

# THE SOCIAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

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## **FIELD TRIP REPORT**

### **Ramanagara- Zilla Panchayat and Gram Panchayat<sup>1</sup>**

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#### **Overview of the Visit**

Ramanagara is located 50 km from the city of Bangalore. Previously, it was called 'The Closepet'. It was later renamed Ramanagara, derived from the Ramagiri hill near the city. Ramanagara is a newly demarcated district in rural Bangalore comprising four Taluks. Ramanagara, Channapatna, Magadi and Kanakapura. The Ramanagara district is famous for its mulberry trees, silk fabrics, milk and toys. Ramanagara has one of the largest silk markets in India, hence the name 'Silk City'. There is an industrial zone in the Ramanagara area, which houses leading companies such as Toyota, Coca-Cola and Bosch.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023, students from the Center for Research in Social Sciences and Education at JAIN (Deemed-to-be university), along with the faculty members visited Ramanagara Zilla Panchayat and Gopahalli Gram Panchayat office to seek information on the functioning of the Panchayati Raj System. After the establishment of the Ramanagara district in 2002, the Zilla Panchayat (ZP) in Ramanagara was formed. Ramanagara Zilla Panchayat was set up under the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, 1993, which promotes grassroots planning and programme implementation. The demography of the district, according to the 2011 Census, there are 823 villages in total, 127 Gram Panchayats, 4 Taluks, and a total population of 11 lakhs (10.5 Lakh from Rural and 50 thousand people in the Urban part). There are 2305 households in the Ramanagara district. There are 821 lower primary schools, 565 higher primary schools, and 328 higher secondary schools, including government-funded and non-government-funded

<sup>1</sup> This report was written as part of the second internal assessment for the project course on *Government Budgeting: Impact on Public Affairs*. This comprehensive report has been prepared by compiling the reports submitted by the student contributors.

institutions. There are also 1,337 Anganwadis of which 59 have smart classes for students. According to the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, a three-tier system of administration has been established, with Zilla Panchayats, Taluk Panchayats, and Grama Panchayats at the district, taluk, and village levels, respectively. There are 22 elected members of the Ramanagara Zilla Panchayat's elected body, as well as administrative staff members working in several areas including development, administration, planning, accounts, DRDA, and council. The village Gopahalli is located in Ramanagara Taluk of Ramanagara District in the State of Karnataka. Ramanagara, which is around 22 kilometres from Gopahalli, is the closest town.

Chief Planning officer of Zila panchayat Mr. Chhikkasubbaiah, P.T. Executive officer Mr. Pradeep, Mr. Lokesh assistant planning officer, Mr. Rupesh Kumar Taluk Assistant director and Mr Sunil Gram panchayat accountant and staff from the office were present to assist and provide detailed information on the rural development of the district.

**The objectives of the field visit were-**

- To gather information about the budget allocation, utilization, and implementation status of various schemes and projects at the various Panchayat levels.
- To interact with the officials responsible for budget planning and implementation, review budget documents and reports, and understand the progress of various development projects being implemented by the Zilla Panchayat and also understand their perspectives on the budget and its impact on their lives.
- To identify the challenges faced by the Panchayat in effectively utilizing the budget.
- To learn and provide recommendations for improving the budget planning and implementation process, which can ultimately lead to better outcomes for the local community.

**Budget Structure & Allocation in the various Panchayat Levels**

The Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act of 1933 stipulates that the Zilla Panchayat (ZP), Taluk Panchayat (TP), and Gram Panchayat (GP) must prepare a budget and approve it in a meeting to be held between February and March. In the ZP and TP, the finance, audit, and planning committee is in charge of budget preparation, whereas the secretary is in charge

of it in the case of the GP. The TPs are required to forward the budget to the ZP for approval similarly, the budget passed by the GP should be sent to the TP within the date fixed by the state government. The audit of the accounts of Zilla Panchayat and Taluk Panchayat is done by the office of Comptroller and Auditor General at the state level while that of the gram panchayat is done by the Local Audi Circle of the State Accounts Department. At present, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) has made social audits for all the activities under the schemes mandatory.

Regarding budgets and allocations, it is the state that releases funds to the Zilla Parishad and Taluk Parishad. An estimate is made by both levels, regarding the funds that would be required to carry out schemes and projects in the district. According to the officials, the allocation of funds by the State is beneficial for them because the State is more aware of the needs and requirements of the people living in different districts. For the year 2023-24, the Zilla Parishad and Taluk Parishad have received INR. 630 crores in total, of which INR. 107 crores have been allocated to Taluk Parishad. This fund is disbursed in 3-4 instalments. All the departments have separate link documents from where they collect the funds and work toward respective projects. The funds come as 'Tied Funds' and 'Untied Funds' which states that 60% of the fund that is tied must be mandatorily spent on the schemes to be implemented and the remaining 40% can be used for the overall urgent requirements of the district.

The budget allocation for Gram Panchayat has different ways to follow. It is not released combined with the other two levels. According to the Fifteenth Finance Commission, a budget proposal is given by the Gram Panchayat to the Union government, where it gets analysed and approved, resulting in the required amount being released directly by the Central government. Moreover, Gram Panchayat receives more political support in comparison to Zilla and Taluk Parishad. Amongst the three levels, Taluk Parishad acts as a cooperating and supervising body and receives the least allocation in comparison to the other two. The gram panchayat is also empowered to make its bylaws. Jamabandi, which is like a community meeting, and other audits are conducted in the Gram Panchayat to check the accounts of the area in presence of all the people living in the Area. This ensures effective accountability and transparency toward people.

The first interactions with the officials revealed that Ramanagara Zilla Parishad consists of 28 departments, including Health, Education, Animal Husbandry, Sericulture, Fishery, and so on, which comprises one Head Officer in each department.

### **Development and the Ramanagara Model**

Ramanagara District has an interesting model, where they plan to converge the scheme funds so that all the branches work together to yield better outcomes from the projects. Rather than a division of funds and working separately, they combine the funds and work together in the needed areas, and this according to them has been able to bring about more development in the district.

With respect to healthcare, Ramanagara has 1 District Hospital, 3 General hospitals, 4 Community Health Centers, 61 Primary Health Centers, 240 Sub Centers, and 4 Urban Primary Health Centers (UPHC). Since the last year (2022), there has been the construction of hospitals for Physically Handicapped individuals, where Missionaries from abroad are brought specifically to treat children from 0-3 years. Moreover, they have 161 veterinary hospitals in the district. Another highlight is the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the district, helping in building up new schools and Anganwadis. The representatives of the companies like Toyota, Bosch, Coca-Cola, and so on, plan meetings with the local government and collaborate in development projects. Amongst the projects, a visit to Gopalahalli Gram Panchayat, we could see, Ramahalli Middle School, Kannada medium, constructed by Toyota Kirloskar Auto Parts (TKAP). Amongst other initiatives through CSR includes the opening of a 100-bed hospital by Infosys in Ramanagara and a further plan of building 7620 biogas units has been promised by the foundation. The convergence of two separate government schemes towards a consolidated purpose is also worth highlighting. For example, it was observed Mid-Day Meal and MGNREGA led to the construction of a hall for serving school meals and workers involved in the construction included workers registered under MGNREGA. This, hence, helped the children living in the area to get access to better infrastructure.

The convergence of funds refers to the pooling of resources from different sources or government schemes to achieve common goals and objectives. The convergence helps to deal with the sector-wise shortage of funds leading to better planning and implementation. For example, in Ramanagara, the convergence plan resulted in focused

and holistic development in specific areas, optimum utilization of available resources, and minimization of the duplication of efforts. This approach led to better outcomes and impact, as the combined efforts of different schemes lead to collaborations and complementarity. It also helps mitigate the impact of budget cuts and reduce the gaps in expenditure. In many cases, when budgets are reduced or delayed, there is a significant impact on the implementation of development initiatives. This can lead to significant delays in funding, which, in turn, can have a negative impact on the implementation of projects and programs, particularly at the grassroots level.

Gopahalli Gram Panchayat is also efficiently working toward sanitation facilities, highlighted by the officials that all the houses in the panchayat areas have toilets, they are also provided with drinking water under Jal Jeevan Mission, street lights for safety purposes, and the full-fledged working of MGNREGA is ensured. All three levels of local government have received a 5 lakhs allocation for MGNREGA respectively for works to be done under the scheme in the district. In Ramanagara district, according to data from the Zilla Panchayat and Gram Panchayat office, 166,173 job cards have been issued, of which 102,035 are currently active. However, the number of active workers, which stands at 276,747, exceeds that of active job cards due to individuals opting out of the NREGA scheme. The convergence of the department of animal husbandry with NREGA has yielded impressive results for the district. The Gopahalli GP has issued 2,250 Job Cards and has 50.8 % of women participation under the scheme. Amongst other initiatives within the district, having kitchen gardens and growing daily used vegetables in their own houses is encouraged. In addition to making social audits obligatory for all activities under NREGA, the planning process for the scheme in Ramanagara district involves door-to-door surveys, Gram Sabha, and Ward Sabha meetings to identify potential beneficiaries. Furthermore, various workshops and training programs are initiated to enhance the scheme's performance. The district's NREGA program includes a range of work, such as constructing farm ponds, multi-arch check dams, and planting mulberry trees, as well as river rejuvenation and plantations.

Yet, there are no separate initiatives towards environmental conservation. The severe drought that has plagued the region for the past four years has had a devastating impact on the community, particularly those involved in dairying, which constitutes a quarter of

the population. Contagious diseases have spread rapidly among cattle due to the unhygienic environment, leading to a decrease in milk production and rendering the livelihood of the farmers unsustainable. Additionally, the contamination and wastage of fodder have only compounded the issue, making it increasingly difficult for the community to overcome these challenges and secure a stable source of income. Urgent action must be taken to address these pressing concerns and provide support to the affected individuals and families.

Thus, the result of the convergence led under the Pashu Bhagya program, technical and financial support was provided to 32 beneficiaries from the Scheduled Caste (SC) or Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities, along with 293 other beneficiaries. The support amounts to Rs. 20.40 lakhs and Rs. 87.09 lakhs, respectively. In addition, under the SCP/TSP initiative, 100 beneficiaries receive a financial grant of Rs. 60 lakhs. The National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) provides skill training to 901 individuals belonging to families involved in dairying. Milk societies and Bangalore Milk Union Limited (BAMUL) provide an assured market, assured price, and timely payment through banks within 15 days. Additionally, medical aid and health camps are organized, and the yashaswini health insurance scheme offers full subsidy for SC beneficiaries and a 50% subsidy for life coverage of up to Rs. 2 lakhs.

Local government administrators in the Ramanagara district are responsible for planning, implementing and monitoring development initiatives at the grassroots level and their efforts can have a significant impact on the growth and development of the village. Through their efforts and planning, the administrators have helped improve the livelihood of the villagers by creating employment opportunities, anganwadis with smart classes, libraries with open access to all, drinking water, street lights, sanitation facilities, financial and technical support, also working closely with civil societies for development of the villages. The administrator also came up with the initiative of greywater management. Greywater management refers to the practice of treating and reusing wastewater generated from domestic activities such as laundry, dishwashing, and bathing. This wastewater, also known as greywater, can be a valuable resource when properly managed, as it can be used for non-potable purposes such as toilet flushing, irrigation, and even groundwater recharge. The management of greywater can involve various

treatment methods, such as physical, chemical, and biological treatment, depending on the intended reuse application. Thus, the need for competent administrators becomes vital.

### **Conclusion**

The key highlight of the district is its method of converging funds to work for development projects, and it would be better if this model is also used in other areas in the district and other districts as it would facilitate better development outcomes. Moreover, promoting the role of CSR and extension of this collaboration would facilitate Public Private Partnership (PPP) between the corporate and government which would lead to better results.

Understandably, some jurisdictions do not come under the local government, but issues such as climate, pollution, etc. know no boundaries. Hence working more towards cleaning rivers, proper waste disposal, and conservation of forests becomes not only a duty of the administration there but also the social responsibility of the people living in a district. This will not only help environmental conservation but would also ensure better health and food for all.

In a district like Ramanagara where silk production is high, it becomes a way for the local government there to expand the sector, which would also help generate more jobs for people, especially women. Support and promotion of self-help groups in all the districts would also contribute ways for women towards entrepreneurship and financial stability. Besides, recently Chief Minister of Karnataka has also announced the construction of a huge Ram Mandir in Ramanagara District, and effective execution of projects like these can turn the district towards having more income, job opportunities, and development of all.

In the domain of education, the smart classes in the anganwadis of Ramanagara district become a model for other districts to work towards the same. Building physical libraries, considering the digital divide in many areas is also a significant step towards providing access to academic materials to students and would help the continuity of learning, even in unprecedented situations, after looking into the consequences of the recent pandemic.



Students and Faculties with the District Zilla Panchayat officials, Ramanagara



Students and Faculties with the officials at the PPP model school in Gopahalli GP





Students and faculties interacting with the officials at the Gopahalli GP office



Local newspaper coverage of the field visit



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