**Background**

The role of panchayati raj institutions (PRIs), the constitutionally mandated local authorities in planning economic development and imparting social justice, is critical for ensuring social inclusion. However, one of the concerns of the Government of India is the lack of capacity of panchayats to deliver their mandate. In addition, a large number of elected representatives of PRIs are unaware of their roles and responsibilities, programmes, procedures or systems. In fact, past experience has shown that mere creation of structures of elected local governments does not necessarily guarantee effective local governance. For devolution to be real and meaningful, local governments should be effectively empowered to frame regulations, take decisions and enforce their will.

It is against this background that the Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan (RGPSA) was launched in 2013. It is a holistic scheme of the Government of India to strengthen panchayats in the country. RGPSA aims to enhance the capacities of panchayats and gram sabhas; enable democratic decision making in panchayats; strengthen institutional structures for knowledge creation; promote devolution of powers and responsibilities to panchayats and gram sabhas; and strengthen the constitutionally mandated framework on which panchayats are founded.
About the project

In line with the priorities of the Government, the primary focus of the project is to strengthen the functioning of panchayats through better implementation of the Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan at national and state levels. It also aims to strengthen the functioning of gram sabhas through social mobilizers in schedule V areas.

Developments so far

A consultation on developing human resources for strengthening panchayati raj institutions as part of RGPSA was held on 19 November 2013. The workshop was organized for sharing best practices in the area of recruitment of personnel at local government level to strengthen the capacity of PRIs and training institutions.

Looking to the future

- Strengthening RGPSA division on issues such as finance; gram sabhas’ mobilization; Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA); natural resource management and livelihoods; institutional development and civic services
- Developing capacities of the faculty of state panchayat resource centres and district resource centres
- Developing information packets on the role of PRIs in social sector programmes for each of the sectors such as education, health, women and child development, natural resource management, livelihoods, and water and sanitation
- Engaging grassroots-level organizations and leading resource institutions in activities aimed at strengthening the capacities of panchayati raj institutions
- Organizing thematic consultations in support of exchanging ideas and galvanizing states into action
- Building institutional mechanisms for strengthening the capacities of mobilizers who are responsible for effective functioning of gram sabhas in Schedule V areas

Empowered lives. Resilient nations.

UNDP partners with people at all levels of society to help build nations that can withstand crisis, and drive and sustain the kind of growth that improves the quality of life for everyone. With offices in more than 170 countries and territories, we offer global perspective and local insight to help empower lives and build resilient nations.