



Grassroots Research and Advocacy Movement

A vision of holistic village and community development

A conceptual framework



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Unnat Gaon / Unnathisheel Gram / Adarsha / Samruddha Gram – a vision of holistic village and community development¹

India as a nation is making great strides in the world, both as a source of talented manpower and resources and also as a destination for global business and trade supported by high domestic consumption and evolving lifestyles. Our cities are bustling, and to at least partly address the huge challenges posed by urban growth, the Govt. has already announced plans to build Smart Cities. However, the growth story of India is also riddled with disparities. Despite many flagship programs for rural development, poverty, unemployment, lack of access to education, health, & social security, prevalence of gender inequity and declining quality of life are realities of rural India.

Therefore, building Smart Cities is just one portion of the country's overall development agenda. Keeping in mind the mandate of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" that the present government has given itself, holistic development of villages must also be undertaken.

Key philosophical underpinnings

The holistic village and community development vision has the following key philosophical underpinnings:

1. Urban development and rural development are interrelated and realizing this is crucial to an integrated vision of development for the nation. The skewed focus on urban infrastructure development at times comes at a cost of rural development with issues such as displacement & migration, loss of forests and agricultural land, pollution and garbage being faced mainly by the rural populations.
2. Development itself must be viewed as an expansion of human capabilities and hence just infrastructural investment and provision of facilities alone cannot lead to holistic development. Emphasis on capacity building as well as attitudinal changes among communities, community leaders, frontline workers, Govt. functionaries at the grassroots is needed. Hence programs must look beyond infrastructure that can make people socially, economically and politically progressive.
3. The process of decentralization must be promoted and adhered to in its true spirit, which would include planning and monitoring at the local

¹ In 2009-10, a scheme called "Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana" (PMAGY) was launched by Central Government, in 1000 villages, where the Scheduled Castes formed the majority population.

level, decisive participation of women and marginalized sections, transparency and accountability at all levels.

4. Self-sufficiency and sustainability should also receive high attention through activities that drive local economy and balance the risks of dependence on external markets / market forces and rural producers also getting a fair share of wealth generated. The rural population must be viewed as partners in wealth creation and not mere recipients of govt. largesse.
5. Ecological sustainability is crucial for any village level intervention as long term prosperity and a better quality of life is directly dependent on sustainable use of natural resources and prevention of environmental degradation.

The approach and rationale

Holistic village and community development should be undertaken in one village / Gram Panchayath (GP) of each Parliamentary Constituency and led by the elected Member of Lok Sabha from that constituency. As a result 544 villages / GP in all the districts of the country would come under the ambit of this program.

The program would depend heavily on the leadership of the Member of Parliament and the active involvement of people and all elected representatives of the region (MLAs, members of Zilla and Block Panchayaths) making it a truly democratic and transparent initiative. No additional funds other than the MPLAD scheme and some budget for contingencies would be needed for this initiative. This is from the recognition that not only the Constitution of India and the various Acts, but also several programs and schemes launched by successive Central and State Governments are aimed at achieving the goals of poverty alleviation, quality education for all, healthcare, food security, protection of environment, right to livelihood, women's empowerment and social upliftment of the marginalized communities, welfare and justice among others.

What is needed today are not new schemes, but ensuring that all schemes and laws are implemented in letter and spirit, and converge for the cause of development. Hence it is the collective effort of the people and their elected representative to the Parliament in understanding and addressing all gaps in implementation that will count. It will also bring the MP closer to the people and the region s/he represents.

The rationale for the above approach stems from the following lessons of development we have learnt in the past

- ***Structural flaws in scheme design***

Description and guideline documents of most rural development schemes focus on issues of channelling of funds, shelf of projects and expected end outcomes without laying out the specific responsibilities of elected representatives in the programme planning, implementation and monitoring. The guidelines abstract away from specific measurable actions and their timelines at different levels that aid in the fulfilling of the

objectives of the schemes. Thus, the structure and design of schemes do not create an environment that fosters meaningful participation of elected representatives, convergence of activities of various line departments and accountability mechanisms. Hence we find the same issues repeatedly affecting the success of programmes and schemes, creating an environment where nothing new can be expected in the implementation of development activities at the grassroots level. Some of these **bottlenecks** and their repercussions are listed below.

- o **Focus on construction and infrastructure development**

Schemes and programmes that targeted overall village development end up with expenditures majorly on constructions and infrastructure development (roads, drainages, buildings and compound walls) without effective focus on participatory needs assessment and the crucial aspects of behavioural and attitudinal changes required, thus resulting in superficial and short term changes within the village.

- o **Working in silos, bounded by programmatic and departmental boundaries.**

Effective governance at the grassroots level requires convergence in planning, implementation and monitoring of benefits accrued through various government efforts. In the absence of such a mechanism, progress reports of various schemes show whether the schemes reached their targets individually, without being able to monitor the overall population covered through these schemes and the overall benefits for the community due to government interventions. This leads to corruption, duplication of efforts and the truly vulnerable sections, are left as they were.

- o **Lack of accountability of the bureaucracy and public representatives.**

With practically no focus on concurrent monitoring of the provision of guidance and orientation, timely planning and fund release during the period of implementation, there is no effective way to create accountability measures and fix responsibilities for intermediate decisions and actions that have considerable impacts on end outcomes. Thus, the bureaucratic machinery and elected representatives at different levels aren't held accountable for the repeated failures/shortcomings of schemes and programmes.

- ***Enough laws, structures, schemes and policies already exist to guarantee that no village gets left behind.***

A survey of existing rules and regulations, policies and schemes shows that, practically all aspects of rural development (including regional disparities, environmental sustainability, addressing issues of vulnerable groups, gender development, education, health and livelihoods) are covered and the need for new policies, schemes and structures could be minimal and restricted to specific geographical/social exceptions. It is a lack of effective local leadership, convergence action, timely guidance and facilitation for ground actions and ineffective monitoring mechanisms

that act has hindering forces in meeting the critical objectives of the schemes.

What do we seek to achieve

Holistic village and community development program would seek to achieve several development ideals that include, but are not limited to

- Quality education for all, (Universal primary education, literacy for all genders and ages of people)
- Safe food and nutritional security for all
- Access to quality curative and preventive healthcare services
- Livelihood security and financial inclusion
- Addressing of social and economic disparities of marginalized communities
- Optimal use, management and sustainability of natural resources and conservation of bio-diversity and greening of villages
- Protection of rights of indigenous communities and access to development opportunities
- Clean drinking water and sustainability of water sources
- Safe sanitation facilities and ecologically sound waste management
- Transparency and accountability in public services and breaking down of information asymmetry
- Gender justice, social justice and elimination of gender based and communal violence
- Good governance at the local level that extends to free and fair electoral process at the GP level
- Scientific temperament and progressive thinking among people

Towards these, specific outcomes must be seen in the villages in a time-bound manner and through a 4 year program from October 2014 to September 2018, there must be focus on the following targets in the identified villages / GPs.

Sector	Targets	Leading to
Education	*Zero dropout rates and out of school children in primary and secondary education *No disparities in learning outcomes *Institutions and manpower in place that can handle children with special needs	Universal primary education / Inclusive, equitable and quality education for all / Access to higher education for all / Elimination of child labor
Health	*Zero preventable maternal	Reduction in all preventable deaths and spread of

	<p>and child deaths,</p> <p>*Reversal in the rate of spread of communicable diseases,</p> <p>Family planning, full immunization</p> <p>*Community participation in health programmes</p> <p>*Health institutions (infrastructure and manpower) completely conforming to IPHS guidelines</p> <p>*Health insurance coverage for all</p>	<p>communicable diseases; greater awareness</p> <p>Addressing of social determinants of health</p>
Food & nutrition	<p>*Compliance to standards prescribed by PDS, Women and Child Welfare departments</p> <p>*Full coverage of children and pregnant women in nutrition programme</p> <p>*Guaranteed provision of caloric as well as nutritional needs</p> <p>*Consumption of locally grown food grains (wherever possible)</p>	<p>No hunger deaths / eradication of hunger and malnutrition / reduction of child mortality /</p> <p>Eventual reduction of BPL beneficiaries in the target village or GP</p>
Livelihood & economic security	<p>*100% inclusion and active participation in savings/banking</p> <p>*Provision of fixed assets for vulnerable households</p> <p>*Enterprise development initiatives</p> <p>*Social security benefits for senior citizens and widows</p>	<p>Financial inclusion, Successful cooperatives and self-sustainable SHGs</p> <p>Enhanced income opportunities for community members</p>
Sanitation	<p>*100% coverage and utilization of toilets</p>	<p>Reduction in prevalence of diseases like Diarrhoea</p>

	<p>*Elimination of open disposal of solid and liquid wastes</p> <p>*Separate toilets for girls / women, senior citizens and PwD in all public buildings (schools, hospitals, etc)</p> <p>*Waste recycling and safe disposal of waste</p> <p>*Full conformity to the ban on manual scavenging</p>	Economically sustainable waste disposal mechanisms
Housing and habitat	<p>*Provision of Pucca houses, with dependable supply of potable water and electricity</p> <p>*Mandatory provision of playgrounds for schools</p>	<p>Elimination of Kaccha houses, creation of permanent assets for all eligible households.</p> <p>Physical well-being of children, and the playground as a platform for bringing different communities together</p>
Gender and development	<p>*Education/literacy for women and girls of all ages</p> <p>*Equitable wages for women, independent financial access, active participation in income generation, reduced health risks due to maternal issues, active participation in community activities and political decision making</p> <p>*Sensitization of men, women and children towards gender issues and gender-based violence and setting up of distress cells / mechanisms</p> <p>*Reduction in Zero cases of dowry demands and harassment related to dowry</p>	<p>Women's security and elimination of socio-economic disparities / greater participation in monitoring and local governance / Elimination of female infanticide / foeticide, under-age marriage / reduction in crimes against women and elimination of cases related to sexual assaults</p>
Marginalized and vulnerable groups	<p>*Full coverage of eligible households under beneficiary</p>	<p>Creation of skill development and sustainable livelihood</p>

	<p>schemes</p> <p>*Equal participation in village, GP activities and decision making</p> <p>*All People With Disability (PWD)s to be enumerated and provisions for social and economic security to be given appropriately</p>	<p>opportunities</p> <p>Elimination of extreme poverty</p> <p>Minimizing socio-economic disparities</p> <p>Minimizing conflict situations and fostering unity</p>
Forests, rivers and coasts	<p>*Rejuvenation of local forests, ponds and natural assets with community managed action plans for resource extraction and protection</p> <p>*No cases of violation of CRZ and other norms</p> <p>*Genuine public consultations to be facilitated for projects</p>	Sustainable natural assets, thriving with local biodiversity
Agriculture, Natural Resource Management and Biodiversity	<p>*Generation of surplus incomes for small and marginal farmers through diversified incomes.</p> <p>*Rational adoption of natural and organic agriculture</p> <p>*Promotion of self-help group based activities for promotion of agricultural activities</p> <p>*Community-centred, off and on- farm natural resource management (eg., soil, rainwater, biodiversity)</p> <p>*Adoption of knowledge intensive Low External Input Sustainable Agriculture (LEISA) practices</p> <p>*Creation of forward and backward linkages to ensure</p>	<p>Creation of sustainable livelihoods for small and marginalized farmers through :</p> <p>Lowered costs of production and risks, and more stable production and returns for the farmers</p> <p>Better conservation and management, and hence, health of, off and on-farm natural resources</p>

	better community access to both, input and output markets	
Livestock and inland fisheries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Utilization of available and potential water bodies for inland fishery development *Promotion of improved animal husbandry practices * Conducting better disease surveillance systems and animal health camps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Optimum utilization of available resources *More enterprise development in the village * Enhanced livelihood security for community members
Groundwater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Village level agreements on equitable and sustainable distribution of groundwater, using participatory mechanisms. *Creation of water conservation structures and mechanisms (and community acceptance and involvement in it) 	<p>Groundwater to be treated as a common good, rather than private property</p> <p>Targeted improvement in groundwater levels (depending on the intensity of the issue)</p>
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Electrification of all targeted villages and increase the dependence on renewable sources (wherever possible) *Reliable telecom connectivity (at least 1 provider) *Roads and drains within the villages and connectivity 	Improved physical and network connectivity that enables growth
Governance / decentralization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Efficient provision of basic services like water supply, street lights, solid and liquid waste management *High rates of tax recovery and user fee collection *Creation of sustainable economic and natural assets 	<p>Sustainable local government, capable of envisioning its future development path.</p> <p>Active community members from all social categories involved in decision making.</p> <p>Active direct community participation in choosing</p>

	<p>*Well attended Gram Sabhas, Social audits and MGNREGA Gram Sabhas (both community and bureaucrats)</p> <p>*Transparent display of GP accounts and action plans</p> <p>GP serving as strong units of local governance</p>	<p>activities, implementation and monitoring</p> <p>Local government having considerable economic and natural resource base to cater to the unique requirements of its villages.</p> <p>Elimination of corruption</p>
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Important Note: The sectors and target indicators listed in the above table are not exhaustive and may be suitably modified and expanded with the opinion of subject experts and development professionals. At the same time, it must be noted that there are some indicators that can be assessed quantitatively, but there are others that can only be assessed qualitatively. Hence, it is very important that social audits form a significant part of the Monitoring and Evaluation process employed.

Among the sectors listed above, each village must focus on at least 70% of those issues that need attention and setting these targets must be a democratic exercise conducted jointly by the Member of Parliament and local stakeholders including PRI members, Govt. officials, frontline workers and the people.

Selection: The selection of village / GP in the constituency should also be made through a consultative process involving the MP and locals and selection of the most backward village or GP in the constituency must be encouraged.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The progress of each of the villages should be monitored twice a year to capture evidences, trends and challenges faced. Two types of M & E would be employed.

- A monitoring and evaluation committee from the Centre which would conduct the evaluation in the 2nd year and the 4th year of implementation across a 109 villages / GPs (20%)
- A team comprising locals and other selected members who would conduct a comprehensive social audit at the end of every year, examine the issues and suggest changes.

The summary of monitoring and evaluation reports as well as social audits should be put in public domain online. A baseline report comprising a comprehensive status of development of the villages / GPs should be made and the most improved village / GPs can be considered for incentives and national recognition.

Conclusion – the way forward

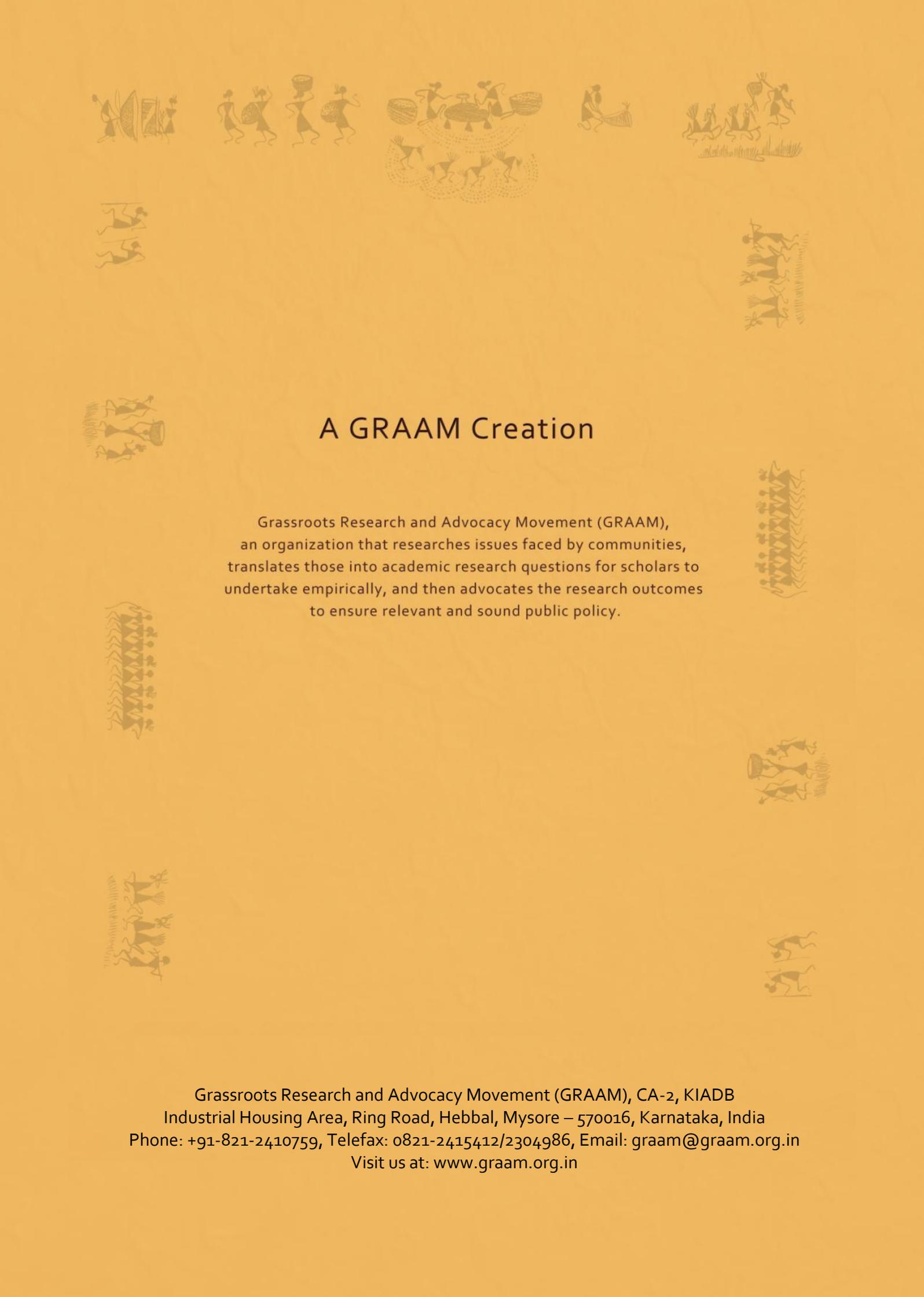
This document attempts to lay out a framework for holistic village and community development and though it may be undertaken in only one village / GP per constituency, it would surely be expected to trigger a process of development in the villages in the vicinity of the selected village. Further, it charts an unprecedented path of not depending on a new financial outlay and provides the MPs an opportunity to work closely with the people they represent.

As a way forward, the following steps may be taken:

- The framework must be considered by the Prime Minister's office and after offering a fixed time period for open feedback from citizens, political parties and civil society organizations, the process of developing Unnat Gaon/Adarsh Gaon should be launched.
- Minor modifications to the rules on spending MPLAD funds should be made to allow for spending on this initiative
- A notification to the Members of Parliament must be issued to start the process and complete the selection of village / GP for implementing the initiative along with local stakeholders must be accomplished by December 2014 along with draft plan that identifies the areas of focus.
- a central committee under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister should be formed to review the progress of the initiative; a part of the committee's responsibility would be to coordinate the monitoring, evaluation and audit of the program as well and for this purpose, it may be supported by research organizations working in the development sector, representatives from civil society and social entrepreneurs in framing suitable & contextual process indicators that could be used for implementing as well as evaluating the initiatives.

It is hoped that this framework will kick-start a process of rural development with a different approach and the villages / GPs identified for the initiative would provide authentic information on development models that work.

This document is to be placed in the public domain and is open for feedback, comments and constructive criticism.



A GRAAM Creation

Grassroots Research and Advocacy Movement (GRAAM),
an organization that researches issues faced by communities,
translates those into academic research questions for scholars to
undertake empirically, and then advocates the research outcomes
to ensure relevant and sound public policy.

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