Information Needs of Gram Panchayat Members: A Study of Kurukshetra District, Haryana

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Abstract -The paper examines the information needs of Gram Panchayat Members (GPMs) of Kurukshetra district. 13.6% (42 sarpanches and 218 ward members) sample has been collected through questionnaire from 3542 GPMs of the Kurukshetra district. The GPMs are receiving information from formal and informal sources. The members of Gram Panchayats (89.6) are aware of source of information and 81.2% able to cater to the information requirements of people. Mainly they feels the lack of library and information centre in their villages and are getting major relevant information from government employees, newspapers, television, colleagues and training programmes. While, almost all GPMs are receiving sufficient information from all sources with the difficulties of handling technological devices and facing time barriers.

Keyword: Information needs, Gram Panchayat Members, GPMs, Kurukshetra district.

Introduction

Panchayat is an integral part of the philosophy of 'Purn Swaraj' and 'Gramin Swaraj' (Pal 2003, 1). Panchayat means assembly of wise members and respected elders chosen and accepted by the village (people) community. Today, the number of these persons who are known as panches (ward member) varies from state to state and also from Panchayat to Panchayat, according to the Acts passed and according to the population of the village (Rashid 2010, 11) and these panchayats are democratically elected bodies and enjoy politically determined functions. They are not to be confused with the traditional panchayat (Singh 2012, 634). Gram panchayat is village based self-government and grass root level statutory institution of rural self-government in India. State government establishes a panchayat in the name of a particular village and there may be more than one village in a gram panchayat. Members are elected by the general public votes. (Haryana Government 2014).

Panchayati Raj Institutions after 73rd Amendment in 1992

The Indian Constitution Amendment Act, 1992, which includes various provisions for strengthening Panchayats at all levels. The Act provides a compulsory three-tier system in all states except where the population doesn't exceed 20 lakhs. These panchayat will be at village, block and district level. All the members of three-tier Panchayats shall be chosen by direct election. Mandatory periodic elections are envisaged every five years. The Government should ensure the finance position of gram Panchayats (Kurian 2000, 42). The Act also provides for reforms particularly in the field of the local electoral system, mechanism for local planning and development and state local relations in matters concerning functional and fiscal power and responsibility.

Role of Gram Panchayat Members

The GPMs are to play an important role in rural development in India. Central and state governments give many grants for rural development, so that GPMs can use these grant and develop their villages. It says that rural progress depends on GPMs which can bring all the people and programmes to be carried out with the assistance of administration. To achieve this objective the five year plan entailed the panchayats to perform civic, developmental, land reform, land management, and judicial functions. The role of GPMs is in rural development like intermediator which is reciprocity between villagers and government (Kadam 2012, 15).

Role of Information in Gram Panchayat Development

Information has an important role to play in all sectors of development. In the fast changing society the role of information has become more important. Today, GPMs can access information from different media like print media, electronic media etc. such as libraries, friends, colleagues, and directly from subscribed newspapers, TV channels and Internet through computers or mobiles for their rural area development. So, the importance of information cannot be denied at the village level.

Information Needs of GPMs

GPMs need information for many tasks like state and central schemes, Government funds, sanitation, road, self-income from panchayat sources. They access information from different sources for better development. They can achieve the aim of rural development through information. But, information needs are not same amongst all rural areas. The needs are different according to state to state of development of the concerned rural areas. Those village are closer to urban areas have access to better infrastructure facilities, whose as the other have very poor infrastructure facilities (Meitei and Th. Purnima Devi 2009, 35-40).

Importance of the Study

In this study, an attempt is made to find out the information needs of GPMs, which they require for different type of campaign, state and central government's schemes or different type of funds which can help in the development of their area. All this information is available from the government and its employees and information communication system of government. Members face different type of problems for receiving information like poor educational qualification, government's employee's behaviour, lack of money, lack of time and awareness of information sources for their information needs in the information society.

Do the government and its employees and information communication systems provide information to GPMs and are they satisfied from it? If government and non-governmental system provide information to GPMs at right time, then they will fully participate in development their area. Thus, the present study is intended to know: what information is required by the GPMs, how they acquire it and which problems do they face in finding their required information.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study is to examine the information needs of GPMs in Kurukshetra district. To fulfil this aim, the following five specific objectives are identified:

- To know the socio-economic characteristics of the GPMs in Kurukshetra district;
- To find the information needs of GPMs;
- To identify the information sources used by GPMs;
- To explore the timeliness of information received from government officers and web sites by GPMs;
- To identify the importance of information for GPMs;
- To ascertain the major barriers in receiving information by GPMs;
- To know the satisfaction level from different source;

Literature Review

In South Africa, Yusuf, Masika and Ighodaro (2013) analysed 80.5% farmers needed information on weed control and management in Konkobe municipality. They believed the extension workers as main channels of information while, In Madhya Pradesh, Sharma (2014) also investigated the farmers' required technical information on weather forecast (80%), disease/pest control (75.25%) and soil management (63.25%). While 76% farmers needed marketing information regarding current market price and 53% for future marketing price.

Foloronsho and Ibrahim (2015) states that half of the legislators needed information on legislative matters and 25% on political matters of Kwara State House of Assembly. 62.5% legislators sought information through informal sources of information and 37.5% indicated formal sources. In the capital city of India, Hari Prakash (2008) also studied the all the MLAs needed information on social welfare, almost 97% MLAs required information about electricity, education and water supply of members of the legislative assembly.

Anunobi, Ogbonna, and Osuchukwu (2014) shows that all traders as well as 81% artisans and 75% farmers needed information on business enhancement, education enhancement and civil service related information. They hardly were seeking information through formal sources. Hossain and Islam (2012) analysed that 86.66% rural women needed agricultural information, 83.33% animal husbandry, 75% each health and food & nutrition or 58.33% needed information on religion of three villages of Bangladesh.

Study Area Description and Methodology

The questionnaire method was used for this study. The universe of the present study consists of 382 Gram Panchayats and 3542 (3160 ward members and 382 sarpanches) Gram Panchayat Members in the district of Kurukshetra in 2015. There are 6 Blocks in Kurukshetra

district. The list of blocks, Gram Panchayat and members were collected from the District Information System of Kurukshetra and Panchayat Directory on Kurukshetra website. In this study, multi-stage sampling was applied for the selection of the sample and 47 Gram Panchayats were selected from the total Gram Panchayats and data collected from 260 (42 sarpanches and 218 ward members) GPMs. 13.6% sample has been collected from the total 3542 GPMs of the district. The president and Gram Panchayat members were contacted at their house and with a request to co-operation to fill the questionnaires by hand.

Analysis of Data

Analysis of response and interpretation of data collected from the Gram Panchayat Members in Kurukshetra district through questionnaire.

TABLE No. 1 STATUS AND GENDER WISE DISTRIBUTION OF GPMs

Block	Sarpanches			Ward Members			Male N (%age)	Female N (%age)	Grand Total N(%age)
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total			
Ladwa	3	4	7	20	13	33	23 (57.5)	17 (42.5)	40 (15.4)
Babain	4	2	6	18	9	27	22 (66.7)	11 (33.3)	33 (12.7)
Thanesar	5	3	8	36	20	56	41 (64.1)	23 (35.9)	64 (24.6)
Pehowa	5	2	7	27	11	38	32 (71.1)	13 (28.9)	45 (17.3)
Shahbad	5	4	9	28	15	43	33 (63.5)	19 (36.5)	52 (20)
Ismailabad	3	2	5	12	9	21	15 (57.7)	11 (42.3)	26 (10)
Total	25	17	42	141	77	218	166 (63.8)	94 (36.2)	260

Table 1 show that the total 260 respondents included, 63.8% male and 36.2% female GPMs respectively. Highest numbers of 24.6% (64.1 % male and 35.9% female) GPMs in Thanesar while 20% (63.5% male and 36.5% female) GPMs in Shahbad. 17.3% (71.1% male and 28.9% female) GPMs in Pehowa. While, 10% GPMs of Ismailabad were lowest.

TABLE NO. 2 AGE WISE DISTRIBUTION OF GPMs

Age group	Male (%age)	Female (%age)	Total N (%age)
< 30	11 (6.6)	14 (14.9)	25 (9.6)
31-40	61 (36.8)	31 (33)	92 (35.4)
41-50	46 (27.7)	27 (28.7)	73 (28.1)
> 51	48 (28.9)	22 (23.4)	70 (26.9)
Total	166	94	260

Table 2 shows that highest GPMs were the age group of 31-40 and 35.4% (36.8% male and 33% female). While the age group of 41-50 were 28.1% (27.7% male members and 28.7% female).

TABLE NO. 3 RELIGION WISE DISTRIBUTION OF GPMs

Religion	Male (%age)	Female (%age)	Total (%age)
Hindu	142 (85.5)	85 (90.4)	227 (87.3)
Muslim	1 (0.6)	1 (1.1)	2 (0.8)
Sikh	23 (13.9)	8 (8.5)	31(11.9)
Total	166	94	260

Table 3 shows that majority of 87.3% (85.5% male and 90.4% female) GPMs belonged to Hindu religion while 11.9% (13.9% male, 8.5% female) GPMs belonged to Sikh religion. The response is according to the population of their religion in Kurukshetra district.

TABLE NO. 4 CASTE WISE DISTRIBUTION OF GPMs

Caste	Male N (%age)	Female N (%age)	Total N (%age)
General	46 (27.7)	19 (20.2)	65 (25)
SC	33 (19.9)	33 (35.1)	66 (25.4)
BC	87 (52.4)	42 (44.7)	129 (49.6)
Total	166	94	260

Table 4 shows that majority of 49.6% (52.4% male and 44.7% female) GPMs belonged to Backword Class and 25.4% (19.9% male and 35.1% female) Schedule Caste.

TABLE NO. 5 EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS OF GPMs

Educational level	Male N (%age)	Female N (%age)	Total N (%age)
Illiterate	17 (10.2)	34 (36.2)	51 (19.6)
Primary	32 (19.3)	20 (21.3)	52 (20)
Middle	38 (22.9)	15 (16)	53 (20.4)
Secondary education	42 (25.3)	18 (19.1)	60 (23.1)
Senior secondary	25 (15.1)	7 (7.4)	32 (12.3)
UG (Undergraduate)	9 (5.4)	-	9 (3.5)
PG (Postgraduate)	3 (1.8)	-	3 (1.1)
Total	166	94	260

Table 5 shows that highest GPMs had 23.1% (25.3% male or 19.1% female) secondary education while illiterate, primary and middle almost each 20% educated. Only 2 GPMs had professional degrees and one in Hotel Management and other had LLB degree.

TABLE NO. 6 OCCUPATION WISE DISTRIBUTION OF GPMs

Occupation	Male N (%age)	Female N (%age)	Total N (%age)
Agriculture	91 (54.8)	--	91 (35)
Manual labour	41 (24.7)	15 (16)	56 (21.5)
Unemployed	5 (3)	--	5 (1.9)
Private job	4 (2.4)	--	4 (1.5)
Self-employed	25 (15.1)	--	25 (9.6)
Housewife	--	79 (84)	79 (30.4)
Others	166	94	260

The Table 6 shows that 35% only male GPMs engaged in agriculture and 21.5% (24.7% male and 16% female) were doing manual labour. While, 30.4% GPMs were house wives.

TABLE NO. 7 COMMUNICATION MEDIA AVAILABLE AT HOME OF GPMs

Source	Frequency	%age
Radio	45	17.3
Television	256	98.5
Mobile Phone	242	93.1
Computer	17	6.5
Newspaper	115	44.2

Table 7 shows that 98.5% GPMs had television at home and 93.1% respondents were using mobile phone. While 44.2% GPMs were using Newspaper for getting latest information.

TABLE NO. 8 PERCEPTION OF GPMs ABOUT INFORMATION CHANNELS

Sr. No.	Statement	YES N (%)	No N (%age)
1	Are you aware of the sources that provide information related to rural development?	233 (89.6)	27 (10.4)
2	Do the people contact you to get any type of information?	246 (94.6)	14 (5.4)
3	Are you able to fulfil the information requirement of the people?	211 (81.2)	49 (18.8)
4	Has the devolution of power taken place at village level together with growth of knowledge?	162 (62.3)	98 (37.7)
5	Do you use internet on mobile, so that the information related to rural development can be collected?	46 (17.7)	214 (82.3)
6	Should there be community information centre to give information related to rural development?	253 (97.3)	7 (2.7)
7	Should there be a library in rural area?	256 (98.5)	4 (1.5)
8	Is there a library in your village?	--	260 (100)
9	Have you done efforts for the development of the library?	47 (18.1)	213 (81.9)
10	Do you understand that Panchayati Raj Institutions strengthen the democracy?	150 (57.7)	110 (42.3)

Table 8 presents the response of GPMs on their perception regarding various information channels. The table shows that out of 260, 89.6% respondents considered themselves aware of the sources of information related to rural development. 94.6% GPMs responded that people contacted them for getting information and 81.2% GPMs were able to cater to the information requirements of people. 62.3% GPMs agreed that the devolution of power had taken place at the village level together with growth of knowledge. Only 17.7% GPMs respondents were using the Internet. 97.3% GPMs agreed that there should be a community information centre, which can give information on rural development. 98.5% GPMs agreed that there should be a library at the rural level. All the respondents said that there was no library in their village and 18.1% GPMs responded that they had done efforts for library development. 57.7% respondents understood that Panchayati Raj Institutions were helpful in strengthening of democracy.

TABLE NO. 9 USE OF INFORMATION CHANNELS FOR APPROPRIATE INFORMATION BY THE GPMs

Information channels	Frequency	%age
Print media	162	62.3
Electronic media	137	52.7
Internet	37	14.2
Government employees	250	96.2

Table 9 shows that out of 260, 62.3% GPMs received information from print media and 52.7% received from electronic media. While largest number of 96.2% respondents received information from Government employees.

TABLE NO. 10 USE OF PRINT MEDIA BY THE GPMs

Magazine	Frequency	%age
Haryana Review	7	2.7
Krishi Samwad	12	4.6
Haryana Samwad	160	61.5
Newspapers	140	53.8
Others	12	4.6

Table 10 shows that out of 260, Majority of 61.5% GPMs were using Haryana Samwad magazine and 53.8% were using Newspaper for information.

TABLE NO. 11 TYPE OF INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM THE MAGAZINE BY THE GPMs

Type of Information	Frequency	%age
Government Plans	156	60
Campaigns run by government	112	43.1
Powers And Functions of Panchayats	41	15.8
Do not use magazine	77	29.6

Table 11 shows that out of 260, 60% GPMs used magazines for getting information about government plans and 43.1% were using to know about the campaigns. While 29.6% GPMs did not used magazines on regular basis.

TABLE NO. 12 USE OF NEWSPAPERS BY THE GPMs

Parts of Newspapers	Frequency	%age
Local News	176	67.7
Political News	168	64.6
Development & Planning	234	90
Read All Parts	156	60

Table 12 shows that out of 260, 90% GPMs used newspapers for development & planning news and 67.7 % GPMs were reading local news. While 64.6% were reading political news from the newspapers.

TABLE NO. 13 USE OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA BY THE GPMs

Electronic media	Frequency	%age
Radio	20	7.7
Television	205	78.8
Mobile phone	168	64.6
Do not use	8	3.1

Table 13 shows that out of 260, majority of 78.8%% GPMs used television and 64.6% respondents mobile phone, while 3.1% did not use any electronic media.

TABLE NO. 14 SOURCES FOR RECEIVING INFORMATION ON GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Information Source	Frequency	%age
Training Programme	223	85.8
Saang Mandli	143	55
Film Projector	76	29.2
Workshop	1	0.4

Table 14 shows that majority of 85.8% GPMs received information from training programmes and 55% received from Saang Mandli. While 29.2% GPMs received information from the Government mobile film projector.

TABLE NO. 15 FIRST NON-DOCUMENTARY SOURCE ACCESSED FOR INFORMATION

Contact person	Response N (%age)
District Development Panchayat Officer (DDPO)	1 (0.4)
Block Development Panchayat Officer (BDPO)	116 (44.6)
Gram Sachiv	45 (17.3)
Colleagues	98 (37.7)

Table 15 shows that a good number of 44.6% GPMs first of all contacted BDPO for receiving information and 37.7% contacted their Colleagues.

TABLE NO. 16 TIMELINESS OF INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM DDPO, BDPO, GRAM SACHIV AND GOVT. WEBSITES

Timeliness	DDPO (%age)	BDPO (%age)	Gram Sachiv (%age)	Govt. Websites (%age)
Generally on time	111 (42.7)	220 (84.6)	229 (88.1)	30 (11.5)
Sometimes on time	7 (2.7)	6 (2.3)	8 (3.1)	9 (3.5)
Sometimes late	17 (6.5)	5 (1.9)	2 (0.7)	9 (3.5)
Undecided	125 (48.1)	29 (11.2)	21 (8.1)	212 (81.5)

Table 16 shows that 42.7% GPMs usually received information from the DDPO on general time and 48.1% GPMs undecided. Mainly 84.6% GPMs generally received information from BDPO on time and 88.1% received information from Gram Sachiv on general time. While 81.5% GPMs didn't use Government website.

TABLE 17 SOURCES OF RECEIVING INFORMATION ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Serial No.	Source	Frequency	%age
1	Library & Information Centre	14	5.4
2	Research Centre	7	2.7
3	Present system	258	99.2
4	All of the above	6	2.3

Table 17 shows that almost all the GPMs (99.2%) received information from the present system of print and non-print media, government officers and so on. While 5.4% GPMs received information from library & information centres.

TABLE NO. 18 COOPERATION FROM SOCIAL GROUPS FOR USE OF INFORMATION

Serial No.	Social Groups	Frequency	%age
1	Youth groups	174	66.9
2	Female Community	136	52.3
3	Self-efforts	246	94.6
4	All of the above	84	32.3

Table 18 shows that majority of 66.9% GPMs received cooperation from the youth groups for better use of information and 52.3% received help from female community. Whereas, a large number of 94.6% GPMs made it by self-efforts.

TABLE 19 THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Serial No.	Importance	Response N (%)
1	Very important	164 (63.1)
2	Important	89 (34.2)
3	Less important	7 (2.7)
4	Least important	--

Table 19 show that majority of 63.1% GPMs considered information very important and 34.2% stated information is important for the rural development.

TABLE NO. 20 BARRIERS IN RECEIVING INFORMATION BY GPMs

Serial No.	Barriers	Frequency	%age
1	Complexity of technology	170	65.4
2	Complexity of language	8	3.1
3	Lack of money	32	12.3
4	Lack of time	165	63.5

Table 20 shows that out of 260, large number of 65.4% GPMs faced the problem of handling technological devices and 12.3% respondents were not able to access information due to lack of money. While 63.5% GPMs respondents found time as a barrier in receiving information.

TABLE NO. 21 SUFFICIENCY OF INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM DIFFERENT SOURCES

Serial No.	Sufficient information providing sources	Fully Agree	Agree	Undecided	Less Agree	Least Agree	Mean
1	Print media	90 (34.6)	161 (61.9)	1 (0.4)	8 (3.1)	-	4.28
2	Electronic media	159 (61.2)	97 (37.3)	1 (0.4)	3 (1.2)	-	4.58
3	Government officers and colleagues of panchayat	186 (71.5)	65 (25)	-	8 (3.1)	1 (0.4)	4.64
4	Government saang mandli, training programme and workshop etc.	77 (29.6)	160 (61.5)	-	19 (7.3)	4 (1.5)	4.10

5	Library and information centre, community information centre and research centre	7 (2.7)	73 (28.1)	17 (6.5)	86 (33.1)	77 (29.6)	2.41
6	Efforts to sort out the information problems	47 (18.1)	97 (37.3)	2 (0.8)	68 (26.2)	46 (17.7)	3.11
7	Satisfactory information from all sources	93 (35.8)	154 (59.2)	-	11 (4.2)	2 (0.8)	4.25

Table 21 shows the satisfaction of GPMs, who received information from different type of information sources. Majority of 61.9% agreed while 34.6% fully agreed that they received sufficient information from print media. 61.2% respondents fully agreed and 37.3% agreed to the statement that electronic media provided sufficient information. Majority of the respondents (71.5%) fully agreed and 25% agreed that Government officers and colleagues of panchayat provided sufficient information.

Sufficiency of Government saang mandli, training programme and workshop as information source was agreed by 61.5% respondents while 29.6% fully agreed with it. Library and information centre, community information centre and research centre were not considered to have a major role as only 28% respondents agreed and 2.7% fully agreed that these provided sufficient information. GPMs faced a number of problems in accessing information and they made efforts to overcome these problems. 37.3% GPMs agreed while 26.2% less agreed to the statement that they made sufficient efforts to overcome these problems. Majority of the respondents' agreed (59.2%) and 35.8% fully agreed from the statement that they received sufficient information from all the sources.

Major findings

In the 47 gram panchayats selected, 218 (83.8%) ward members and 42 (16.2%) sarpanches responded to the study. It included 63.8% male and 36.2% females from all six blocks. Every two of three GPMs are in the middle age group (i.e. 31 to 50 years) and GPMs are mainly Hindus (87.3%) and Sikhs (11.9%) which are the main religious communities in this region. Half of the GPMs are from Backward Classes. The educational status of GPMs is not very high as more than 95% are educated only up to senior secondary level. Almost every house hold has a television and mobile phones and 44.2% respondents were getting newspapers at home. 83.9% respondents had not participated in any literacy campaign. Every two out of three GPMs have political affiliation. The GPMs (89.6%) considered themselves aware of information source and 81.2% were able to cater to the information requirements of people. 62.3% GPMs agreed that the devolution of power had taken place at the village level together with growth of knowledge while 82.3% GPMs did not use internet on their mobile phone for getting information related to rural development. There was no existing library in Kurukshetra's villages. Majority of respondents (57.7%) generally consider that Panchayati Raj Institutions are helpful in strengthening of democracy.

Largest number of respondents (96.2%) received appropriate information from government employees while 62.3% from print media. They mainly used Haryana Samwad magazine (63.3%) and newspapers (53.8%). 60% respondents received information from magazines about government plans and while 29.6% respondents did not use magazines. 67.7 % respondents were reading local news from newspapers and 90% used newspapers for development & planning news. Main electronic media used by GPMs were television (78.8%) and mobile phone (64.6%). 85.8% respondents received information for government

schemes from training programme. Most of the GPMs first of all contact BDPO for receiving information. The GPMs are generally receiving information from government officers on time the decreasing order of Gram Sachiv (88.1%), BDPO (84.6%) and DDPO (48.6%). While 81.5% respondents didn't use government website. The present system (99.2%) of information government officers, print and electronic sources, etc. is sufficient to provide timely information to GPMs and 5.4% GPMs received information from library & Information centres. 94.6% GPMs generally survey the area themselves for better use of information and 81.5% do not use government website. The GPMs (63.1%) consider information very important for rural development but face the problem of handling technological devices (65.4%) in receiving information and get less time for the same.

Largest number of 98.5% respondents either fully agreed or agreed that they received sufficient information from print media. Almost all respondents (96.5%) fully agreed or agreed to the statement that electronic media and Government officers and colleagues of panchayat provided sufficient information. Sufficiency of Government saang mandli, training programme and workshop as information source was fully agreed and agreed (91.1%) while Library and information centre, community information centre and research centre were not considered to have a major role as only 28% respondents agreed that these provided sufficient information. 37.3% respondents agreed to the statement that they made sufficient efforts to overcome these problems. 95% respondents fully agreed or agreed from the statement that they received sufficient information from all the sources.

Conclusion

On the basis of above findings it can be concluded that the members of gram panchayats in Kurukshetra district need different type of information for rural development. Large number of GPMs are aware of source of information and are able to cater to the information requirements of people. The formal information centres like libraries, community information centres, etc. are not present in the villages, so their role is quite limited. The GPMs feel the lack of library and information centre in their villages. The GPMs are getting major relevant information from print and non-print media including government employees, newspapers, television, colleagues and training programmes. Almost all GPMs receive sufficient information from all sources with difficulties of handling technological devices and facing time barriers. Thus, GPMs are playing a major role in rural development.

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