

# How an ordinary Sarpanch is making a difference

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When Suresh G. Chhanga took charge as Sarpanch (the head of a village) of Kunariya panchayat

in Gujarat, there were many challenges for him to tackle. For example, problems such as lack of public participation at every level, decision-making by limited people in the panchayat, lack of co-ordination among local government officials, problems with drinking water supply, irregular local services by panchayat, unemployment and high drop-out rate of girls from schools were some of the glaring issues.

To solve these problems and improve the well-being of its citizens, the Gram Panchayat took up various activities. From January 2017 to May 2019, The 33-year-old created employment opportunities worth approximately Rs 1.2 crore to 552 families under MNREGA scheme. Under National Food Security Act, nine families were given rations regularly.

Nutrition Day was celebrated for children and pregnant mothers in order to increase awareness against malnutrition. Cooking competitions were being organised at the level of 'Anganwadi'.



In 2017-18 alone, by routinely following these activities, the risk of malnutrition has been reduced by 50 percent. For the past two years, three programmes have been organised for distributing sanitary pads to adolescent girls. For development to take place it is necessary for changes to take place in thought processes of people. To this end, 115 awareness programmes on health, education, agriculture, animal husbandry, women participation, cleanliness, employment and environment are being organised for the past two years, in which approximately 16,000 citizens have participated so far.

Chhanga leveraged the media to ensure proper information was given to the citizens so as to increase their participation in various programmes. These included mediums such as use of loud speakers at religious places, voice calling using own voice, SMS texts in Gujarati language, Whatsapp groups, public notice boards and Facebook.

To create engagement and motivation in schools, teachers were felicitated and student admissions gradually increased. Events were organised to mark Water Day and Environment Day. As many as 20,000 trees were planted in two years

Chhanga started women's meetings for encouraging their participation in various development programmes. A separate meeting hall was arranged for women. Efforts were also made to increase women's participation in regular panchayat as well as 'gramsabha' meetings. As a result, women's participation in 'gramsabha' increased from zero to 50 percent. To ensure that villagers receive local entitlement services, he implemented the State government's 'SevaSetu' programme in which 65 people registered their Aadhar card and ration card-related queries, and 40 people registered for Chief Minister's 'Amrutam' programme card. Using CM's 'Amrutam' card, eight people got medical treatment free of cost. In the future, Chhanga plans to streamline services offered by the present panchayat. He also aims to ensure 99 percent school attendance, and plant 20,000 more trees.

