

Citizen's Assertion Campaign

COVA - PUCAAR

Citizen's Assertion Campaign

Setting the Political Agenda

Participation in Planning and Governance

- Only Members of Parliament and Legislative Assemblies had the opportunity to participate in the process of development planning
- With the advent of the functioning of Panchayats and municipal bodies, Panchayat members, Counselors and Corporators gained powers to engage in development planning for their respective areas.

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- Common people did not have any say in the formulation of the development plans at any level
- Their only prerogative was their vote
- That was made available to them once in five years
- That was also rendered ineffective as an expression of political will of the people
- Due to multiple malpractices by political parties
- Like rigging, purchase of votes, intimidation etc

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- 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India empowered the Panchayat and Municipal bodies to take up the development planning of their areas
- These two Amendments are also opening doors for the common people to participate in developing plans for their areas
- Through the medium of Grama Sabhas and Area Sabhas
- There is no election or nomination required for membership of a Grama Sabha or Area Sabha
- Only requirement to participate is that one should be a registered voter of the area

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- Area Sabhas and the Grama Sabhas are mandated to prepare the basic plans for the development of their areas and determine priorities
- All the higher bodies like the Ward Committees, Panchayats, Municipalities etc are expected to take into account the recommendations of the Grama and Area Sabhas for formulating any plans for development.
- Most people are still not aware of this power and prerogative available to them
- To participate in governance and become shapers of the development of their areas

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Setting the Political Agenda

- Most think of approaching politicians and the system for redress of simple and basic complaints and requirements
- Without realizing that most of their problems are the result of defective planning and execution
- If proper and people centric planning and well monitored execution is undertaken most issues and problems will not arise at all
- Even if they do, could be resolved easily
- People centric development planning cannot be expected from politicians
- There has to be sufficient and sustained pressure from the people for a planning that would deliver equitable, holistic and sustainable development

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Setting the Political Agenda

- Need to sensitise people to go beyond approaching the system as subjects and supplicants
- Motivate them to actively participate in the processes of planning and governance through the medium of the Grama Sabhas and Area Sabhas
- With the opportunity to participate in the processes of governance people can now set the political agenda for development
- Instead of allowing only politicians to decide and determine the trajectory of development and growth of the country

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Politicians Agenda v/s Peoples Agenda

- Politicians setting the agenda for over 60 years
- Two Types of agendas promoted by politicians:
- Divisive- based on caste, religion, region, language etc- against the basic principles of equity and social justice-
- leads to discrimination, exclusions and social conflicts
- Tokenistic: Mandir, Masjid, 2 rupee kg rice, colour Televisions-
- leads to diversion from the real needs and issues of people –

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Politicians Agenda v/s Peoples Agenda

- Divisive and Tokenistic political agendas enable politicians to bypass the real challenges of developments like education, health, basic services, livelihoods etc.
- When real challenges of development are not addressed- everyone suffers-
- Including members of their own community
- who have voted them to power not on the basis of their integrity, track record of service to society and caliber as a leader
- But mostly on considerations of kinship.

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Politicians Agenda v/s Peoples Agenda

- **Sufferers:**
- People at large especially the poor and the marginalized
- Including members of their own community
- Development and progress of the constituency and the country
- **Gainers:**
- Political leader and his / her family
- Immediate circle of friends and political followers-
- Privileged members of society irrespective of their caste or community etc.

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Taking Politics Beyond Elections

- All politicians and political parties are competing for votes of people and not for their service
- People are also responsible for this state of affairs
- In any election many candidates contest but 3 to 4 are serious contenders
- With backing of regional or national political parties, large cadre and claims of political leadership in the area
- While only one candidate can win the elections- others lose by a few thousand and in some cases even with a few hundred votes
- But after the election results are declared people totally ignore and forget about all the other candidates and approach only the winning candidate for all their needs and requirements

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Taking Politics Beyond Elections

- Most times the elected representatives are unable to or do not bother to attend to the representations of the people
- There is an immediate need to set up competition between politicians not just for votes
- But also for service of the people
- If people make their representations not just to the elected representatives but also to those who had contested and lost or even to those who claim themselves to be political leaders then it is seen that they become active in taking up peoples issues for the following reasons
- Keep themselves busy and relevant
- Establish their own leadership
- Benefit from the publicity and recognition
- As preparation for the next elections

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Taking Politics Beyond Elections

- **Advantage People:**
- With leaders of the area activated for the redress of peoples needs
- Competition between different political leaders and parties for service to the people could be initiated
- Experience has shown that people gain whenever there is competition between political parties for serving the people
- Political competition can be initiated for local civic issues
- also for larger issues like health care, education, livelihood etc
- That could be addressed at the state and national level by ensuring their inclusion in the political manifestos of different parties

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Politicians enjoy power by making people fight

People can enjoy only by making politicians compete
for their service!

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Group Work

Operationalising Citizen's Assertion Campaign in Patna
/ Bihar

- The possibility
- Identification of different actors to be involved for initiating the Campaign
- Role of movements and civil society organisations
- Strategy and activities