

**Capacity Building for Right to Information and Gram Sabha: A Catalyst for  
Citizen Centric Governance at the Village Level in Telangana State of India  
(A MCR HRD Institute Initiative)**

Dr. MCR HRD Institute of Telangana has recently established a Centre of Excellence (CoE) on Capacity Building for Right to Information (RTI) and Gram Sabha. The project sanctioned by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), Government of India, seeks to strengthen Citizen Centric Governance at the Village Level by promoting people's participation, transparency and accountability in the local self government institutions at the village level, i.e., the Gram Panchayats and the Gram Sabhas.

The CoE's primary objectives are to strengthen the functioning and effectiveness of Gram Sabhas which are the basic level decision making entities at the village level through improving access to public information at the grassroots. It aims to improve attendance and active public participation in Gram Sabhas, promote transparency and participatory decision-making and ensure accountability.

Further, the CoE strives to increase voluntary disclosure of information at the Gram Panchayat level and facilitate social audits of public-funded works and schemes. By addressing low awareness and limited participation, the CoE creates a culture of informed citizenry, ensuring that delivery of public services at grassroots level is transparent, accountable and responsive to the needs of all, especially women and marginalized sections.

To achieve these goals, the CoE has been implementing a robust action plan since its launch in December 2024. With a sanctioned budget of ₹2 crore (USD 2,34,227), it established a coordination team at the Institute to coordinate the activities of the



project in collaboration with the Panchayat Raj Department. Training Needs Assessment (TNA) workshops were conducted with elected representatives and officials to identify gaps in RTI knowledge,

Gram Sabha processes and leadership skills.

The inputs were used to develop training modules for training of four key stakeholder groups at village level: viz. (i) Panchayat Secretaries, (ii) Elected Representatives like Sarpanches and ward members, (iii) Line Department Functionaries responsible for public service delivery such as education, nutrition, health, etc., (iv) Self-Help Group (SHG) and Civil Society members. These modules cover topics on practical governance, RTI compliance and women's empowerment, incorporating group exercises focusing on social justice.

District Resource Persons for imparting training to these stakeholder groups were identified. Two Training of Trainers (ToT) programs have equipped 94 District Resource Persons to impart district-level training, to over 6,000 stakeholders commenced in April 2025.

By training Panchayat Secretaries, who serve as administrative cornerstones, and Elected Representatives, including Sarpanches (Elected heads of Gram Panchayats), the CoE ensures that Gram Sabhas become vibrant platforms for obtaining actionable information, collective decision-making and monitoring. The unique provision of Mahila Gram Sabhas, mandated by the Telangana Panchayat Raj Act, 2018, promotes women's leadership and participation, aligning with the Constitutional provisions and global priorities highlighted in the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration on women-led development.

The CoE is also developing a standardized, customizable website template for Telangana's over 12,769 Gram Panchayats to enable proactive disclosure of critical information, such as budgets, schemes and Gram Sabha proceedings, according to Section 4 of the RTI Act.

Through training and digital tools, the CoE enables citizens to monitor welfare schemes, demand accountability and access essential services like drinking water, sanitation and birth certificates. Enhanced transparency protects the rights and interests of low-income communities.



Despite the constitutional significance of Gram Sabhas and the RTI Act, several gaps impede the effective governance at the grassroots. Low awareness of RTI law and Gram Sabha among citizens and officials and reluctance to disclose information

limits their impact. Participation barriers, particularly for women and marginalized groups, result in low attendance at Gram Sabhas. Additionally, capacity deficits among Panchayat Secretaries and Elected Representatives inhibit their ability to facilitate inclusive Gram Sabhas and respond to RTI requests effectively.

The CoE attempts to address these gaps through a multifaceted approach. Comprehensive training equips stakeholders with the legal and procedural knowledge needed to steer RTI and Gram Sabha processes. Training Modules on Gram Sabhas provide necessary tools to promote inclusivity, empowering common people to participate effectively and meaningfully in governance. Institutional collaborations with the Telangana Institute of Rural Development and civil society groups ensure sustainable impact. By developing digital tools like standardized websites, the CoE enhances proactive disclosure, making information accessible to rural citizens.

The CoE's transformative potential lies in its ability to create a virtuous cycle of political and economic empowerment for rural citizens and transparent and accountable governance. Its efforts to equip citizens with RTI tools and participatory governance mechanisms help ensure inclusive service delivery and sustain vibrant democratic forums at the village level. The CoE has the potential to serve as a national model for bridging the gap between constitutional ideals and grassroots realities by strengthening village level governance and embedding the public institutions with mechanisms of values of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity.