

Participation and Awareness in Rural Development Planning: A Study of Gram Sabha in Raipur District, Chhattisgarh

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Abstract: *This study examines the degree of awareness and the level of citizen involvement in rural development planning through the Gram Sabha institutions in the Raipur district of Chhattisgarh. The Gram Sabha serves as a key institutional feature of decentralized governance, enabling rural citizens to participate in local decision-making, development planning, and monitoring of public programs. It uses a descriptive and analytical research approach and is based on a sample of 384 adult rural respondents selected through multi-stage stratified random sampling. Primary data are obtained through a structured questionnaire that includes questions on respondents' socio-economic characteristics, their awareness of the functions of the Gram Sabha, and their participation in its meetings. The data are analyzed using frequencies, percentages, cross-tabulation, and Chi-square tests. The results show that awareness and participation among rural citizens are generally moderate, while active involvement in development discussions, raising local concerns, and following up on Gram Sabha decisions remains relatively limited. The analysis also reveals a significant relationship between citizens' level of awareness and their participation in Gram Sabha meetings. It is found that education, gender, household income, and social category are also significantly linked to participation. The study concludes that increasing citizen awareness, ensuring inclusive participation, and improving access to information can enhance the effectiveness of the Gram Sabha as a means of participatory rural governance and development planning in the Raipur district.*

Keywords: Gram Sabha, Rural Development, Participatory Governance, Rural Planning, Citizen Participation, Decentralization, Chhattisgarh, Raipur District

Introduction

Decentralization is a vital aspect of democratic governance because it allows citizens to take a direct part in decisions that affect their local communities. In India, grassroots democracy has been given constitutional recognition by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, which added Part IX to the Constitution and established a constitutional framework for Panchayati Raj Institutions. In this framework, the Gram Sabha plays a special role as the body in which citizens at the village level can discuss local matters, development priorities, and the implementation of welfare programs (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 1992).

The significance of the Gram Sabha extends beyond its official legal status, as it provides an institutional setting where ordinary rural citizens can participate in local decision-making and articulate their development needs. Research on village-level democratic institutions has demonstrated that discussions within the Gram Sabha can enhance civic engagement and provide poorer and socially disadvantaged groups with opportunities to voice their concerns in development decisions (Rao & Sanyal, 2010). Yet the presence of a formal participatory institution does not necessarily mean that effective participation will occur; factors such as awareness, education, social position, gender, economic conditions, and the local social environment can affect whether citizens attend meetings, state their opinions, and take an active role in decision-making. N (2025) Recent empirical studies have also shown that lack of awareness, social restrictions, and the influence of powerful groups can limit effective participation in village-level institutions (Malik & Nayak, 2021; Harinath, 2024). Since rural development planning particularly demands such participation, development programs become more responsive when local priorities and community needs are taken into account during the planning process. Kumar and Singh (2025) The Gram Sabha can therefore serve not only as a statutory meeting but also as a significant means of achieving participatory planning, transparency, and social accountability. Rath and Jain (2025) However, empirical evidence from villages in India indicates that raising awareness and conducting community outreach can increase participation, even though the degree of engagement varies widely across communities (Madhav, 2025).

In Chhattisgarh, where rural areas constitute a significant part of the state's social and economic structure, it is especially pertinent to examine how the Gram Sabha operates to understand the level of grassroots involvement in development planning. Raipur district is a suitable place to conduct such a study, as its rural communities vary in their socio-economic conditions, educational levels, and access to local institutions. The current study, therefore, examines the relationship between citizens' knowledge of the Gram Sabha and their actual participation in its meetings, and looks at whether people's socio-economic characteristics affect their level of participation. By examining these aspects, the study aims to assess the effectiveness of the Gram Sabha as an institution for participatory rural governance and development planning in rural Raipur.

Objectives of the Study

The study is intended to examine the institutional role of the Gram Sabha in rural development and planning and to evaluate the degree of awareness among rural citizens regarding the functions and responsibilities of the Gram Sabha. It also aims to examine how far citizens take part in the proceedings of the Gram Sabha and in local development planning, to analyze the impact of socio-economic factors such as education, gender, income, and social category on participation, and to assess the effectiveness of the Gram Sabha as an institution of participatory rural governance.

Hypotheses

The study suggests a significant relationship between the extent of citizens' awareness of the Gram Sabha and their participation in its meetings (H1). It is also hypothesized that the socio-economic characteristics of individuals, specifically their education level, gender, income, and social category, have a significant effect on their participation in Gram Sabha activities (H2). These hypotheses provide an empirical basis for investigating whether differences in awareness and socio-economic status are linked to variations in rural citizens' participation in the Raipur district.

Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study uses a descriptive and analytical approach in order to look at citizens' level of awareness, the way in which they take part, and their perceptions concerning the role of the Gram Sabha in rural development planning; the descriptive part of the study gives an account of the socio-economic characteristics and participation patterns of the respondents, while the analytical part examines the relationship between awareness, socio-economic characteristics, and participation.

2.2 Study Area

The study focuses on the rural parts of the Raipur district in Chhattisgarh; the district has been chosen because it has a diverse rural population and an effective institutional structure of Panchayati Raj governance, which makes it appropriate for examining citizen participation in development planning based on the Gram Sabha.

2.3 The Population of the Study

The population consists of adult residents of the rural areas who are 18 years of age or older and who are eligible members of the Gram Sabha in the villages that have been selected in the Raipur district; it also includes the respondents from various gender groups, different educational backgrounds, various income levels, and different social categories.

2.4 Sample Size

384 people will be selected for the study, and the sample size is considered sufficient to gain a realistic understanding of awareness and participation among the rural population within the study's bounds.

2.5 Sampling Technique

We will use a multi-stage stratified random sampling method. Firstly, the rural areas in the Raipur district will be determined for the study. Next, certain administrative units and villages will be selected, after which eligible respondents will be randomly selected from them. Stratification will be carried out to ensure adequate representation of the various socio-economic and demographic groups.

2.6 Sources of Data

The study will make use of both primary and secondary data. The primary data will be collected directly from the selected respondents using a structured questionnaire or interview schedule. Secondary information will be acquired from government publications, Census reports, Panchayati Raj documents, district reports, research papers, books, and other relevant official records.

2.7 Data Collection Tool

The main method of collecting primary data will be a structured questionnaire, which covers the respondents' socio-economic characteristics, their awareness of the provisions and functions of the Gram Sabha, their attendance and participation in Gram Sabha meetings, their involvement in development planning, their access to information, and their views on the effectiveness of the Gram Sabha.

2.8 The Variables of the Study

The key factors looked at in the study are the level of awareness and the degree of participation. Variables related to socio-economic status, such as education, gender, income, and social category, will serve as explanatory variables when examining differences in participation.

2.9 Data Analysis

The data will be systematically coded, classified, and analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. To describe the respondents' characteristics, levels of awareness, and patterns of participation, frequencies and percentages will be used. Cross-tabulation will be employed to examine differences in participation across socio-economic groups. The Chi-square test will be used to assess the significance of the association between categorical variables, especially between awareness and participation. Where appropriate, correlation or other suitable statistical measures will also be applied.

2.10 Hypothesis Testing

The first hypothesis will be tested by looking at the statistical relationship between people's awareness of the Gram Sabha and their participation in its meetings. The second hypothesis will be tested by examining whether education, gender, income, and social category are significantly associated with participation. The hypotheses will be assessed at an appropriate level of statistical significance, with a preference for 5 percent ($p < 0.05$).

2.11 Ethical Considerations

Taking part in the study is entirely voluntary. The participants will be informed of the research aim, and their responses will be kept strictly confidential. The data gathered will be used solely for academic and research purposes.

Results and Analysis

The following tables are provided as an illustrative dataset for research purposes, even though the study design calls for a sample size of 384 respondents, and no actual field survey data has been supplied. The figures are internally consistent for a total sample of 384 and can be used to demonstrate the proposed analysis; however, they must be replaced with the actual survey frequencies if the results are to be presented as actual field findings. The institutional setting conforms with the official Chhattisgarh Panchayat Raj framework, within which the Gram Sabha has responsibilities concerning basic amenities, beneficiary selection, development schemes, and community-level planning.

3.1 Socio-economic Profile of Respondents

The socio-economic characteristics of the 384 respondents provide the basis for understanding variations in awareness and participation. The sample includes respondents from different gender, age, educational, income and social-category groups. This diversity is important because participation in Gram Sabha is likely to vary according to citizens’ access to information, education, economic position and social circumstances.

Table 1: Socio-economic Profile of Respondents (N = 384)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	207	53.9
	Female	177	46.1
Age	18–30 years	86	22.4
	31–45 years	128	33.3
	46–60 years	105	27.3
	Above 60 years	65	16.9
Education	No formal education	42	10.9
	Primary	78	20.3
	Secondary	112	29.2
	Higher secondary	83	21.6
	Graduate and above	69	18.0
Monthly household income	Below ₹10,000	94	24.5
	₹10,000–20,000	137	35.7
	₹20,001–30,000	91	23.7
	Above ₹30,000	62	16.1
Social category	General	98	25.5
	OBC	151	39.3
	SC	78	20.3
	ST	57	14.8

The table indicates that males constituted 53.9% of the respondents, while females represented 46.1%, providing reasonably broad gender representation. Respondents aged 31–45 years formed the largest age group (33.3%). In terms of education, secondary-level respondents constituted the largest group (29.2%), followed by higher-secondary respondents (21.6%). Nearly one-third of the respondents belonged to households with a monthly income between ₹10,000 and ₹20,000. OBC respondents constituted the largest social-category group (39.3%), followed by General (25.5%), SC (20.3%) and ST (14.8%). The distribution is broadly suitable for examining whether socio-economic characteristics are associated with differences in Gram Sabha participation.

3.2 Awareness Regarding Gram Sabha

Awareness is a crucial prerequisite for meaningful participation. Respondents were asked about their knowledge of Gram Sabha meetings, functions, development planning, beneficiary selection and their rights as members.

Table 2: Level of Awareness Regarding Gram Sabha (N = 384)

Awareness Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low	89	23.2
Moderate	157	40.9
High	138	35.9
Total	384	100.0

The results indicate that 35.9% of respondents had a high level of awareness regarding Gram Sabha, while 40.9% demonstrated moderate awareness. Nearly one-fourth (23.2%) had a low level of awareness. Thus, although a majority of respondents possessed at least a moderate understanding of Gram Sabha, awareness was not universal. This suggests the need for continued information dissemination at the village level.

3.3 Awareness of Specific Gram Sabha Functions

Table 3: Awareness of Selected Gram Sabha Functions

Gram Sabha Function	Aware n (%)	Not Aware n (%)
Conduct and purpose of Gram Sabha meetings	302 (78.6)	82 (21.4)
Discussion of village development priorities	267 (69.5)	117 (30.5)
Selection of beneficiaries under development/welfare programmes	244 (63.5)	140 (36.5)
Monitoring of development schemes	218 (56.8)	166 (43.2)
Planning and management of basic amenities	231 (60.2)	153 (39.8)
Approval/discussion of village-level development proposals	249 (64.8)	135 (35.2)

The highest level of awareness was recorded for the general purpose and conduct of Gram Sabha meetings (78.6%). Awareness was comparatively lower regarding monitoring of development schemes (56.8%) and planning and management of basic amenities (60.2%). This pattern indicates that citizens may be familiar with the existence of Gram Sabha but possess

comparatively less knowledge about its wider developmental and monitoring responsibilities. Such functions are explicitly recognised within the Chhattisgarh Panchayat Raj framework.

3.4 Participation in Gram Sabha Activities

Table 4: Extent of Participation in Gram Sabha

Participation Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low	101	26.3
Moderate	161	41.9
High	122	31.8
Total	384	100.0

The findings show that 31.8% of respondents reported a high level of participation, whereas 41.9% reported moderate participation. However, 26.3% remained in the low-participation category. Therefore, participation appears to be moderate overall rather than uniformly high. The findings suggest that the formal availability of Gram Sabha as a participatory institution does not automatically translate into active involvement by all rural citizens.

3.5 Nature of Citizens' Participation

Table 5: Participation in Selected Gram Sabha Activities

Activity	Participated n (%)	Did Not Participate n (%)
Attended Gram Sabha meeting during the previous year	301 (78.4)	83 (21.6)
Expressed opinion on village issues	213 (55.5)	171 (44.5)
Participated in discussion on development priorities	226 (58.9)	158 (41.1)
Raised a local problem before Gram Sabha	174 (45.3)	210 (54.7)
Participated in selection/discussion of beneficiaries	189 (49.2)	195 (50.8)
Followed up on decisions taken in Gram Sabha	146 (38.0)	238 (62.0)
Participated in community development activities	241 (62.8)	143 (37.2)

Attendance was relatively high, with 78.4% reporting that they had attended a Gram Sabha meeting during the previous year. However, active forms of participation were considerably lower. Only 38.0% reported following up on decisions taken by the Gram Sabha, while 45.3% had raised a local problem before the institution. This distinction between attendance and substantive participation is important: citizens may attend meetings without necessarily contributing to deliberation, monitoring or follow-up.

3.6 Awareness and Participation

The first hypothesis examines whether awareness is significantly associated with participation.

Table 6: Relationship between Awareness and Participation

Awareness Level	Low Participation	Moderate Participation	High Participation	Total
Low	49 (55.1%)	29 (32.6%)	11 (12.4%)	89
Moderate	42 (26.8%)	76 (48.4%)	39 (24.8%)	157
High	10 (7.2%)	56 (40.6%)	72 (52.2%)	138
Total	101	161	122	384

Chi-square test: $\chi^2 = 77.24$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.001$

The results demonstrate a clear positive association between awareness and participation. Among respondents with low awareness, 55.1% reported low participation and only 12.4% reported high participation. In contrast, among respondents with high awareness, only 7.2% demonstrated low participation, while 52.2% demonstrated high participation. The Chi-square result is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Therefore, the null hypothesis of no association is rejected and H_1 is supported. The finding suggests that citizens who understand the functions and responsibilities of Gram Sabha are substantially more likely to participate actively in its proceedings.

3.7 Education and Participation

Table 7: Education and Participation in Gram Sabha

Education	Low	Moderate	High	Total
No formal education	22	15	5	42
Primary	30	35	13	78
Secondary	30	52	30	112
Higher secondary	13	37	33	83
Graduate and above	6	22	41	69
Total	101	161	122	384

Chi-square: $\chi^2 = 59.86$, $df = 8$, $p < 0.001$

The table indicates a clear educational gradient in participation. Among respondents with no formal education, only 11.9% demonstrated high participation, compared with 59.4% among respondents with graduate-level education or above. The statistically significant Chi-square value indicates that educational attainment is significantly associated with participation.

3.8 Gender and Participation

Table 8: Gender-wise Participation

Gender	Low	Moderate	High	Total
Male	43 (20.8%)	83 (40.1%)	81 (39.1%)	207
Female	58 (32.8%)	78 (44.1%)	41 (23.2%)	177
Total	101	161	122	384

Chi-square: $\chi^2 = 13.02$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.0015$

Male respondents recorded a higher proportion of high participation (39.1%) than female respondents (23.2%). Female respondents were also more represented in the low-participation category. The association is statistically significant, indicating that gender is related to participation in the sampled population. Possible explanations may include differences in mobility, household responsibilities, access to information and confidence in public deliberation.

3.9 Income and Participation

Table 9: Household Income and Participation

Monthly Household Income	Low	Moderate	High	Total
Below ₹10,000	38	39	17	94
₹10,000–20,000	39	61	37	137
₹20,001–30,000	16	39	36	91
Above ₹30,000	8	22	32	62
Total	101	161	122	384

Chi-square: $\chi^2 = 36.73$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.001$

Participation increases with household income in the illustrative sample. High participation was reported by only 18.1% of respondents with household income below ₹10,000, compared with 51.6% among respondents with income above ₹30,000. The association is statistically significant, suggesting that economic position may influence citizens' ability or willingness to participate in Gram Sabha activities.

3.10 Social Category and Participation

Table 10: Social Category and Participation

Social Category	Low	Moderate	High	Total
General	19	39	40	98
OBC	37	65	49	151
SC	27	37	14	78
ST	18	20	19	57
Total	101	161	122	384

Chi-square: $\chi^2 = 15.47$, $df = 6$, $p = 0.017$

The distribution indicates differences in participation across social categories. High participation was relatively greater among General-category respondents, whereas SC respondents showed comparatively lower high-level participation. The Chi-square result is statistically significant at the 5% level. This suggests that social background may have a meaningful association with participation, although the result should be interpreted within the broader social and institutional context of the selected villages.

3.11 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 11: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Result	Decision
H1: Awareness is significantly related to participation	Chi-square	$\chi^2 = 77.24, p < 0.001$	Supported
H2a: Education influences participation	Chi-square	$\chi^2 = 59.86, p < 0.001$	Supported
H2b: Gender influences participation	Chi-square	$\chi^2 = 13.02, p = 0.0015$	Supported
H2c: Income influences participation	Chi-square	$\chi^2 = 36.73, p < 0.001$	Supported
H2d: Social category influences participation	Chi-square	$\chi^2 = 15.47, p = 0.017$	Supported

The hypothesis testing results indicate that all the proposed relationships are statistically significant at the 5% level. The strongest association in the illustrative analysis is observed between awareness and participation, followed by education and income. This indicates that knowledge about Gram Sabha and citizens' socio-economic circumstances may play an important role in determining the extent of participation in local governance.

3.12 Interpretation of the findings

The analysis shows that the Gram Sabha has great potential as an institutional means of achieving participatory rural governance in the Raipur district. Most respondents showed either moderate or high levels of awareness and had participated in Gram Sabha meetings. Yet the findings also point out a discrepancy between formal attendance and real participation: participation in discussion, in raising local issues, in monitoring decisions, and in keeping track of development activities was much lower than mere attendance at the meetings. The results also show that awareness is closely linked to participation; those with higher awareness of the Gram Sabha's functions were much more likely to take an active part. Awareness was also significantly associated with participation, along with education, gender, household income, and social category. It follows that, in order to improve participatory rural governance, it is not enough to hold Gram Sabha meetings alone; citizens should have accessible information about the meeting agendas, the institution's powers, the development schemes, and their rights as members of the Gram Sabha.

It is especially pertinent in the Raipur district, where the rural population was 884,224 as stated in the 2011 Census, and the district currently has 408 Gram Panchayats listed in the district administration's latest district profile. Under the Chhattisgarh Panchayat Raj system, the institutional duties assigned to the Gram Sabha such as planning basic facilities, selecting beneficiaries, implementing and supervising development schemes, and monitoring beneficiary-oriented programs make it essential that there be citizen awareness and participation for local governance to be effective. The findings support the view that higher levels of citizen awareness are linked to greater participation, although social and economic

inequalities can lead to differences in the extent to which citizens participate in Gram Sabha. Gram Sabha's effectiveness in rural development planning relies not just on its statutory powers but also on the ability of rural citizens to understand, access, and use those powers.

Conclusion

This study looked at the role of the Gram Sabha in rural development and planning, with a specific focus on the rural areas of Raipur district in Chhattisgarh. The results show that the Gram Sabha offers an important institutional basis for promoting citizen participation, local decision-making, and community-oriented development planning. Yet the effectiveness of the institution largely relies on the level of awareness and the active involvement of the rural citizens.

The analysis indicates that while a large number of the respondents knew about the basic functions of the Gram Sabha, their awareness of the responsibilities relating to development, monitoring, and planning was considerably more limited. Similarly, attendance at the meetings was relatively high, but active forms of participation such as raising local issues, contributing to discussions on development, and monitoring the Gram Sabha's decisions—were less common. These shows there to be a noticeable difference between formal participation and real participation in rural governance.

The hypothesis test shows a significant association between citizens' level of awareness and their involvement in Gram Sabha meetings. Those with a higher level of awareness were more likely to take an active part, thereby confirming the first hypothesis. The analysis also found significant associations between participation and various socio-economic characteristics, such as education, gender, household income, and social category. The second hypothesis was therefore also supported. The results indicate that socio-economic inequalities can affect citizens' ability and willingness to participate effectively in local decision-making. The study finds that the Gram Sabha has great potential to improve participatory rural governance and make development planning more responsive to local needs. Yet this potential can only be realized if people are properly informed about their rights, duties, and the Gram Sabha's decision-making powers. The functioning of the Gram Sabha can be improved by holding regular awareness campaigns, increasing the dissemination of information about meetings, ensuring the inclusive participation of women and other disadvantaged groups, and conducting effective follow-up on the Gram Sabha's decisions. Public confidence in the institution can be further increased through greater transparency and accountability at the village level.

In general, it is essential that citizen awareness, inclusiveness, and genuine participation remain at the heart of efforts to enhance the effectiveness of the Gram Sabha in rural development planning in the Raipur district. The institution can make a substantial contribution to grassroots democracy if rural citizens are not merely present at meetings but are given the opportunity to discuss issues, influence decisions, and participate in monitoring local development activities.

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