



A STEP TOWARDS GENDER RESPONSIVE PANCHAYAT: INSIGHTS FROM ANANDI



1. Introduction

After the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 in India, women's participation in local self-government institutions became a foundational pillar of democratic decentralisation. The amendment mandated one-third reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), leading to structural transformation in rural governance which was subsequently raised to 50 percent in Gujarat, among other states.

Recent mixed-method research (2021-2024), including state-wise data analysis and surveys of 450 women representatives across five states, demonstrates that over 1.45 million women are actively participating in local governance.¹ Women-led Panchayats show 30 percent greater efficiency in the utilisation of social welfare funds and improved maternal health indicators. However, only about 10 percent of women representatives exercise independent decision-making authority, highlighting the continued need for institutional strengthening and capacity building.² As such, a significant demographic of citizens is left out from development planning processes and the voices of most vulnerable among them, the Dalit, Adivasi and other Bahujan women is unheard.

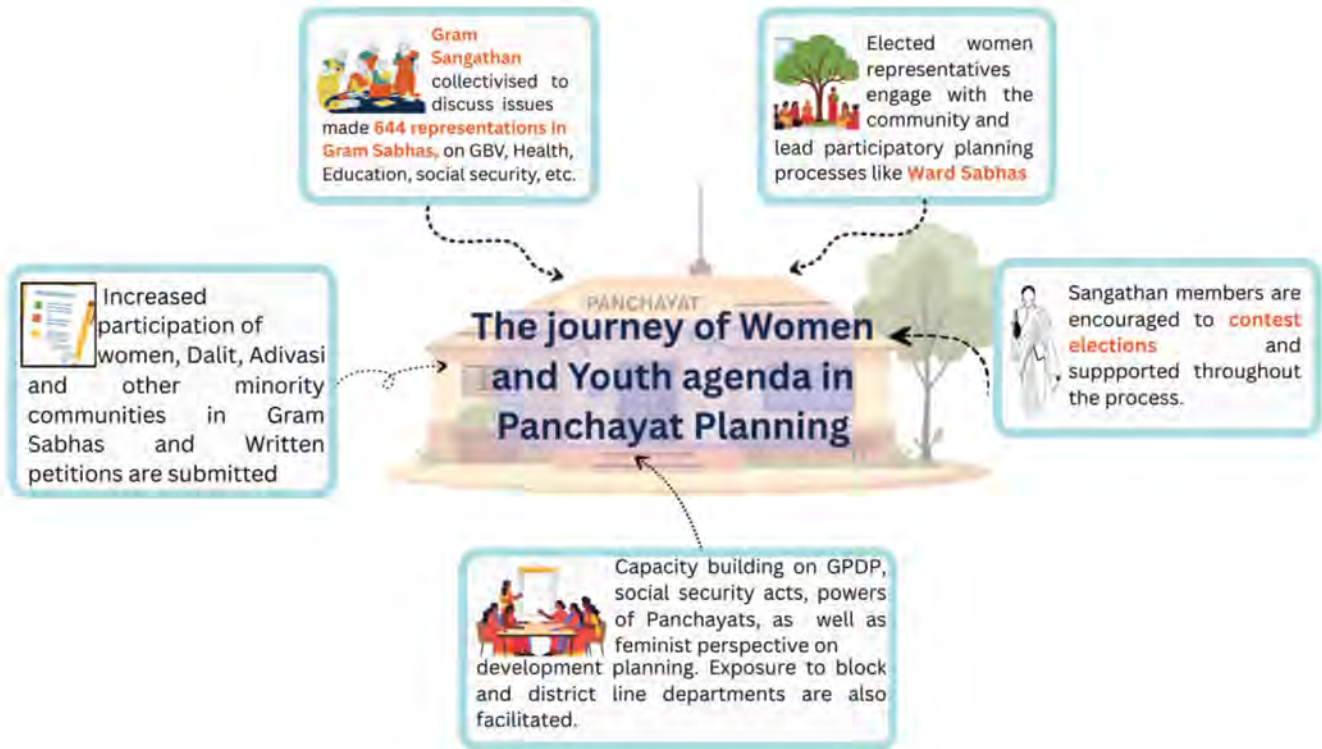
This fact sheet presents field-based evidence from the grassroots work of ANANDI and Devgadhi Mahila Sangathan in Devgadhi Baria block of Dahod, demonstrating how organised women's collectives move from community participation to formal governance leadership, contributing to gender-responsive local governance. This factsheet is structured to explain how ANANDI nurtures collectives (Sangathans), women's leadership, and facilitates dialogue with stakeholders and governance institutions to mainstream gender issues in Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabhas.

¹ Kumar, S. (2024, January 31). *Elected women representatives in local rural governments in India: Assessing the impact and challenges*. Orfonline.org. [https://www.orfonline.org/research/elected-women-representatives-in-local-rural-governments-in-india-assessing-the-impact-and-challenges#:~:text=India's%2073rd%20Constitutional%20Amendment%20Act%2C%5Ba%5D%20which%20came%20into,and%20China%20\(28.1%20percent\)](https://www.orfonline.org/research/elected-women-representatives-in-local-rural-governments-in-india-assessing-the-impact-and-challenges#:~:text=India's%2073rd%20Constitutional%20Amendment%20Act%2C%5Ba%5D%20which%20came%20into,and%20China%20(28.1%20percent)).

² Hamal, M., De Cock Buning, T., De Brouwere, V., Bardaji, A., & Dieleman, M. (2018). How does social accountability contribute to better maternal health outcomes? A qualitative study on perceived changes with government and civil society actors in Gujarat, India. *BMC Health Services Research*, 18(1), 653. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-018-3453-7>

2. From collective mobilisation to institutional impact: ANANDI's Model

Village-level Gram Sangathans are a forum for women from vulnerable communities, including Dalit and Adivasis, widows, women with disabilities, and young persons, where women convene to discuss their concerns, and celebrate their achievements. Monthly meetings of these village level Sangathans provide space to discuss personal and village-level concerns and collectively strategise solutions.



2.1 Capacity building, contesting elections and Inclusive Development Planning at Gram Panchayat

Under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, the Gram Sabha is the foundational, highest, and only permanent body of the Panchayati Raj System at the village level. It consists of all registered voters in a village, acting as the general body for the Gram Panchayat. Candidacy awareness campaigns were conducted to encourage Sangathan members to enter elected governance, training women to independently complete nomination processes and build confidence and autonomy. Capacity-building trainings supported elected women representatives (EWRs) to effectively manage Panchayat administration and prioritise issues related to women, children, and youth through development planning processes such as Gram Sabha awareness campaigns, Ward Sabhas, and Mahila Yuva Sabhas, where EWRs take leadership in shaping their ward plans within the GPDP. As a result, 85 women from Gram Sangathan were elected to local self-government institutions, including 4 Sarpanches and 81 ward members. Between 2023 and 2025, these women Sarpanches chaired 194 Gram Sabha meetings and facilitated participatory planning and review of GPDPs with the Gram Sabha and Gram Sangathan.

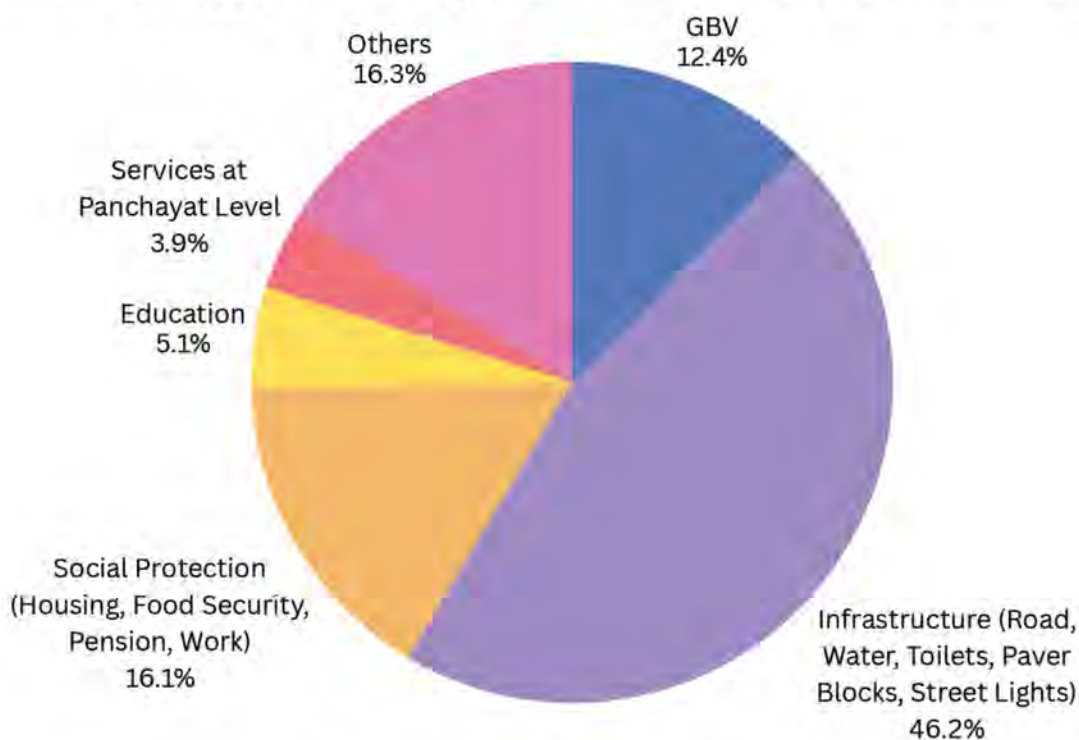
2.2 Increased community engagement with Local Governance Institutions through Gram Sangathan Leadership

The process begins within Gram Sangathan meetings where women collectively identify priority issues. Before Gram Sabha meetings, concerns are documented and written applications are prepared. During the Gram Sabha, these issues are formally presented and recorded.

A total of 644 issues were raised by Gram Sangathan in Gram Sabhas over the reporting period, of which 320 were formally submitted as written petitions, indicating strengthening institutional engagement and procedural awareness among women.

Significantly, social protection concerns, including housing, food security, pensions, and employment rights, accounted for 95 cases, reflecting economic vulnerabilities within marginalised communities. Issues related to Gender-based violence were raised in 73 Panchayats by Gram Sangathans, demonstrating that women are increasingly bringing gender justice issues into public governance forums. Health-related issues were largely connected to Anganwadi services, Ayushman cards, and malnutrition. Education-related concerns and regularisation of Panchayat-level service providers such as Village Computer Entrepreneurs (VCEs), Talati, and ASHA workers were also.

Nature of Issues Raised by Women's Collectives in Gram Sabha



ANANDI Gram Sabha Dataset, 2023-2025

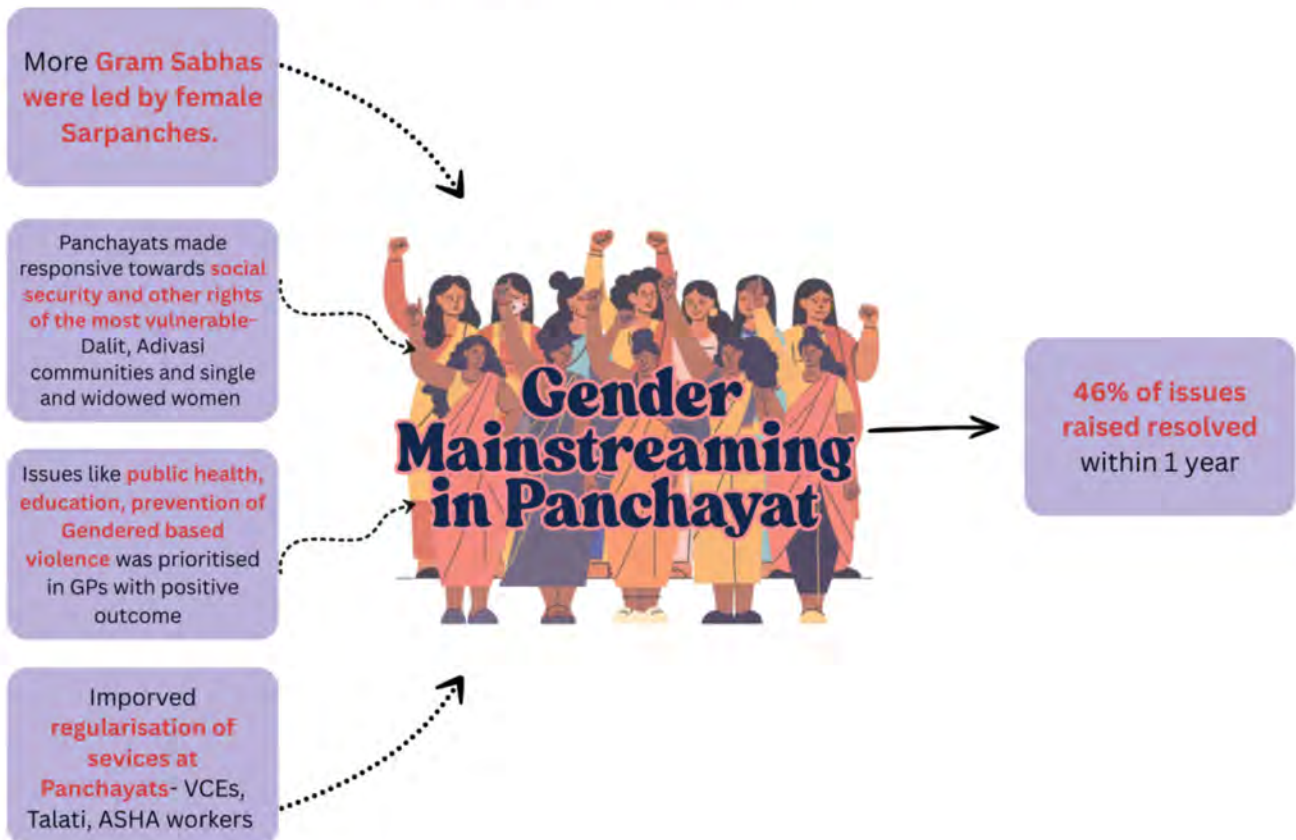
Case Study: Leadership Emerging from Marginalised Communities



Geetaben Solanki, a Panchayat member from Abhlod and Bhadbha Group Gram Panchayat in Devgad Baria block of Dahod district, belongs to the Dalit community. Despite facing caste-based resistance, she asserted her role in governance and raised the issue of unsafe school infrastructure. The village school building was dilapidated and functioned only up to Grade 5.

Through continuous advocacy and Gram Sangathan support, a new school building was constructed and the school was upgraded to Grade 7. She has also actively worked on housing, water access, right to work, and food security. Her aspiration to become Sarpanch reflects growing confidence and leadership among marginalised women.

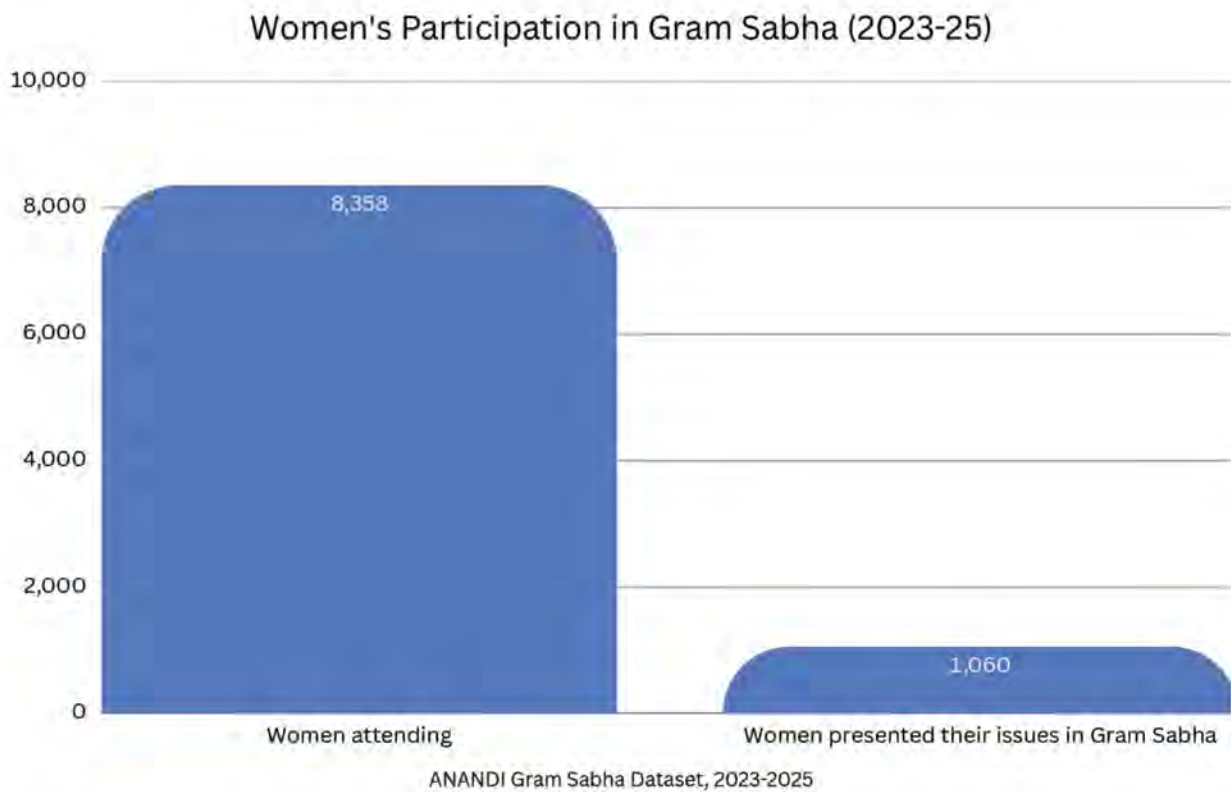
3. Gender Mainstreaming in Local Governance



Elected women representatives emerging from Gram Sangathan processes are more responsive to inclusive developmental concerns. This transition reflects movement from symbolic representation to substantive leadership, embedding gender-responsive governance within planning and implementation process

3.1 Women's participation in the Gram Sabha ?

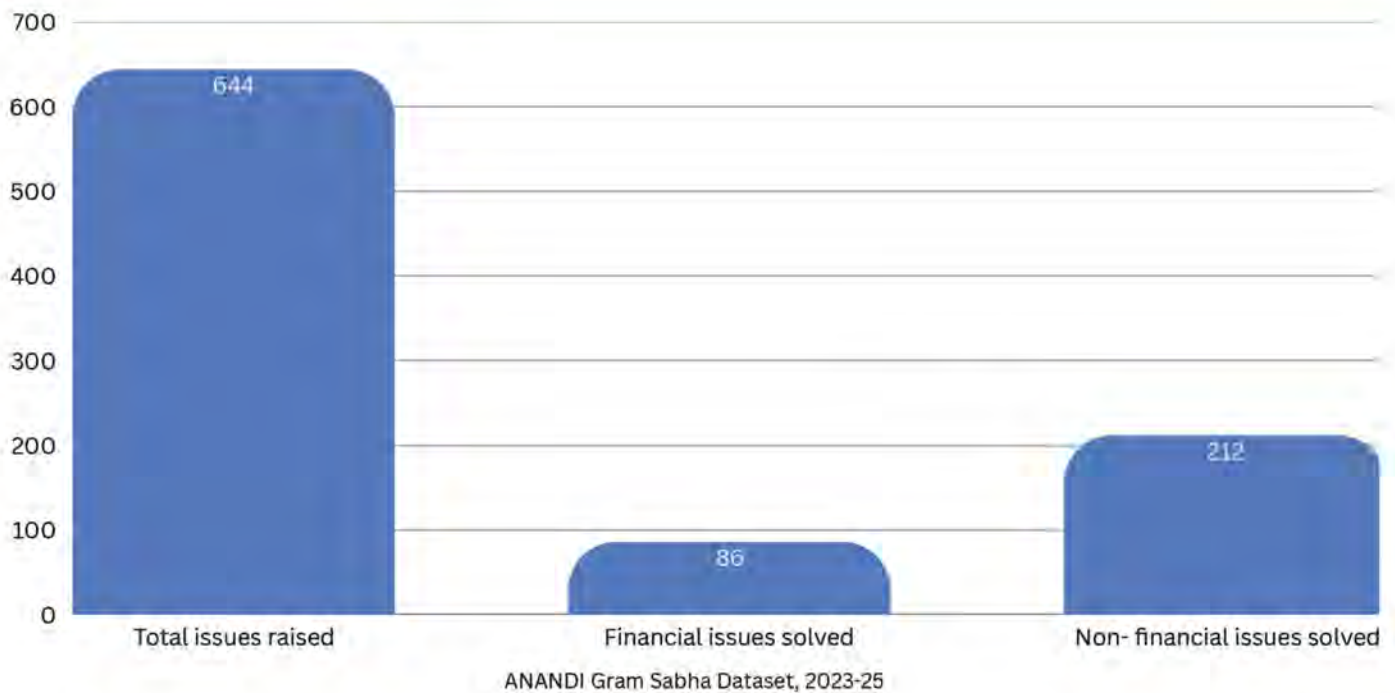
As per the below pie chart, from 2023 to 2025 a total of 8,358 women attended the Gram Sabha. Out of these, 1,060 women, representing 11 percent, stood up and presented their own and village issues which is encouraged and prepared for during Gram Sabha awareness campaigns are conducted as part of prior preparation. The Gram Sabha schedule is collected from the block office and during the campaign the date, venue and time of the Gram Sabha are written on posters and displayed in central places in the hamlets so that people can see them. Public announcements are also made through microphones.



3.2 Work completed on issues raised in Gram Sabha by Gram Sangathan:

Between January 2023 and December 2025, a total of 212 non-financial collective issues raised in Gram Sabhas have been resolved and 86 collective financial issues raised by Gram Sangathans have been resolved, which is 46% rate of resolution. Continuous written follow-up by Sangathan members ensures accountability and timely resolution. In situations where denial or exclusion at the Panchayat level happens, Gram Sangathan leaders support the rightsholders to accelerate their cases to block and district level through relevant grievance redressal systems.

The collective strength of organised women reduces the invisibility of marginalised households and transforms grievance expression into structured governance engagement.



3.3 Responsible Panchayat towards the rights of women from marginalised communities

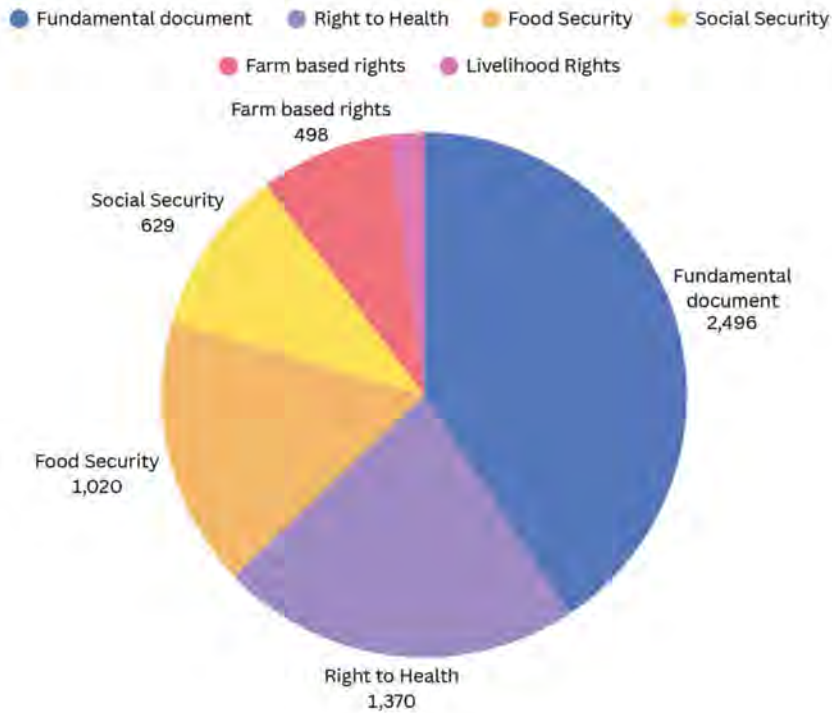
When Gram Sangathan leaders raise concerns regarding rights and entitlements of community members, like housing rights, right to food, social security and other fundamental documentations, it becomes a routine practice in Panchayats, to prioritise access to these entitlements for the vulnerable rights holders. The impact is visible in Gram Sangathan members' outreach to entitlement like Ration Card, Ayushman Card, Widow and Old Age Pension, Aadhar Card and other livelihood entitlements.

The access of rights and entitlement at Panchayat level in 2023-25 was 6147. This included Fundamental documents (Aadhaar Card, Voter ID Card, Caste certificates, etc.), right to food entitlements like access to ration cards, livelihood rights under NREGA, pension schemes, to name a few. The sensitisation of Panchayat functionaries, perspective strengthening of Gram Sangathans and capacity building of Elected Women Representatives also culminates into improved outcomes for Dalit, Adivasi and other OBC communities.

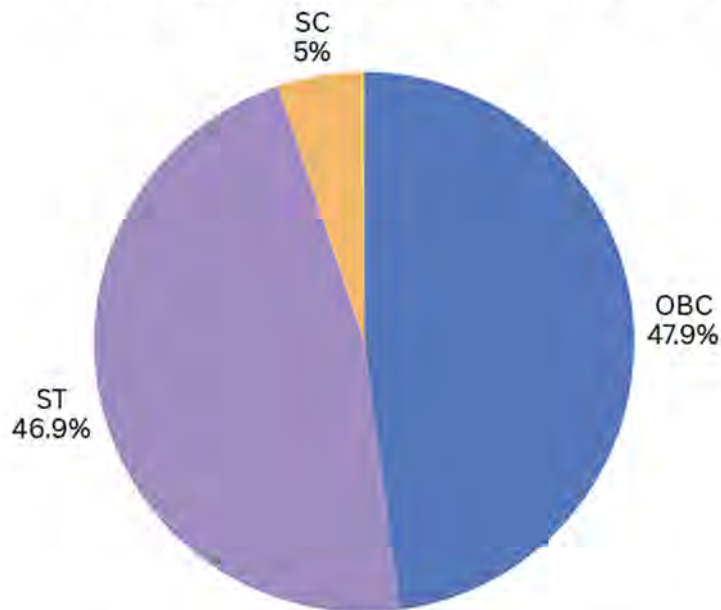
The chart below demonstrates caste- disaggregated data for outreach of entitlements in Devgad Baria block of Dahod district. As a percentage of population, Adivasi community forms 24.10% and Dalit community forms 3.5% of the total community. However, Adivasi and Dalit outreach forms 52% of those who have been supported for their rights and entitlements through Panchayat and Gram Sangathan efforts.

Through these processes, the Panchayat has become more accountable towards the rights and entitlements of women from marginalised communities.

Access to Rights by Gram Sangathan Members



Access to Rights: Disaggregated by Caste



ANANDI Lok Adhikar Kendra (LAK) database, 2023-2025

The access of rights and entitlement at Panchayat level in 2023-25 was 6147. This included Fundamental documents (Aadhaar Card, Voter ID Card, Caste certificates, etc.), right to food entitlements like access to ration cards, livelihood rights under NREGA, pension schemes, to name a few. The sensitisation of Panchayat functionaries, perspective strengthening of Gram Sangathans and capacity building of Elected Women Representatives also culminates into improved outcomes for Dalit, Adivasi and other OBC communities.

4. Conclusion

The evidence from this report demonstrates that when women are organised, trained, and provided institutional platforms, they emerge as transformative leaders. Gram Sabhas are increasingly becoming spaces of inclusive participation where marginalised voices shape development priorities.

Gender-responsive governance is not limited to women's empowerment alone; it strengthens overall rural development, accountability, and democratic functioning. The integration of women's perspectives into planning, budgeting, and monitoring processes ensures sustainable and equitable development outcomes.

