



# Empowering Panchayats: building trust in local governance institutions through development plans, lessons from Bhachau block, in Kutch district Gujarat

Location:  
Bhachau, Kutch

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Kanthkot Village - a view from the top  
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Women from the tribal community, who were earlier dependent on forest resources have had to change their livelihood practices  
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## Background

*The preparation of GPDP in itself has been a great learning experience and an opportunity to incorporate risk management into the development planning at the ground level.*

In a remote area in Gujarat's, Kachchh district lies Kanthkot, a Gram Panchayat consisting of four villages with a total population of 3000 people. The village is characterized by a semi-arid drought prone landscape with rare occurrences of flash floods. The land is mostly undulated with a lot of slope variations and has a considerable wetlands area with approximately 14 small and big water bodies are present in the Gram Panchayat. Along with that, the GP has almost 20,000 acres of forest cover. After the devastating earthquake in 2001, a large number of houses were destroyed along with the school that took the lives of 50 children. Following the earthquake was a period of unregulated infrastructural development in the entire district. The focus of service infrastructure to boost industry in the area has adversely affected the common property resources including the wetlands and other natural resources in the landscape. Kanthkot Gram Panchayat is home to people of different communities who are involved in different livelihood practices – mainly agriculture, animal husbandry and agricultural labour.

The region has witnessed impacts of climate change. Rainfall patterns have changed in the past 25-30 years. The quantity of total rainfall has not changed much (mostly increased), but the downpour has become more sporadic and irregular. If this rainfall data of the region is analyzed in details, it will be seen that there have been dry spells for some years while, very good rainfall for some years. The mean maximum temperatures have shown considerable increase in the past 50 decades. The impacts of these changes are visible mainly through the changes in the agricultural practices and land usage. Due to increases in heatwaves in the area, the moisture retention of the crops has decreased, increasing the cost of irrigation and for the rain-fed crops, the quality is compromised. The use of pesticides in such conditions have led to adverse impacts on the soil and crops. The agricultural laborers also have to reduce their time of work which ultimately affects their earnings. The heatwaves have had an impact on the water bodies that can store water for lesser period than before or get completely dried up during summers, which affects the households engaged in animal husbandry adversely. Over all, these have affected the health of the community members, especially children.

The Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) is an essential tool, recognized by the panchayati raj department, for enhancing rural development but also for addressing the vulnerabilities of the poor and the marginalized sections. GPDP is being used as tool in PfR by mainstreaming IRM measures specifically nature-based solutions to enhance water security for building resilience. The participatory approach adopted by UNNATI enables community members to voice their opinions and include their ideas within the GPDP. The preparation of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan in itself has been a great learning experience and an opportunity to incorporate risk management into the development planning at the ground level.



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Community participating in natural resource mapping  
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Local leader addressing the community on the significance of reducing disaster risks and managing the available natural resources  
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*Historical profiles were created for the gram panchayat with reference to the past disasters, their frequency and intensity, sources of livelihoods, land use patterns, rainfall patterns, cropping patterns, agricultural practices, mapping of natural resources and their uses, types of cattle, types of diseases, etc.*

### Empowering PRIs: The process of preparation of GPDP in Kanthkot

The process of preparing the GPDP for Kanthkot GP started with meeting the members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI), which are the local governing bodies at the village level. The Sarpanch (elected head of the village), the Upsarpanch (deputy-sarpanch), the Talati (Revenue officer) and members of the PRI and different village level committees, along with some local leaders were continuously engaged in the planning process.

The first step after initial meetings was to take a transect walk around the villages in the Gram Panchayat. This enabled a basic understanding of the community settlements – which community is settled at what locations, density of settlements, available physical services in these locations, evacuation points in emergencies, local resources that can be used during emergency periods, land use and the landscape. For data collection, several participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods and tools were used. Especially, the use of hazard vulnerability capacity assessment (HVCA) and ecosystem services shared value assessment (ESSVA) tools were done to get an all-encompassing picture of the village situation. Social and resource mapping were done including natural resource mapping. Also, timelines were produced with the community to understand historical and seasonal trends. Historical profiles were created for the gram panchayat with reference to the past disasters, their frequency and intensity, sources of livelihoods, land use patterns, rainfall patterns, cropping patterns, agricultural practices, mapping of natural resources and their uses, types of cattle, types of diseases, etc. This included major events in history that the community remembers and changes associated with them. The use of the seasonal calendar tool enabled to map the changes in the occurrence of disaster events, rainfall, temperatures, migration, cropping cycle, etc. Several focused group discussions were carried out with pastoralists, farmers, daily wage laborers, artisans and they were done separately with men and women, and service providers. Also, government programmes and services were mapped.

All of these contributed to the risk assessment in the Gram Panchayat, through which gaps were identified and major issues and concerns to be addressed with regard to the services, infrastructure and livelihoods were noted down. Because of unequal power relations in the social structure, certain groups of the community are bound to get excluded. The multiple layers of discrimination lead to unequal access to resources and facilities that reduce the capacity of these people to cope with the risks. Through the HVCA tools, the vulnerable groups were identified not just based on their location which puts them at risk, but also with regard to other physical, social, economic, political and environmental factors. Based on these findings, a draft action plan was prepared.

Following which, a second round of consultations took place and action points were determined for each issue or concern, in consultation with the PRI members, departments and the community based on their traditional methods and innovations with those ideas. The action points were prepared in accordance with the GPDP guidelines 2018 by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, the SECC data for the vulnerable and deprived groups and Mission Antodaya; and they address the concerns of the global frameworks like the SFDRR, SDGs and COP21 under the UNFCCC. The Sarpanch, the Deputy-sarpanch, who are responsible for the overall provision of services and the development of the GP and the Talati had a very important role to play as they gave a lot of inputs to strategize the steps to be taken and how resources can be leveraged to complete those actions. This helped in making a resource envelope for the Panchayat. This expanded the sources of funds available with the Panchayat to carry out the activities like Panchayat's own source income, government departmental funds, state and district government grants, various public schemes and programmes, local NGOs and private companies and finally community contributions. They also contributed to how the vision of the Panchayat can help take up the no cost development agendas. These areas for development may not require any additional financial assistance, which may be achieved through proper implementation of programs and schemes and behavioral changes - especially to address social inequalities and exclusion in the Gram Panchayat. Based on these activities, the Panchayat developed a 5-7 years plan and a yearly plan was prepared with regard to the priorities of the Panchayat.



### Key highlights from the plan

The whole process of preparation of the GPDP in Kanthkot Gram Panchayat brought about some very significant observations, which can also be called as the major highlights of the planning process.

*They have decided to work on, not just the water distribution system in the GP, but also on the sources of water, so that they do not have to face water scarcity in the future, through a catchment treatment plan and working for alternate sources of water.*

- Trust in PRI enhanced: the Panchayat members were able to once again realize that they are the focal governing institution of the Gram Panchayat for any kind of development activities.
- The PRI members paid a lot of attention to revival of the common property resources in the GP, including water bodies, land and forests through capacity building initiatives by UNNATI.
- Using the landscape approach: the PRI members and the community recognized and planned to rejuvenate the defunct ponds, so that they can be sustained for a longer period of time. They have decided to work on, not just the water distribution system in the GP, but also on the sources of water, so that they do not have to face water scarcity in the future. For the whole catchment, a treatment plan (watershed development plan) is proposed to be formulated to combat erosion and biomass run off, that may be linked with various government schemes. Deepening and embankment (ogan) repair in ponds is included in the plan for alternative sources of water. Small embankments to be constructed to avoid wash outs and construction of more check dams which will prevent the problem of soil erosion is included in the plan document.
- Along with the focus on water, the development of the common grazing lands for the cattle is on their agenda, for which they have identified around 1000 acres of land.
- They have made special efforts to regain the livelihood of communities based on the forest land and its resources, which they had to change because of issues related to forest rights. Also, training or workshop to be organized by the panchayat for local farmers on the use of locally produced seeds and how to increase productivity with the same is being included in the GPDP.
- Through the various PRA activities carried out in the GP, the impacts of climate change on the livelihoods of people were discussed on various occasions. Given the present drought situation in the area, sustainable cropping patterns and agricultural practices garnered lot of attention and discussion. Awareness generation about insurance schemes and their incentives and links with Prime Minister Fasal Bima Yojana is a part of the plan.
- The process of the GPDP brought out the prospects of how the government agencies, technical institutions like IMD and local weather stations may be roped in to initiate development activities in the GP and has been included in the plan by the Panchayat.
- Some core disaster risk reduction measures, like clearing the natural passage of water flow to avoid logging, upgradation and retrofitting of identified households with tile and sheet roof and linking the kachcha houses to PM Awas Yojana, has been incorporated in the GPDP as well. The whole process of the preparation of the GPDP threw light on the importance of the natural resources in the development of a village and the services which they provide to the community that resides there. The process enabled the PRI members along with the community to think about reviving or maintaining these natural resources in a strategic manner, through a government mechanism in place. This also may help other civil society organizations to get an overview of the significance of intervening at the local levels and how the same can be done for mainstreaming the IRM approach in development planning.

