

BLOCK 5

**RURAL LOCAL GOVERNANCE:
INNOVATIVE PRACTICES, CHALLENGES
AND WAY FORWARD**

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Unit 12 Innovative Practices in Governance: Case Studies

Unit 13 Rural Local Governance: Challenges,
Opportunities and Way Forward

UNIT 12 INNOVATIVE PRACTICES IN GOVERNANCE: CASE STUDIES *

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12.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the rural governance innovations, which is taking place at the local level;
- Discuss the type of activities, which have been taken up under these innovations;
- Examine the effects of Innovative Practices in Governance; and
- Highlight the lessons learnt from these practices.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

In common parlance, governance means the use of rules and regulations by an agency/institution in discharging its duties. Innovation may be denoted as a new idea, method, device or introduction of new practices in a particular area. In the case of rural government, even enabling people to participate in local governance in the form of Gram Sabha, Committees or Sub-committees or inclusion of marginalised groups like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women in the decision-making process at the local level is itself an innovation because these

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groups have been traditionally on the margin. In fact, to encourage competitive spirit among the Panchayati Raj Institutions, incentivising the best performing Panchayats through awards and financial incentives have also been initiated by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj since 2011, under its Incentivisation of Panchayats Scheme in recognition of their good work for delivery of services and public goods. These awards have always been a strong source of inspiration. In fact, recognising exemplary performance is an incentive and encourages them for streamlining the governance at the local level. The award money or incentives released to the concerned Panchayats is to be utilised for public purposes especially livelihood support, assets creation, civic amenities creation, and maintenance, and bridging gaps in the funds received from Union and State Government under various projects.

In this Unit, four case studies have been included. One relates to the SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village Areas) scheme. It is being implemented across the country for better outcomes in rural areas. Second, relates to Kistamput Gram Panchayat in the State of Telangana, which addresses the issue of Sanitation at the grassroots level. Third relates to elected representatives paving the way for all-round development of the GP in the Kamrup district of Assam. Fourth one relates to Kiltan GP in district Lakshadweep, Lakshadweep UT. These case studies show innovations accomplished by the Rural Local Governments with the collaboration of other stakeholders at the grassroots level.

12.2 SURVEY OF VILLAGES AND MAPPING WITH IMPROVISED TECHNOLOGY: A CASE STUDY OF SVAMITVA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village Areas) Scheme on 24th April 2020, while interacting with the Presidents of the Gram Panchayats (GPs) on TV on the occasion of National Panchayati Raj Day. It is an innovative scheme, that will not only document ownership of the property of the villagers but also enable them to monetise the assets for taking up loans from banking institutions for business purposes. It will cover 6.62 lakh villages in the country. The scheme would be useful in providing the 'record of rights' to villagers household owners possessing houses in inhabited rural areas in the villages and issuance of property cards to the property owners. This would facilitate the monetisation of rural residential assets for credit and other financial services.

i) Need for the Scheme

The need for the scheme is reflected in the following issues:

- Survey of rural areas in India for Settlement and record of rights had last been completed many decades back; and
- ABADI (inhabited) areas of villages were not surveyed/mapped in many states.

In the absence of the legal document, the owner of the property in the rural areas is notable to leverage their own property as a financial asset acceptable by the banks for the purpose of providing loans and other financial assistance. Therefore, there is a need to provide the legal right of the property to the household owners with the help of the latest Drone Technology and Continuously Operating Reference Station (CORS) technology for capturing images. National Topographic database on all scales as per user requirements is prepared by the Survey of India (Sol).

ii) Objectives of the Scheme

The Scheme would be helpful to villagers in earmarking of their properties and preparation of village plan. It aimed at:

- Provide financial stability to the villagers to use their property as financial assets for taking loans and other financial benefits;
- Ensure clarity on property rights of people and facilitate the preparation of planning and revenue collection;
- Determine property tax, which would accrue to GPs directly in states where it is developed or else, add to the State exchequer;
- Help in preparation of better-quality Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDs), leveraging the maps created under this programme;
- Provide an integrated property validation solution for rural India, engaging the latest Drone Surveying technology, for demarcating the inhabited (Abadi) land in rural areas;
- Mapping of rural housing land can be done by using the latest survey methods and drones;
- Creation of survey infrastructure and GIS maps that can be used by any department for their use;
- Increase liquidity of land parcels in the market and increase the financial credit availability to the village; and
- Reduce property-related disputes.

It is clear from the above objectives that the Scheme not only provides ownership rights to villagers of their residential properties but, also builds a database for decentralised planning with people's participation.

iii) Stakeholders

SVAMITVA is being implemented in convergence mode with the efforts of:

- Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), Government of India as Nodal Ministry
- Survey of India
- State Panchayati Raj Department
- State Revenue Department

- Local district authorities
- Property owner
- Gram Panchayats
- National Informatics Centre

iv) Significant Process

- Signing of MoU between Survey of India and respective State Government
- Identification of villages to be surveyed
- Sensitisation of GPs/villages
- Demarcation of abadi area and chunna (white powder) marking of rural properties
- Large scale mapping of rural abadi area by using unmanned aerial vehicles/drones
- Creation of maps
- Ground verification of maps by drone survey teams
- Correction of maps-post ground verification
- Inquiry Process/Objection process – Conflict/Dispute resolution
- Generation of final Property Cards/ Title deed or “Sampatti Patrak”
- Availability of the Property Cards on digital platform/ hard copies.

v) Monitoring Mechanism

Online monitoring and reporting dashboard has been created for real-time monitoring of the progress of various activities. A three-layer Institutional Mechanism for Implementation, Monitoring and Management at district, state and national levels has been created for better outcomes.

vi) Current Progress of Scheme Implementation

As per MoPR Annual Report 2020-21 as of 17th January 2021, drone mapping has been completed in 19,697 villages, whereas data processing and feature extraction has been completed in 13,213 and 11,161 villages respectively. More than one lakh property cards have been issued in 763 villages on October 11, 2020. One of such recipients was a widow who was from village Mohammadpur Chauki, tehsil Nawabganj of district Barabanki of Uttar Pradesh. The Property Card issued under SVAMITVA Scheme enabled her to avail a loan of Rs 20,000/- from the Bank of India, which was utilised for the hand cart to further augment her business of snacks and food.

One farmer from village Billaka, block Sohna of district Gurugram of Haryana also received a Property Card of his asset under the SVAMITVA Scheme. On the basis of the property card, he has been able to secure a loan of Rs. 5 lakh from a Haryana public sector bank and has commenced the construction of his house.

vii) SVAMITVA: A Critique of the Scheme

Decentralised planning, which is also known as micro-planning or local planning has not been operationalised in length and breadth in the countryside. What to think about the plan, elections to panchayats were also not held in the states. Whenever there were changes in the leadership of the states, elections to Panchayats were held by the new government in the name of power to the people. Nothing worthwhile has happened in the case of decentralisation and putting it into practice by operationalising the plan at the grassroots levels. The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution has brought a revolution in decentralisation particularly in political decentralisation by enabling more than three million elected representatives including elected from women, SC and ST categories across the country. Panchayats and Municipalities, which are constituted as per the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, are expected to prepare a plan for economic development and social justice including 29 subjects listed in the 11th schedule, and 18 subjects listed in the 12th Schedule of the Constitution. Further, Article 243ZD of the Constitution states that after integrating plans prepared by the Panchayats and Municipalities, the DPC will prepare a District Development Plan which among others, will also prepare a spatial plan of the district as a whole. But the million-dollar question is as to how a spatial plan will be made without attempting and making a spatial plan at the village and Nagar Panchayat levels. The Scheme would be a step toward fulfilling the objective of the Constitutional Amendment Act. However, a spatial plan cannot be made without making a spatial database of assets, inventories, land records, etc. The spatial data so generated would be very helpful to villagers in many ways.

No doubt, the Scheme would be useful to villagers in numerous ways. Some of the major benefits may be enumerated as follows:

- i) So far inhabitants are not able to use their property as collateral to get loans from the banks and other financial institutions. Only those who have agricultural land are able to take the loans from banks, etc. These sections of villagers or farmers would be having an additional source of getting money from the banks. Hence, they will be empowered additionally. But the real empowerment would be for landless persons, whose properties are their buildings/houses and they cannot use them for getting any loans or financial assistance, and for them their property acts as collateral.
- ii) So far, if there is any dispute of property, there has been no way to resolve it due to the absence of any record. The local people have been in the picture and their decisions are influenced by caste and creed, and money considerations. Besides, in some of the states like Haryana, lands are verified by the Lamberdars (traditional revenue person) and the President of the GP. Now, there will be a foolproof record in the possession of the owner of the properties and the use of such persons is not required further.
- iii) Panchayats would be able to get financial benefits on account of the transfer of property through the sale. The amount so received by the GP would be used for the creation and maintenance of community assets, and also for the

creation of requisite infrastructure, that is useful for the village community and society.

- iv) With such an exercise, the value of the property would be appreciated. Such appreciated value of the property would give new development direction to rural areas. There would be changes to the location of industries in these areas and those areas, which are located on roads or nearby, their property value will appreciated further.
- v) This would also be instrumental in building peace and harmony in the village society as social strife on account of land and property disputes would be eliminated.

However, there are challenges in the implementation of the Scheme in the fields where farmers go to any extent to save land, which he has encroached. There are more challenges in the location of agricultural land, illogically possessed by a person or family. The land or pond, which is located in the vicinity of habitats, has been encroached by villagers, and they have constructed houses. How it would be freed by the administration. In fact due to laxity of action on the part of the Panchayats, they have encroached on such important common land and water sources. The local politics on the part of Presidents of the GP and other influential persons would also be another challenge in the implementation of the Scheme. Another important aspect of the Scheme appears that it would reduce indebtedness among farmers. The Kisan Credit Cards (KCCs) have not been used by a sizeable number of the farmers. Further, a rent seeker group among the farmers has also emerged. Such Groups take loans from a bank under KCCs at a very subsidized rate, however, gives loans to the needy at an exorbitant rate. Now, there is an urgent need to keep a strict check on such people, otherwise, they will get an additional source for taking loans from banks and other financial institutions and will exploit already exploited people at the village level.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

- 1) What are the objectives of the SVAMITVA Scheme?

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- 2) Examine the SVAMITVA Scheme and highlight its benefits in the village.

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12.3 SANITATION: A CASE STUDY OF KISTAMPET GRAM PANCHAYAT IN TELANGANA

Kistampet Gram Panchayat, which is located in Raikal tehsil of Karimnagar district in the State of Telangana is a Model Panchayat for the development of Panchayat due to its good governance practice in terms of holding regular Gram Sabha meetings, every two months. Members of the governing body, village level officers and standing Committee members visit every Friday, every ward in the village and identify the problems, which are discussed and solved in the Gram Panchayat meetings. The GP has done good work not only for sanitation but in other developmental areas of the village also.

i) Steps were taken by the GP for Ensuring Proper Sanitation

In order to ensure proper sanitation in the GP, the Gram Sabha has taken the following steps:

- Removal of silt and garbage from the drains, collection of garbage with the help of GP Tractors and Tricycles.
- Removing stagnant water, and spraying oil/mosquito spray to demolish larva.
- Spraying bleaching powder in drinking water wells, water tanks, water standing areas, drainage gutters and weekly market areas.
- Organising medical camps in the rainy season in order to protect people from the seasonal diseases.
- Distribution of two dustbins to every house in the village to give wet and dry waste separately at the time of collection of waste on door to door basis.
- Maintenance of roadside vegetation, by regular pruning.
- Demolition of abandoned and unused structures to avoid dumping.
- Building individual toilets to make the GP Open Defecation Free (ODF).

ii) Sanitation

As an active step, the GP is involved in mobilising teams between 4.00 am to 6.00 am every morning. The teams formed by the GP patrol and use whistles etc. in a bid to discourage ODF. Interestingly if anybody is found with a *Chembu (Vessel)*, s/he is named and shamed by calling her/ him as *Chembu Raja*. Not only had that but an amount of Rs. 500/- fine would be imposed on them. Even announcements through Dandora (Tom-Tom), and giving prizes to those who have built toilets in their houses are some of the other measures to motivate for maintaining sanitation.

In 2017, the GP and the villages were declared ODF villages. For newcomers into the village, Community Toilets were built with all facilities. The GP has taken up a resolution that the permission for constructing a new house will be given to the people who would build a toilet in their houses.

iii) Rain Water Harvesting

Rain Water Harvesting is another area that the GP is actively promoting where it is resolved that every house should have a catchment area and people who would agree to build a catchment area can avail its construction through the MGNREG scheme. The GP attained success in having soak pits in every house in the village.

iv) Use of Plastics

The GP has sensitised the people about the ill consequences of using plastics. They prohibited the usage of plastic in the villages and provided the villagers with jute bags. Notices are issued to the shopkeepers who are using plastic bags as carry bags. The GP motivated people with wall writings, and rally meetings about the ill consequences of the use of plastics. If anybody in the GP doesn't follow this instruction an amount of Rs.500/- fine will be imposed.

v) Drinking Water

On drinking water, the GP does chlorination to the OHSR (water tank) that supplies pure drinking water to the people in the village. Leakages and the gate valves are monitored and repaired so that every house is provided with safe, purified drinking water.

vi) Plantation

For promoting plantation, the Gram Panchayat has developed its nursery of 50,000 plants. The GP has planted 11,000 fruit plants in village. The GP has distributed 6 plants to every house. Every house in the village has a kitchen garden. In this context, for addressing the Monkeys problem, the GP has developed Vanara Vanam (monkey forest) so that they could not destroy the farms and gardens of the villagers.

The efforts of the GP converted into an innovative exercise due to the convergence and cooperation of different stakeholders including officials at the district, block and village levels. This could happen with the cooperation of all non-officials and officials.

12.4 PREPARATION OF GRAM PANCHAYAT DEVELOPMENT PLAN: A CASE STUDY OF KILTAN GRAM PANCHAYAT IN DISTRICT LAKSHADWEEP

Panchayats have been mandated for the preparation of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) for economic development and social justice by utilising the resources available to them. The GPDP planning process has to be comprehensive and based on a participatory process, that involves the full convergence with schemes of all related Central Ministries / Line Departments related to 29 subjects enlisted in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.

The 12th Finance Commission had recommended that panchayats should use the grants to improve service delivery relating to water supply and sanitation. The unconditional basic grant awarded by the 14th Finance Commission was intended to be used to improve the status of specified basic services. To this, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj added a condition of completion of the GPDP to avail performance grant. The 15th Finance Commission award for 2020-21 was granted to all three tiers of Panchayats, which is proposed for 2021 to 26 as well. Of which 70-85 per cent is for the panchayats. However, 15 per cent of the grants to rural local bodies were tied to sanitation and maintenance of ODF status, and supply of drinking water and rainwater harvesting.

Many programmes have been launched for ensuring access to various services to the citizens in the rural areas. The Panchayat representatives have been assigned various responsibilities at the three levels, under these programmes. In this regard, selected programmes, and role of the PRIs therein are mentioned below.

Jal Jeevan Mission

It is envisioned to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024 to all households in rural India. The Mission is based on a community approach to water, and will include extensive Information, Education and Communication as a key component of the mission. It looks to create a Jan Andolan for water, thereby making it everyone's priority.

Gram Panchayat plays a lead role in planning, implementation, management, operation and maintenance of the water supply infrastructure in a village. The role of Gram Panchayat includes identifying needs, planning, involving the community, implementing schemes, and monitoring the quality of water. For achieving all this, the Gram Panchayats could form a 'Village Water and Sanitation Committees (VWSC)'. This Committee could help to mobilise communities, educate them, and ensure that they get the necessary training and technical support to achieve drinking water.

The Block Panchayat could help in the overall implementation of the action plan developed by the Village Water and Sanitation Committee. The Gram Panchayats of the Union Territory of Lakshadweep are much progressive in their inclusive development and growth. The Gram Panchayat Kiltan is one of those, which has not only made remarkable efforts for social and infrastructural development of the Panchayat but, also set an example in ensuring better child development.

Kiltan Gram Panchayat

It is located in Kiltan Tehsil of Lakshadweep district in Assam, which is situated 115 km away from the district headquarters. The total geographical area of the GP is 220 sq.km. It has seven wards and eight elected representatives. There are 778 households, and 3,946 persons in this Panchayat. It has a total 1,352 child population in the Panchayat area. The GP has 8 Anganwari Centers, 6 Government Schools and a Degree College with dedicated staff members.

Earlier, the GP had many issues related to infrastructure, sanitation, malnutrition, anaemia in adolescent girls, and crimes related to children. In this regard, the elected representatives activated their Gram Sabha members and proactively discussed all such issues in each Gram Sabha meeting. The GP has prepared an effective development plan by involving all stakeholders to immediately resolve the issues of the Panchayat. The GP constituted a village-level Child Protection Committee and included Panchayat members, Anganwari workers and other key persons of the Panchayat. This Committee is functional, and presents its report in each Gram Sabha meeting.

The GP Kiltan is facilitating the schools and anganwadis to serve the nutritious mid-day meals in the schools regularly, which is monitored by the School Management Committee. All the schools have play grounds with sufficient area to conduct sports and various other games. Hundred per cent of children are retained in the schools. There are zero dropouts in these schools. All the children below 5 years are fully immunised with the cooperation of the Health Department.

The Gram Panchayat has got the Open Defecation Free Panchayat status during the year 2019. It has been observed that the sanitation, cleanliness and hygiene care are maintained in the schools and Anganwaris. Even, separate toilets are available for boys and girls in the schools. Awareness generation camps are organised in the schools and the Department of Women and Child Development, Health Department and Education Department are involved in this activity.

It emerged from the above discussion that people's participation in the form of GS, and other platforms like subject committees are formed as per the Panchayati Raj Act, and this model can be adopted by other Panchayats also.

12.5 ROLE OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES IN ALL-ROUND DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF GRAM PANCHAYAT IN KAMRUP DISTRICT

Sonapur Gram Panchayats

It is an example of improving rural governance through convergence. This GP is situated in Dimoria Development Block in the district of Kamrup of Assam. It is an example of successfully providing better services in the Panchayat by way of conversing with line departments on the platform of GPDP. Out of 11 elected members in the Panchayat, nine members are women. Interestingly, different problems of different areas of the GP have been surveyed and maintained persistently. In the course of addressing various developmental issues, the elected representatives acted as a connecting bridge between the public and the Government.

All activities and work of the Panchayat are approved by the Gram Sabha in its monthly meetings. Meetings of the Standing Committees are organised on a quarterly basis. The functional committees in the Panchayat are Development

Committee, Social Justice Committee and Social Welfare Committee, besides Construction Committees for implementing all Government related schemes.

The GP has done excellent work during the COVID-19 pandemic by sanitising all the wards, distribution of masks, and providing ration and money to people who were in need. Grocery items have also been distributed to 1700 families in the GP.

One of the best achievements of this GP was the construction of roads connecting different wards under the GPDP. After this innovation, a road connecting the villages of Sonapur and Kasutali Pathar was also constructed. It linked these villages with the mainland market of Sonapur. With the Grants of the 14th Finance Commission, the GP has also constructed a road benefitting villagers. Besides, under the GPDP, a concrete bridge of length approx. 40 ft. was also constructed to connect the villages. Further, a river Ghat has been constructed in the village on the banks of Digaru river warding off people from heavy water and conservation of soil resources.

The GP has faced umpteen challenges in constructing a road with the support from Dimoria Development Block and Kamrup Metro Zilla Parishad by cutting the hill, blasting stones and carrying heavy machinery for this venture. The work of the GP has emerged as an unparalleled example of its leadership in the implementation of different works by inclusion of them as a part of the GPDP and cooperation of Line Departments, which can be followed by other Panchayats also.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

- 1) What are the significant innovations in the case study of Kistampet Gram Panchayat?

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- 2) How did the elected representatives of Panchayat address the issue of social and economic development of the GP?

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12.6 CONCLUSION

Despite constraints and limitations, there are many outstanding performers among Panchayats all over the country. Here, a few such cases have been explained. The SVAMITVA in itself is an innovative Scheme for the development of rural areas. There are two examples in the Unit, which indicate the benefits of this scheme for the common man. Encouraging Panchayats by, National Panchayat Awards, which is a medium for creating awareness and sharing of knowledge across the country about the achievements of Panchayats. It develops a feeling of competition and commitment among Panchayats in the country. These case studies are based on innovative practices in governance, which are very useful and can be replicated in other states also.

12.7 GLOSSARY

Spatial Planning:

Spatial planning is a vital aspect of any planned development. It is not only significant for the development of services but also for the development of infrastructure in a particular area. Spatial planning denotes the management of space not only for land use purposes but the complete and holistic effect of spatial patterns and processes. In other words, it is a sort of management of a particular territory with a focus on intra and inter-related territories.

Standing Committees:

Under the State Panchayati Raj Acts, there are provisions for constituting Standing Committee/ Subject Committee/ Sub-Committee to focus on a particular activity/issue/subject/squarely. Examples of such committees are like Health Committee, Education Committee, Sanitation Committee, etc. Generally, these committees are headed by the President/Vice President of Panchayats and members of the Panchayats. The Gram Sabha members and experts in a particular area may also be represented on these Committees.

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12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should include the following points:
 - For your answer, refer to Section 12.2 (ii)
- 2) Your answer should include the following points:
 - For your answer, refer to Section 12.2 (vii)

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Your answer should include the following points:
 - For your answer, refer to Section 12.3
- 2) Your answer should include the following points:
 - For your answer, refer to Section 12.5

UNIT 13 RURAL LOCAL GOVERNANCE: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND WAY FORWARD*

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Rural Local Governance: Issues and Challenges
- 13.3 Rural Local Governance: Opportunities
- 13.4 Rural Local Governance: Way Forward
- 13.5 Conclusion
- 13.6 Glossary
- 13.7 References
- 13.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

13.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the challenges before rural local governance;
- Highlight the major issues and challenges for the various opportunities of rural local governance; and
- Discuss the way forward so as to how to make rural local governance more effective.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Rural local governance has emerged as a prominent issue in the literature of Public Administration and is one of the important social inventions of this century. It became an important policy objective during the 1970s and 1980s, as the government in developing countries sought to create more socially equitable patterns of economic growth and meet the basic needs of the poor. As a result of a great increase in the number and complexity of functions of the modern state, rural local governance has become a major element in the administrative organisation of governmental services. They assume importance due to the need to contain the relentless demographic pressures and optimum use of scarce resources for development. They act as vehicles in carrying back to the people the power that really belongs to them (Misra, et al., 1996).

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In recent years, it has become the golden calf of management philosophy and it is much more compatible with the behavioural aspects of management. With the shifting emphasis on development strategies towards promoting more socially equitable economic growth and meeting the basic needs of the poorest groups in developing societies, widespread participation in decision-making is considered essential to the development process, which has been advocated as a way of eliciting that participation.

Numerous countries are experimenting in this direction, and have taken initiatives to devolve powers and responsibilities to elected bodies at the lower tiers of the political and administrative system. In many countries, rural local governance as a means of achieving socio-economic goals has got constitutional mandate (Kueck, et al.,1998). In the case of India, efforts in this direction have been made since independence. There have been strong voices in favour of it, and to have a third tier of governance where local decisions will be taken by the people. As a result, in 1992, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act was passed with an aim to provide a third tier of governance. The Act has opened avenues for facilitating the social mobilisation process at the grassroots level.

13.2 RURAL LOCAL GOVERNANCE: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

With the passing of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, the rural local bodies in India have got constitutional status and is a step in the direction of speeding up the process of rural local governance and giving strength as well as stability to local institutions. It has made a sea change in the status of panchayats. The Constitution has made it mandatory for all the states to set up three-tier (in smaller states having less than 20 lakhs population – two-tier) panchayats and to hold direct elections to all the tiers at regular intervals of five years. In respect of the devolution of powers and resources to panchayats, however, the Constitution has laid down only the basic principles by way of declaring it as an institution of self-government and providing an illustrative list of functions that can devolve on it (Ghosh & Kumar, 2003).

Once the Act was passed, all the states completed the process of enacting fresh legislation on strengthening these bodies. But mere legislative enactments do not ensure the effectiveness and viability of the local bodies in the states. Their operationalisation was important. During the initial days, there were a number of issues and challenges, which literally doubted the intention of the state governments. In this regard, certain issues and challenges are discussed below.

i) Ensuring the Participation of Women, SC and ST

The Act provides for one-third reservation of seats for women and reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their population. In an elite and male-dominated hierarchical society like ours, implementing this provision was a very big challenge. It was difficult to get these many women to the reserved seats as women were confined to the four walls, especially in the rural areas. The male members of their

family were not willing to send them to these bodies. They felt threatened as their power was now being shared. However, they had no option as seats were reserved for women. Reluctantly they had to send their wives, daughters, sisters and daughters in law to the reserved seats. But they merely acted as proxies as they were totally unaware of their new role as also the male members of their family resented their public role.

Similar was the case with the SC and ST candidates. The rural local bodies were dominated by the affluent from this section of the society. They were not happy that the weak and the downtrodden among them will now share power, and occupy important positions in these bodies. However, they occupied important positions in these bodies because of the reservation of seats. But they could not act on their own, and remained the mouthpiece of the affluent section among them.

ii) **The Gram Sabha to be made Effective**

In the old system of rural governance, the Gram Sabha's were totally non-functional as also the rural local bodies were not having constitutional status. Hence, the system could not deliver goods. Thus, the biggest challenge was to make the Gram Sabha's active and functional in order to make the grassroots democracy successful. It is the basic unit of Indian democracy and it is through them that the elected representatives were to be made accountable to the electorate. Hence, the need of the hour was that Gram Sabha's should become vigilant and sensitive to their own problems and also meet periodically with maximum participation of the people. Only then rural governance would be possible in the true sense of the term as it is in the Gram Sabha's that the development schemes and programmes are to be decided and prioritised.

iii) **Financial Devolution**

Another issue was to strengthen the financial base of the rural local bodies as in the earlier system there was a lack of financial resources. The Act provided for the constitution of a State Finance Commission (SFC) at the interval of every five years with the hope of improving the financial position of these bodies. Apart from this, there was a provision under Articles 243H and 243I, which empowered the rural local bodies to levy and collect the taxes. These provisions in a way no doubt appeared to enhance the financial position but the real challenge was to constitute the State Finance Commission and devolve financial powers to the rural local bodies. The State governments were quite reluctant for the same as they feared that their power will now go to the local bodies, and they will be left with back seating driving. Hence, they delayed the constitution of SFC's.

iv) **Functional Devolution**

Yet another challenge was to devolve functions to the rural local bodies so that they can function as institutions of self-governance. Any amount of constitutional guarantee cannot ensure smooth and successful functioning of the local bodies unless the functions are devolved to them and they are

allowed to function independently without any interference from the states. Though the Act takes care of this problem by adding Eleventh Schedule, which assigns 29 subjects to the PRI's. The Constitution expects the State legislature, by law, to endow the rural local bodies with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government and such law may contain provisions for the devolution of powers and responsibilities upon the panchayats at the appropriate level. However, the state governments showed their reluctance in devolving the list of 29 subjects to the rural local bodies and no detailed executive instructions devolving powers and responsibilities on different tiers were issued. Wherever the functions were devolved, it was done through executive order rather than through a piece of legislation. Apart from this, the sphere of activity of each tier under each item has not been defined and is left to the discretion of the concerned State Government (Mishra, 2003). This poses a challenge as to which tier will legislate on which subject.

v) Effectiveness of District Planning Committee

Article 243ZD provides for the constitution of District Planning Committees (DPCs). They have got constitutional status by way of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act. Unfortunately, however, they have been made ineffective. Thus, another major challenge was to make the DPCs functional and effective. Initially, there was a delay in constituting the DPCs as also certain variations were seen in their composition, wherever they were constituted. The presence of MPs and MLAs in the DPC is another major issue. It has been found that the DPC works only as an arm of the State Government, and is incapable of independent functioning. The need of the hour is that the DPCs should be made effective and the district plan prepared by the PRIs and municipalities should be approved by the State Government without any change.

The above discussion highlights that rural local governance is confronted with a number of challenges. These challenges have to be taken care of, if we really want rural governance to flourish and change the face of rural India. People's welfare and development can happen only if the rural local bodies are strong and ready to deliver goods. However, there is no need to be disheartened as with challenges, certain opportunities can also be seen in the new system of rural governance. These opportunities no doubt provide hope and strength to the rural local bodies. Its functioning over the last two decades brings to light that despite the challenges, the opportunities have been properly utilised by these bodies. In the succeeding section, we will discuss some of these opportunities, and see how it has brought a change in the rural areas.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

- 1) What are the major issues and challenges before the Rural Local Governance?

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- 2) Examine the functioning of District Planning Committee.

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13.3 RURAL LOCAL GOVERNANCE: OPPORTUNITIES

Before we proceed to the opportunities of the rural local bodies, it is worth mentioning what the intention was behind the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. It appears that perhaps after seeing the failure of the old system and the poor condition of Indian villages even after 50 years of independence or so, it was felt desirable to incorporate the rural local governance system/Panchayati Raj system into the basic framework of the Indian Constitution. As a matter of fact, the soul of India resides in villages and unless the condition of Indian villages based on people's participation is not improved, we cannot think of the 'Gram Swaraj' that Gandhi visualised. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment was visualised, keeping in view all the above.

The greatest opportunity that it provided was that it gave constitutional status to the rural local bodies, something which the government was trying for long by way of different committees and commissions. It made it mandatory for the government to provide for a uniform three-tier structure with uniform tenure and elections at regular intervals. It ensured political decentralisation as uniform structures were created as a result of elections to these bodies. By 1994, most of the states had completed the process of enacting conformity legislation and holding the first round of elections to the panchayats. Vastly increased number of elected representatives provided new opportunities for political representation at the local level, especially for women and marginalised social groups. The percentage of political participation also increased, reflected in active campaigning (usually on a non-party basis for gram panchayats), high levels of voter turnout and heightened engagement with local officials and elected representatives, which in turn helped to invigorate local democracy. The first

round of elections saw the creation of 226,188 village panchayats, with 3,198,554 members; 5736 intermediate panchayats, with 141,412 members; and 467 district panchayats, with 17,935 members (Jayal, et al, 2007).

The Gram Sabha's have acquired a new and important role. After the initial inactive and non-functional nature of Gram Sabha, slowly and steadily it became active. A welcome step in this direction was taken by the government when it declared the year 1999-2000 as the "Year of Gram Sabha". To energise the Gram Sabha's, State/UT Governments were told to initiate measures such as vesting full powers in them for identifying beneficiaries and determining the priorities for various programmes in the village and approval of the budget. Later on, the year 2009-2010 was also observed as the "Year of Gram Sabha". The basic idea is to make Gram Sabha's more effective and also to ensure that they meet periodically and people participate in large numbers. In the state of Kerala, they became active since the Act came into being. In the first Gram Sabha organised way back in 1996, more than two million persons participated. In general, the Gram Sabha's have been a huge success and generated public debate on development all over Kerala (Sharma, 2007). In Madhya Pradesh, the Gram Sabha's have got a new status through the State law to ensure holistic development of villages. In West Bengal, absolute power has been given to the Gram Sabha/ Gram Sansad in respect of the selection of individual beneficiaries under the poverty alleviation programmes (Mathew, 2007).

The other opportunity that the Act provided was with regard to the representation of the weaker sections of society. The reservation provision for this section of the society, in a way, ensured that the high level of elite dominance, which was seen in the earlier system is no longer there. It provided opportunities for formal representation of these sections in the rural local bodies. It has provided them with increased visibility and an opportunity to influence local affairs. It brought to panchayats at all levels close to a million women, a large number of members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and in some states – which provided for such reservation in their conformity Acts – members of the OBC category as well. In most states, democratic decentralisation has made politics more inclusive of women, SCs and STs (Jayal, 2006). Today, the democratic base of women has been widened. Indeed around 80 per cent of all women elected are from reserved seats. It has motivated many women to contest elections and participate in the political process (Mathur, 2013).

There are many instances, where women have managed to generate modest local development dividends by marshalling financial resources and lobbying bureaucrats and politicians at higher levels. Evidence from different states indicates that women members have performed well and have taken up many serious issues relating to the development of their areas. They have fought against odds and taken up issues, which cater to vital needs such as children's education, safe drinking water, primary health care facilities for women and basic nutrition.

In Kerala, the process of popular mobilisation through the People's Planning Campaign has ensured the active involvement of SCs and women in decision-

making in panchayats with a resultant flow of benefits to these groups (Issac, 2000). Studies from Karnataka indicate that women have made some headway in gram panchayats by using reserved seats as a vantage point to shape the local development priorities. The evidence also suggests that individual women panchayat leaders have registered significant success in securing government resources for sanitation and street lighting (as health and safety issues are prioritised by women), local infrastructure in the form of village roads and community buildings (such as schools and childcare centres), and ensuring that public servants such as school teachers carry out their designated responsibilities. These modest but important gains demonstrate the ability of women to use the elected office for the benefit of the community and strengthen their legitimacy as elected representatives (Stephen & Sekaran, 2001).

The research work of Indu Pathak has highlighted the decision-making capacities of rural women leading towards their empowerment in Almora and Nainital districts of Uttarakhand. From a sociological perspective, it examines the decision-making capacities of rural women (both indoor and outdoor day-to-day activities of hill women) and their role in the domestic, economic and political spheres of their life (Pathak, 2016). It stresses the need for the State Government to introduce such schemes that provides an ideal opportunity for rural women to enhance their social status, improve their awareness and outlook towards life, to improve their overall personality and their financial condition.

With regard to the empowerment and participation of SC, ST and OBCs are concerned, it has been found that in some states like Karnataka, Orissa (now, Odisha), Andhra Pradesh etc. it has been quite effective and they have been able to assert their position and powers. This happened especially in those cases, where the elected representatives were educated and experienced. The reservation seems to have created a kind of self-confidence that strengthens their moral character as well as the extent of empowerment in the process of self-governance (Chandrashekar, 2000). Some elected presidents from these communities have been able to use their newfound authority to significant effect by bringing in more resources and challenging caste discrimination in village affairs. The SC community leaders encourage Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to participate in the Gram Sabha meetings. One SC woman president herself formed a trust to serve independently to the SC community (Palanithurai, 2005). The SC representative in the capacity of head of Social Justice Committees has been able to make effective use of these committees to block inappropriate decisions or challenge the authority of the dominant caste. In the parts of Gujarat, SC representatives have successfully empowered the Social Justice Committees (Robinson, 2005).

Another opportunity for the rural local governance can be seen in the provision of functional devolution, which devolves on the panchayats 29 subjects, on which they can make laws and thereby make the rural local bodies function as institutions of self-governance. Though there exists variation from state to state with regard to assigning of powers and functions to each tier of the PRIs, under the governmental direction, each level is now conducting 'activity mapping'. The

activity mapping now being undertaken by the states is being done with the expectation that it will clearly identify the functions that are to be performed at each level of the panchayats. This will help in assessing the revenues required and assigning their sources. In addition, it will help in the devolution of functionaries to implement these activities (Mathur, 2013). Wherever functions have been devolved, they are doing a good job. In the state of Kerala, certain functions have been given to three tiers under various subjects (Gupta, 2004).

Another opportunity that we can see is the provision of funds for panchayats. In the new system, some definite steps have been taken, which find expression under Articles 243H, 243I and 243X, which empower the Panchayati Raj Institutions to levy and collect taxes. Apart from this, there is also a provision for the State Finance Commission at the interval of every five years. The Finance Commission will recommend to the Governor with regard to the financial resources of the PRIs, which will be an obligatory duty of the State Government to implement. These provisions have indeed provided opportunities for the panchayats to function as institutions of self-government. Initially, there was reluctance on the part of state governments to constitute the SFCs and they delayed its constitution. The SFCs have given notable recommendations, especially in the case of Kerala, West Bengal and Karnataka. In the State of Kerala, there is a large degree of autonomy as 40 per cent of funds under the general sector are in the untied form. The State has taken bold steps for devolving funds upon Zilla Parishad in lump sum with a formula to further allocate them to three tiers. The general category fund is divided among the Gram, Taluk and Zilla Panchayats in the ratio of 70:14:14 respectively. In West Bengal, it is in the ratio of 50:20:30. In Karnataka it is the opposite, the allocation is in the ratio of 25:35:40 (Panchayati Raj in India - Status Report, 2000). States like Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra provide substantial funds to Zilla Parishad. But they do not give much scope to panchayats in terms of autonomy, as funds are invariably tied to a particular programme or scheme.

Yet another opportunity for rural local governance can be seen in the provision of the District Planning Committees under Article 243ZD, which provides them constitutional status by way of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act. The DPC was supposed to be constituted in every district to draft the development plan for the district as a whole, but there are very few states like Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, which have constituted it in all the districts (Gupta, 2004). In those states that have such committees, a fifth of the total number of members is nominated, leading to the domination of civil servants and higher-level politicians such as the local MP and MLA (Jayal, et al, p.11). There are also large variations with regard to their formation, composition and functioning. If these problems are taken care of, the DPCs can become an effective institution of planning leading to the development of the rural areas. The DPC as a planning facilitator will go a long way to address local aspirations more effectively. More so, the PRIs have to play a significant role in the entire planning process (Singh, in Chahar, 2005).

On the whole, it can be said that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has provided a whole range of opportunities for rural local governance but they have not been used and utilised properly for some reason or the other. But there is no need to be disappointed as they have shown positive results as well. The new system has generated awareness in many sections of the rural community and in certain cases, strong voices against exploitation and excesses have been registered. One of the most heartening aspects has been the inclusion and participation of various disadvantaged groups such as Dalits, Adivasis and women leading to the deepening and widening of democracy. The access of weaker sections to rural power structures has been ensured legally, thereby enlarging the social base of the system. They have got an opportunity to air their grievances and get them cleared through a participatory decision-making process. Studies have shown that the developmental outcomes in panchayats headed by women are impressive, even if empowerment impacts have been rather slow in materialising (Jayal, et al, 2007). The PRIs to an extent have been deeply rooted in the rural community and have become the real vehicle of change and development in the countryside. The rural masses have become more conscious and aware of their rights and duties, and have started participating in large numbers. All this will go a long way in making the system of rural local governance far more effective in times to come.

13.4 RURAL LOCAL GOVERNANCE: WAY FORWARD

The functioning of the rural local bodies over more than two and half decade highlights that a lot still remains to be done. There exist large variations among states in the functioning of the rural local bodies at the operational level. In order to make the system of rural local governance more functional and effective, we need to take care of all the ills which are present in the system. Certain amendments are required in the Act in order to remove the anomalies, which are hindering the progress of rural local bodies. In the succeeding paragraphs, ways to strengthen the rural local bodies are being discussed.

As far as functional devolution is concerned, much is left at the discretion of the states because of which we see problems in the devolution of functions. States have shown their reluctance in transferring the functions. Thus, the need of the hour is that the Act be amended with regard to this and instead of state may devolve; the word state shall be added. Also, the sphere of activity of each tier under each item should be defined clearly in order to avoid any kind of overlapping. The functions should be devolved through proper legislation, rather than through an executive order as is presently being done. Finally, all the 29 subjects/functions should be devolved to the panchayats and nothing should be left in the hands of the states. It has been found that the state governments have retained many regulatory, controlling and supervisory powers, which in fact takes away the autonomy of the PRIs (Aziz, 2007). So, if we really want to give autonomy to the PRIs and allow them to function as an institution of self-governance, the above suggestions need to be incorporated.

Another important issue in the functioning of panchayats is finance. Though many provisions have been made in the Act with regard to improving the financial status of the panchayats, still the financial autonomy of the PRIs is restricted. Hence, they should be provided financial autonomy to raise revenues. Also, a large part of the transfers should not be scheme based so that the PRIs can use them according to their own requirements. Decentralisation with a strong resource base is required to enhance the financial capabilities of the PRIs as also a strong fiscal base accruing from sources internal to them. Moreover, taxing powers and other financial provisions will ultimately improve the financial position of the PRIs (Mishra, 2005). The PRIs should be encouraged to take steps for innovative resource mobilisation such as the generation of income from entrepreneurial activities, projective loans, public contribution, tax sharing and tax assignments, matching grant incentives for tax collection instead of totally depending on the government grants. Besides, proper tax collection machinery at the panchayat level is required. The PRIs should get a share of more elastic and productive taxes such as sales tax. Finally, they should be assigned all or part of sales proceeds of the area within their purview. All these measures will definitely improve the financial status of panchayats.

So far as the DPC is concerned, it is suggested that a uniform policy should be in place with regard to its formation, composition and powers. Also, the DPCs should be constituted in all the districts at the earliest. States should not be allowed to interfere in their functioning. As far as possible, the MPs and MLAs should be kept out of it. The Chairperson of the DPC should be an elected member from the panchayats or municipalities. There should be adequate experts as its members in order to provide technical inputs and make analysis for reaching rational decision-making. Some kind of a planning committee or unit should exist at the block or panchayat level in order to carry out local level planning, and also to provide vital inputs on local needs and resources to the DPC (Gupta, 2004). Finally, there should be no parallel body at the district level, if we really want the DPCs to make plans and act effectively.

Accountability is a precondition for creating trust in the mind of people so that the abuse of power and misuse of public resources is prevented. The PRIs can be successful, if a proper system of accountability is provided, as the citizens expect their representatives to be responsive to their needs, wishes and preferences. Accordingly, the PRIs must remain accountable for being responsive to the needs of the citizens, which they serve. This accountability should be on a day-to-day basis and not just once in five years when they go to seek votes (Ghosh, 2005). Many states have made provisions for the financial audit and social audit, which acts as a check mechanism. A good example of this is jan-sunwai or public hearings in Rajasthan, through which they compelled the panchayat leaders and government officials to account for development expenditure. All, that is needed is social activism like Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan in Rajasthan. People should be vigilant and should question the decisions of the members of PRIs, in case there is a genuine need, and also participate actively during discussions in the panchayats. However, the Right to Information (RTI) Act is a welcome step in this direction. The use and importance of RTI is visible in the MGNREGA. All

this will go a long way in ensuring accountability and transparency in the system and thereby, better functioning of the PRIs.

It is further suggested that the system of rotation in a reserved constituency should not be altered just after every election. In other words, a particular constituency should be reserved for at least two consecutive terms, enabling uninterrupted development on a sustained basis and only after that, without compromising on the principle of rotation, it should be continued. This will provide the members from the reserved constituency to have sufficient time at their disposal to establish a better rapport with the local people and their voters and also make them fully acquainted with the needs of that area.

Proper coordination between the Panchayati Raj representatives, officials and the local people is also required in order to make panchayats function in a better way. This three-way collaboration among the stakeholders will lead to an efficient implementation of the programmes/schemes and accruing more benefits and opportunities for the local people. Moreover, it will also ensure people's participation in decision-making.

Finally, the State has a vital role to play in providing support for the building of local institutions, legal framework and in creating enabling environment for people to participate and take the advantage of opportunities. The need of the hour is positive intervention by the state through policies for human resource development and institutional development are critical as these would strengthen the process of decentralisation. The State has to build institutional structures at the local levels and set standards to deal with the challenges of global trade, communication system, environment, labour laws, etc., which have a direct bearing on the lives of people in the villages, and simultaneously meet the standards of governance (Gupta, 2004).

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

- 1) "73rd Constitutional Amendment has provided many opportunities for effective rural local governance". Examine.

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- 2) Describe the necessary measures for effective rural local governance.

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13.5 CONCLUSION

Rural local governance is no magic wand as the experience indicates. Its success or failure hinges upon the nature of the institutions created, the extent of power and finances delegated, the pattern of power distribution among groups in the region and the participation of civil society. On the basis of the above analysis, it can be stated that the rural local governance has firmly been established in all the rural areas. Local democracy has been deepened, political participation broadened and representation diversified, particularly in the context of women empowerment, as a result of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. This process of governance has now given an opportunity to the rural local bodies to assume greater responsibility for rural management. The new system of governance has provided an element of continuity and enlarged the participatory process at the grassroots level. The states have taken certain measures to transfer functions and devolve funds upon the local bodies.

Despite this, the local bodies at the grassroots level are laced with the insurmountable task of addressing the problems. The experience brings to the fore the need to address the challenges faced by the local bodies to meet the desired standards of governance. In this process, the State has a vital role to play, so that the right kind of system of governance is established at the grassroots level. The periodic shuffling and reshuffling of leadership by way of regular elections and an increase in the level of politicisation of the local community will certainly ensure the success of the PRIs in the foreseeable future. Transparency, accountability, effective planning and efficient delivery of goods and services can go a long way in improving the decentralisation pattern in India.

13.6 GLOSSARY

Self Help Groups (SHGs): SHGs are usually informal clubs or associations of people, who choose to come together to find ways to improve their life situations. The most useful role for an SHG is to provide its members opportunities to save and borrow, and it can act as a conduit for the banking services to reach its members. Such groups can provide a guarantee system for members who borrow or they may develop village banks in their own rights. In rural areas, SHGs may be the only way for people to get financial services (<http://www.ruralfinance.org/servlet/CDSServlet?>).

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS): It is a registered society set up in 1990 to fight corruption related to departmentally implemented public works programmes. They supported the struggles of rural workers on issues of non payment of full minimum wages. They also raised issues like fabricated muster rolls in works

implemented by the Gram Panchayats under Jawahar Rojgar Yojana, a centrally sponsored scheme. The mode of public hearings initiated by MKSS commences with the gathering of people in a village by the beat of drums and then a demand for all documents related to works undertaken with public funds.

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13.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should include the following points:
 - For your answer, refer to Section 13.2
- 2) Your answer should include the following points:
 - For your answer, refer to Section 13.2 (v)

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Your answer should include the following points:
 - For your answer, refer to Section 13.3
- 2) Your answer should include the following points:
 - For your answer, refer to Section 13.4

SUGGESTED READINGS

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