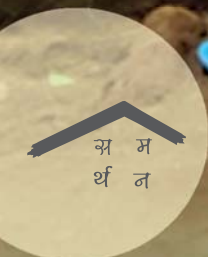


# FROM DIGITAL TO SOCIAL INCLUSION

DEKH PARAKH AS A PATHWAY TO  
SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT



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**Samarthan - Centre for Development support**

ऑनलाइन पोर्टल के उपयोग व भौतिक सत्यापन पर युवाओं की  
**दो दिवसीय संभागीय कार्यशाला**  
स्थान:- संकल्प गार्डन पन्ना      दिनांक:- 17/18 मार्च 2019  
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# PREFACE

Precondition of the effective governance is to establish accountable public institutions. Accountability eco-system in India has been well defined in the Constitution and established through various statutes. In order to promote downward accountability, provision of social audit report cards, public hearing have been built in various rights based constitutional amendments.

E-governance has emerged a one of the major thrust area within the Government Departments and their programmes, as a means to improved, transparent, and accountable governance. Digital platforms have been created for the management of information of various programmes as well as for promoting transparency. In order to address the grievances of the citizens, various mechanism have been evolved to protect the rights of the citizens as well as to ensure efficient delivery of the entitlements.

It is found that in spite of several mechanisms and procedures, the common citizens living in difficult situations in remote rural areas are unable to access the benefits. There is a wide gap in the information uploaded on the web portals of the programmes and the ground realities. However, easy access of information is one of the positive outcome of the web based portals.

Dekh Parakh is a citizen led initiative of monitoring of the rights and entitlements by using the digital platforms to access information and taking actions in case of discrepancy. Many young boys and girls in rural areas have been trained as Dekh Parakh Sainik. They function as volunteers to provide services to the poor citizens by checking the information uploaded on the web portals and identify mismatch so that relevant stakeholders may be held accountable for the denial of the benefits to the poor citizens. This process of monitoring and audit has yielded significant dividends in improving efficacy of the social sector programmes as well as established downward accountability mechanism for the service providers. The experiment is still in its infancy, however shows great potential for scaling up.

The document is an attempt to capture the process and learning of the experiment.

**Shrdha Kumar**

Programme Director



## 1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been increasing attempt to use technology to improve public services for making them more transparent and inclusive. This is being done by streamlining processes, reducing transaction costs and time and simplifying conditionalities associated with accessing them. Information technology (IT) is being used as part of e-governance for creating accountable and transparent systems and improving outreach and quality. Whether it's through development of online monitoring systems, grievance-redress mechanisms, application of mobile based services or use of bio-metrics, there is an attempt within public institutions to make services pro-poor and better track resource-use and its impacts. This is being done through uniform and open access to information and its use for streamlining Government to Citizens (G2C) services.

The 11th report of Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) on 'E-Governance' recommended a comprehensive review of the entire range of public services for a complete business process re-engineering. This was to be based on a clear assessment of citizen's needs, existing processes and identification of weaknesses and redundancies to re-design processes by changing forms, processes, structures and statutes. Its 12th Report on 'Citizen Centric Administration' emphasized the need for making "public institutions vibrant, responsive and accountable" and to undertake "process reforms" for making governance citizen-centric through "adoption of appropriate modern technologies" for making service delivery efficient, universally accessible and SMART. It called on governments to explore "how simplification of procedures can improve efficiency and bring government services to the doorstep of citizens."

Taking cue from the ARC recommendations, union and several states governments have developed innovative e-governance solutions for better targeting, improving outreach and access to information and services. Under the National e-Governance Plan there is impetus to develop new IT-enabled services for improving citizen's access through Common Service Centers or government portals, thus 'marking a shift from human to technology based interfaces'. As a result, almost all major schemes/ programmes now have their own portals or mobile applications that make large amounts of data available in the public domain in user-friendly formats so that citizens can use these services with minimum outside support.

While the intent has been good, digital access to services remains a challenge as a) each agency has different procedures for accessing information, b) there is a multitude of platforms and sources from which to access services, c) need for establishing eligibility for every service sought to be availed- as most portals and platforms don't talk to one another, d) huge errors of exclusion and inclusion in eligibility databases of schemes due to absence of proper ground-truthing and regular updation- leading to undeserved finding themselves among eligible, while the un-empowered struggle to find a place, e) low literacy and awareness, f) rent-seeking and complex procedural requirements, g) multiplicity of agencies involved in delivering a single service- local bodies, line departments, certifying agencies, banks/ financial institutions etc- all of which leads to inefficiency, leakages, poor accountability. Thus, the lack of rationalisation and simplification of schemes and their associated processes poses a barrier to citizens.

## 2. *Project on Deepening and Up-scaling Social Accountability*

Samarthan's experience of working on issues of social accountability in Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh made it realize that while community monitoring like Social Audit and Community Reports Cards were powerful tools for identifying gaps and inefficiencies in program design or implementation and also in empowering communities through improved participation, most such mechanisms were one-off exercises that largely depended on post-facto actions, impacts of many of which could not be reversed. Experience also showed that since these approaches were based on petitioning, decision-makers that provided action-solutions were often distant, corrective actions time-consuming, fixing of accountability got lost in bureaucratic systems and issues were often conflated-leading to local tensions and social-political conflicts.

Another key challenge faced while working on the issue of social accountability for entitlements access was the huge gap between data uploaded on the scheme portals and ground reality. Whenever the local bureaucracy was confronted with the issue of poor service or entitlement delivery- like release of wage payments under MGNREGA or toilet payments under SBMG- they quoted data on scheme MIS and portals to suggest that implementation was smooth and entitlements were reaching. They always insisted on the infallibility of portal data, without realizing that this data was also generated from the ground and it was important for it to be periodically validated.

Samarthan thus decided to seek support for challenging this whole approach of treating the portal data as sacrosanct and empirically showing the data gaps through large scale validation in the field and how it adversely impacted the communities. It sought support from National Foundation of India to test this approach on a large scale with a social accountability perspective.

*The project "Deepening and Upscaling Social Accountability and Transparency Tools to Secure Rights and Entitlements for the Women, Dalits, Adivasi and Other Marginalized Sections in Madhya Pradesh" aimed at strengthening accountability and transparency mechanisms at the community level, so that rights and entitlements could be realised by the marginalized themselves through improved access to information and by making them familiar with IT enabled services and portals created by the government.* One block each from Panna, Chattarpur, Tikamgarh, Sehore, Raisen Mandla and Barwanidistricts were selected- with the first 3 characterized by high inequity, feudal dominance, extreme caste and gender-based discrimination and last 2 tribal dominated with low scheme coverage, weak institutions and poor accountability.

The project was popularly called 'Dekh Parakh' as it aimed to undertake verification of digital data by training community monitors to access portals, collect feedback from community as well as different institutions -Panchayats, administration and departments to understand the service and data management related problems from their perspective and publish district-specific findings -'Digital-Dekh Parakh' Reports highlighting gaps between portal data and the ground.

The strategy was to focus on major social security programmes and target select flagships like MGNREGS, PMAY and SBMG as entitlements under these schemes were meant for the most vulnerable, and there were large scale evidences of exclusion, inefficiencies, rent-seeking, sub-optimal quality and absence of social accountability in these programmes.



### 3. *Dekh Parakh for Making Entitlements Streamlined and Accessible*

Under Dekh Parakh Samarthan tried to test a new methodology that wrested on the question ‘Can available e-governance systems of the state be used to bridge the divide and carve a pathway for digital to social inclusion?’ The idea was simple- train the community to access, interpret and use digital information available on government portals and websites to track and wrest entitlements and further use it for ensuring transparency and accountability.

Within these identified schemes, attempt was made to narrow down to specific issues that people confronted the most –delayed or no labour payments, manipulations in status of works under MGNREGA or changes in PMAY beneficiary priority lists- to understand problems related to them better, so that people could, in turn, be helped to find a resolution.

#### **A. Induction of Motivated and Technology Conversant Dekh Parakh Sainiks**

In order to create a cadre of community members who could use this data and take it to the community, Samarthan identified a group of young volunteers from each project village, who had the inclination to use technology, were using smartphones for various purposes and had the willingness to help the community. In the beginning one person per Panchayat was identified to become a Dekh Parakh Sainik- DPS and help the community. Later, these numbers were increased depending on location, work load and challenges of the area. Considering that several programmes were being implemented, it was decided to focus mainly on those that targeted the excluded and most vulnerable- social security pensions (old-age, widow and disability), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act- MGNREGA works, Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana- PMAY and Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin)- SBMG.



Capacity building intervention				
Intervention	District	No. of Participants		Total
		2018	2019	
Structured trainings of DekhParakhSainik On Govt. Portal /App	Barwani	75	70	145
	Sehore	50	80	130
	Mandla	33	152	185
	Panna	112	138	250
	Chatarpur	47	90	137
	Tikamgarh	15	117	132
	Raisen	24	91	115
	Bhopal		43	43
Ratrichaupal on govt. Portal	Badwani		776	776
	Sehore		80	80
	Panna		352	352
	Chatarpur		50	50
	Mandla		315	315
Panchayat Level Community /Youth Orientation on Govt. Portal /app	Badwani		1435	1435
	Sehore		254	254
	Panna		155	155
	Tikamgarh		207	207
	Raisen		210	210
Trg. Of Dekh Parakh committees formed at Gram Panchayats	Mandla		75	75
	Sehore		50	50
	Panna		60	60
	Tikamgarh		60	60
	Raisen		12	12
	<b>Total</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>4872</b>	<b>5228</b>

Initially, 3-day training (combination of classroom and on-site) was provided to DPS on these schemes, their MIS, related portals and trained on how to access information using their smart-phones and were told to return to their villages and start accessing information. During this and subsequent trainings they were also familiarized with portals like- MP government's Samagra, NREGA,SBMG and PMAY MIS, Planplus, Panchayat darpan, Panch Parmeshwar, ShramikPanjiyan; Mobile applications like mSwachh, mPension and mShikshamitra; Grievance mechanisms like CM Helpline, Uttara and 181 helpline.

<sup>1</sup>SBMG was later dropped as the program was about to close and as per government records most habitations had become open defecation free.

Intensive handholding was initially provided by Samarthan staff and regular refreshers were provided till the time the DPS became fully conversant with schemes, their processes and in extracting information from portals. They were also oriented on poverty, rights based approach, larger accountability/ governance ecosystem and on conducting themselves in community, including need to remain politically neutral. Since the temptations for DPS who were finding discrepancies or raising issues of corruption were high (they were being offered bribes for keeping silent), when this came up during initial DPS meetings, a component on ethics was also included in their training module. Monthly meetings were also used to refresh and clear doubts about scheme procedures and eligibility conditions. As a result of their interest, gradually some DPS became experts and started handling issues independently, monitoring works, and also trouble shooting in adjoining GPs and supporting other DPS.





TIME	SUBJECT MATTER	METHOD
Day -1		
09.30 - 10.00	Registration and Introduction	Introduction in Pair
10.00 - 11.00	Understanding on Sustainable Development Goal	Through Lecture and PPT
11.00 - 12.00	Sensitization towards poverty and its causes	Game
12.00 - 01.00	Value and ethics in Dekh Parakh	Game, case study
01.00 - 02.00	Understanding of key social welfare programs MGNREGS PMAY Social Security Pensions	To make aware of the actual situation on the portal
02.00 – 02.30	Lunch	
02.30 – 04.00	Issue and challenges in Program implementation of MGNREGS PMAY Social Security Programs Other relevant programs ( depending on the situation)	Group discussion
04.00 – 05.30	Practice based session un-derstanding of the program Portals	MGNREGS PMAY SBM/ Pensions/ others
Day -2		
9.30 – 10.00		
10.00 -4.00	Practice on verification in field	Field based practice
4.00-5.00	Problem resolution and Grievance redressals	Practice based/ lecture method
Day -3		
10.00 -12.00	How to take case for redressal	Group discussion
12- 1.30	Need for formal communication	Practice based session
1.30	Lunch	
02.00 -3.30	Interaction with departmental officials	Interactive/ exposure
3.30-5.00	Action plan	Group work and open house

## B. District Specific Strategies

*It was realized that a one-size-fits-all strategy may not be suitable and that district specific strategies may be required.* Panna, where Samarthan had been working with a rights-based approach for a long time was familiar territory, and the organization had the necessary support system -traction with the local administration and media- to take up issues hands-on. It was

decided that here the organization would work intensively and try to deepen the process of entitlement access, by working on social accountability and community empowerment.

In Barwani, which was a relatively new field for Samarthan, and where it was working with SRLM-SHG's in an entire block on issues of governance and accountability, it was decided that an extensive, block-wide approach (covering entire Rajpur block) would be taken; to bring scale to entitlement access, without delving into the larger accountability issues. In remaining districts, many where Samarthan was working through partners, it focused on development of local cadres of Dekh Parakh Sainiks and data validation for entitlement delivery, without entering into the more sensitive domain of social accountability.

*The lesson during the unfolding of these district specific strategies was that for its replication to be successful, unless the organization was familiar with the territory (community, local administration and other stakeholders) and unless it had the wherewithal to resist the different pulls and pressures that local power players often exerted, chances of success would be low and risks higher. The organization needed to have well established support structures and existing interventions (in the form of other projects) to be successful and to be able to deepen social accountability.*

### **C. Unfolding of DekhParakh Process in the Community**

Government portals while aimed at improving scheme efficiency also suffered from poor database management, flawed or incorrect data, issues of usability by rural communities and poor inter-operability. It was decided that despite these challenges understanding about portals needed to be deepened beyond the DPS so that there was community-wide understanding and large scale use of portals. Ratrichaupals were conducted in these project villages to showcase the power of portals and how information could be accessed anywhere, anytime. Examples of individuals with unrealized entitlements from within the village were taken up and the entire community shown (using projectors) the status of their entitlement and why they were not receiving them. DPS were asked to identify and train others (youth, service providers, and elected representatives like Ward members) who were interested in this work- many of whom volunteered to come forward during these Ratrichaupals. More than 1500 community members attended these chaupals to learn about their entitlements and help others. Separate orientation trainings were organized for these youth and community members by Samarthan.



SCHEME PORTALS	COMMON ISSUES CONFRONTED
<b>MGNREGA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fake Muster Rolls</li> <li>▪ Delayed or no Payments to actual workers</li> <li>▪ Reflection of incomplete works as complete on portal and vice versa</li> </ul>
<b>PMAY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Wage payment into another bank account</li> <li>▪ Jumping of the PMAY priority list</li> <li>▪ Late release of house installment</li> <li>▪ No or delayed release of labour component of PMAY</li> <li>▪ Transfer of labour payment to another bank account</li> </ul>
<b>SOCIAL SECURITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of Aadhar link</li> <li>▪ Inactive bank accounts</li> <li>▪ Wrong account details in the pension portals</li> <li>▪ Release of pension to another bank account</li> <li>▪ Pensions accumulating into accounts without beneficiary knowing about it</li> <li>▪ Pension going into ghost accounts</li> </ul>

Handouts and whatsapp message detailing the stepwise process for accessing data or availing different entitlements were prepared and shared with DPS. They were also made aware of available grievance redress mechanisms that could be used to register complaints in case their realization seemed difficult. For example, in Panna it was made mandatory for DPS to attend GP based Jan-sunwai every Tuesday (where all government officials come together as a Abhyuday Dal-Dawning Group to ensure smooth service delivery). Here DPS were supposed to help community members in submitting applications, following-up on previous application and discuss pending issues. Community members feel that the quality and number of petitions improved if DPS attended these Jansunwai's.

#### **D. Digital Dekh Parakh Reports on Status of Schemes**

*The premise for developing periodic Dekh Parakh Reports was to work in a structured manner to monitor schemespecific data to see their outreach and delivery:* capture bottlenecks in implementation and community feedback for presenting them to the district for corrective action. The reports were also part of the larger Dekh Parakh and tried to capture the deviation of portal information from the actual ground status. The idea was to deepen the process of entitlement-tracking through a participatory process during the data collection survey, which also educated the community to monitor them on their own.

DPS were trained to administer standardised monitoring tools in the community to validate the data reported on portals/ scheme MIS' and report any data-discrepancies based on feedback received from beneficiaries. In each round a particular theme was picked up and a team of DPS spent 1-2 days per village, covering all habitations to understand the status of schemes and discuss development issues.

*Thus scheme and district-wise reports were developed and then disseminated among stakeholders (including the villages from where this data was collected) based on feedback*



*received during data collection.* They highlighted issues of exclusion, shortfalls in scheme subsidies in case of PMAY or SBMG, wrong reporting of status of works in official database in case of MGNREGS and PMAY, poor usage of assets created for poor households due to construction flaws- PMAY,MGNREGS, poor quality or lack of timely technical support, rent-seeking for releasing payments, interference of contractors in labour market for MGNREGS, delays by banks in processing FTOs or fund transfers to wrong accounts and also reported challenges faced by Panchayats in implementation.

### **E. Fraud Detection and Correction**

*One of the objectives of Dekh Parakh was also to enforce accountability for last mile entitlement delivery. This was done by closely working with GP, its representatives and staff to highlight gaps and share individual cases of entitlement denial. Initially, when issues were not responded to by the GP, they were flagged to the block and district administration, but subsequently it was realized that escalation not only adversely impacted relations with Panchayat, sometimes their resolution also became difficult and time-consuming. Escalation was, at best, found to be a last resort when nothing else worked or for use as a deterrent.* Emphasis was mostly laid by the project on engaging with GPs and finding solutions locally.

This was against their earlier approach when many Sarpanchs and Secretaries didn't engage with the DPS or ignored issues taken to them. As project progressed they also became more amenable to resolving issues or undoing past actions that led to denial of a rightful claim. Elected representatives and staff felt comfortable if matters were brought to them first, before flagging them to the block/ district or registering grievances or informing the media. As a result of this approach relations with GP improved, as DPS identified gaps and problems and first brought them to the GP's notice providing them adequate opportunity to rectify their mistakes. DPS also supported them in streamlining implementation or getting cooperation from community for different schemes.



## 4. Groundwork for Implementation

### I. Choice of Schemes for Targeting

At the beginning of the project a mapping of schemes was done, which helped identify that social security pensions target the most vulnerable and those inter-sectionally excluded, namely widows, old-aged, single women/men and people with disabilities (PwDs). Among the major national flagships, it was found that MGNREGS, PMAY and SBMG were aimed at improving the wellbeing of most marginalized- NREGA aimed at economic upliftment, PMAY targeting homeless and vulnerable and SBMG addressed women's vulnerability and dignity. One year into implementation SBMG was dropped as most panchayats/ districts had been declared open defecation free and funds were not being allocated to districts for toilet construction.

*As experience during implementation showed, working on select schemes helped in focusing better, as these schemes had a wide outreach (all panchayats and villages), and touched the lives of most vulnerable and excluded.*

### II. Selection of Youth for Volunteering as DPS

As shared in the previous section, young energetic boys and girls were selected to work as local volunteers-Dekh Parakh Sainiks to connect individuals and households to schemes. Willingness to serve for free, motivation for volunteering, sensitivity towards the poor, leadership qualities, possession of a smartphone and interest in technology were the criterion for their selection. *Care was taken to ensure selection of DPS from all social categories, with preference to those belonging to socially weaker castes- SC, ST and OBC- especially in areas where with high vulnerable population. This was especially done in feudal districts where caste dynamics were strong and important positions/ roles were concentrated among dominant castes.*

In such panchayats, Sainiks who belonged to the general castes were able to use their family and local influence to get works done, while those belonging to the backward and scheduled castes were more subdued to begin with. Like Gajraj, an educated DPS and son of an influential farmer in Panch Pipaliya GP of Sehare mobilized local farmers to hold the Panchayat accountable when he found that a road constructed by them had been shown as Panchayat work on the Panch Parmeshwar Portal; Or Shubhi Sahu of Peepardahi GP of Mandla, who found one of her poor neighbours, Jaina Bai, a homeless widow, had been provided a very poor quality PMAY house and worked hard to hold the Sarpanch accountable and get the construction completed.

As the project progressed, strong and regular capacity building inputs from the project helped DPS to develop confidence and engage with the local power structures on equal terms. Networks of DPS were created and regular peer-learning and experience-sharing meets were organized to keep their morale high and to help them learn from each other. In Bundelkhand, where the structures were feudal and where threats to DPS were higher from established power structures, a regional Bundelkhand Youth Forum of DPS was created with much fanfare and wide media coverage to give it legitimacy and recognition.

### III. Strategies for Community Mobilization

Based on its previous experiences, *Samarthan had found that one of the most effective strategies for mobilizing communities were Ratri Chaupals or night camps- where people were*

more relaxed, open to new ideas, discussions were free-flowing and had quality. Samarthan organized a series of such ratrichaupals in all panchayats to demonstrate the power of information and use of portals for tracking and receiving benefits from government programmes.

*Complementing this, the DPS were trained to initiate inter-personal contact within their own and neighbouring villages to seek people's experience of accessing entitlements (or its denial) and to help them in getting these benefits.* They were also encouraged to identify and train other like-minded youth to access portals and help others. This mobilization got the shape of a small campaign, where not only the youth, but also frontline workers, ward members/ panchs, aware citizens, staff of other civil society organisations showed interest in learning how to access these portals and applications and were co-opted by the project.

Where mobilization was weak, primarily due to adverse relations between local authorities and the community, and where DPS were threatened, the project constituted Dekh Parakh Samitis of 10-15 members, to bolster support for DPS. The Samiti comprised of aware villagers who were interested in village development and were willing to step up and support the DPS if need be. This helped to create a critical mass for change in the village, develop a sense of confidence in the community, and strengthen the hands of DPS.

#### **IV. Government and Media Engagement**

*It was important that Samarthan's work on entitlement access not be viewed as fault-finding or investigative in nature by local administration, but as a process to facilitate improved efficiency, better outreach, and inclusion.* For this, it was pertinent to closely work with the local administration, keep them informed and involved during implementation. This was more important in areas like Panna, where the project had an intensive approach, and where chances of issues escalating were high. Samarthan was able to take this approach here as it had a stronger presence and direct access to a largely supportive district level bureaucracy.

From the beginning, local officials of key departments - MGNREGA, SBMG and PMAY, Janpad Panchayat-JP- were appraised about project objectives, invited to team or DPS meetings, field visits and community functions. DPS were also encouraged to develop a rapport with local officials for seeking clarifications and bringing issues to their notice, when higher intervention was required. This gave a direct message to lower bureaucracy throughout the districts that Samarthan was working in close coordination with the administration. Where cases were sensitive in nature or involved large scale corruption, they were directly brought to the notice of concerned local officials.

For example, when Janpad CEO of Rajpur was appraised of the scale of problems related to pensions, he gave a list of 7000 beneficiaries to Samarthan for validation. Samarthan agreed to do it for 10 GPs to show data inconsistencies. It brought out several cases where pensions were going to other accounts, eligible not getting pension, and cases of ghost pensions or where pensions were going into suspended bank accounts. A report was shared with CEO, who was taken by surprise. He further requested Samarthan to validate all 12,000 pensioners of his block. Samarthan found that nearly 4,000 people were either not getting pensions or were not able to access their bank accounts.





Media played an important role in Samarthan's work on entitlement access and social accountability. *Where local administration would not have been as effective and in cases where bringing issues to the notice of larger public, including the administration was felt important, Samarthan engaged with the Media.*

Local bureau chiefs, reporters of prominent newspapers and channels were invited to some DPS monthly meetings and the field, to sensitize them to issues, as well as to make DPS comfortable in engaging with them at a later stage, if needed. Local media covered many cases of vulnerable beneficiaries like widows, old aged, single women who had been short-changed either by local bureaucracy or Panchayats and forced the administration to take action. This engagement also created a deterrent for those involved in malpractices and forced them to become accountable. DPS were encouraged to engage with media directly but use these contacts sparingly, only when the situation demanded their involvement. Media not only highlighted cases of denial but also covered stories of success where benefits had been realized, thus giving visibility to the project.

## 5. Key Project Impacts

### I. Inclusiveness & Efficiency in Schemes

As shared earlier, targeting of schemes was such that it automatically ensured the inclusion of socially marginalized. MGNREGA, PMAY, SBMG and social security schemes were meant for the homeless, asset-less and the excluded. Within these categories, Dekh Parakh tried to work more closely with those who were more vulnerable and voiceless and had been denied their rights or benefits.

During Dekh Parakh rounds, the DPS were asked to cover all hamlets and vulnerable households to capture their experience and highlight cases where they had been deprived of entitlements. DPS were also trained to ensure inclusion and identify those who were vulnerable-single, women, disabled and in need of help in realization of their entitlements.

Dekh Parakh was able to ensure inclusiveness by creating awareness and connect people to entitlements. There were several cases where either the vulnerable were not aware of their entitlements, didn't get it or were misguided to surrender them. Examples abound where the project helped beneficiaries in undoing denials and returning entitlements. Like the case of Chimna Ahirwar, a single, widow of Chauka Panchayat (Chattarpur) who was fooled by Gram Rozgar Sahayak-GRS into surrendering her PMAY, citing that residence had been allotted to her by mistake and was being provided a cash compensation of Rs 30,000 for the mistake. While in reality she was made to sign papers in court declaring that she had sold her PMAY to a prominent individual. The bank kiosk operator in collusion with GRS also transferred her PMAY installments into another account. When, with project support Chimna filed a complaint with Janpad CEO, the GRS sought time to undo his mistake, gave her Rs 65,000 and extended support for repairing Chimna's nephew's house.

*Several cases came up where vulnerable beneficiaries went from pillar to post- repeatedly visiting district and block offices, Gram panchayats and Jan-sunwai's but no one paid attention to them until the program and its foot soldiers-the DPS helped undo the wrong and helped them get their entitlements.*

*Elected representatives and local officials admit that the project succeeded in reducing the misuse and diversion of funds and due to strong community oversight created by the project, many service providers became conscious about the need to ensure quality.* Manoj the GRS of Rehuniya (Panna) accepted that now it is not possible to make 'castles and dams in the air' like it happened in the past. APO-NREGA of Panna shared his observation that inflation of muster rolls has reduced and attributed it to the project. Earlier, an average of 3000 labourers were reflected as working on different sites per day in Panna block; in recent months this number has come down to 1500-1600 labourers, suggesting that Panchayats fear being caught or being unable to make timely payments.

### II. Information & Technology- New Age Tools for Social Empowerment

The project has succeeded in showcasing the effectiveness of information technology for awareness generation, sharing information and had built a case for orienting communities on its

use as a new age tool for empowerment. *It was able to generate a lot of excitement within the community about how services could be tracked and accessed at the touch of a device and how they did not have to chase government officials or leaders (at huge costs) to get what they rightly deserved.* It also demonstrated that social accountability could also be enforced by using online mechanisms for grievance redress.

*People realized that technology could be a useful instrument (which most were unaware of) till they associated with Dekh Parakh.* This not only involved communities within the project villages but also generated a lot of curiosity among neighbouring villages. While initially the project aimed at orienting the DPS and a few other youth on technology use, several elected leaders, service providers, and aware citizens came forward to get trained. *So far, more than 2200 youth, community members and beneficiaries have been provided orientation on government portals and mobile applications.*

*DPS also admitted that now since they have understood schemes and how technology operates, no one can fool them.* They can now access information to help people and have created a cadre of young and aware community members, who can themselves hold institutions accountable using information available in the public domain. Apart from community, the frontline workers, including Panchayat staff have also started regularly using these portals to validate their own data and match it with state level data.

### **III. Larger Awareness about Entitlement & Benefits**

Mobilisation and discussions around entitlements led to widespread awareness about different benefits available to communities under different government schemes and how they could be accessed. Many community members admitted that though they were aware of entitlements they did not pursue them, given the high transaction cost of chasing them and with no guarantee of success. But when they saw the result of Dekh Parakh, it rekindled their desire to seek them.

*During the mobilization DPS discussed entitlement related issues with the community at the hamlet meetings and during Ratrichaupals. They also personally visited those who were aggrieved and educated them on why their entitlements were not coming and what they could do to receive it. This led to improved awareness about eligibilities and rights to different services.* In some cases, aggrieved belonging to the same category (like NREGA labourers or pensioners) went as a group to block offices demanding entitlement or seeking action against those who had denied them their pensions/wages. In such cases, Samarthan did not come to the forefront but encouraged beneficiaries to petition the Panchayats and block directly.

Some Panchayat staff admitted that such is the awareness that now if there is any delay in processing people's claims due to other deadlines or technical issues, people see the status on portals themselves and come asking for explanation. As a GRS shared in Panna, now sometimes people don't come to them directly; they get a printed copy of the muster from the MP Online Kiosk to see whether their names, labour days and account numbers have been correctly entered by the GP! If there are discrepancies, they lose no time to question the Panchayat staff.

Due to this heightened awareness unreasonable works, or manipulating priority lists (like in case of PMAY) have significantly reduced. Conversely, panchayats are also able to withstand

political pressure or instructions from block/ district citing close monitoring by the community.

During consultations beneficiaries admitted that many among them did not know that there was provision for NREGA labour entitlement of upto 90 days under PMAY if people had themselves labored in their PMAY, or that pension entitlement under most social security had increased from Rs 300 to Rs 600 per month a year ago. Due to close interaction with the DPS, sometimes they come to know of latest changes in schemes / procedures even before some sarpanchs or ward members. There were also few cases where beneficiaries who had benefited through Dekh Parakh in the past were guiding others (neighbours, friends and relatives) or sending them to DPS for seeking help.

#### **IV. Motivated Foot soldiers for Social & Technological Transformation**

A key link in the process of Dekh Parakh has been the energetic cadre of Dekh Parakh Sainiks, who have been providing community interface to the project, as its change agents or foot soldiers. They have been undertaking real time monitoring of schemes on behalf of the community-seeing works on the ground, cross-validating it with data on government portals and vice-versa. Most DPS have been able to develop a reasonable working relationship with Panchayats, even while working on issues of accountability.

Early in Dekh Parakh, it was realized that creating a dialogue with Panchayats and service providers was a better approach to solving problems instead of escalating them. Aggrieved community members were encouraged to confront GP/ functionaries with hard facts and government data, instead of indulging in pointless arguments and seek help from DPS only if this approach didn't work.

*DPS not only worked on awareness creation and teaching others how to access portals, they also helped community members in preparing eligibility documents like age, caste or domicile certificates, getting accounts linked to Aadhar or Samagra and counseling people on process for realizing entitlements.* The approach was to guide and empower people to themselves claim their rights and not be dependent on others. In case of most vulnerable, DPS helped them proactively, including accompanying them to government offices.

Many DPS admitted that while earlier they considered themselves to be aware and educated, they couldn't actually help people when asked for specific guidance. All they could suggest was to go to the block and bribe the clerk to get their work done. However, formal training and continuous orientation on schemes received under Dekh Parakh made them adept with the system; now they are able to offer clear guidance on the process to be followed for seeking benefits.

Though DPS are at different levels of attainment, as a result of their knowledge and work, many have been able to earn a reputation within the community, and some even in the block and district administration. As some DPS told, earlier when they visited Sarpanch, Secretary or any government offices to submit applications, their applications were dumped and no action was taken. With gradual training, and exposure they developed confidence and started asking for receiving on every document submitted- resulting in more accountable services and better response. Once active, many DPS have not stopped at the 4 schemes targeted by the project, but



have also helped communities in getting health or crop insurance, LPG connections, school and hostel admissions, PDS entitlements, etc.

*DPS cited various motivations for working as a knowledge volunteer. Improvement in personal understanding about government systems, experience of handling different situations and meeting new people, experience of engaging with government and media, better confidence and recognition, goodwill from the community were some key motivators mentioned. Several DPS shared that people come to them for advice before going to Sarpanch or Secretary.* Gayatri the DPS from Indrapur (Barwani), shared that everyday nearly 4-5 people come to her seeking guidance, including some from other GPs.

Preeti, a DPS from Panna shared how a widow in her village wanted a toilet but the Panchayat didn't pay heed. Determined, the widow sold her jewelry to buy construction material. Preeti flagged this issue to the administration and shared her story with media. The case evoked huge media coverage and public anger. Due to pressure, Panchayat asked them to take back their complaint. Preeti's family and neighbours also asked her to withdraw from the case, but both of them resisted the pressure. Ultimately, the Panchayat was forced to give the widow 2 installments of Rs 4000 each and also approved her widow pension which had been pending for long.

## **V. Adding Value & Providing Feedback on Governments Efforts**

As shared earlier, futility of confronting the administration or panchayats was recognized both during initial implementation. The DPS were encouraged to work with them and contribute to their efforts to maximize benefit distribution. Thus they helped GPs in enrolling beneficiaries for new schemes, which was very difficult earlier as people never come forward to avail schemes. DPS educated community members about their benefits, helped in getting their filled and collected - a win-win for both community and GP.

*Many service providers accepted that programmes have achieved a better coverage and implementation due to support from Dekh Parakh.* GRS from Rehuniya GP (Panna) admitted that due to better outreach, quality of implementation and lesser complaints from his GP his work has been appreciated in block level meetings. He mentioned how sometimes immense pressure or deadlines from the district lead to mistakes in data entry or delays. He narrated a recent incident where only 10-15 days were provided for completing registration of labourer under state's Naya Savera scheme, and how without the help from DPS (mobilizing villagers and getting documents) he wouldn't have met the deadline. Another Sarpanch shared that DPS of his GP sits in the bank kiosk the day when pensions are transferred. He tracks whether it has been sent to all pensioners of his village and immediately brings cases of non-payment to their notice for corrective action.

Many leaders appreciated that the DPS bring mistake to their notice and help them to rectify. They are also happy if DPS occasionally takes up issues with higher authorities, as sometimes they can't directly hold block or district accountable for delays or inaction on their part. One Sarpanch shared that when DPS submits application, block officials acknowledge it and the work gets done faster, even though the Panchayat may have submitted the same application

several times in the past!

District and block officials acknowledge that there is improved transparency and efficiency in implementation due to regular feedback and monitoring. Greater community monitoring also helps them to counter political pressure. DC-PMAY(Panna) shared that no one was tracking the convergence component of NREGA-PMAY until it was initiated under Dekh Parakh. No one knew whether labour component of PMAY was reaching its rightful beneficiary. When Samarthan brought out this issue, gaps were realized and its monitoring was started. As Dekh Parakh brought out several cases of poor construction quality, engineers have become active and monitoring has improved. APO-NREGA shared that Samarthan's mobilization and awareness building is appreciated by the District Collector and shared how a recent case of Samarthan's volunteer mobilization for pond deepening was cited as an example to blocks when CEOs talked about fund shortage. DC-PMAY (Chhatarpur) shared that based on feedback they had now started tracking release of 30 days labour payment to beneficiaries along with each construction installment.

They were also able to bring complexities of online systems to the administration's notice. Like the need for getting Samagra ID for school enrolment or hostel admission every year, where every time a child is to be admitted, parents had to visit the block or district level LokSeva Kendrat to get them included in the family Samagra ID. The high transaction costs of getting documents uploaded on portals, including visits to the block and getting copies of their documents were raised with the administration.

State and district officials were also sensitized about the need for further simplifying portals and websites to enable easier access- which was the purpose of such portals. Advocacy was also done on making NREGA DPRs available in Hindi and also for freezing the SECC list and matching it with the PMAY waiting list to prevent local manipulations.



## ***Annexure - Case Studies***

### **I. Surjeet Singh- Lone Warrior Connecting People with Entitlements**

Surjeet Singh Thakur, 24 years, is a confident, young man of Rahuniya Gram Panchayat in Panna district. His father is a respected traditional leader and Surjit aspires to come out of his shadows and carve a place for himself. He had been helping fellow villagers since his school days and when the opportunity to be a Dekh Parakh Sainik came, he volunteered out of interest as well as curiosity.

The Sarpanch is from his larger extended family and discouraged him when he started helping others, but this did not deter him from accomplishing himself as a DPS. Surjit says the older leaders now feel threatened by this new lot of DPS that is emerging.

Surjeet started by helping a very poor woman Rani Dulaiya of her village. Rani had a small parcel of land, but in the absence of irrigation was unable to get the desired productivity. Her request for a Kapildhara well was approved by the GP for Rs 3.73 lakhs in 2015-16, and she along with her husband and neighbours started digging the well upon its sanction. They dug upto 15-16 feet of hard rock for close to a month, but when labour payments did not come the neighbours abandoned the work. While pressure from neighbours for getting their payment mounted, Sarpanch and Secretary continuously said that payment had not come. Helpless and hopeless, she stopped doing the rounds of the GP and block.

When Dekh Parakh camp was organized in the village she told Surjeet about her case. Upon seeing the portal Surjeet found that Rs 60,000 had been disbursed against labour payment in 2016 itself, but not to the people who had worked on the well. She was asked to bring all supporting documents-bank passbooks, details of laborers who had worked and other records- to the camp. When Surjeet posed this case to the GP, they accepted that the payment received had been 'adjusted' to pay for past works and agreed to make all pending payments to her immediately.

As part of their training, Dekh Parakh Sainiks like Surjeet received multiple trainings to get familiar with various government portals and applications to access information and understand procedures for availing entitlements using smartphones. Intensive handholding support was provided to Surjeet on validating information from the field and helping community members to use digital mechanisms to redress their grievances.

Buoyed by his initial success, so far Surjeet has helped 31 pensioners get their old age pensions by helping them prepare documents and submit them, 25 cases where he helped widows and the disabled to receive pensions, 21 cases where he either got names included in the PMAY list or found cases of diversion of ownership or funds to someone else. He helped prepare and submit (sometimes re-submitted) nearly 700 Ujjwala applications from Rahuniya and Jamuniya GPs with almost all having received the connections. Nearly 65-70 MGNREGA job-card holders demanded work from the Panchayat. The Sachiv asked them to start working on a site, but owing to past legacy they did not trust the Panchayat and did not work. When Surjit came to know he promised that he will ensure that their names are in the muster and they get paid accordingly. Believing him they worked and received an average of 40-50 persondays of work.

Apart from this, he has helped 2 PwDs to get special tri-cycles, 6 cases of getting names included

in the PDS, in 99 cases he helped people get the PatrataParchi (entitlement slip) for getting the PDS ration, opened the bank account of more than 100 people and 33 cases where he got the Samagra ID of children added to the family ID and getting them re-admitted to the school.

A broad estimateshows that the access to entitlement facilitated by Surjeet alone is close to Rs 55 lakhs, including more that Rs 4 lakh in pension entitlements, nearly Rs. 6 lakh in MGNREGA payments and Rs. 31 lakh in PMAY subsidy.

### **Estimate of entitlement facilitated by Surjeet, DekhParakh Sainik in Panna**

ENTITLEMENT PROVIDED TO BENEFICIARIES	AMOUNT (INR)
Old age pension	223,200.00
Widow and Disability pension	180,000.00
PMAY benefits	3,150,000.00
Ujjwala scheme	1,120,000.00
MGNREGA labour payments	585,000.00
Tri-cycle for the disabled	18,000.00
PDS entitlement including eligibility slip	54,000.00
School enrolment and re-admissions	198,000.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,52,280.00</b>

The Gram Rozghar Sahayak of Rahuniya- Jagdish, is appreciative of his work. According to him, whenever there is a need to connect villagers to a scheme, he just tells the DPS, who mobilizes the community, tells them about the scheme, get forms filled. This not only leads to improved outreach and reduced work pressure for him, the Panchayat also gets appreciation in the cluster and block level meetings.

Rahuniya Sarpanch elaborated why in some cases DPS is more effective than the Panchayat itself. Whenever they submit applications to block office, they cannot dare ask for a receiving, as a result it is difficult to follow up on past submissions and hold block officials accountable. However, DPS is able to directly ask officials for a receipt/ receiving, which makes follow-up and accountability easier to establish.

### **II. AmanKushwaha and the Sleight of Bank Kiosk Operator**

Aman Kushwaha a labourer belonging to Mukarba village of Maheba Panchayat in Chhattarpur works as construction worker in Delhi for 6 months and as agricultural labourer for the remaining year. His joy knew no bounds when his PMAYwas sanctioned in 2017-18 and he received the first tranche of Rs 40,000 to begin construction.He received regular installments and completed the construction in December 2018. Although he had labored during constructionhe did not receive the labour payment of approx. Rs 15,000 under MGNREGA.



He followed up with Gram Rozgar Sahayak but did not receive funds. Follow up with the Sarpanch and Secretary was also not fruitful. Aman says he made more than 100 trips to the kiosk of Madhya Bharat Grameen Bank, which is 5kms away to enquire about the payment, each time he returned disappointed. Every time he was told that either payment had not come or server was not working and asked to come later. He also went to a Janpad Jan Sunwai with his grievance, but never heard from them.

Aman attended a ratrichaupal organized as part of Dekh Parakh and got in touch with Rajendra Ahirwar, a young DPS and narrated his story. Rajendra, who was conversant with several government portals due to the intensive training he had received, immediately opened the MGNREGA portal and found that Aman's labour payment had already been transferred to his bank account few months ago. Aman asked Rajendra to reconfirm, as Panchayat officials or kiosk has repeatedly told him that labour payment hadn't come.

When he went to the kiosk, operator said his information was wrong and that funds hadn't come. He again went to Rajendra, who told him that Rs 14,661 had been transferred as labour payment against 89 days of work. Rajendra then took Aman along to the kiosk operator; this time the operator said he had already made the payment! Aman remembered that the operator had taken his thumbprint on several occasions in the name of checking his balance. The operator stuck to his stand, but Rajendra assured Aman that he will get his money back. Rajendra researched and found that as per procedure after giving funds the operator is supposed to get physical signatures/thumb impression of the recipient on a transaction register. He asked operator for the register as proof, but wasn't shown it. Rajendra warned that if he wasn't able to show the proof he will complain on CM helpline.

The operator realized that he had been caught and confessed that he had taken out the money and requested Aman not to complain. He agreed to pay back and has so far paid back Rs 12, 985 with a commitment to pay the remaining shortly. Aman is happy having received the funds and says that he cannot thank Rajendra enough for what he has done.

### **III. Rinku and Suresh's Struggle to get Disability Pensions**

Suresh Gamarsing and Rinku Suresh are a polio afflicted couple with more than 45 percent disability. Suresh is polio affected on one leg, her wife Rinku has polio on both her legs. They own 2 acres of poor quality land and a few cattle in Bobalwadi village of Barwani that feeds their old parents and 3 children. Despite their disability, to earn enough to feed all, they also work as graziers for other villagers.

Nearly 4 years ago someone told them that they were eligible for disability pension. From there started Suresh and Rinku's arduous journey to realize this entitlement. Suresh doesn't even remember the number of times he submitted pension applications to the Sarpanch and Secretary. Initially they said that pension comes only in case of 80 percent disability, but he countered them and was assured that pension will come soon. When it didn't, he went with his cousin brother (also polio-affected) to the block offices- 3 rounds to Ojher, 2 to Rajpur and 2-3 rounds to Barwani- each time submitting fresh applications and returning with assurance. He ended up spending nearly 3-4 thousand rupees on travel, getting disability certificates, photocopies, not to mention the foregone



wage labour.

In early 2019 he came in touch with Ritesh Rathore, the Dekh Parakh Sainik for his Panchayat and narrated his story. Ritesh took him to LokSeva Kendra in Rajpur to put an application online, but the portal did not accept the application. After consultation he found that disability certificate has to be first linked to the pension portal by Panchayat and then put on Samagra portal using the individual's Samagra ID. When Suresh approached the Secretary to upload and link the 2 he asked for Rs 500 per case. He told Ritesh about it, who took Suresh along to lodge complain with CEO-Janpad. The CEO assured him and asked him to go to Ojher LSK after 2-3 days and upload the form on pension portal while he gets the other issues resolved.

The pension was approved and from August 2019 they have finally started receiving Rs 1200 as

pension, a significant contribution to their otherwise family income of Rs 2500 per month. Rinku and Suresh have decided that they will spend this pension wisely on their children's education, parent's medicines and healthy food for the entire family.

#### **IV. Bringing Accountability through Larger Mobilisation**

Bilkhura Panchayat in Panna district was taken up by Samarthan as part of its focused work in 30 GPs under Dekh Parakh. Ratrichaupals were organized to make the community aware about its entitlements and how to access them. During the chaupal it was found that many people were not getting services due to rampant corruption in the Panchayat and rules were blatantly flouted, as the Sarpanch was backed by some powerful, upper caste families of the village.

People told that 2 Kapildhara wells were sanctioned at Rs 85,000 per well 2 years ago, but no payment had been made. A Panchayat land had been identified for developing a school playground but it had been encroached upon by the family and funds allocated for the play ground had been siphoned. PMAY lists were changed to give priority to those close to them and PMAY labour payments were not made to 15 eligible. The entire Panchayat was live example of poor construction under MGNREGA-with collapsing internal drains and damaged CC roads (less than 2 years after construction). Though there was a lot of angst against the Panchayat, no one dared confront the Panchayat.

Work under Dekh Parakh was initiated and the Dekh Parakh Sainik- Vijay Shukla started helping people to access information regarding their entitlements and providing support in getting them, through liaison with the block, Panchayat and directly through portals; all this while encouraging community members to visit panchayats and block office to demand their rights. He also helped them in receiving pensions and pending MGNREGA payments. He took the 15 PMAY beneficiaries to Janpad for getting their labour payment released. When Sarpanch and Secretary came to know about this they exerted pressure as a result of which 6 withdrew their applications while 9 withstood the pressure and after some time received Rs 52,000 as labour payment. Vijay was soon recognized as someone who selflessly helped people access entitlements, something that no one around them did. However, the dominant families did not like it and Vijay was given a death-threat.

Since this was the first case where a Samarthan volunteer had been directly threatened under the program, it was decided that Vijay should not work there alone and soon an 11-member Dekh Parakh Samiti of aware community members was constituted. Vijay and the project also trained another 16 youth to broad-base their work. Large scale support for Dekh Parakh put this dominant family on the backfoot and finally the Sarpanch started showing signs of becoming flexible.

A large dam has recently come up adjoining Bilkhura, its backwaters touching 5-6 farms of the village. Two years ago these farmers approached the Panchayat to build embankments, fearing that water might enter their farms and damage crops once the dam became operative. But after Panchayat refused help they built the embankment on their own. This year, the Panchayat got some concrete mixture poured over these embankments, without consulting anyone. When Vijay investigated, he found that GP had not only claimed funds not only for the concrete but for the entire embankment.

This was a tipping point, the community decided that now they needed to stand up and take what is rightfully theirs. Complaints regarding corruption were reported on grievance portals including CM

Helpline and scheme portals. Media was invited to look at the poor quality of work and how funds were not reaching those entitled. As a result of media engagement, both issues figured prominently in local newspapers; simultaneously local officials were informed by Dekh Parakh Samiti. A number of investigations were ordered against the Panchayat's functioning.

Seeing the new, empowered community, the Sarpanch approached Vijay and the DP Samiti for reconciliation, with the promise that he would correct whatever they think went wrong.





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**Samarthan Centre for Development support**

36, Green Avenue, Chunna Bhatti, Bhopal-462016,

Tel: 0755-2467625 | [www.samarthan.org](http://www.samarthan.org)