)
- Fire Rescue Department

The list has been prepared after interaction with a few sarpanches and the block level government officials. Departments were further added to the list as and when required.

The respondents were asked to list the departments the panchayat has to work with. The average number of departments named by the women sarpanches were two and a maximum of six departments. 37.93 per cent women sarpanches could not name even one department the panchayat works with. However, when the same question was asked to the sarpanch representatives/husbands, the average number of departments they could name were five with a maximum of 10 departments and all the respondents could list a minimum of one department. Only 10.34 per cent of women sarpanches could name more number of departments than their respective representatives/husbands and 13.79 per cent sarpanches named equal number of departments when compared with their husbands/representatives.

3.2. Interaction with Government Officials

To understand the involvement of women *sarpanches*, it was crucial to analyse how often they interacted with the field staff deployed by different departments at the village-level to ensure delivery of services. The list of field staff was shortlisted after understanding the frequency of the field staff's interaction with the *sarpanch*. Both, the *sarpanch* and the *sarpanch* representatives, were asked how many times they contacted (telephonically or in-person) a particular member of the field staff in a given period of time. The responses were analysed and a comparison was drawn between the two.

3.2.1. Patwari (Revenue Department):

The *patwari* from the revenue department is responsible for looking after the land records, demarcation and mutation of land and verification of certificates like the caste certificate, etc. Since *panchayats* undertake multiple infrastructural development projects on the *panchayat's* land, their dependence on the *patwari* is unavoidable. The respondents were asked how many times they contacted the *patwari* in a month on an average.

58.62 per cent women *sarpanches* did not interact with the *patwari* of the village, while only 24.13 per cent *sarpanches* interacted less than four times in a month with the *patwari* and 6.89 per cent interacted greater than three but less than five times in a month. One respondent said that she could not remember how many times she met

or contacted the *patwari* and another respondent answered “very less” because she was pregnant and could not recall the exact number. One of them said that she met the *patwari* only one to two times when he came to her home and at other times her husband met the *patwari*. Two respondents shared that they did not meet the *patwari* because he was a man. One of them also said that she did not know who the *patwari* was. Twelve out of 29 respondents mentioned that either their male relatives (*sarpanch* husband/representatives) did the talking and they only handled the work with the *patwari* or the *sarpanch* contributed partially in the meetings.

The same question was asked to the *sarpanch* representatives/husbands and 89.65 per cent respondents had met the *patwari* more than once in a month. 44.82 per cent met the *patwari* less than or equal to five times in a month. An equal number of respondents, i.e., 44.82 per cent, met the *patwari* greater than five times in a month. Out of the 44.82 per cent, 46.15 per cent met the *patwari* more than ten times in a month. One respondent said that there were some months when he did not meet the *patwari* at all, whereas there were seasons when he met the *patwari* daily for work. Two *sarpanch* representatives said that they do not have much work with the *patwari*.

3.2.2. School Head

The school head is a government appointed teacher with administrative powers who looks after the government school in the village. The respondents were asked the number of times they met the school head in their village school in a month on an average.

Out of the selected *gram panchayats*, two did not have a school in their *gram panchayat*. Therefore, the question was not valid for the *sarpanches* located there. Out of the remaining, 25.92 per cent *sarpanches* did not meet the school head on a monthly basis. 40.74 per cent respondents met the school head less than three times in a month and only 33.34 per cent *sarpanches* met the school head three or greater than three times in a month. The minimum number of visits on average in a month were zero and the maximum were eight in a month.

The minimum number of times the *sarpanch* representatives contacted the school head in a month was three and maximum was thirty. All the *sarpanch* representatives who had a functional school in the village contacted the school head three or more than three times in a month on an average. Out of which 25.92 per cent contacted the school head ten or more than ten times in a month.

3.2.3. Anganwadi Worker

Anganwadi centers are another important government entity in every *gram panchayat*. It comes under the purview of the Women and Child Development Department and is supervised by a supervisor from the department who is required to make monthly visits to the center. The *anganwadi* worker is an importance field functionary for many government schemes and hence their interaction with the *sarpanch* is inevitable. The *panchayat* monitors whether the *anganwadi* workers are ensuring delivery of services or not.

The women *sarpanches* were asked how many times they contacted (telephonically or in-person) the *anganwadi* worker in a month. 13.79 per cent did not meet the worker. 62.06 per cent met the *anganwadi* worker less than five times in a month and 50 per cent of them met the worker only once or twice. 24.13 per cent met the worker more than five times in a month.

Out of the 29 *sarpanch* representatives who were asked this question, only 13.79 per cent reported that they did not contact the *anganwadi* worker(s) of their *gram panchayat* and one respondent said that he did not remember if he ever met the worker. The representatives highlighted that since it was a women's department, they did not go there and the *sarpanch* only goes in case of work and meetings. One of the respondents said that in case the *anganwadi* worker has any problem, the worker shares it with their husband or father-in-law who contacts the *sarpanch representative* and tells him about the issue faced by the worker. The *sarpanch representative* never spoke to the workers directly. 44.82 per cent respondents contacted the *anganwadi* worker less than five times in a month and 37.93 per cent contacted them five or more than five times with one of the respondents sharing that he goes to the center almost daily.

3.2.4. ANM (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife)

The ANM is from the health department and is in charge of immunisation and other health initiatives at the village-level. They have a schedule, according to which, they make weekly visits to the village for immunisation or conducting check-ups for pregnant women.

Close to half of the respondents, which is around 48.27 per cent, did not meet the ANM; were not aware who the ANM was; met the ANM for some personal work (for e.g., immunisation of their children); or said that their husbands spoke to the ANM. Only 17.24 per cent met the ANM more than twice in a month.

37.93 per cent of the *sarpanch* representatives said that they either did not meet the ANM or it was a "ladies department" so the woman *sarpanch* only spoke to her or that they did not have monthly interactions with the ANM for *panchayat* work. 41.37 per cent of the representatives met the ANM more than twice in a month.

3.2.5. ASHA Worker (Accredited Social Health Activist)

ASHA workers are women from the village who create awareness about various health programs and provide support to pregnant and lactating women in the village. They do house visits and conduct door to door surveys and awareness camps for health programs. They require assistance of the *panchayat* to get announcements made in the village, organise village-level meetings, and to conduct their work.

20.68 per cent women *sarpanches* did not contact the ASHA worker at all for *panchayat* work or had met her only when she came home. 72.41 per cent respondents contacted the ASHA worker more than once in a month, out of which only 19.04 per cent contacted the worker more than five times in a month. Two of the respondents met the ASHA worker daily because she lived close by. This shows that geographical distance is a key factor influencing meeting between women *sarpanches* and the ASHA workers.

41.37 per cent *sarpanch* representatives did not meet the ASHA worker on a monthly basis and only met them in case of any important work. Out of this, 41.67 per cent respondents explained that they did not interact with them because either they are not very comfortable talking to women or the ASHA worker is not comfortable talking to them. 55.17 per cent representatives contacted the ASHA worker more than once in a month, out of which 62.5 per cent contacted the worker more than five times in a month.

3.2.6. Junior Engineer (JE), Panchayat Department

The engineering wing of the Panchayat Department is responsible for assisting the *panchayat* in construction projects like roads, sewers, cremation grounds, etc. Every *gram panchayat* has been assigned a junior engineer whose work is to support the *sarpanch* and the *panch* to implement infrastructural projects passed in the *gram sabha*. The respondents were asked how many times they contacted the JE in a month for the *panchayat* work. The JE is mostly a man and this explains the hesitation of the women to talk to him.

86.20 per cent women *sarpanches* said that they either never spoke to the JE or did not meet the JE regularly on a monthly basis for *panchayat* work. Only three respondents contacted the JE more than once in a month for *panchayat* work.

When the same question was asked to the *sarpanch* representatives, the average number of times the JE was contacted in a month was 14. 75.86 per cent of the representatives contacted the JE more than five times in a month.

3.2.7. Visit to the Block Development and Panchayat Office (BDPO)

The block-level Development and Panchayat Office is the place where all the rural development functionaries reside. The *sarpanch* and the *panch* often have to make visits to the office for the *panchayat* work and other important meetings. To understand how involved were the women *sarpanches* when it came to visiting the block office for *panchayat* works, the *sarpanches* were asked about the number of times they visited the office in the last three months from the time the interview was conducted.

34.48 per cent *sarpanches* did not visit the block office even once in the last three months and only 17.24 per cent visited the office more than three times in the last three months. Three respondents explicitly mentioned in the interaction that their husband went to the block office and they did not go.

Among the *sarpanch* representatives, 72.41 per cent said that they visited the block office more than 15 times in the last three months and out of this 33.34 per cent responded that they visit the office daily.

3.3. Performance of Defined Roles in Specific Areas

Questions around specific roles and responsibilities under different departments were formulated and the *sarpanch* and the *sarpanch* representatives/husbands were asked similar questions to understand the extent of their involvement in work related to

various departments. The results have been analysed in the section below.

3.3.1. Food and Supplies Department

Almost every village has a ration depot that is responsible for the distribution of subsidised ration to the beneficiaries in the village. The *panchayat* is responsible for looking at the overall functioning of the depot and attending to people's grievances in case of any malpractices.

Out of the 30 women *sarpanches*, 56.67 per cent did not visit the ration depot in the last one month from when the interview was conducted. Only 13.33 per cent visited the depot in the last one month. The frequency of the visit for the latter was either once or twice. On the other hand, 62.06 per cent of the *sarpanch* representatives visited the ration depot in the last one month with sometimes a frequency of more than two *Sarpanch*

Women sarpanch (N=30)	Never	Once	twice	> 2 times	Other responses
How many times have you visited the ration depot in the last one month?	56.67%	10.00%	3.33%	0.00%	30.00%

The number of women *sarpanches* who visited the ration depot in the last one month was very small. Therefore, the analysis of performance of further roles and responsibilities with respect to the depot could not be conducted on such a small sample size.

Sarpanch representatives N=29	Never	Once	Twice	> 2 times	Other responses
How many times have you visited the ration depot in the last one month?	13.79%	31.03%	10.34%	20.69%	24.14%

The number of *sarpanch* representatives who visited the ration depot atleast once in the last one month from when the interview was conducted were 18. A further analysis of performance of other roles and responsibilities in the ration depot for the selected respondents was also conducted. All the respondents claimed to check the quality of the ration received and 71.43 per cent said that they also checked the quantity of the ration.

N=21 (<i>Sarpanch</i> representatives who had a depot in their <i>gram panchayat</i> visited the depot at least once in the last month from when the interview was conducted)	Yes	No	Other responses
Do you check the quantity of ration received across the requirement?	71.43%	14.29%	14.29%
Do you check the quality of the ration received?	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Do you fill the stock register of your ration depot based on your inspection report?	0.00%	90.48%	9.52%
Have you done any survey in the past two years to identify if there is a need to open a new ration depot? N=24	20.83%	29.17%	50.00%

3.3.2. Health Department

The field workers (ANMs and the ASHAs) of the health department conduct monthly immunisations camps (the frequency depends on the population) and antenatal checkups in the village. They also collect and maintain data of the checkups conducted. The field workers require support from the panchayat in order to effectively implement the health drives and conduct surveys in the village. The *panchayat* is also responsible for resolution of grievances, ensuring accountability of the field staff and making regular visits to the health center, if applicable, and attending meetings of the village-level health committees.

56.67 per cent women *sarpanches* and 48.28 per cent *sarpanch* representatives claimed that they visit the center in their villages on the scheduled day for immunisation. Further comparative analysis of the job roles was conducted and it was seen that involvement of the women *sarpanches* when it comes to looking at the report and registers of the ANMs and ASHA workers was slightly higher than that of the *sarpanch* representatives. This could possibly be because the *sarpanch's* signatures is required on a few selected reports. Also, since the field workers, both ANMs and ASHAs, are women, it is easier for the women *sarpanches* to interact with them.

A depiction of their job role is given below:

Sarpanch

N=30	Yes	No	Other responses
Do you visit the centre on the immunisation day?	56.67%	20.00%	23.33%
N=21 (Removed certain responses: “They do not call me” and “Never Visited the Centre”)	Yes	No	Other Responses
Do you check the attendance of the ANMs on the immunisation day?	61.90%	38.10%	0.00%
Do you check the registers of the ANMs?	57.14%	42.86%	0.00%
Do you check the reports prepared by ASHA workers?	47.62%	52.38%	0.00%

Sarpanch representatives

N=29	Yes	No	Other responses
Do you visit the centre on the immunisation day?	48.28%	34.48%	17.24%
N=19	Yes	No	Other responses
Do you check the attendance of the ANMs on the immunisation day?	26.32%	68.42%	5.26%
Do you check the registers of the ANMs?	36.84%	63.16%	0.00%
Do you check the reports prepared by ASHA workers?	31.58%	68.42%	0.00%

3.3.3. Electricity Department

The electricity department conducts periodic camps in the villages to spread awareness about the new schemes offered by the department and to ensure every household pays the electricity bill. The panchayat assists them to conduct the camps and surveys.

When the women *sarpanches* were asked if they had supported the electricity department to conduct the camps, 30 per cent responded affirmatively, whereas 86.21 per cent *sarpanch* representatives claimed to assist the department in these camps.

Sarpanch

N=30	Yes	No	Other responses
Do you assist the electricity department to conduct camps to collect the bills from the villagers?	30.00%	53.33%	16.67%

Sarpanch Representatives

N=29	Yes	No	Other responses
Do you assist the electricity department to conduct camps to collect the bills from the villagers?	86.21%	3.45%	10.34%

3.3.4. Social Welfare Department

One of the predominant responsibilities of the Social Welfare Department is delivery of the pension schemes. The department has to ensure that all the beneficiaries covered under the schemes get the services. The signature of the *sarpanch* is required in the application to certify the identity of the person, which leads the villagers to approach the *sarpanch*. In some cases, the panchayat also conducts surveys to identify the beneficiaries who are not registered with the department. The *sarpanch* on most occasions helps the villagers to complete the documentation and provides guidance for completing the application work.

Only 26.67 per cent of the women *sarpanches* responded affirmatively when asked whether they conducted awareness drives to identify beneficiaries in their village and 44.83 per cent *sarpanch* representatives claimed to have conducted drives in their village. The *sarpanch* representatives were also asked whether they helped the woman *sarpanch* in certifying and verifying the pension applications of the villages and 85.71 per cent claimed that they helped the *sarpanch*.

Sarpanch

N=30	Yes	No	Other responses
Have you ever conducted drives in your village to identify beneficiaries of the various pension schemes? (window/old-age/disability)	26.67%	13.33%	60.00%
Do you sign on the pension application of the beneficiaries?	93.33%	0.00%	7.14%

Sarpanch Representatives

N=29	Yes	No	Other responses
Have you ever conducted drives in your village to identify beneficiaries of the various pension schemes? (window/old-age/disability)	44.83%	13.79%	41.38%
Are you aware that application of the beneficiaries for pension is signed by the <i>sarpanch</i> ?	96.55%	0.00%	3.45%
If yes, then do you help the <i>sarpanch</i> in certifying and verifying? N=28	85.71%	14.29%	0.00%

3.3.5. Animal Husbandry Department

The Animal Husbandry Department is responsible for delivery of schemes and subsidies related to livestock. The *panchayat* helps the department to conduct awareness camps and identify beneficiaries in the village. The women *sarpanches* who claimed that their *gram panchayats* had a Veterinary Livestock Development Assistant were asked whether they had accompanied them to conduct camps in the village. Around 22.22 per cent women *sarpanches* responded affirmatively.

The *sarpanch's* signature is required for verification of the beneficiary details for the various schemes of the department. To understand the dependence of the *sarpanch* on the *sarpanch* husbands/representatives, the *sarpanch* husbands/representative were asked whether they helped the *sarpanch* verify any application. 52.17 per cent *sarpanch* representatives responded affirmatively.

Sarpanch

N=30	Yes	No	Other responses
Does your <i>gram panchayat</i> have a Veterinary Livestock Development Assistant?	60.00%	23.33%	16.67%
N=18	Yes	No	Other responses
Have you assisted them in conducting any camps to inform the villagers about the department's schemes?	22.22%	66.67%	11.11%

Sarpanch representatives

N=29	Yes	No	Other responses
Does your GP have a Veterinary Livestock Development Assistant?	79.31%	20.69%	0.00%
N=23	Yes	No	Other responses
Have you helped the <i>sarpanch</i> verify any application regarding availing the schemes of the Animal Husbandry department?	52.17%	47.83%	0.00%

3.3.6. Implementation of MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act)

The *panchayat* plays a crucial role in the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The *sarpanch* signs on the daily attendance (also called the muster roll) and based on this the beneficiaries receive their payment. They have other responsibilities like conducting awareness campaigns, getting job cards made and appointing a mate⁶.

23.33 per cent women *sarpanches* said that they have conducted awareness campaigns in the villages to generate a list of projects that can be undertaken by the *panchayat* under MNREGA. By contrast, 75.86 per cent, a much greater percentage in comparison to the women *sarpanches*, *sarpanch* representatives responded affirmatively when asked if they conducted such campaigns. 37.93 per cent women *sarpanches* from *panchayats* where MNREGA work is ongoing knew what a muster roll is. At 96.15 per cent a much greater percentage of *sarpanch* representatives knew about the muster roll.

Sarpanch

N=30	Yes	No	Other Responses
Have you even conducted awareness campaigns/drives to generate a list of projects under NREGA according to demand?	23.33%	60.00%	16.67%

N=29	Yes	No	Other responses
How you created any job cards since you got elected	51.72%	37.93%	10.34%
Do you know what a muster roll is?	37.93%	58.62%	3.45%

N=29	Yes	No	Don't Know	Other Responses
Does Your GP have a mate?	48.28%	10.34%	37.93%	3.45%

N=14	Yes	No
Do you know what a mate does?	92.86%	7.14%

Sarpanch Representatives

N=29	Yes	No	Other Responses
Have you even conducted awareness campaigns/drives to generate a list of projects under NREGA according to demand?	75.86%	13.79%	10.34%

N=26	Yes	No	Other Responses
How you created any job cards since you got elected	73.08%	3.85%	23.08%
Do you know what a muster roll is?	96.15%	0.00%	3.85%

N=19 (Excluding the GPs that did not have a mate in their village, according to them)	Yes	No	Other Responses
Do you know what a mate does?	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%

3.3.7. Projects Initiated using Panchayat Funds

Apart from the funds granted to the *panchayat* under various schemes by the central and state government, the *panchayat* also has its own sources of revenue. Mostly, the revenue is through assets like land, ponds, etc. The *panchayat* gives these assets on contract and earns revenue. For a *sarpanch*, it is imperative to know the sources of the *panchayat's* own funds. These funds are invested in various development works in the village. 63.33 per cent women *sarpanches* were aware of the sources of income for the *panchayat*, whereas all the *sarpanch* representatives knew about the different sources of revenue. 56.67 per cent women *sarpanches* said that they monitored the progress of the infrastructural development works undertaken by the *panchayat*. And all the *sarpanch* representatives claimed that they monitored the development works.

To execute infrastructural works the *sarpanch* arranges labourers for the work. Ten per cent women *sarpanches* answered affirmatively when asked if they find the

labourers for the panchayat work. By contrast, 96.55 per cent *sarpanch* representatives responded affirmatively to the same question. When asked whether they directly spoke to the labourers regarding work, 36.67 per cent women *sarpanches* and all *sarpanch* representatives answered affirmatively.

Sarpanch

N=30	Yes	No	Other Responses
Are you aware of all the sources of income for the Panchayat?	63.33%	33.33%	3.33%
Do you monitor the progress of these works?	56.67%	43.33%	0.00%
Do you find the contractors/labour for these projects?	10.00%	90.00%	0.00%
Do you directly talk to the contractors/labour regarding work?	36.67%	63.33%	0.00%

Sarpanch Representative

N=29	Yes	No	Other Responses
Are you aware of all the sources of income for the Panchayat?	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Do you monitor the progress of these works?	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Do you find the contractors/labour for these projects?	96.55%	0.00%	3.45%
Do you directly talk to the contractors/labour regarding work?	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%

3.3.8. Dispute Resolution

The villagers approach the panchayat for resolution of personal disputes and therefore, unofficially, dispute resolution is handled by the male relatives (*sarpanch* husband/representatives) of the *sarpanch*. Fifty per cent of the women *sarpanches* said that they were involved in resolution of disputes related to women and family only. 96.55 per cent of the *sarpanch* representatives said that they were involved in resolution of all kind of disputes in their village.

Sarpanch

N=30	Yes	No	Related to ladies and family	Together with male members of the family
Do you involve yourself in resolving disputes in your village?	13.33%	26.67%	50.00%	10.00%

Sarpanch Relative

N=29	Yes	No	Other responses
Do you involve yourself in resolving disputes in your village?	96.55%	0.00%	3.45%

3.4. Perception of Government Officials About Involvement of Women Sarpanches in the Panchayat Work

Gram sachiv or village secretary is a government official whose responsibility is to support the *panchayat*—the *sarpanch* and the *panches*—in their work and complete the administrative requirements. They closely work with the *sarpanch* and therefore, the *gram sachivs* of the selected *gram panchayats* were interviewed to understand their perception about the involvement of women *sarpanches* in the *panchayat* works. *Gram sachivs* require support from the *sarpanch* to complete their daily reporting work and hence it was important to understand the extent to which women *sarpanches* are able to assist them.

Every *gram sachiv* has been allocated more than one *gram panchayat* so there were cases where a single *gram sachiv* was interviewed for more than one *panchayat*. For the purpose of this study, 23 *gram sachivs* were interviewed for 30 *gram panchayats*.

3.4.1. Tenure duration

The average amount of time the respondents spent in the *gram panchayat* was 15 months with a minimum of 0.5 month (15 days) and a maximum of 84 months.

In one of the *gram panchayats* we interviewed two *gram sachivs*, both had served with the same *sarpanch* at different time periods. One of them worked with the *sarpanch* only for three months and the other worked for a year, but that was seven months ago from when the interview was conducted. In order to get accurate information about the working of the *sarpanch*, we chose to interview the *gram sachivs* who were with the *panchayat* for a longer duration. In cases where the *gram sachiv* served more than one tenure with the same *sarpanch*, the total duration was calculated by adding all the tenures of the *gram sachiv*.

3.4.2. Assistance in work by family members

According to the *gram sachivs* all the women *sarpanches* of the selected *gram panchayat* were assisted by someone in the family to do the *panchayat* works. When they were enquired about the relation of the person who supported the *sarpanch*, 76.67 per cent respondents said that the *sarpanches* were supported by their husbands, 13.34 per cent were supported by their brother-in-law and 6.67 per cent were supported by their father-in-law.

One of *gram sachivs* mentioned that if the husband was not present the father-in-law assisted the *sarpanch*. A respondent also shared that the *sarpanch* he worked with was supported by her uncle. It is important to note that the people supporting the *sarpanch* in the *panchayat* work, according to the *gram sachivs*, are male members from the family of the *sarpanch*.

3.4.3. Communication for meetings

The *gram panchayat* meetings are held twice in a month and the *gram sachiv* has to be present in the meeting to prepare the proceedings and other administrative reports. Usually the *sarpanch* or any of the *panch* members informs the *gram sachiv* regarding the meeting.

The *sachivs* were asked who contacts them to schedule the *gram panchayat* meetings and 70 per cent of them answered that the male relative (*sarpanch* husband/representative) of the *sarpanch* called them for the meeting instead of the *sarpanch*. In 6.67 per cent cases, the *sarpanch* and the male relative, both called them and in only 10 per cent of the cases, the *sarpanch* called the *sachivs* to schedule the meeting. In one of the cases, the respondents answered that the male relative of the *sarpanch* or the male *panch* members called the *gram sachiv* for the meeting.

One of the respondents shared that the meeting had not happened in the *gram panchayat* as he was recently appointed. In a specific case, the *gram sachiv* said that he only initiates the conversation during the meeting and does not receive any specific call for scheduling it. Whereas another *sachiv* mentioned that the dates of the meeting are fixed and nobody had to call him to schedule the meeting. He also added that in case of any other work the husband of the *sarpanch* or *male panch* members called him and the woman *sarpanch* or women *panches* never called him.

A *gram sachiv* highlighted that the *sarpanch* usually informed her brother-in-law who called the *sachiv* for the meeting despite the *sarpanch* owning a phone. According to him, she could not call him directly because of societal issues. Another *gram sachiv* mentioned how the husband of the *sarpanch* also called him in case of any urgent work. This clearly indicates the interference by male relatives (*sarpanch* husbands/representative) in a role which should ideally be performed by the women *sarpanches*.

3.4.4. Attendance in *gram panchayat* meetings:

According to the Haryana *Panchayati Raj* Act, *gram panchayat* meetings should be held at least twice a month where all the members of the *panchayat* (*sarpanch* and

panch) convene to discuss any issue or new projects that can be initiated in the village. Information about new schemes/policies is also provided by the *sachiv* during such meetings. It is the responsibility of the *sarpanch* to schedule the meeting in consultation with a majority of the *panches* in her *panchayat*.

When asked whether it was the *sarpanch* or their male relative (*sarpanch* husbands/representative) who were more frequent attendees in the *gram panchayat* meetings, 36.67 per cent said that the male relative(s) attended more number of meetings than the *sarpanch*, whereas 46.67 per cent said that both the male relative(s) and the *sarpanch* attended equal number of *gram panchayat* meetings. Only in 13.34 per cent *gram panchayats* the *sarpanch* attended more number of meetings than the male relative, according to the *gram sachiv*. At the time when the study was conducted for one of the respondents the *gram panchayat* meeting had not happened yet. In yet another case, the *gram panchayat* meeting happened only once and both the male relative and the *sarpanch* attended the meeting.

One of the *gram sachivs* also highlighted that the *sarpanch* accompanied the male relative but sat in the *gram panchayat* meeting only for a short duration because she had to complete the household chores. According to him, female *panch* members were also not very active in the *gram panchayat* meetings because of the presence of respected elderly members of the village in front of whom they could not speak, a practice widely prevalent across Haryana. Another *gram sachiv* mentioned that both, the *sarpanch* and the male relative, usually attended the meeting, but in case the *sarpanch* is not in the village then only the husband would attend. The respondents also shared instances where the *sarpanch* attended the meeting but would not interact with those who were present. A *gram sachiv* mentioned that *pardah pratha* was followed in the village.

3.4.5. Involvement in the *gram panchayat* meetings

During the *gram panchayat* meeting the development plan for the village is created and discussed. To understand the involvement of the women *sarpanches* in the *gram panchayat* meetings, knowledge of their mere attendance was not enough. Instead, *gram sachivs* were asked to choose who spoke the most in the *gram panchayat* meetings.

68.96 per cent responded that the male relative (*sarpanch* husband/representatives) spoke more than the *sarpanch* in the meeting, while only 20.68 per cent *gram sachivs* said that the *sarpanch* spoke more in the meetings. Two respondents answered that both the *sarpanch* and the male relative were equally interactive and one respondent said that it was the male relatives and the male *panch* members who spoke the most. In one of the *gram panchayats* no meeting had been conducted during the tenure of the *gram sachiv* who was interviewed and he preferred to not comment. One of the *gram sachivs* also informed that the *sarpanch* and the male relative discussed the issues to be raised during the meeting beforehand.

3.4.6. Nature of projects discussed by the *sarpanch*

When the *gram sachivs* were asked about the kind of projects the *sarpanches* discuss in the meetings, 24.13 per cent shared that either the *sarpanches* did not talk at all or

did not have any interest in discussing specific projects. One of the *gram sachivs* also highlighted that he had not heard the *sarpanch's* voice even once in the one year of him having attended the meetings. Another respondent shared that because of the practice of *pardah pratha* the women could not talk during the meetings.

34.48 per cent of the respondents mentioned that the *sarpanch* of the assigned *gram panchayat* spoke about projects related to the *anganwadi*, *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* Scheme, employment for women, issues highlighted by the female *panch* or other welfare schemes for women launched by the government. Women *sarpanches* could probably associate with these issues and therefore must have found it easy to initiate conversations around them.

The remaining *sarpanches*, according to the *sachivs*, mostly spoke about projects related to development of roads, sewers, cremation ground, and other infrastructural development in the villages, similar to what the male relatives spoke about in the meetings.

3.4.7. Availability for work

The *gram sachiv* is also responsible for assisting the *panchayat* in various administrative tasks. This requires the *sachiv* to meet the *sarpanch* multiple times in a month. To understand how often the *gram sachiv* met the women *sarpanch*, they were asked whether they met the *sarpanch* or the male relatives whenever they went to the village.

Eighty per cent of the respondents answered that they met the male relative more than the *sarpanch* for any *panchayat* related work. Only 13.34 per cent respondents claimed that they met the *sarpanch* more than the male relative. One of the *gram sachivs* shared how he and the *sarpanch* were from the same village because of which it was easy for him to talk to the *sarpanch* as she treated him like her brother. The in-laws of the *sarpanch* also did not object to the interactions between the two regarding *panchayat* work. Only two respondents answered that they met the *sarpanch* and the male relative equal number of times for any *panchayat* work

3.4.8. *Pardah Pratha* in official meetings

Fifty per cent of the *gram sachivs* said that the *sarpanch* wore a veil in the *gram panchayat* meetings. They further specified that they either wore a veil throughout the meeting or slightly covered their heads during the meeting. In case the village elders were present they would always wear the veil. But the other 50 per cent responded that the women *sarpanches* did not wear a veil in the meetings.

3.4.9. Attendance in the *gram sabha* meetings

The *gram sabha* meetings are conducted every quarter of a year and all the villagers and government officials from various line departments are present. The officials and the *panchayat* members talk about various schemes and listen to the issues faced by the people of the village. The *panchayat* takes many decisions based on a public vote

and therefore it is a crucial meeting. Since the meeting happens every quarter, three respondents did not get a chance to conduct the meeting with the woman *sarpanch* as they had recently joined as *gram sachivs*.

The *gram sachivs* were asked whether the *sarpanch* or the male relative attended more *gram sabha* meetings. Out of the respondents who attended a minimum of one meeting, 77.78 per cent answered that both the *sarpanch* and the male relative attended the meeting. They also shared that it was mandatory for the *sarpanch* to attend this meeting because a video recording of the meeting and photographic evidence is made to validate whether the *sarpanch* was present or not. The fear of suspension by senior officials pushes the women *sarpanches* to attend all the meetings on most occasions. 14.81 per cent respondents said that the *sarpanch* attended more *gram sabha* meetings than the male relatives and only one respondent mentioned that the male relative attended more meetings than the *sarpanch*.

3.4.10. Involvement in *gram sabha* meetings

The *sarpanch* is responsible for addressing the concerns of the villagers during the *gram sabha* meetings. It is during these meetings that talks on projects is initiated with people from the village.

The *gram sachivs* were once again asked a question to gauge the participation of the *sarpanch* during meetings. 66.67 per cent respondents said that the male relative (*sarpanch* representative/husbands) of the *sarpanch* spoke more than the *sarpanch*. Only 11.12 per cent answered that the *sarpanch* spoke more than the male relative and another 11.12 per cent said that both the male relative and the *sarpanch* spoke equally during the meeting. In one of the *gram panchayats*, the *gram sachiv* expressed that he only took the lead during the *gram sabha* meeting as neither the *sarpanch* nor her husband was interested in the *panchayat* projects. One of them mentioned that the male *panch* spoke the most in the meeting and another said that the women and the men of the village sat separately and the *sarpanch* spoke to the women of the village and the male relative spoke to the men.

The *gram sabha* meetings also sees the participation of village elders. The *gram sachivs* shared that because of their presence the *sarpanches* are often uncomfortable sharing their views. This has happened in cases where the *sarpanch* is well educated and independent as well (the *sachiv* shared that the *sarpanch* drives a car). This hampers their involvement as a *sarpanch* in the meeting. One of the *sachivs* also shared that women generally don't know what to talk about in the meetings, so their male relative takes the lead. This shows lack of knowledge about *panchayat* works which results in low confidence among the women *sarpanches*.

3.4.11. Involvement in various *panchayat* works

Certain work-related parameters were defined based on the roles and responsibilities laid down for a *sarpanch* in the state guidelines and detailed discussions with the officials. The *gram sachivs* were asked questions to gauge the involvement of the

sarpanch and the male relative in the defined roles shortlisted for the purpose of this study. The table below summarises the results:

S. No.	Work parameter	Involvement of the sarpanch is more	Involvement of the male relative is more	Both are equally involved	Other responses
1	Monitoring the physical progress of the developmental works initiated in the <i>gram panchayat</i>	13.34%	86.67%	0%	0%
2	Speaking to the labourers involved in the construction work	0%	90%	3.34%	6.67%
3	Overseeing the functioning of the <i>anganwadi</i>	60%	26.67%	3.34%	10%
4	Overseeing the functioning of the school	16.67%	53.34%	10%	20%
5	Implementation of MNREGA	10%	60%	3.34%	26.67%
6	Involvement in Open Defecation Free Campaign	30%	16.67%	3.34%	50%

The results reveal that the perception of government officials like the *gram sachivs* about the involvement of women *sarpanches* in *panchayat* work is high in the working of the *anganwadi*, but low when it comes to monitoring infrastructure development projects initiated by the *panchayat*, talking to the laborers involved in the construction projects, implementation of MNREGA, and overseeing the functioning of the village school.

3.4.12. Visit to district and block level offices for work/meetings

The *gram sachivs* are often required to visit the district and the block offices to meet officers who usually brief them about projects which can be implemented in the villages. The *gram sachivs* were asked who out of the *sarpanch* and the male relative accompanies them more frequently during such visits.

Since the block office of the panchayat and development officer is where all the approvals and other administrative processes take place, the *sarpanch* has to come here often for meetings, trainings, and paperwork that requires her signatures. 63.34 per cent

respondents said that the male relative was seen more often than the *sarpanch* in the block office and he accompanied them for work and meetings. Only 10 per cent said that the *sarpanch* accompanies them more often than the male relative and 13.34 per cent *gram sachivs* said that both, the *sarpanch* and the male relative, came to the block office. The remaining respondents highlighted that in case of meetings, where the *sarpanch* is specifically called and senior officials are chairing it, the women *sarpanch* attends it, but in the case of meetings with the block office staff, for example, the junior engineer to get estimates for projects prepared or related administrative work it is the male relative who came along. They also mentioned that the *sarpanch* is always present in cases where her signature is needed.

The *sachivs* were also asked who accompanies them more often to the deputy commissioner's and additional deputy commissioner's office for meetings and work. 36.67 per cent said that the male relatives come more often than the *sarpanch* and only 13.34 per cent respondents mentioned that the *sarpanch* came more often for such meetings. 10 per cent said that both the *sarpanch* and the male relative came together and 20 per cent said that in case of any *panchayat* related work, it was the male relatives who accompany the *sachiv*. When it comes to attending meetings, where her presence is absolutely necessary, the *sarpanch* does come to the office. Twenty per cent respondents were not aware of such meetings and could not comment.

The *gram sachivs* also mentioned that since the *sarpanches* cannot drive, their husbands usually accompanied them for the meetings.

3.4.13. Opinion and thoughts of the *gram sachivs* on reservation of seat for women *sarpanches*

The *gram sachivs* were asked an open-ended question to gather their opinion on how the policy of reserved seats for women in the *panchayat* was helpful and how it could be made more effective. Some relevant points which emerged from the discussion are mentioned below:

- There are some specific kinds of work which are by default considered to be the domain of men. For example, opening of tenders. There was a need to create awareness among women *sarpanches* regarding such work.
- The policy has helped create a participatory atmosphere among the women of the village who now communicate through the woman *sarpanch*.
- They can approach the woman *sarpanch* easily and share their problems. It has also motivated other women in the village to participate in meetings and raise issues that concern them.
- For the woman *sarpanch* to succeed in her work she requires the support of the villagers and the family.
- The district administration needs to take strict action to counter the practice of proxy *sarpanches* and involvement of male family members in the *panchayat's* functioning.

- Daughter-in-laws of the village are not completely aware of the various issues concerning the village because they do not belong to that particular *gram panchayat*.
- There is also a need of women *gram sachivs* and officials so that the women *sarpanches* feel comfortable interacting with them.
- The women *sarpanches* have to be self-motivated to do the work.
- Women from lower castes are the most oppressed and it is difficult to break this structure.
- This issue of reservations for women is political and requires a mass movement in support for women if any change has to be brought about.
- *Purdah pratha* followed in the village hinders participation of women.

III DISCUSSION

The research conducted in Karnal highlights the limited involvement of women *sarpanches* in the working of the *panchayat*. Increase in number of women *sarpanches* and *panches* does not necessarily mean increase in involvement and greater level of participation in the *panchayat* works. The existence of an unofficial, self-proclaimed position known as the “*sarpanch pati*” or the “*sarpanch pratinidhi*”, indicates the involvement of the male members of the family of the women *sarpanch* in the *panchayat*.

For a *sarpanch* to be completely involved in the work of the *panchayat* it is unavoidable for her to restrict interactions with certain key government officials. The study conducted in Karnal reveals a disturbing scenario with regard to the awareness levels of the women *sarpanches* about government departments. 37.93 per cent *sarpanches* could not name one department the *panchayat* worked with. And on an average the women *sarpanches* could name only two government departments. The *sarpanch* representatives/husbands, on the other hand, could list an average number of five departments. It was observed that 58.62 per cent women *sarpanches* did not interact with the *patwari*, however all the representatives/husbands met the *patwari* at least once in a month. Only 33.34 per cent women *sarpanches* interacted with school heads three or more than three times in a month, whereas all the representatives/husbands interacted with the school heads three or more than three times in a month. 86.20 per cent women *sarpanches* who were interviewed said that they either never spoke to the JE or did not meet the JE regularly on a monthly basis for *panchayat* work. A greater level of involvement of the *sarpanch* representatives/husbands was also seen in the comparative analysis of involvement in the *panchayat* works between the *sarpanch* and the *sarpanch* representative/husbands. Only 30 per cent women *sarpanches* assisted the officials from the electricity department to conduct camps in their village, whereas at 86.21 per cent, the numbers were much higher for *sarpanch* representatives.

I concluded from this research that the involvement of the *sarpanch* husbands/representatives in issues involving sources of revenue for the *panchayat*, monitoring the progress of infrastructural development works in the village, and overseeing the labourers involved was high. Low involvement of women *sarpanches* in important job roles and increased involvement of *sarpanches*' husbands/representatives will not bring about any significant changes in making local governance truly representative in character.

All the *gram sachivs* who were interviewed felt that the *sarpanch* of the *gram panchayat* assigned to them was supported by male member of their family. Eighty per cent of the respondents said that they met the male relative (*sarpanch* representative/husband) more often than the *sarpanch* for *panchayat* related work. This shows that the

interaction between the women *sarpanches* and the *gram sachivs* was limited. The *gram sachivs* also mentioned that they mostly met the *sarpanch* during official meetings which required their mandatory presence. 86.67 per cent of them expressed that the involvement of the *sarpanch* representative/husband is more in monitoring the physical progress of *panchayat* works when compared with that of the *sarpanch*. This was also highlighted during the in-depth individual interviews with the *sarpanch* and the *sarpanch* representatives. The perception of the *gram sachiv* about involvement of women *sarpanches* in *panchayat* works is extremely important because they are the link between the *panchayat* and the administration.

Women *sarpanches* often struggle to manage work and family duties and their perceived limited knowledge of their job profile as a *sarpanch* complicates their functioning. Some women *sarpanches* highlighted that experience matters in this field and that they did not have prior experience and received inadequate training to perform their job role as a *sarpanch*. Out of the 30 respondents, only two respondents said that the decision to stand for the election was their own. Because there is reservation for women in local governance, often the families, predominantly the male members, ask the female members of the family, who qualify, to participate.

In this study the verbal communication of the women *sarpanches* with government officials is also taken as a key factor which helps understand their participation in local governance. Out of the 83.34 per cent respondents who had phone, only 52 per cent respondents shared their number with the officials and the remaining preferred giving the phone numbers of their male relatives. Out of this 52 per cent, 84.61 per cent had also shared the contact details of their husband, father-in-law or brother-in-law with the officials. Since mostly the government officials are men, the women are often uncomfortable interacting with them.

This study has demonstrated through rich empirical data that the introduction of reservation policy is not sufficient to empower women and strengthen their role as key stakeholders in local governance. Effective participation of women in local governance will rely on creating an environment conducive for their participation, building their capacity through training, and strengthened administrative will and conscious effort on their part to communicate with women *sarpanches* and support them.

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Footnotes

- 1 Data received from the district-level records of the Development and Panchayat Department.
- 2 An independent study conducted in November 2017 to understand the participation of the women *sarpanches*.
- 3 The study began with an assumption that not every woman *sarpanch* will be acting as a proxy and be supported by a male member (*sarpanch* representatives/ husband). The *gram sachivs* of the selected *gram panchayats* were approached and asked whether the *sarpanch* was actually leading the *panchayat* or not. Based on this information the *sarpanch* representatives/husband were chosen.
- 4 A public area in the village where anyone from a particular community sit and socialise. There are multiple *chaupals* based on caste in the village.
- 5 It is the State Institute of Rural Development of Haryana responsible for training and capacity building of elected representatives and government officials working in or related to the rural development department.
- 6 A person who is responsible for monitoring the day-to-day activities under MNREGA and looking after the labourers