

DNA, Mumbai, 14 Jul 2008

# Panchayats leading social change: survey

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Participating in local governance by the elected representatives of panchayats is a known factor, but of late they were found to be actively involved in wiping out social problems from their communities.

In a survey conducted by ACNielsen ORG-MARG for the ministry of Panchayati Raj, it was found that the elected representatives of panchayats are strongly taking up social issues. Discouragement of child marriage attracted the highest intervention by 71% representatives followed by male child obsessions (44%). Problem of gambling was addressed by 41% and alcoholism by 26% of panchayat leaders.

Alcoholism was a major problem reported by 40% households.

The survey sought to test whether the process of empowerment through Panchayati Raj had helped in other areas like increasing female literacy levels or check incidents of domestic violence. On domestic violence, 62% women representatives admitted having come across these incidents which they tried to reduce while 11% said intervention was not required. Interestingly, it is the men pradhans (79%) who made more efforts to sort out domestic violence matters compared to female ward members (58%).

School enrolment, particularly for girls, was an area of priority area for many panchayat leaders and members. Eight out of every ten pradhans (80%) took initiatives to increase school enrolment. About four-fifths of them, including 78% of female pradhans, claimed to have made special efforts in getting girls enrolled and encour-

aging them to study in schools.

The elected representatives are expected to pay door-to-door visits and organise awareness generation camps and look into reasons for dropouts and help resolve them. Results showed that 79% of pradhans were involved in awareness generation to re-

## For a cause

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duce drop-outs 87% pradhans monitored MDM. Here too wide gender parity was recorded - nearly 58% of women compared to 72% of men were found to be actively involved in these.

Representatives from Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Sikkim, Tripura and Rajasthan could be lauded for initiatives taken to increase school enrolment while Orissa and Uttar Pradesh, Goa and Uttrakhand were the poor performers. In Maharashtra 100% men and 81% female pradhans worked to increase enrolment in schools. In Gujarat this ratio was 73:90 while in Rajasthan 97% men compared to 84% women pradhans took initiatives.

However, on health matters, the indicators were quite dismal as only 67% pradhans participated in health related campaigns.

When questioned on the developmental issues and the types of amenities they helped provide, the majority of elected representatives mentioned drinking water (86.4%), followed by road construction (74.3%) and sanitation (70%) as an area of priority. While a large number of elected women representatives raised issues relating to women and child, and sanitation, a higher proportion of women were also found making efforts to provide street lights, drinking water, construction of bus shelters.