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Do Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) Harbinger Grassroots Level Growth in Agricultural R & D Process ? : An Enquiry through SWOT Analysis

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I

INTRODUCTION

Rural development has been on the agenda of almost all political parties as well as the priority of the Government's Five Year Plans since Independence. Whatever may be the reasons for emphasis on rural development in the past, the present day circumstances point that many of the problems the country is facing at the national level like unemployment, stagnating production and productivity, poverty and price rise, urbanisation, and even the increase of population have their roots in villages. There is an increasing realisation among the political parties, planners and policy makers that rural development can no more be a vote or funds fetching slogan but it is the key issue for national progress.

There are two schools of thought to bring about rural development. One is of the ideology that rural development will take place by providing basic living facilities to the people in rural areas, i.e., drinking water, hospital, roads, telecommunication, and education. The village Panchayats (local self-government), therefore, should take in hand and concentrate more on these facilities. The other school of thought emphasises that rural development is to be achieved through agricultural development and the Panchayat system should give major impetus to agricultural research and development in rural areas. The second logic appears to be more appropriate because the increased agricultural production will result in not only in poverty alleviation and increase in employment, but also in generation of additional revenue to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). In turn, these institutions will be able to provide basic minimum facilities in a better way. Speaking strictly in business terms, agricultural research and development is to be treated as the 'key result area' for PRIs.

Therefore, the purpose of the present paper is (i) to analyse in length strengths(S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O) and threats (T), popularly known as SWOT, of the PRIs in the 'key result area' of agricultural Research and Development (R & D); (ii) to identify the roles that the PRIs could effectively play in agricultural R & D; and (iii) to suggest policy perspective to consolidate on strengths/opportunities (S/O) and minimise the effects of weaknesses/threats (W/T).

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PRIs in the Present Context

The PRIs were established in all the states of the Indian Union, with a few exceptions, to promote grassroots planning through people's participation. These institutions, however, could not grow fully because of a variety of factors, including apathy of the political parties. Finally, it was L.M. Singhvi Committee report submitted in 1986, which recommended to vest Panchayati Raj with constitutional status so as to make the identity and integrity of the PRIs reasonably and substantially inviolate. It led to the notification of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 on PRIs.

The Amendment provides a basic framework that it is obligatory on all the states to have three tiers of PRIs with a tenure of five years and re-elections are to be done within six months. The states having a population below 20 lakhs may not have Panchayats at intermediate level. The Act is not applicable to Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram and hills of Manipur and Darjeeling district of West Bengal because these areas have government notified political committees/unions. Every state will appoint a State Finance Commission (SFC) and a State Election Commission (SEC) to look after these aspects of PRIs. The Panchayats are to be assigned 29 subjects listed in the XI Schedule and of these as many as thirteen subjects are related, directly or indirectly, with agricultural and allied sectors. The seats have been reserved for weaker sections of the society like the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and women as members and as chairpersons which will be allotted by rotation among constituencies/wards. For further details of provisions in the Amendment, see FRCH (1996) and Biju (1998, pp.126-127).

Since the PRIs have been constituted in all the states except in Bihar and Jammu and Kashmir, there are 474 Zilla Parishads, 5,906 Panchayats Samities and 2,34,078 Village Panchayats working in the country at present.

Conceptualisation of Agricultural Development and PRIs Relationship

For an in-depth understanding of the concept, the term agricultural development fits into a triangular framework consisting of three components - production, farmers and institutions. The first component, production is the output of crops, animals, horticulture, forestry, fishery, etc. However, in order to cover developmental aspects, change in productivity instead of production is considered. To bring about growth in productivity and agricultural development, attention has been paid in the past to three things, namely, technological development, extension and input supply. The institutions providing these services are Universities, Research Centres, Departments of Agriculture and Co-operation and input supplying agencies. The studies conducted by Kumar *et al.* (1995) and other scholars indicate that the total factor productivity (or the output generated by a unit of inputs) growth has declined in the 1980s compared to the 1970s. In this context, it is being realised now that the institutions responsible for past agricultural development have lacked in their approach to direct technologies, extension and input services in the right perspective in the needy areas.

On the other hand, the farmer, the main player in the game, has generally been ignored in attempts for the agricultural development and in the National Agricultural Policy. His expectations, visions, intelligence and involvement have been ignored at every stage and

place. The contribution he can make through participation in decision-making process of agricultural development has been overlooked in the past. That is one of the important reasons that production has come to a standstill or even declined and developmental institutions have failed to perform effectively and efficiently. Though institutions have been able to perform better to some extent in potential areas, they have achieved limited success in backward, rainfed and less favoured areas. It has happened due to lack of understanding of the situation in these areas by the institutions and lack of involvement of people of the area to plan accordingly. That is why farmers' participation in research, planning, development and execution of programme is being increasingly advocated. The regular and consistent participation can be ensured through farmers' organisations but such organisations are either very weak or non-existing. Since each and every village in the country cannot have a farmers' organisation, the PRIs are the de facto farmers' organisations and can help in making the agricultural development institutions responsible and responsive to the farmers' needs and aspirations. Reaching investments and development inputs across large and widely spread areas needs active networks of grassroots level organisations, especially the PRIs (Rao, 1994).

Shift in Decision-Making Process

In the new environment of global liberalisation and emergence of strong civil society, there are two types of forces working in the decision-making process. One is top-down force where donors and the government are expecting that public funded institutions must reduce costs and demonstrate accountability. They are required to demonstrate, in concrete terms, their contribution to the well-being of the people and sustainable economic growth at the grassroots level. They are required to broaden their agenda to show more concern for poverty alleviation, resource management, and protection of environment. The agricultural R & D carried mainly in the public sector in developing countries, which will continue to be the same in the near future, is no exception to it and should be more responsive to the farmers and agribusiness sections.

The other is bottom-up force from clients and other stakeholders at lower levels to meet their expectations because of enhanced awareness and emergence of strong civil society in terms of economic independence, education and organisational set-up. These forces converge to the point of decentralisation and participation in the process of decision-making at the grassroots level. The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, 1992 was intended to facilitate decentralisation in decision-making process through Panchayati Raj system. The decentralisation empowers the people with authority to make decisions, devolve responsibility and resources to execute them. By facilitating peoples' involvement in the development process, decentralisation ensures economy, equity, effectiveness and accountability in the administration of development, besides ensuring corruption-free, cost effective, speedy, people-centred development (Dasgupta, 1995). Likewise, an active participation of the people in political, administrative and developmental decision-making ensures formulation of appropriate strategies and take adequate action for overall welfare of the society, in particular, and the development of nation, in general.

II

SWOT ANALYSIS OF PRIs

SWOT as an acronym stands for strengths (S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O) and threats (T). The SWOT analysis was initially used in industry. In management sciences, it plays a paramount role in understanding the management problems in micro- and macro-environment at all stages irrespective of the type of organisation. It is one of the effective tools of strategic management which may help policy makers and managers in shaping the strategic agency operating within a given situation or context (Rabin *et al.* 1989).

Strengths

1. *Politico-cum-Socio-Economic Development Institution at Grassroots:* A Village Panchayat is one of important institutions at the grassroots level for taking socio-economic development activities besides co-operatives and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Over and above, as a democratically elected body, Panchayats are supposed to articulate the voice of the majority. This institution has the largest recognition and widespread acceptance of its policies and decisions.

2. *Adequately Represent the Weaker Sections of the Society:* Poverty and malnutrition is more concentrated in small farmers, landless labourers, children, SCs, STs and women. Representation given to the SCs, STs and women in PRIs is likely to enhance their participation in decision-making process and thereby making various development programmes more concerned to their cause.

3. *Understanding of Ground Realities:* A member of a Panchayat is expected to have more realistic approach to the problems of a village than a MLA or MP because of his closeness with the community and better understanding of ground realities. They are in a position to suggest better solution based on people's expectations.

4. *Close Intimation with the Government as well as the People:* The Panchayats are immediately answerable to the people due to its closeness and, at the same time, have a close liaison with the government, being the political institutions and the third tier of governance.

Weaknesses

1. *Lack of Knowledge on Power, Authority and Responsibility:* The knowledge in respect of power, authority and responsibility of the PRIs is generally found lacking in a majority of the cases. A large number of office-bearers are illiterate or do not have adequate exposure to the functioning of these institutions, especially those belonging to the weaker sections and women. In many of the cases, the women members in particular are not able to move outside because of tradition and domestic obligations or some times, they are represented by proxy by their spouse or relatives.

2. *More Functions and Inadequate Revenue:* The revenue available to PRIs in comparison to the assigned functions is quite inadequate. The PRIs get funds from sources like (i) Central Government through Central Finance Commission; (ii) State Government; (iii) under Central Government rural development schemes such as Jawahar Rojgar Yojna; and (iv)

taxes and other resources. The inadequate finance made it beyond the capacity of the PRIs to perform all those functions especially those under the discretionary category like development of agriculture, animal husbandry and cottage and small industries (Babu, 1996).

3. *Lack of Technical Knowledge and Administrative Support:* Technical knowledge and administrative support of the PRIs are almost non-existent. It is difficult for the PRIs to perform the functions where specialised knowledge is required such as construction of roads or irrigation channel, soil and water conservation, training, health and sanitation, etc. The local institutions, because of their being associated with the area, can formulate plans/schemes and ensure their execution effectively in association with the expert departments but the PRIs do not have knowledge to perform these functions by themselves.

4. *Poor Fiscal Capabilities:* There is a lack of an organised system of fiscal data based on field studies and collected from primary sources. The financial capacities of the PRIs will strengthen in the new Act but it requires systematic fiscal data base to look into their performance in financing, planning and development at the local level (Mishra, 1996). Such an attempt will help the State Finance Commission to suggest improvements in PRIs' financial self-reliance.

Opportunities

1. *Participatory Planning and Development:* Planning from the top level has proved to be unrealistic at the lower level. The realistic planning requires people's participation at the local level so as to be able to meet the felt needs of the people. Various problems faced by the agriculture and allied sectors could be efficiently tackled with popular participation in the planning process (Biju, 1998).

2. *Guardians of Common Property and Natural Resources:* Villages are the treasures of natural resources. The biggest challenge is the conservation and sustainable use of these resources such as soil, water, forest, land, etc. As monitoring and control of these resources by an authority out of the village or locality are impossible, there is an opportunity to entrust this responsibility to the PRIs.

3. *Provide Village Information System:* Information is a power in the modern world. The availability of modern gadgets of information technology in rural India may require another 50 years. In such a situation, the PRIs can provide better village information system. The reading habit of the rural people is very poor. In the absence of this, information about technology, new programmes and government policies could be better covered by the Panchayats through Gram Sabha.

4. *Better Target-Growth with Equity:* The village Panchayats are better equipped to identify the poor and deprived group. Even if they identify the wrong person, they face the direct and immediate reaction from the society. The Panchayats can help in reallocation of crucial resource such as land, for the benefit of target group and bring about growth with equity.

5. *Participatory Agricultural Research and Extension:* In order to make agricultural research more need based and agricultural extension more target oriented, people's participation in setting research agenda and prioritisation of problems is lacking. In the present practice, the Agricultural Universities or Research Institutions invite progressive farmers

in proxy from the villages who lack the understanding of the process and feel reluctant to speak because of non-recognition in the group. The gap can be filled in by the PRIs having recognition as development institutes at the grassroots level.

6. *Technology Refinement in Rainfed and Dry Areas*: The technology developed for rainfed and dry areas have failed to perform well and requires tuning to the experience and resource base of the farmers. The farmer is a researcher also. Generally, he has ideas to refine these technologies to make them suitable in these areas. Those suggestions, guidelines and co-operation are not coming forth in the absence of a forum and representative body.

7. *Management of Agricultural Infrastructure*: The village system works on exchange and sharing basis. A large number of agricultural infrastructures at the village like irrigation ponds and channels, wells, link roads, common threshing and storage places, etc., have been developed either by the people themselves or with the assistance from the government. These are uniformly available to all people in the village irrespective of rich and poor. These facilities have been neglected for quite some time now due to lack of any institution to look after them and the farmers having small area and low purchasing power, have to pay the price to get these facilities or develop them on their own. Therefore, maintenance of such facilities for the benefit of poor farmers is essential and there is an opportunity to manage them better by the PRIs (Hunter and Bottrall, 1974).

Threats

1. *Political and Bureaucratic Apathy to Delegate the Power and Authority*: Panchayats is a state subject. There is a reluctance for State-level politicians to recognise the importance of lower levels of governance - their autonomy, their power and their areas of functioning. The State Governments have not vested these bodies with adequate powers and resources. The government officials and employees also prefer to work in close compartments and hesitate monitoring by any one else. However, the genuine devolution of powers will take place only through strong demand from below - the Gram Sabha, Village Panchayats and District Panchayat as well as enlightened citizens organisations (Mathew, 1997).

2. *Excessive Dependence on External Grants*: Decentralisation of governance does not end with elections alone but it looks for economic, financial and administrative autonomy. The autonomy of the PRIs on other fronts has also suffered in the past due to excessive dependence on Central and State financial transfers. It is, therefore, recognised that at least one half of local government revenues should be internally generated for local fiscal autonomy (Datta, 1996). The State Finance Commission (SFC) has a great responsibility to strengthen the fiscal self-reliance of Panchayats by augmenting own sources of revenues and develop a method for appropriation of state revenues.

3. *Lack of Clear Direction from Top to Bottom*: The very basic principle of decentralisation or delegation of power is the clarity of job, duties and jurisdiction. Any confusion, over-attempts, over-ruling of decision of the PRIs by the top two tiers of governments will do harm none other than to this crucial institution. The present state-of-art is a biggest threat to the existence and functioning of the PRIs.

4. *Assigning more of the Civil Work*: The PRIs have neither the technical know-how nor administrative support to do the civil work, supervise and keep records of the schemes. It has been observed that the PRIs are involved in the construction of roads, digging wells, laying drinking water lines, etc., for which they do not have any expertise. If these institutions remain busy in such works, they will not be able to perform other crucial duties like planning, co-ordination, monitoring, supervision, etc.

The SWOT analysis of the PRIs is helpful in carrying out a comparison among four components. Such a comparison is essential because the first two components - strengths and weaknesses, are related with internal appraisal whereas the other two components - opportunities and threats, are due to environmental factors or external appraisal. So, when the PRIs are appraised from these two angles, i.e., internal and environmental, it is easy to draw a note that environmental factors like Centre-State relationship, financial health of the state, positive attitude of politics towards the PRIs, assigning functions in specificity rather than broad areas as mentioned in the Schedule and equal financial support by the State Government, are going to play a very crucial role in the future progress and effectiveness of these grassroots level institutions.

III

ROLE OF PRIs IN AGRICULTURAL R & D

Keeping in view the SWOT analysis of the PRIs and its newly chartered mandate, these institutions can play an important role in three broad areas of agricultural R & D. These broad areas could further be divided into sub-areas for their detailed perception.

A. Agricultural Research and Extension

1. *Redefine Agenda of Research Institutions/Stations*: In the changing political and economic landscape, public sectors are also expected to demonstrate accountability and cost effectiveness. The agricultural research carried mostly in the public sector in developing countries, agendas are continuously to be revised including clients and other stakeholders in the decision-making process. To initiate and sustain success, the research institutions have to choose their programmes at the lower stage by involving the representatives of industry and the PRIs representing rural India and farmers. This can be done by constituting district level committees having representation of the PRIs and finalise the agenda at the institution level. The participation of these agencies will also result in increase of support base for agricultural research as well as improvement in the quality of decisions taken (ISNAR, 1997).

2. *Implement Research - Extension Link Programmes*: Only one-fourth of the technology evolved is reaching the farmers' fields, which emphasises more for research-extension linkages. Some of the programmes initiated to this effect in the past and at present are Lab to Land, Institution Village Link Programmes, National Demonstration Project, etc. The success of these programmes is uneven and selective. The success is more in areas having elected local institutions. These institutions ensure the flow of required feedback on the technology because of their being socially and politically active organisations.

3. *Participatory Research and Refinement*: The research methodologies which ensure participation of the farmers or group of farmers to identify the field problems, suggest traits to be incorporated in new varieties and integration of approaches like Farming Systems

Research, Participatory Rural Appraisal, Farm Production Systems, etc., are all based on the information provided by the 'key informants' including functionaries of the PRIs. Functioning of these institutions at the grassroots level will help effective implementation of such research methodologies.

In the process of technology generation, the knowledge developed by the farmers as per their requirements and resources, termed 'Indigenous Technical Knowledge' (ITK) in exact words, has been playing a significant role. These ITKs help the agricultural researcher to develop further and refine the already existing technologies.

B. Agricultural Development

1. *Programme Planning, Implementation and Disaster Management*: The Panchayats are to be responsible for formation of micro-level plans related to agricultural development and their implementation in the area. Given the technical support, the potential of Panchayati Raj can be utilised in the implementation of agricultural development programmes (Sinha and Jain, 1974) such as Desert Development Programme, Drought Prone Area Development programme and Livestock Improvement Programmes, with wider impact.

The importance of the PRIs has been observed in the programmes of disaster management in the event of drought, flood, cyclone, earthquake, etc., in prompt and efficient response and fair distribution of relief (Lieten and Datta, 1995). Such a political organisation at the grassroots level plays a pivotal role in preparing against disaster (Dreze and Sen, 1989) and in raising early warning about potential calamities (Manor, 1993).

Food security and nutritional health are the other issues that could be efficiently handled by the PRIs by identifying the vulnerable sections of the society, by maintaining constant supply of food and by increasing internal production through micro-level planning (Charurvedi, 1997).

2. *Input Distribution*: Panchayat Samitis at block level have been assisting in the supply of inputs like fertiliser, seed and pesticides. The supply of these inputs has also been maintained with the help of government agencies and co-operatives. Nevertheless, there was lack of co-ordination by combining the requirements of village Panchayats at block level and of Panchayat Samitis at district level (Rao *et al.*, 1974).

Major emphasis, in future, at the PRIs' level is required on quality of these services - timely supply and avoiding adulteration. Since the majority of the farmers operate on small and marginal land holdings, they cannot afford to purchase or maintain a tractor, thresher, sprayer or other heavy equipment involving huge initial investment. These equipments could be purchased by village Panchayats and supplied on rent to these farmers.

The institutional credit has always been illusive to the farmers. It has come neither in right quantity nor in required areas. The involvement of the PRIs in preparing the credit plans of regional rural banks and lead banks will help in the smooth flow of institutional credit to agriculture. Village Panchayats having solvency can also act as surety for the grant of loan to the needy farmers with poor resource base.

3. *Institutional Co-ordination*: Lack of co-ordination among various departments and institutions working at the village level is a major drawback of the present institutional framework and the end result is 'pick and choose' approach to the problems of agricultural development. There is a greater need for co-ordination at the village level than at the intermediate and top levels of the PRIs. The level of co-ordination at the intermediate level

is required more of technical type (Hunter, 1970). Various institutions including marketing boards, credit institutions and service units below the level of districts are required to work in close coordination with the PRIs.

In the open market structure of the economy, the whole world is shrinking to a village. There are many national and multinational seed and export-import companies working in close association with the farmers. In such circumstances, it becomes essential to look into the interest of the farmers. The PRIs could prove to be an effective moderator and convenor of such associations with judiciary powers.

4. *Agricultural Infrastructure and Resource Improvement*: The PRIs have the functions of construction and maintenance of roads, electricity and market structure. In addition, these institutions can play an active role in the development of storage and modern transportation facilities strongly required to meet the present market preferences. There is a need for land levelling and soil conservation measures for increasing moisture retention in rainfed areas. These activities require group action which can be better initiated by local self-governments. In the absence of a local institution not even an attempt has been made to overcome these constraints in realising the potential of the areas (Jain, 1997).

C. Natural Resource Management

Villages are the treasures of natural resources like land, water, forests, plant and herbs of economic importance, and bio-diversity. These resources are in more demand now to increase production and develop new bio-technologies. At the same time, these resources are available to the rural people especially the rural poor free of cost which keeps their cost of living low, increase production and generate additional revenue. The over-exploitation and encroachment of these resources affect directly the rural poor and the economy as a whole. Consequently, the rural people individually and their organisation as a group are more concerned about conservation and sustainable use of these resources. The PRIs can play a pivotal role in the conservation of these resources. This will help in meeting the food requirement, sustaining the life of the rural poor and in overall agricultural development, in the long run.

1. *Equal Sharing of Resources*: In the present environment of individualism, and hoarding and gripping over resources, the owner of natural resources is going to be the richest in future. A rural community unaware, to some extent now, of this phenomenon is facing the threat of owning of resources by a few people and commercial exploitation of these resources. A very important task, in that case with the PRIs, is to provide equal sharing of benefits of these resources by all people especially the poor ones. In this direction, as a first step, the PRIs have to provide land rights to the farmers and protect these rights. The local institutions can perform this function effectively in the case of other resources provided they are given the right directions to this effect.

2. *Conservation and Sustainable Use*: Another important aspect in natural resource management is the conservation and their sustainable use. The shifting of land, forests, water, grassland in the village under the control of Panchayats will result in their development, improvement and conservation. The forestation of common lands with trees of economic value, horticulture plants and auction of grasslands will generate additional

revenue to the Panchayats. Similarly, auction of herbs and aromatic plants for commercial purposes will yield royalty to the villagers. The PRIs, being a political and democratically elected body, can enforce the regulation for the use of these resources.

3. *Environment Protection*: The absence of an institution at the grassroots level to guard the use of natural resource has resulted in open mining, pollution of water and deforestation. The mining, extract has affected agricultural land and destroyed water resources. The use of explosives in mining has failed to generate employment to the rural people, on one side, and has endangered the topography and very existence of life and habitat, on the other. There are reports from different parts of the country that an individual or group of individual farmers has challenged this trend in the courts. But the cases are pending in the court for a long time because of the influence and tactfulness of the business houses and some times the petitioner has faced life threats also. Such a situation arises when the petitioner is an individual. If the petitioner is an institution of democratically elected persons, the offender has to yield to the directions. The PRIs has greater role to play in environment protection, and protect the interest of the people by bringing culprits to the books and act as an advisory body to the Pollution Control Boards of the Government. Otherwise these boards sitting at a distance are unable to watch and ward the environment of villages which are the respiratory system of the country as a whole.

On the basis of above discussion and SWOT analysis, the levels of authority in different areas of agricultural R & D that can be assigned to the PRIs, have been compiled in Table 1. Two important inferences could be drawn from the study of the table. (1) The PRIs have the strengths and opportunities to play an important role in certain areas of agricultural development such as agricultural research and natural resources and disaster management. And (2) the main authority in the case of research-extension linkages and input distribution should be vested with Panchayats at village level and Zilla Parishad at district level respectively. In input distribution, procurement and distribution cost will determine the efficiency and it can be achieved if operated in bulk after pooling the demand at lower level. In the case of research-extension linkages, village Panchayats have the required strengths to follow this continuum.

IV

POLICY PERSPECTIVE AND CONCLUSIONS

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are the local institutions explicitly accountable for rural development and implicitly responsible for agricultural development. The importance of this politico-democratic institution in socio-economic development of the people has been realised since Vedic period. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 has given it a new constitutional status and proposed to extend power, responsibility and autonomy for its effective functioning. From an analysis of Strengths (S), Weaknesses (W), Opportunities (O) and Threats (T) of the PRIs with reference to 'key result area' of agricultural R & D, the following points of policy perspective and conclusions can be made.

1. Agricultural development activities are to be the major functions of the PRIs to bring wholesome development in rural areas. It includes participatory planning, management of infrastructure and input distribution. The additional revenue for the local institutions from marketing, organisation of fairs, transportation, royalty and joint venture profits, will subsequently enable Panchayats to provide better civic facilities.

TABLE I. LEVEL OF AUTHORITY OF PRIS IN DIFFERENT AREAS IN AGRICULTURAL R & D PROCESS

PRIs	Agricultural research and extension				Agricultural development			Natural resource management		
	Redefine agenda of research	Research-extension linkages	Participatory research	Planning, implementation and disaster management	Input distribution	Institutional co-ordination	Infrastructure and resource improvement	Equal sharing	Conservation and sustainable use	Environmental pollution
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
District level	Main authority			Main authority	Main authority*		Helping authority		Helping authority	Helping authority
Intermediate level	Co-ordinating authority	Co-ordinating authority	Main authority			Main authority	Co-ordinating authority		Main authority	Main authority
Village level	Helping authority	Main authority*	Main authority	Main authority		Co-ordinating authority	Main authority**	Main authority	Co-ordinating authority	Co-ordinating authority

* Disagree with XI Schedule; ** Agree with XI Schedule.

2. To change the stereotype functioning of the Research Institutions/Universities the PRIs should be involved in various committees of research prioritisation, reviewing, social auditing and impact assessment in their respective areas. The PRIs can perform an active role in Participatory Research. Therefore, there is a need to incorporate agricultural research along with extension in the functions of agricultural development in the Schedule.

3. Different departments working at the village level lacks co-ordination and work in isolation which result into failure of many important plans. Thus the PRIs should act as a co-ordinating, monitoring and evaluation body. These departments especially Department of Agriculture and Co-operatives should work in close co-ordination with the PRIs to make the activities of departments impact oriented. A new system is required to be evolved to involve the PRIs in formulation, planning and execution of each activity of government departments.

4. Disaster management in the case of flood, drought, earthquake, cyclone, etc., should be added to the functions of the PRIs. Having close contact with the people in the area, they must be involved in making contingency plans, distribute assistance and execute rehabilitation work depending on the resources and local conditions.

5. The Dunkel draft and World Trade Organisation agreement have unleashed another reign of terror among the agricultural community. The PRIs should come forward to protect the interests of the farmers in the exploitative nature of market economy. The very important responsibility that these institutions can take is the documentation of ITKs, products of Geographical Indicators and spices/herbs of economic importance existing in their areas which could be a reference book for any writ petition against patenting of those items.

6. The Panchayats should be made guardians of the natural resources and bio-diversity at the village. These may be common land, forests, grasslands, plants and animals of economic importance. These institutions should have the authority to regulate commercial use, development, conservation and protection of these resources.

7. There has been always a complaint about inadequate flow of credit to the farmers in the village in the absence of adequate surety. Since the individual is a member of the Gram Sabha and Panchayat is aware about the creditworthiness and moral character of the farmers, if village Panchayat is made surety for bank loans, the flow of institutional credit to agriculture will increase.

The role of Panchayats in agricultural development have not yet been exactly defined except the fact that as many as 13 items listed under the XI Schedule of the Constitutional Amendment belong, directly or indirectly, to agricultural and allied activities. Therefore, there can not be any question as far as the role and responsibilities of Panchayats in the field of agriculture is concerned. What is needed is that, keeping in view the positive outcome of the SWOT analysis, measures are taken to ensure a far greater role to the PRIs in the promotion of agricultural development by incorporating agricultural research, natural resources and disaster management.

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