

## Good Governance At The Grassroots: A Comparative Study of Youth Participation in Gram Panchayat And Village Committee in Tripura

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### INTRODUCTION

India has a large (about 68.8%) rural population. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of Nation, insisted on self-sufficiency of the Indian villages so that each village works as republic through decentralization of socio-economic and political power. The villagers through the Gram Panchayats (GPs) will be the sole authority in the decision-making process. The Panchayats will exercise legislative, executive and judicial functions. It will look after over all development of the grass root marginalized people. The GPs will be the grass root institutions working for strengthening grass root democracy in India (Madhumathi, 2011). Article 40 of the Indian constitution provided for forming of village panchayats. It confers with such powers and authority as required for functioning as units of self-governance. The Indian government appointed several committees to study the idea of implementation of rural self-government. The B. R. Mehta Committee, A. M. Committee, G.V.K Rao Committee and L.M. Singhvi Committee are most notables among them. Finally, after a prolonged negotiations the Government of India through the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 introduced three tier Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) with Gram Panchayat (GP) as the lowest grass root political institution (Singh, 2019). In accordance with the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment, the Government of Tripura enacted the Tripura Panchayat Act, 1993 introducing PRI in Tripura (The Tripura Panchayats Act, 1993). The Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India was introduced in Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) in 1988. Subsequently, the Government of Tripura established Village Committee (VC) in the TTAADC area under the Establishment of Village Committee Act, 1994. Since then, Tripura has two sets of grass root political institutions-the GP and the VC (Hansaria, 2010).

The grass root political institutions provide the foundation of grass root democracy. They provide an element of direct democracy where people can be involved in face-to-face relationship and direct communication with leadership and administration (Singh & Singh, 2010). Hence, understanding the issue of governance at the grass root democratic institution becomes pertinent. Ensuring good governance is equally important for good performance of democratic institutions including the grass root institutions like GPs within the Indian democratic set up. India is also a country with highest number of youth population. The role of youth is important in strengthening the democratic institutions and ensuring good governance through political institutions with reference to the GPs and VCs of Tripura.

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## METHODOLOGY

The study has been carried out in two selected GPs under Dukli R. D. Block and two VCs under Hazamara R. D. Block. From each selected GP and VC, 3 selected representatives with a total of 12 members, representing both male and female have been interviewed. Similarly, 15 respondents from each selected GP and VC totaling 60 respondents have been chosen through stratified random sampling on the basis of beneficiary and non-beneficiary, sex, caste and educational qualification criteria. The selected youth are within the age group of 18-39. The Panchayat Secretary and Secretary of the selected VCs and GPs have also been interviewed to gather primary sources of data. Besides, informal discussion with few government officials at the block level has been conducted to gather primary data. A semi structure interview schedule has been used for interviewing the selected respondents. Besides, research papers and reports, articles, internet sources, books, chapters, journals, government documents etc. have been used for collecting secondary data.

### Democracy And Good Governance: Conceptual Basis

#### Democracy

There is no consensus on the definition of democracy. It is widely accepted that democracy has been originated in the 5th century B.C. from the Greek words (demokratia) meant the “rule of the people”, where ‘demos’ referred to “people”, ‘kratos’ meant “power” (Nwogu, 2015). However, citizenship in the Athenian democracy was confined only to an elite class of free men. It excluded the slaves and women from participation.

In modern times, democracy generally refers to a system of government where people are considered as the ultimate source of power and where the powers are vested with different institutions responsible for making and executing laws, mediating and adjudicating disputes between individuals or groups to uphold the rule of law (Odoek, 2006). Therefore, separation of powers between legislative, executive and judiciary is another important aspect of democracy. Democracy is also understood in terms of the procedures followed within the political system. In most democracies, essential decisions are generally taken through popular elections, or opinion expressed by majority. In some democracies like Switzerland and France, plebiscite or referendum is also used to take political decisions. Sometimes, the idea of proportional representation is considered for representation of minority groups.

Abraham Lincoln's definition was the most notable one. According to him, democracy is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Jeremy Bentham argued for the greatest good of the greatest number in a democratic form of government. For Larry Diamond (2004), democracy means choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections with active participation of the citizens in politics and civic life. This includes protection of human rights of all citizens and provides equal opportunity to all citizens.

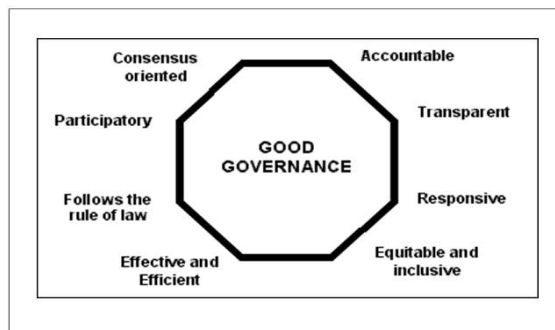
#### Good Governance

There is also no consensus on the definition of ‘good governance’. The idea of good governance received its importance in modern days administration and politics. Yet its origin can be traced back to the time of ancient Greek. Aristotle stood for good life of the citizens through the existence of state. The good life of the citizens was

again dependent on good governance (Carcaba, 2017). P. R. Chari defined good governance in terms of promotion of efficiency and transparency in public administration, respect for human rights and the rule of law with greater role for the civilian bodies in monitoring and managing the security sector (Chari, 2001).

The report of the World Bank (WB) entitled '*Governance and Development*' of 1992, defined good governance in terms of exercising power in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development (World Bank, 1992). Asian Development Bank (ADB) in its policy paper, 1992 on "*Governance: Sound Development Management*" defined good governance with four essential aspects: accountability, participation, predictability and transparency (ADB, 1992).

According to the UNDP, "good governance" refers to the process of exercising powers to ensure participatory, transparent and accountable governance. It promotes the rule of law, works for a broad consensus on political, social and economic priorities and hears the voice of the most vulnerable in decision making over allocation of development resources (UNDP, 1997)



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### Democracy, Good Governance and Role of Youth

It is pertinent here to consider some criteria and features of societies governed on the principles of democracy and good governance as : (i) does the ruling group hold and exercise government power in the interests of all sections of the people? (ii) Does it follow functional distribution of power among different institutions at various levels? (iii) What is the nature of the government's control over the political, economic and social life of the society? Does it include the participation of other groups in economic, social and political spheres? (v) Do the political, social and economic programs of the government consider the wishes of the people? (vi) Does it also willingly accept criticism or suppress the contrary voices? A meaningful response to these questions will help to understand whether a society is governed on the basis of good governance.

Nowadays, youth participation in governance is considered increasingly important because they are believed to possess the ability to develop innovative ideas, perspectives and provide solutions to problems. Therefore, youth voice with active citizenship in decision-making processes is important to shape their lives and the lives of the future generations holding leadership accountable to the people and the principles of good governance. India has a population of about 808 million below the age of 35.

It accounts for 66 percent of its population. Therefore, India possesses the potentiality to involve the dynamic role of the youth for successful working of India's democracy and development of rural India. The state of Tripura do also reflect the all India character as far as youth is concerned.

### **Working Of Gram Panchayat And Village Committee In Tripura: A Comparision Constitution of Village and Working of Village Committee**

The Executive Committee (EC), constituted under Rule 157 of the TTAADC (Constitution, Election and Conduct of business) Rules, 1985, by notification published in the Tripura Gazette can declare any Revenue Mouja or part of it or groups of Revenue Moujas or part thereof to be a village specifying its name with the local limits. The EC is responsible for formation of villages. In exercising its powers, it can exclude any area from any village or include any village or any area contiguous to such village. It can also divide the area of a village to form or reorganize a village. It can also integrate the areas of two or more villages to constitute a single village. Each village will have a Village Committee with a maximum of 11 members to deal with matters of the village.

#### **Functions of the Village Committee**

The Village Committee (VC) looks after sanitation and conservancy, cleaning and maintaining of village roads and paths. It supervises such works like construction, maintenance and improvement of village wells and tanks, burial and cremation grounds for human dead bodies and disposal of animal bodies. It takes curative and preventive measures of epidemic diseases. It also maintains records of annual population, cattle, spinning and weaving loom, landless and unemployed persons record. The VC promotes cattle farming, establishes village grazing grounds to control stray cattle, maintains the register of birth and death, constructs and maintains rest house, social and cultural clubs including reading and recreation room in the village. It popularizes indigenous sports, folk dances and music and celebrates National days and festivals and perform any such function delegated to it from time to time (Village Committee Rules, 2006).

#### **Powers of Village Committee**

The VC levies and collects fees at prescribed rates defined by the Executive Committee. It includes fees for promoting elementary education, roads, bridges, paths and rest house, public well, tanks and water supply constructed or maintained by it. It also collects fees for lightening of village roads. Fees are also collected for providing anti-epidemic services and other social services within the village (Establishment of VC Act, 1994).

#### **Obligatory duties of Gram Panchayats**

Every Gram Panchayat (GP) within the area under its jurisdiction looks after (i) sanitation, conservancy and prevention of public nuisances; (ii) curative and preventive measures against malaria, small pox, cholera or any other epidemic diseases; (iii) supply of drinking water, cleaning and protection of public streets; (iv) maintenance and repairing, protection of public streets; (v) removal of encroachment of public streets and public places; (vi) protection and repairing of buildings and other property vested in it; (vii) management and caring of public tanks, common grazing grounds, burning ghats and public graveyards; (viii) imposition, assessment and collection of taxes or fees liveable under this Act; (ix) supplying of any such local information to the District

Magistrate, the Zilla Parishad, the Panchayat Samity or the Sub-Divisional Officer (The Tripura Panchayats Act 1993). The functions of the panchayat are given under Articles 243H, I and K of the Constitution.

#### **Discretionary Duties of Gram Panchayat**

Subject to conditions as prescribed, any GP may make provision for maintenance of lighting of public streets, promotion of plantation along public streets. Such provisions also include maintenance of horticulture training centre and sinking wells and excavation of ponds and tanks. It can introduce and promote of cooperative farming, organizes exhibition of local handicrafts and home industries. It can assist and advise agriculturists in obtaining loan, its distribution and repayment. It is empowered to fill up of insanitary conditions and reclaim the unhealthy localities. It is also responsible for disposal of unclaimed cattle, corpses and carcasses and establishment and maintenance of libraries and reading rooms, clubs and other places for recreation or games and sports. It also maintains annual records population, agricultural labour census, crop census, cattle census and record of unemployed persons and other statistics as may be prescribed (The Obligatory and Discretionary Functions of Gram Panchayats).

#### **Power of Gram Panchayat in respect of Water Supply**

GP has controlling power over private water course, spring, tank, well or other place, which are used for drinking or culinary purpose. It can take all or any of the following steps within a reasonable period specified in notice (i) to keep and maintain the same in good repair; (ii) to clean the same from time to time, (iii) to protect it from pollution; and (iv) to prevent its use, if polluted; (v) exercises such powers upon delegation by Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti (The Tripura Panchayats Act 1993).

A comparison between the GPs and VCs indicates clearly that the GPs enjoy more powers and functions than VCs. Unlike the VCs, the GPs enjoy discretionary power to take immediate decision concerning the GPs. Moreover, unlike the VCs, the GPs are directly connected with the Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad and accordingly, the GPs have better opportunity of success in implementation of different schemes. The GPs have also more power than the VCs to levy taxes and collections.

#### **People's Participation In Gram Panchayat And Village Committee With Special Reference To The Youth**

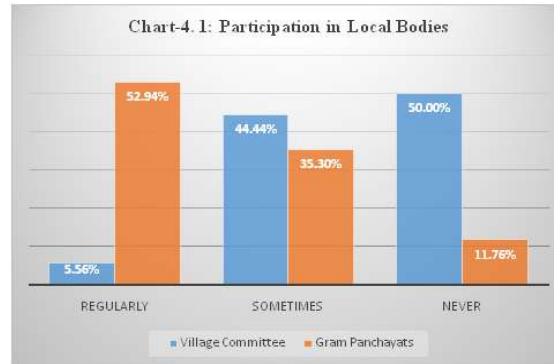
Tripura has 87.33 percent literacy rate which indicates the presence of a sizable number of literate youth population. About 76.17 percent of Tripura's population lives in rural areas and 14.05 percent are below poverty line (Basic Statistics of Tripura-2020). Therefore, without empowering the rural population and people living below poverty line, Tripura cannot be on the path of progress and development.

As noted above, the VP is the lowest grass root level political institution working in the rural areas for achieving this noble objective. The Sixth Schedule provided a provision to establish VC to perform the role of VP as the lowest level of grass root political institution in the TTAADC.

The youth of Tripura have better opportunity to ensure good governance at grass root through active participation in the affairs of VPs and VCs. This study has tried to understand the youth's role towards ensuring good governance at VCs and GPs in the Sixth Schedule and non-Sixth Schedule areas of Tripura.

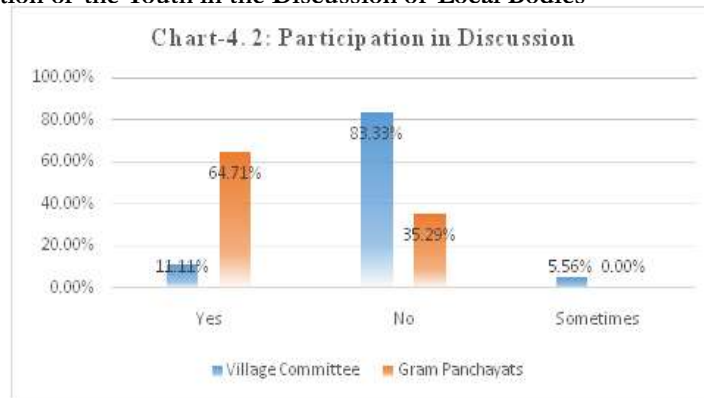
### Participation of the Youth in the Local Bodies

The nature of youth participation is given below in Chart-4.1:



The Chart4.1shows greater participation of youth in the activities of the GPs than the youth of VCs. Whereas, GPs experienced 52.94 percent of youth's participation, only 5.56 percent of the youth participated in the VCs. About 50 percent of the them did not have any experience of participation in the VCs. The study observed that non-conduct of elections for 587 VCs since 2022 was a major reason for such poor participation. The youth who stayed in the urban areas for better educational and employment reasons mostly avoided such participation.

### Participation of the Youth in the Discussion of Local Bodies



The study also (Chart-4.2) observed greater participation of people in the discussion of GPs than the VCs. About 83.33 percent of the respondents did not participate in any discussion of VCs as compare to 64.71 percent of GPs. In the case of VCs, majority of the respondents maintained that they had limited opportunity for such participation due to suppression of contrary voices. Many of them were not interested and did not have any information about such discussion. The conflicting situation between the common people and the head of the VCs also significantly discouraged people from participating in such discussion on the issues of rural development

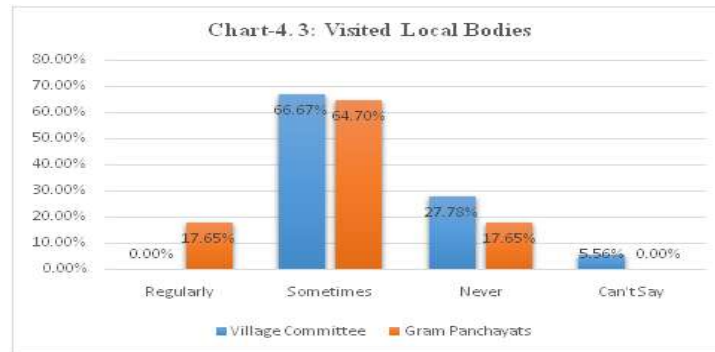
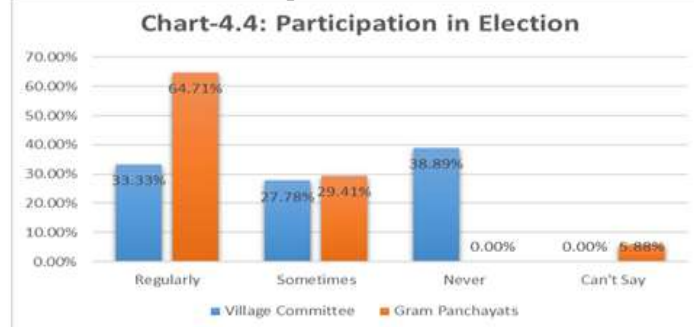
**Experience of the Youth in Visiting the Local Bodies**

Chart-4.3 of the study observed very poor experience of the youth visiting the local bodies. More than 60 percent of youth did not feel the value of visiting the GPs and the VCs. About 27.87 percent of the youth of VCs and 17.65 percent in GPs never visited the VCs and the GPs because they feel that these local bodies cannot fulfil their requirement.

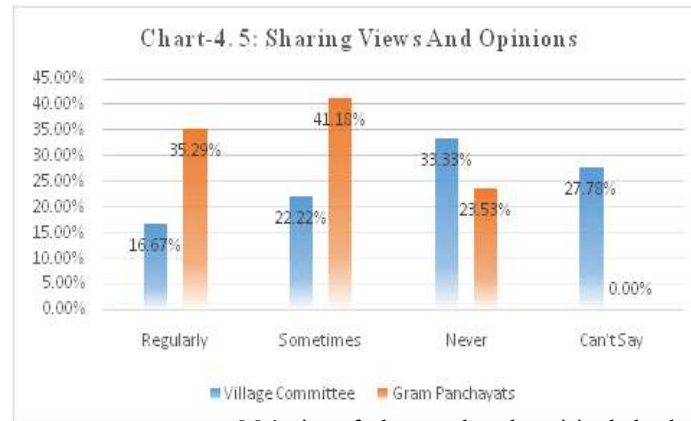
**Experience of the Youth's Participation in Election to the Local Bodies**

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**Experience of the Youth's Participation in Election to the Local Bodies**

It is noted that GPs with 64.71 percent have more experienced people's participation in election than the VCs (only 33.33 percent). The study observed that about 38.89 percent of the youth of VCs had never participated in the election to the local body. One important reason for such poor participation was absence of elections to the VCs since 2022. Consequently, majority of the youth aged between 20-25 years did not get opportunity to participate in election to the VCs. The participation of the youth in the GPs is comparatively better because election to the GPs has been conducted at regular interval.

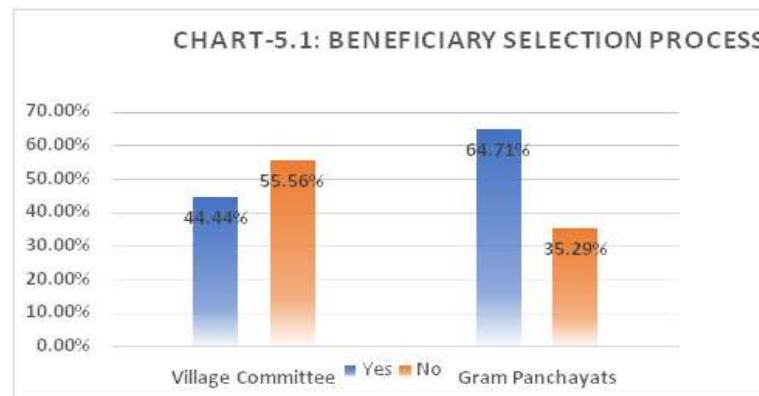
### Experience of the Youth's in Sharing Views and Opinions



Majority of the youth, who visited the local bodies, participated in discussion of the local bodies' without sharing views and opinion. Only 35.29 percent participated in discussion of GPs with views and opinion. In case of VPs, it was remarkably low with only 16.62 percent. About 27.78 percent had no idea of such opportunity. The youth were not interested because the role of the local bodies was insignificant in fulfilling their requirements. The youth felt that there was hardly any scope of criticism against the plans and policies of the ruling group holding and exercising the government powers.

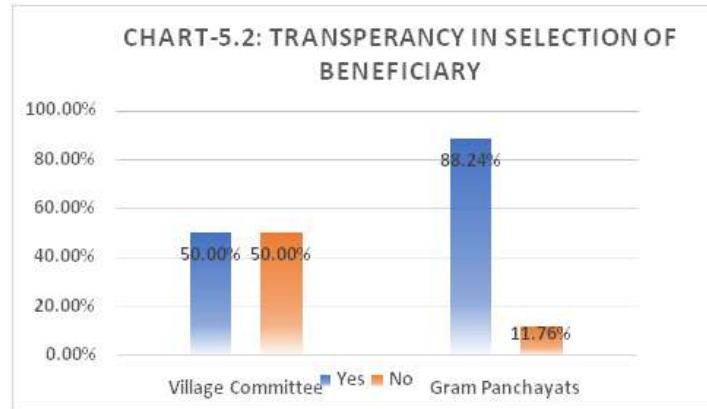
### TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE FUNCTIONING OF GRAM PANCHAYAT AND VILLAGE COMMITTEE

The study has considered various parameters such as the beneficiary selection process, regularity of the Secretary, display of citizen information boards, availability of the chairperson and cooperation of the local bodies in time of requirements etc. to understand the workings of the GPs and VCs.

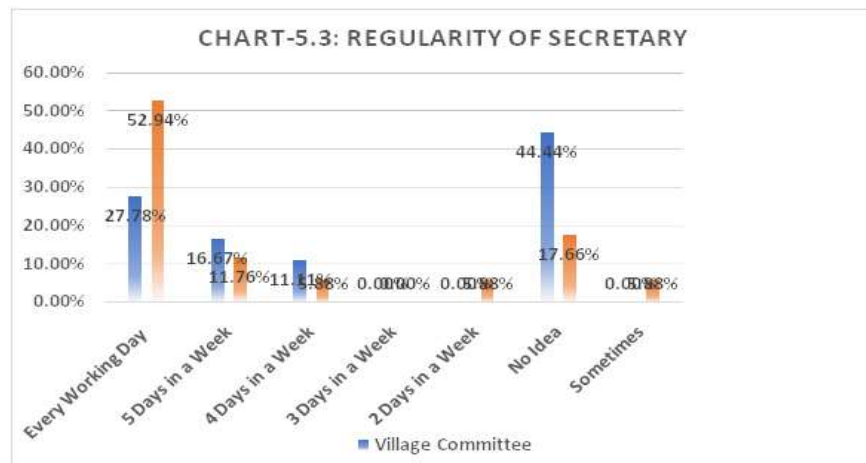




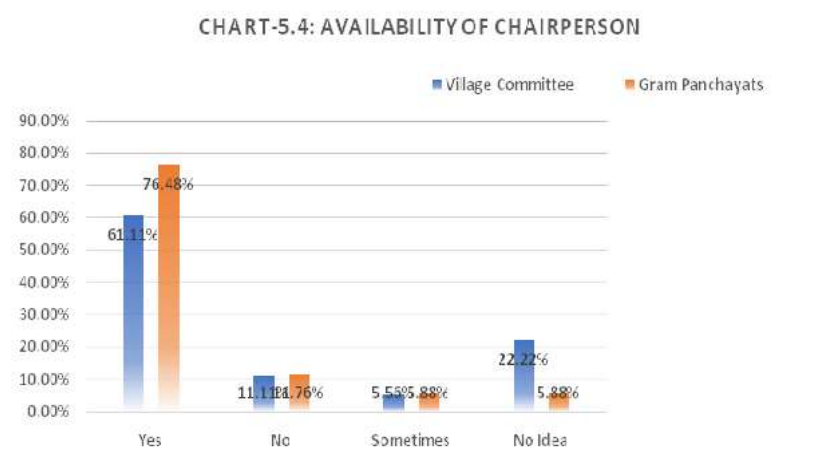
About 64.71 percent of the respondents of GPs and 55.56 percent of VPs agreed that beneficiaries were selected through discussion.



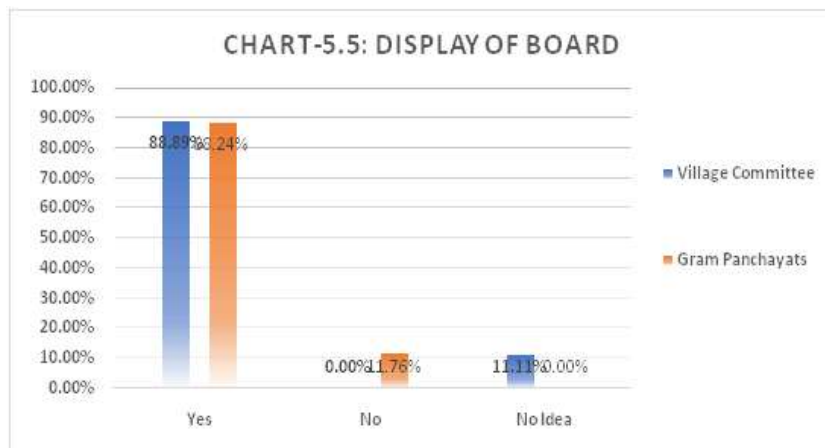
Majority of the respondents (88.24 percent in GPs and 50 percent in VCs) have agreed that the beneficiaries were selected in a transparent manner. Those who did not agree with it argued that corruption and political nepotism had significantly influenced selection of beneficiaries. Selection was not done on merit but on political preference and interference. The study observed lack of connection between political, social and economic programs of the government and wishes of the people.



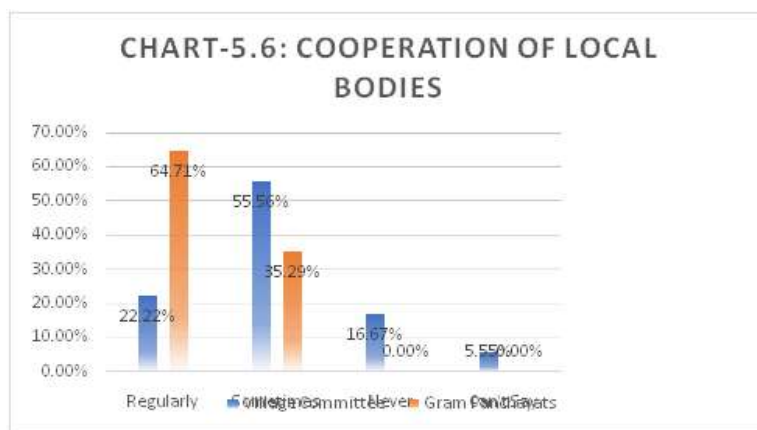
About 52.94 percent (GPs) and 27.78 percent (VCs) agreed that the Secretary is regular to the office. Whereas 44.44 percent had no idea about the regularity of the Secretary in VCs.



Majority of the respondents (76.48 percent in GPs and 61.1 percent in VCs) agreed with the availability of the Chairperson in time of their requirement .However, about 22.22 percent hold the view that the Chairperson of the VCs was selectively responsive and not available at the time due to either personal reason or lack of interest in matters of the common people.



About 88 percent of the respondents of GPs and VCs agreed with the presence of citizens' information boards displaying the basic information to the common people about projects, year wise works taken up or completed by the GPs and VCs, employment provided, receipt of fund and expenditure, lists of materials and qualities used in each work etc.



About 64.71 percent in GPs and 22.22 percent of VPs believed that these local bodies were cooperative on local issues and problems. However, 55.56 percent argued that the VCs were cooperative only on some selected issues and problems.

### CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

Both the GPs and the VCs are vested with lots of powers and responsibilities in the Panchayat raj system. By exercising such powers and responsibilities, these political institutions can play significant role in rural development. About 76.17 percent of Tripura's population live in the rural areas (both Sixth Schedule and non-Sixth Schedule areas). A vast majority of them do live below poverty line. Good governance in these grass root political institutions is indispensable to take care of rural development. The participatory role of the youth, particularly educated youth, is equally important to ensure these local bodies working in innovative, accountable and transparent manner. However, the results of the study noted that the role of the youth had not been satisfactory. In most cases, they lacked enthusiasm and had very little interests in the affairs of rural administration performed by these local bodies. This lack of enthusiasm was more associated with the youth living in the areas of VCs. Majority of the youth participated in this study as respondents did not feel the importance of visiting the local bodies. Those who visited also did not take part in discussion with views and opinion on issues of rural development. Although majority of the respondents participated in election to the GPs and exercised right to enfranchise, in case of VCs, the study observed very poor participation in election to the VCs, primarily because of absence of regular elections to the VCs since 2022. As a result, the respondents aged between 20 to 25 years did not get opportunity to take part in election to VCs.

The study found that beneficiaries of various government schemes were selected through discussion. Yet many hold the view that the selection of beneficiaries in most cases was not done on merit but on political preference indulging in corruption and nepotism. The ruling group holding and exercising the government powers did not represent the interest of all sections of the common people. Majority of the respondents agreed with the presence of display of citizen's information board providing various programs of the Panchayat. However, the respondents under VCs expressed dissatisfaction with the regularity of the Secretary to the official duties and dereliction

of responsibilities. Although the Chairperson of both GPs and VCs were mostly available in time of requirement, yet sometimes the Chairperson was not keen to take care of interest of the common people. The youth neither had better participation in the local bodies nor participated with innovative ideas and alternatives to provide solution to the local issues and problems due to lack of interest on the working of these local bodies in Tripura. However, despite absence of most of the essential requirements of good governance, the performance of the GPs and the role of youth having faith in rural administration of GPs is better than that of the VCs.

### **POLICY OPTIONS**

Like GPs, there is a need of conducting general election to the VCs at regular interval. Efforts to consider introduction of three tiers PRI in the TTAADC areas with VC functioning at the lowest level may be taken, if required, through amendment of the Sixth Schedule. To encourage and motivate youth's involvement in the grass root political institutions, youth capacity building programs may be organised at the GPs and VCs. Political authority needs to accept the autonomous existence of the youth and other groups in the economic, social and political spheres. There is a need of connection between political, social and economic programs of the government and wishes of the people. Accordingly, the government needs to pay due attention to this for improving the performance of GPs and VCs in Tripura.

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