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GOA INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION & RURAL DEVELOPMENT



Panchayati Raj Institutions and COVID – 19: Challenges And The Way Ahead.

(Let's beat it together)



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READY RECKONER

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Objectives

The objective of preparing this Ready Reckoner is to make the Local Bodies aware of the challenges before them due to the COVID -19 pandemic. By using this Ready Reckoner, the Local Bodies will be able to identify key concerns related to their Village, and its community and address them.

This booklet is prepared for the benefit of the training of the PRIs. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, everything is affected and the need of the hour is to build the capacity of the Panchayats so as to enable them to successfully overcome the challenges of these tough and testing times.

Abbreviations

GPDP – Gram Panchayat Development Plan.

IPHB – Institute of Psychiatry and Human Behavior.

IT – Information Technology.

NCC – National Cadet Corps.

NGO – Non Government Organisation.

NSS – National Service Scheme.

PDS – Public Distribution System.

PHC – Primary Health Centre.

PRIs – Panchayati Raj Institutions.

SHGs – Self Help Groups.

Panchayati Raj Institutions and COVID – 19: Challenges and the Way Ahead.

1. Introduction.

The COVID – 19 has brought the entire world to a halt and every other State is trying hard to come out of this pandemic situation. As every level of Government authorities are playing their role, the Local Self-Government bodies too have a critical role to play since they are the grassroots level governance agency / body.

2. Challenges faced by the Panchayats.

The entire country will be faced with diverse challenges and Goa is no exception to it. Therefore it is important to identify these challenges and start working upon an action plan to address them. In view of the COVID – 19, the local government institutions are expected to face problems of the following nature.

2.1 Health related challenges.

Due to the COVID – 19, health has been a major concern. Due care has to be given to sanitation, hygiene and health related protocols so that every individual is protected from the COVID – 19 as well as from other illnesses. The Panchayat definitely has to ensure that every person, each ward and the village as a whole is safe and take due precautions to remain healthy.



2.1.1 Role of the Panchayats and preparedness to handle these challenges.

1. Create awareness on a continuous basis regarding the precautions to be taken among the citizens.
2. Periodic fumigation, cleanliness drives in the wards and public places such as schools, anganwadi, PDS centers, Panchayat Office, health centres, bus stops, etc.
3. Create a database of people who had/have tested Corona positive, so as to monitor their health parameters and encourage them to take adequate medical action and follow up.
4. Monitor home quarantine of families.
5. Monitor events and programmes/ social gatherings arranged by the villagers, as and when, such events / gatherings are permitted.
6. Arrange periodic health check ups and health camps for senior citizens and children.
7. Ensure that public toilets in the village have water supply.
8. Ensure that the panchayats are equipped with functional thermal guns and all visitors are checked.
9. Ensure periodic collection and treatment / disposal of waste and encourage mandatory segregation at source.

10. Identify people with critical illnesses ward wise, so that they receive due attention and medical care.
11. Conduct sanitation and cleanliness drives.
12. Devise a system to penalise those who violate social distancing norms and personal hygiene in public places, as well as, not putting on a face mask.
13. Devise protocols for hygiene, cleanliness, entry, social distancing, etc in all public places in the village panchayat area.
14. Create a high voltage awareness drive on COVID - 19 with factual data.
15. Devise a plan /mechanism to handle suspected cases of Corona particularly those are returning to Goa from outside the State. It is expected that students, sea farers and people stranded in foreign countries and other parts of the country will arrive into Goa. This may be done in collaboration with the Health Authorities.
16. Mobile Apps can be developed with the help of colleges which can be used by people to seek details of various services, etc.
17. Attitude and behavioural change among people is important,Hence, plan for dissemination of information on hygiene practices, do's and don'ts related to COVID - 19, social distancing, etc.

18. Plan educative programmes related to health care.
19. Arrange to reach out to those who are home isolated/quarantined.
20. Ensure the regular health services such as vaccination, etc are provided as required.
21. Create a database of educated unemployed ward wise, who can be trained in para medical services such as first aid, bandaging, checking blood pressure, sugar level, injections, etc.; whose services can be availed by those suffering from diabetes, minor injuries, hypertension, etc.
22. WhatsApp groups can be created and necessary information regarding the services available, COVID -19 management plan and key information can be circulated on a regular basis. These groups could be ward wise under the control of the Ward Member.
23. The Health and Sanitation Committee should be activated and periodic reports on the above parameters should be insisted upon by the Sarpanch.
24. Engage with Religious Institutions, Social groups, NGOs etc., to create awareness amongst the community.
25. Ensure compliance with the guidelines issued from the Government, District Administration, Police and Health Authorities from time to time.

2.1.2 Special attention to Senior Citizens.

The senior citizens are said to be in the vulnerable groups, hence they need to be specially attended too. The Panchayat can have a monitoring group exclusively to focus on the senior citizens in the village.



1. Check on them frequently, preferably by phone, given the risk of transmission.
2. Plan for providing them with groceries, supplies and medicines.
3. Make sure they have at least a month's stock of all their regular medicines in case they need to stay home.
4. Help them connect with doctors, neighbours, friends and family if needed.
5. Remind them to wash their hands frequently, keep objects and surfaces clean, and avoid physical contact with those who are sick.
6. Make a plan in case they fall ill and decide how transportation will be arranged to seek immediate health care. Also arrange for a weekly checkup on their medical status.
7. Encourage them to maintain a healthy lifestyle:

eat nutritious foods, get enough sleep, don't smoke, stay active and limit alcohol use.

8. Be kind and show empathy. Talk and listen to them. Help them cope with stress.

2.3 Economic challenges.

Several households in the villages are going to face economic hardships due to loss of livelihood / livelihood options / jobs cuts and resulting in



low income as a consequence of the lock down. Economic activities will be hit badly. The key activities related to tourism, food and hospitality services, public transport, service industry and also foreign remittances will reduce thereby affecting incomes of the people and affecting the local economy at large. Undoubtedly, this is the time to make efforts towards building a self-sufficient and self-sustainable village.

This is a major challenge for the Village Panchayats in the COVID -19 period. Hence they will have to identify the potential activities within the village which can provide livelihood for the people. An assessment of the possibility of livelihoods through agriculture and allied activities, horticulture, animal husbandry – poultry, dairy, fishing and initiating /reviving micro and small scale industries will become important. Besides, traditional livelihood options, artisan craftsmanship, etc. could be revived.

2.3.1 Role of Panchayats in addressing economic challenges.

- 1.** Identify the list of opportunities for agricultural activities including horticulture and allied activities etc. within the village through focus group discussions with SHGs, farmers, unemployed youth, etc.
- 2.** Analyse the GDPDP reports of the past five years to identify the projects which can be taken up by the villagers. A plan to this effect will have to be worked upon.
- 3.** The Production Committee of the Panchayat should be activated and an action plan for revival of agriculture and related activity, other MSME activity etc. should be prepared with the help of experts.
- 4.** Involve SHGs in agriculture, food processing, value addition programmes and activities, related to such groups and organisations have to be initiated.
- 5.** Identify outlets /marketing area or other mechanisms for sale of agriculture produce, other products, etc. Arrange skill based training related to agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, apiculture, sericulture, pisciculture and allied activities, with the help of related Government Departments.
- 6.** Encourage kitchen gardens in the village.
- 7.** Encourage vermicomposting which can be used for agriculture activities/kitchen gardens.

8. The SHGs should be encouraged and provided with income generation work in the above areas so that micro and small scale livelihood activities can get initiated within the village itself.
9. Services of the SHGs should be availed for providing essential services in times of need to the people. (community kitchens, stitching masks, supply of groceries, providing allied goods and services, etc)
10. Alternate sources of income generation for the Panchayats need to be studied and a action plan initiated for its implementation.
11. Identify uncultivated land including Comunidade land for community farming.
12. Identify projects related to desilting of water bodies. Besides, identify projects for various natural resources within the village which can yield benefits to the village community.

2.4 Social challenges.

The present scenario may give rise to several social problems such as alcoholism, drug abuse, eve teasing, abuse of women, greater incidence of sexual harassment, higher school dropout rates, robberies and thefts due to unemployment, domestic violence, etc.



It is seen all over the world, including India that cases of domestic abuse have increased during the lockdown period. The present scenario of lock down has also kept the students away from studies. Therefore it is necessary to consider this problem as a critical one and efforts have to be made to reduce and eliminate such cases in the village. The youth need to be engaged in meaningful tasks and activities.

2.4.1 Role of the Panchayat in addressing the social challenges.

1. Channelize the youth into meaningful activity.
2. Skilling and self employment activities for the youth.
3. Periodic sessions on motivation, dealing with depression, loneliness, etc.
4. The youth/students can be asked to join various Committees of the Panchayats so that they can contribute to the work of each Committee.
5. The youth can be involved to teach e-skills / IT related skills including mobile usage skills (e.g operating a mobile and apps to the SHG women, senior citizens, others in the community), so as to propagate IT related knowledge to the community at large.
6. The youth can help prepare database of the households, database of the youth themselves, prepare an inventory of the various Government and public assets in the village, prepare signages and communication plan in the village.

2.5 Psychological challenges.

Loss of jobs, bleak employment opportunities will put strain on the people. This could lead to psychological problems such as depression, stress etc, leading to family discords, affecting relationships, etc. There are reports stating the rise of cases of mental stress among people during the COVID – 19 period.



2.5.1 Role of the Panchayat in Psychological challenges.

- 1.** Stress management sessions will have to be conducted periodically. Recordings of such sessions can be circulated to all.
- 2.** Time management sessions can be arranged by the panchayat.
- 3.** Counselling centre can be set up in the village panchayat. Counselling can be provided over telephone as well.
- 4.** Activate all committees by encouraging people to join them.
- 5.** Engage a Helpline for domestic violence, abuse, etc. This can be done with the help of organisations like SANGATH, IPHB or any such agency etc.

2.6 Role of the Panchayat in managing the unorganized work force.

The unorganized workforce in the villages has been contributing to the local economy. Panchayats have a role to see that the unorganized labour is monitored periodically to ensure that they too abide by all the hygiene and health protocols set out by the Panchayat.

1. Create a ward wise database of the unorganised/ labour.
2. Identify the places of work so that social distancing norms and personal hygiene is enforced through the employer.
3. Periodic checking of the unorganised labour for symptoms through the PHC.
4. Periodic checking of the migrant children at Anganwadi centres / schools if at all they are enrolled.
5. Arrange for community kitchens, if required.

3 Additional efforts from the Panchayats.

In addition to the above, the Panchayats have to undertake the following activities which will enable them to address the challenges more effectively.

3.1 Creation of database.

The Panchayats will have to work like a liaison institute with different service providers / Government Departments /NGOs/schools and colleges. A data base of these needs to be maintained by the Sarpanch, Secretary, Ward Members and VDC Convenors.



1. Database of all key and essential officers/other revenue officers/Police, Principals of Schools / Colleges / Doctors / Medical practitioners / Fire and Emergency Services in the area, etc.
2. Create a list of all senior citizens, those staying alone, with contact numbers, ward wise.
3. Create a list of all the associations, clubs, with contact details.
4. Develop a database of all households with contact details,ward wise. This database could be prepared with the help of NSS volunteers, NCC cadets, teachers, ward members, students etc.
5. Create a database of unorganized work force residing in the village.
6. Database of students ward wise.

7. Directory of service providers like plumbers, electricians, carpenters, etc. who can be contacted by people in need.

3.2 Activate the Committees at the village level.

The Village Development Committee (VDC) and other Committees have to be activated. The Panchayat members alone will not be able to manage the herculean task before them and hence these Committees can be the helping hands for the Panchayat Body.

3.2.1 Role for the Committees.

The VDC should work closely with the Sarpanch and the Ward members.

- a. The VDC can identify the people/person who have had travel history and report to the helpline no/PHC/CHC. VDC can help identify such persons who have recently entered the village from outside the State
- b. The VDC can identify all the senior citizens living in the village premises so that they can be attended to, during the distribution of services/ration/health, etc.
- c. The VDC can identify distribution points ward wise for distribution of essential services/ration, etc.
- d. The VDC can monitor the lockdown (subsequent restrictions as and when imposed by the Authorities) and report any non compliance to the concerned Authorities.

- e. The VDC can try to identify the needy so that they can be provided with necessary help.
- f. The VDC can monitor the distribution of the services/ration at the village level.
- g. Identify the youth in the ward and rope them in, to teach basic IT skills to SHG women/senior citizen/others on their smartphones.
- h. Vigilant groups should be formed by the VDC members, ward wise so that they can check or monitor people visiting the wards, social distancing norms are followed by the shops, vendors, etc. Vigilant rounds, tours should be made to these places.
- I. Ensure essential services like clinics, grocery, PDS, etc, are open and operate to reduce the hardships caused to the people.

3.3 General concerns/preparedness.

1. The Panchayat should prepare for the monsoons and also prepare for the illnesses which can come up, such as vector borne diseases like malaria, dengue, etc.; and other monsoon related illnesses.
2. Educate people on garbage segregation and disposal.
3. Prepare for the festivals which are approaching such as Ganesh Chaturthi etc. and identify the challenges the Panchayat may have to handle during this period.

4. Plan for community kitchens if at all the need arises. These can be entrusted to SHGs and the primary schools can be centres to operate these kitchens.
5. Discourage stigmatizing of COVID – 19 positive patients and their families. Share factual and authentic data, and support people providing essential services.
6. Conscious planning and allocation of funds is necessary to strengthen healthcare facilities, existing infrastructure facilities – water bodies, internal village roads, etc.
7. Prepare Disaster management plan to handle any type of disasters etc.

(Note: The challenges, role to be played by the Panchayat Body, activities suggested in this Ready Reckoner are not exhaustive and the Panchayat Body should identify more such challenges, more activities, more innovative solutions, so as to further add on to the several suggestions made in this Ready Reckoner)



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