



Assessment of The Hunger Project's Strategy towards Strengthening and Building Leadership of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs)

End-line Assessment, Odisha

Assessment Period 2017-2022

Prepared by:

OUTLINE
India

Supported by:

THP Netherlands

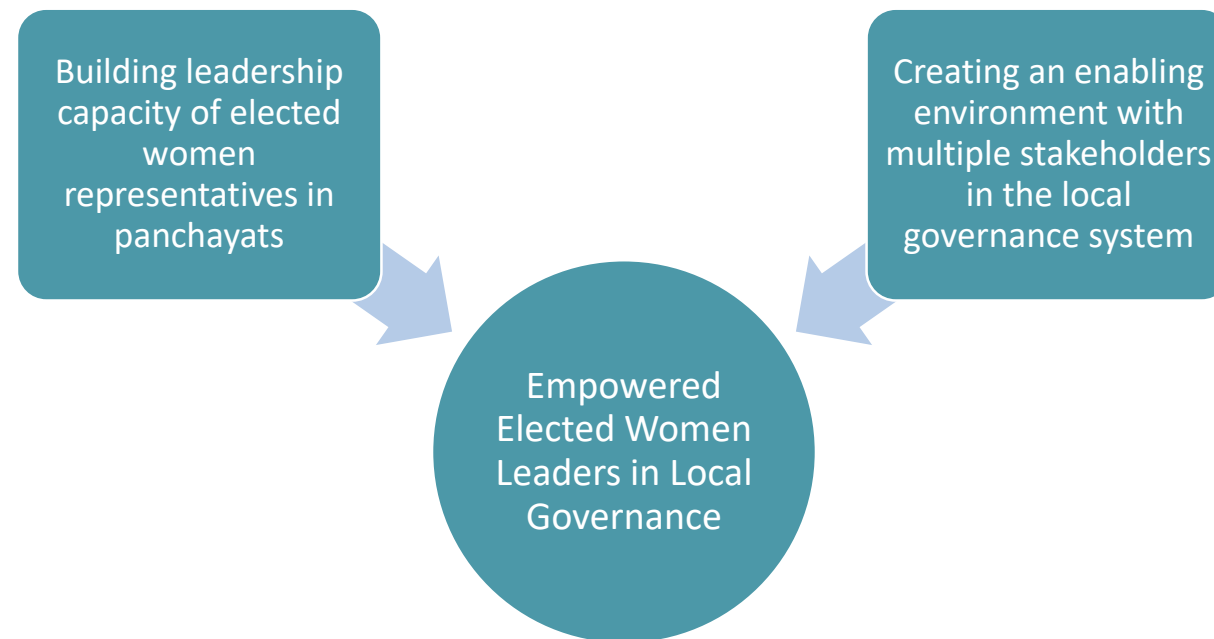
Prepared for:



Background

THP PROGRAM STRATEGY

THP India delivers its program objective through a two pronged approach:



The two child norm disqualification criteria for EWRs contesting elections has been there since 1994 which has affected local grassroots democracy for long.

THP's (The Hunger Project India) presence in Odisha completes a two decade mark and continues its commitment onto the fourth election cycle of the State. **During 2017 to 2022**, THP has engaged with **748 Elected Woman Representatives (EWRs)** in the State working in **7 districts across 7 blocks and 101 gram panchayats**. The districts are highlighted in grey on the right.

THP – Netherlands has supported the program since 2017 in two phases, where the second phase in 2019 added four more districts of Mayurbhanj, Koraput, Sonapur and Sundergarh.

This assessment is an end-line evaluation for the EWRs serving the 2017 to 2022 election term.

CONTEXT

The State of Odisha formerly called as Orissa, has **30 districts, 314 blocks and 6,234 panchayats**. The three tier Panchayat Raj Institution was established in Odisha in 1961. Later, the 73rd constitutional amendment in 1992, formalized it into a constitutional instrument after which, the panchayat laws were amended for consistency. **Four Panchayat elections** have taken place until now, with the last one in 2017 and the next one to be in 2022. A distinguished feature in Odisha is that the President or the Vice-president must be a woman.



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About Intervention

ADVOCACY



Strategies, initiatives and success of EWRs towards improving services and facilities for communities; increasing awareness etc. in the state.

FEDERATIONS



THP's success in the formation of federations for EWRs to encourage cross learning and create support structures. Also understand how these are formed, its achievements and importance.

JAGRUK MANCH



Another vital component of THP's strategy that builds an enabling environment by expanding the essence of support structures beyond the collectives of EWRs by including the community women in the discussions and actions for resolving local issues.

PANCHAYAT STRENGTHENING



Increasing awareness of the community on participation in gram Sabhas; information sharing to plug gaps on knowledge about rights and with a focus on gender.

COVID RESPONSE



THP adopted COVID specific strategies to respond to the needs of the communities during the pandemic. EWRs played a major role as local leaders in resolving development priorities during both the waves.

Methodology



TOOLS

- A mixed-method approach
- Quantitative survey with EWRs
- Qualitative:
 - Focus group discussions with EWRs from federation and women from community
 - In-depth interviews with Block officials, EMRs, THP officials and NGOs/ CSOs



SAMPLING

- Stratified random sampling: 7 blocks across 7 districts
- Sample size:
 - 137 quantitative surveys with EWRs
 - 2 IDIs with block officials
 - 1 IDI with NGO
 - 1 IDI with THP staff
 - 3 FGDs with EWRs with Jagruk manch members each



DATA COLLECTION

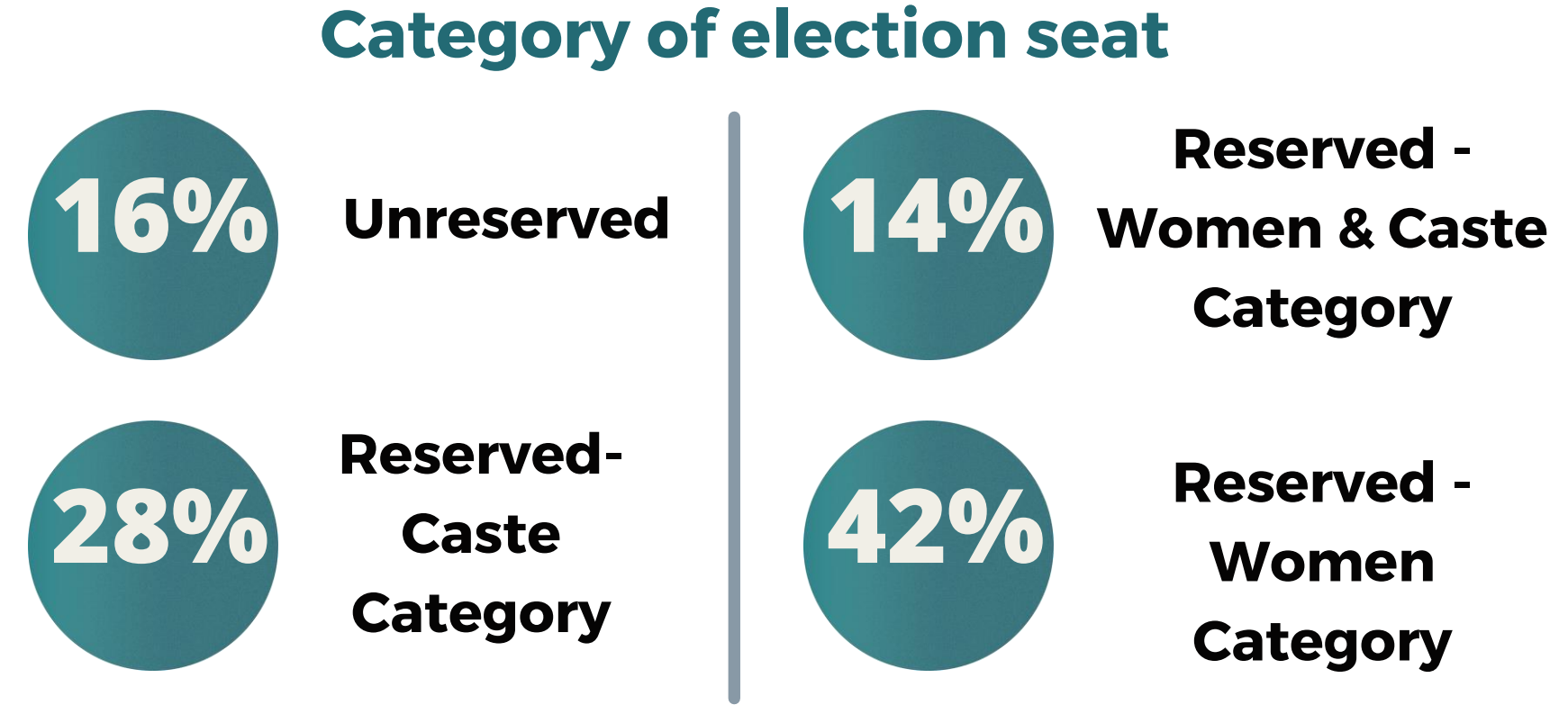
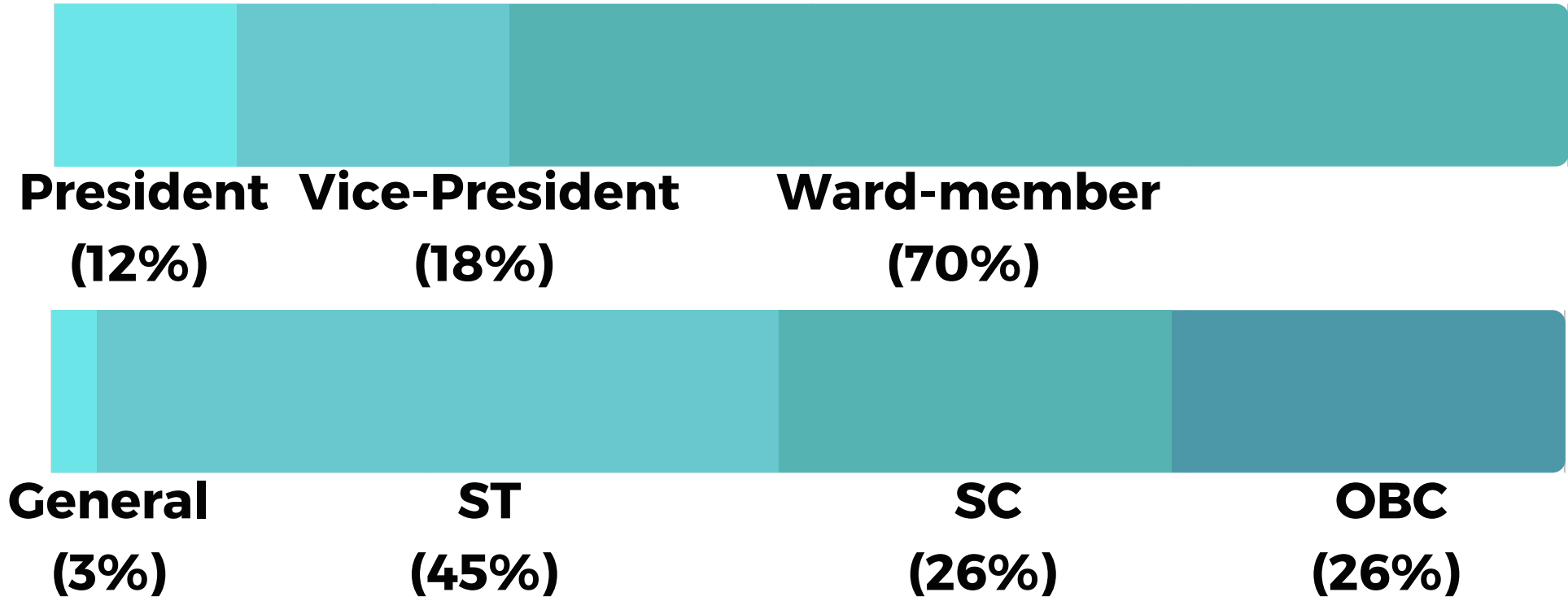
- Local enumerators with strong contextual knowledge
- Two-day intensive training on the data collection tool, ethics, and protocols
- Practice session and feedback mechanisms to strengthen probing and survey techniques



ANALYTICAL METHOD

- Primary data cleaning and analysis tool: MS Excel and STATA
- The analysis of the quantitative data involved analyzing the performance of EWRs at block-level
- The qualitative findings were then correlated with the quantitative findings obtained from respective blocks

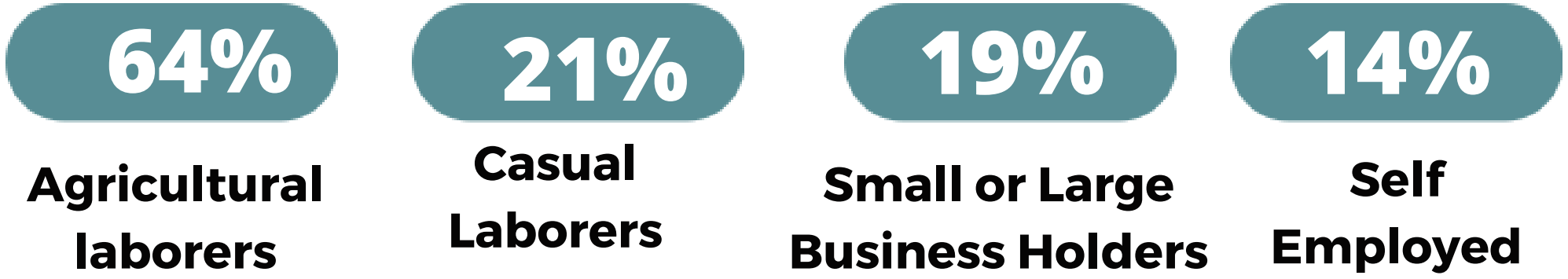
Socio-Demographic Characteristics



92% of EWRs have some form of formal education



Major income-generating activities EWRs are involved in

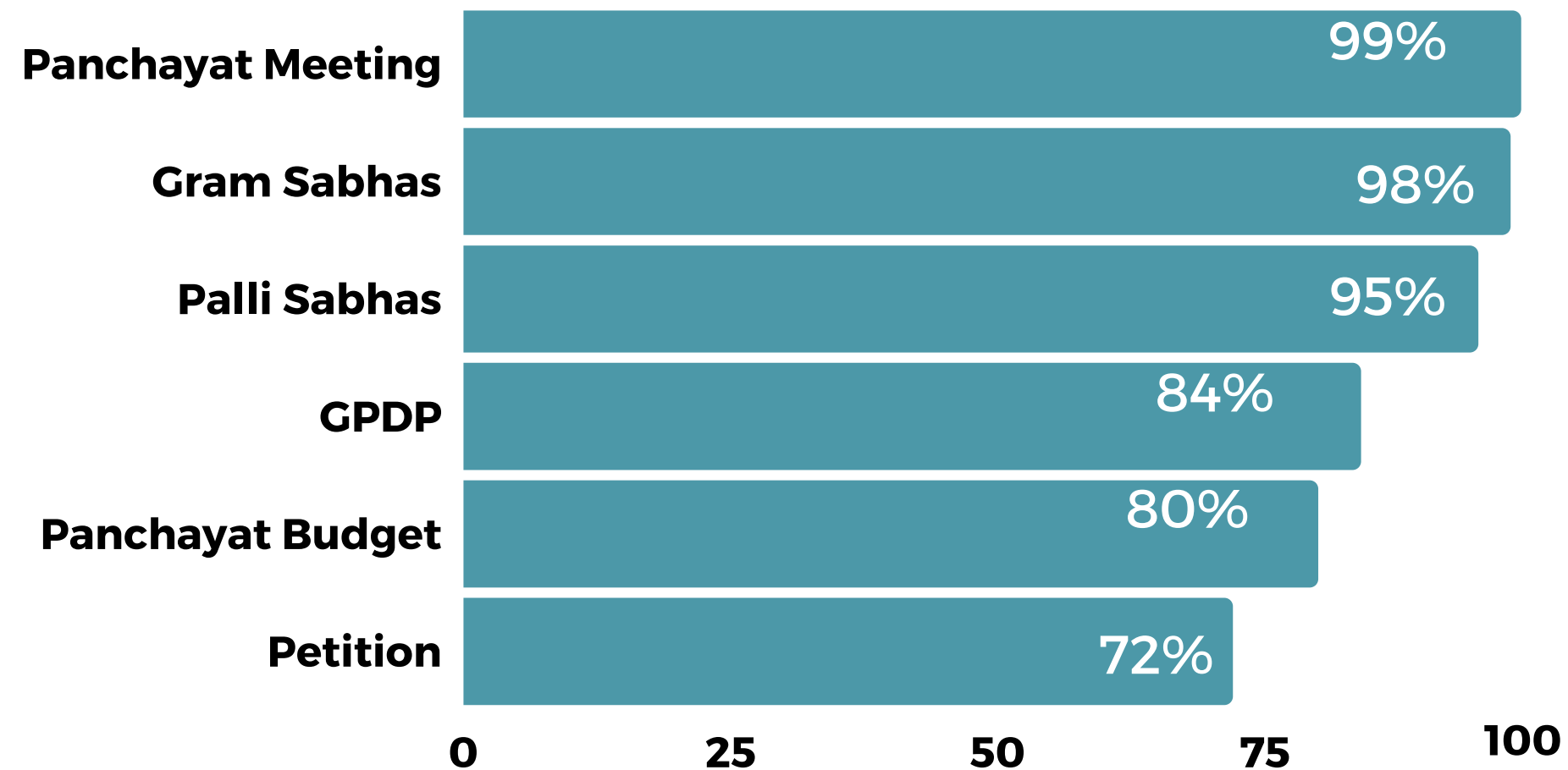


Awareness and Participation

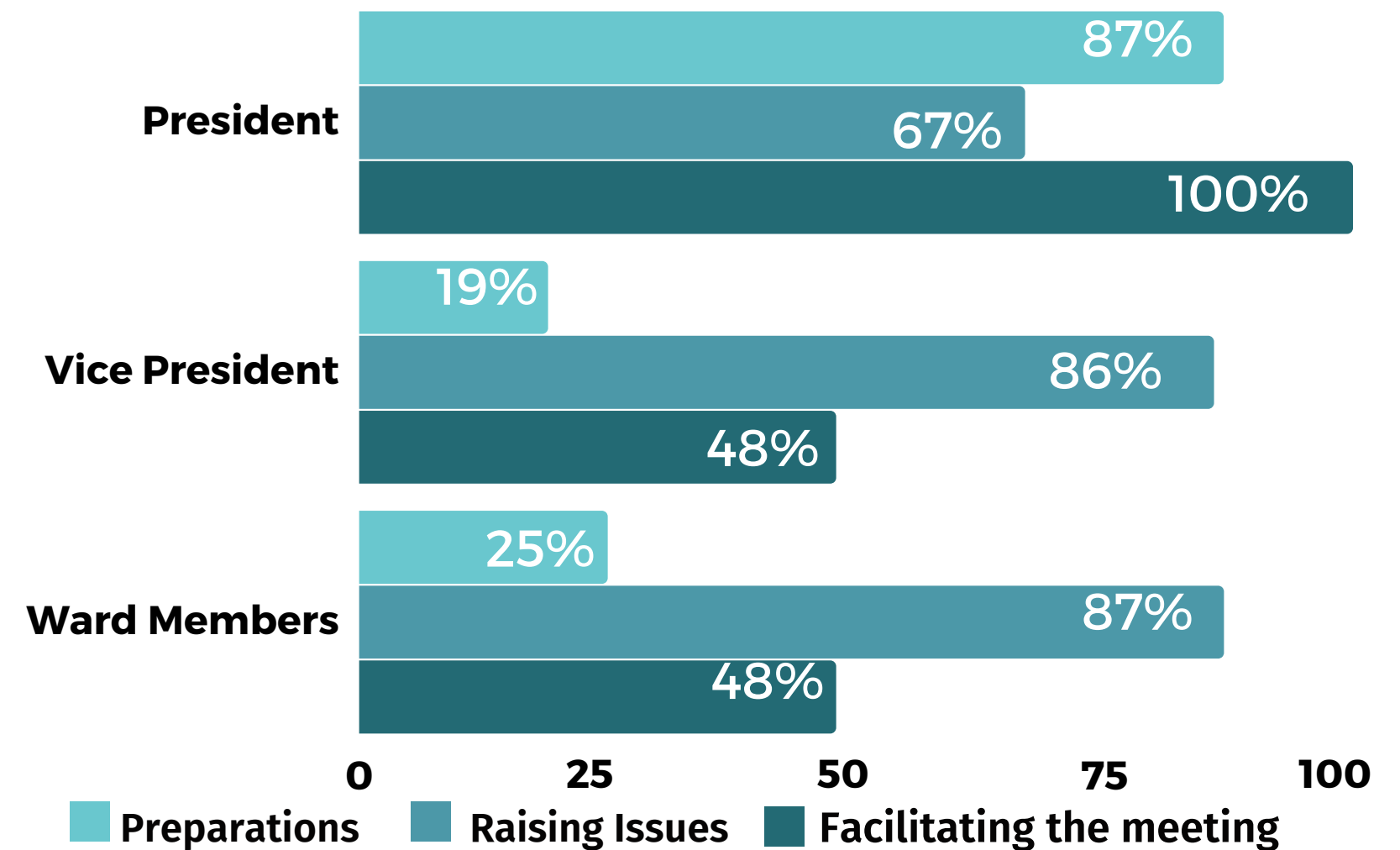
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Knowledge about Panchayati Raj Institutions



Involvement of EWRs in Gram Sabhas



97%

EWRs claimed to have actively participated in panchayat meetings by raising issues

92%

EWRs affirmed actions were taken on the issues raised by them in panchayat meetings.

It is seen that currently the **number of schemes** that more than **50% EWRs** know of is **4**.

Awareness and Participation

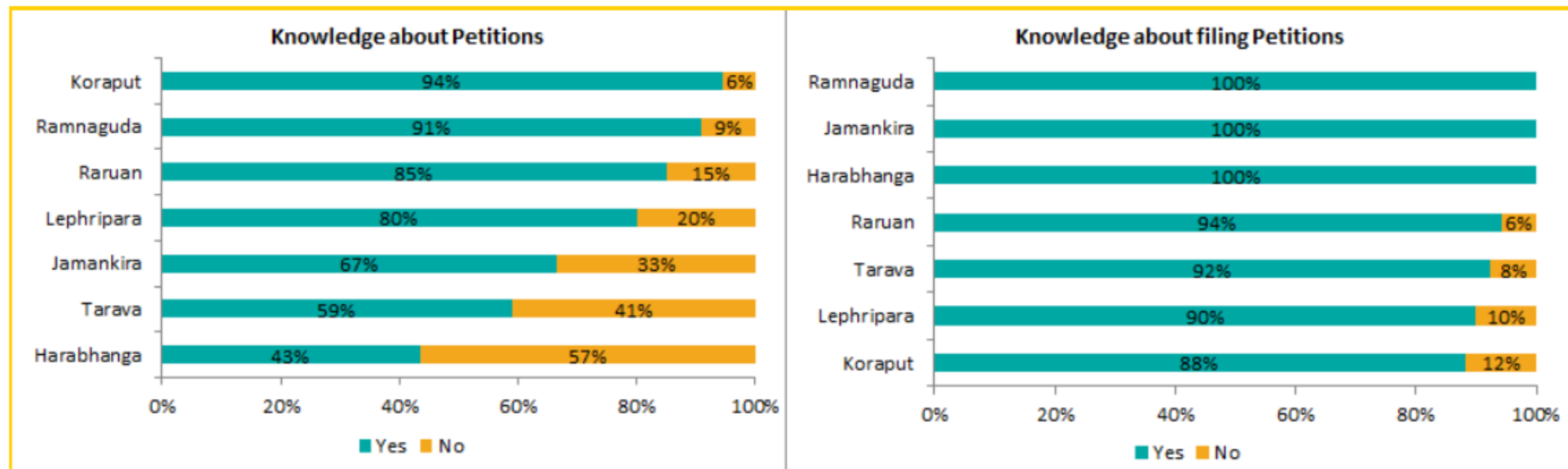
72%

EWRs claimed to be aware about petitions.

94%

Of these EWRs, had knowledge about filing petitions. Of those who were aware about Petitions, all the Vice Presidents claimed to have knowledge about filing petitions, followed by Presidents (93%) and ward-members (93%).

Block wise



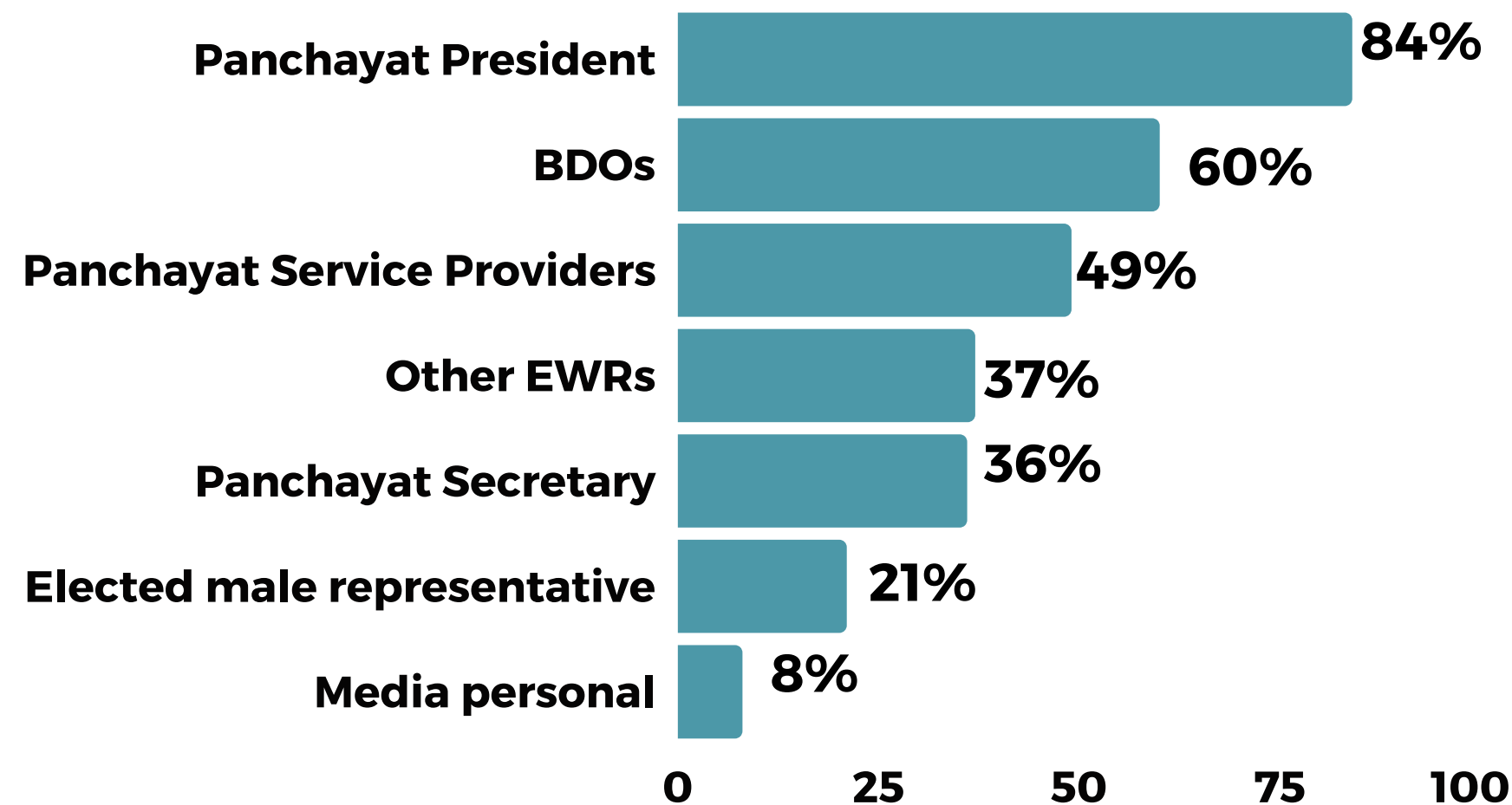
The most highlighted issues in **PETITIONS** were: improvement in infrastructure for the Panchayat (**93%**), improvement in access to government schemes (**53%**), improvement in access of basic facilities for women, girls and members of marginalized communities (**~46%**), among others

Leadership and Advocacy

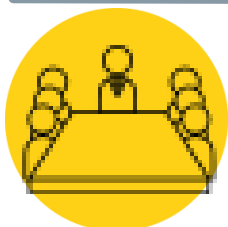
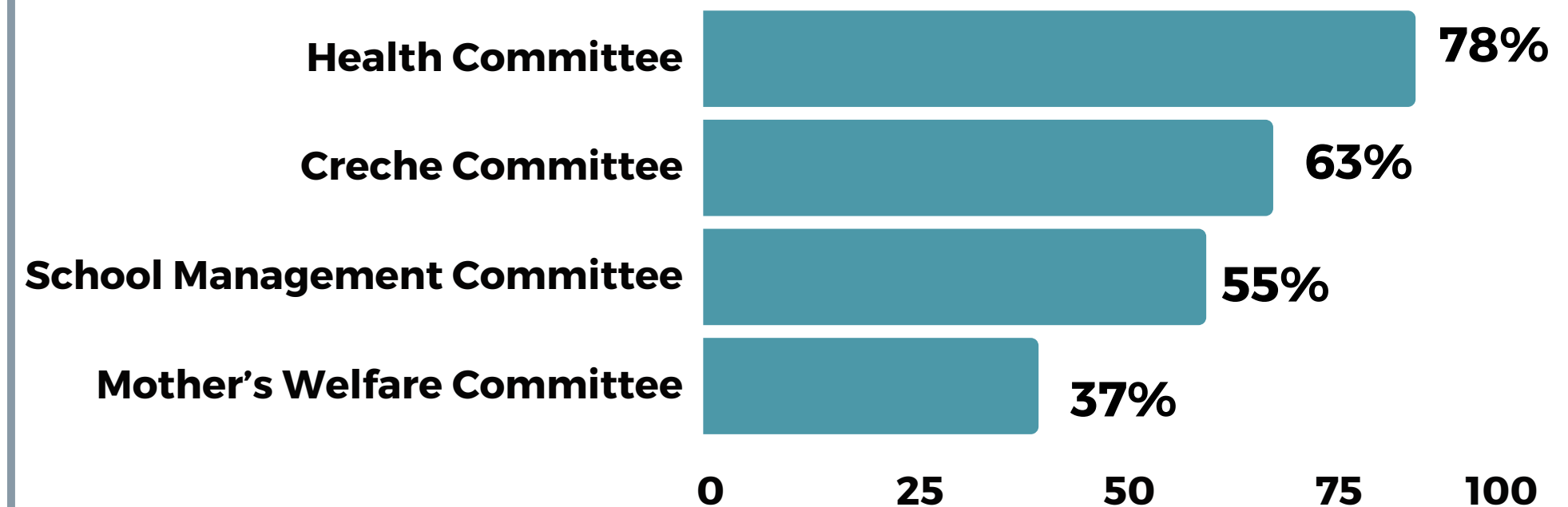
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Stakeholders EWRs interact with while carrying out their work



Committees in Panchayat which undertakes and monitors development work



Nature of interaction with stakeholders

76%

Discussing the issue to be addressed and their solution

42%

Submission of petition

41%

Engaged with them during meetings

37%

Participation in interface meetings



Activities undertaken as member of development committees

72%

Attended meetings for these committees

59%

Monitoring of activities conducted by the committees

50%

Participate in implementation of development activities

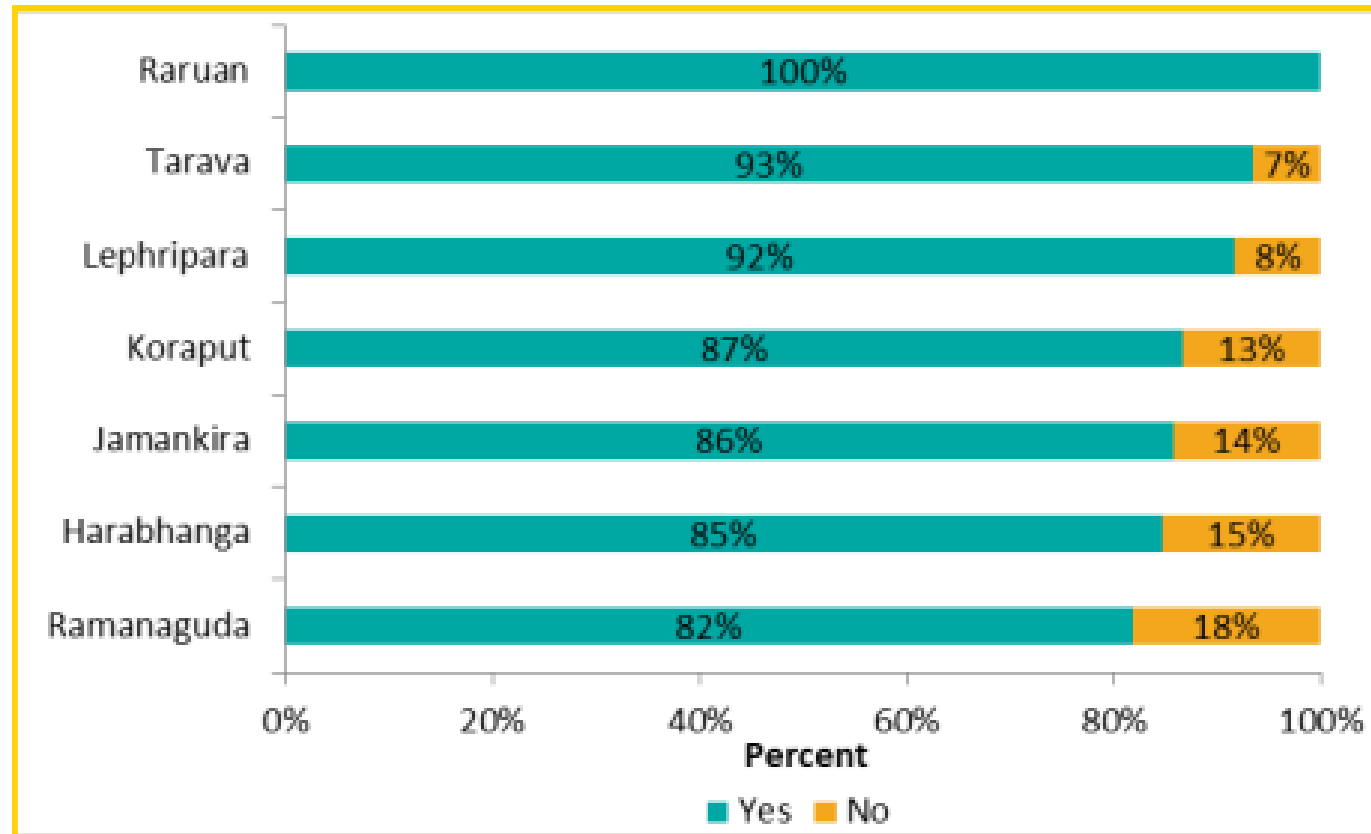
36%

Held leadership position in committees

Leadership and Advocacy

90%

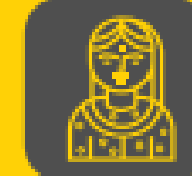
EWRs confirmed that they are involved in planning of Gram Panchayat Development Plan.



Change in attitude towards EWRs



One respondent at **Harbhanga FGD** with **MAS** members highlighted how people's attitude towards her has changed after joining MAS. She distributes food as relief work and now she is happy about how people perceive her.



One **block level officer** from **Tarava** mentioned that the government has prioritized the work of EWRs, so whenever a woman representative comes with any work, her file is cleared immediately without delay.



One **block officer** from **Tarava** engaged in the education sector shared how women come to them directly and inspect school supplies; they also come for students' scholarship issues etc. He also confirmed that EWRs work is cleared immediately, they need not come a second time.



A **Block official** from **Harbhanga** commented that as most documents are in English, a woman who studied till 5th standard will have problems coping, while a man is usually more educated and is therefore a more capable leader.



One **block level officer** from **Tarava** shared, "There was a girl less than 18 years old. She wanted to go to college, but her parents arranged her marriage. They did not listen to Anganwadi workers. Local EWRs raised the issue with us, we went there with the EWRs and stopped the marriage."

Harbhanga THP staff ensured that **block officers** are more receptive to EWRs now.

Leadership and Advocacy

The **block official** from **Tarava** further highlighted that the matter of **food distribution** was delegated to creche workers where they prepared a new committee under the leadership of EWRs.

63%

EWRs reported active work being done on **food and nutrition** themes through the ICDS development committees (creche committee), where even 66% of the them have reported to be members of this committee.

63%

EWRs reported that **access to MGNREGS (employment guarantee)** as the most identified issue to be worked on among the federation of EWRs.

51%

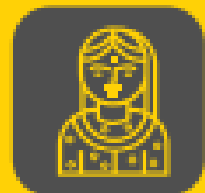
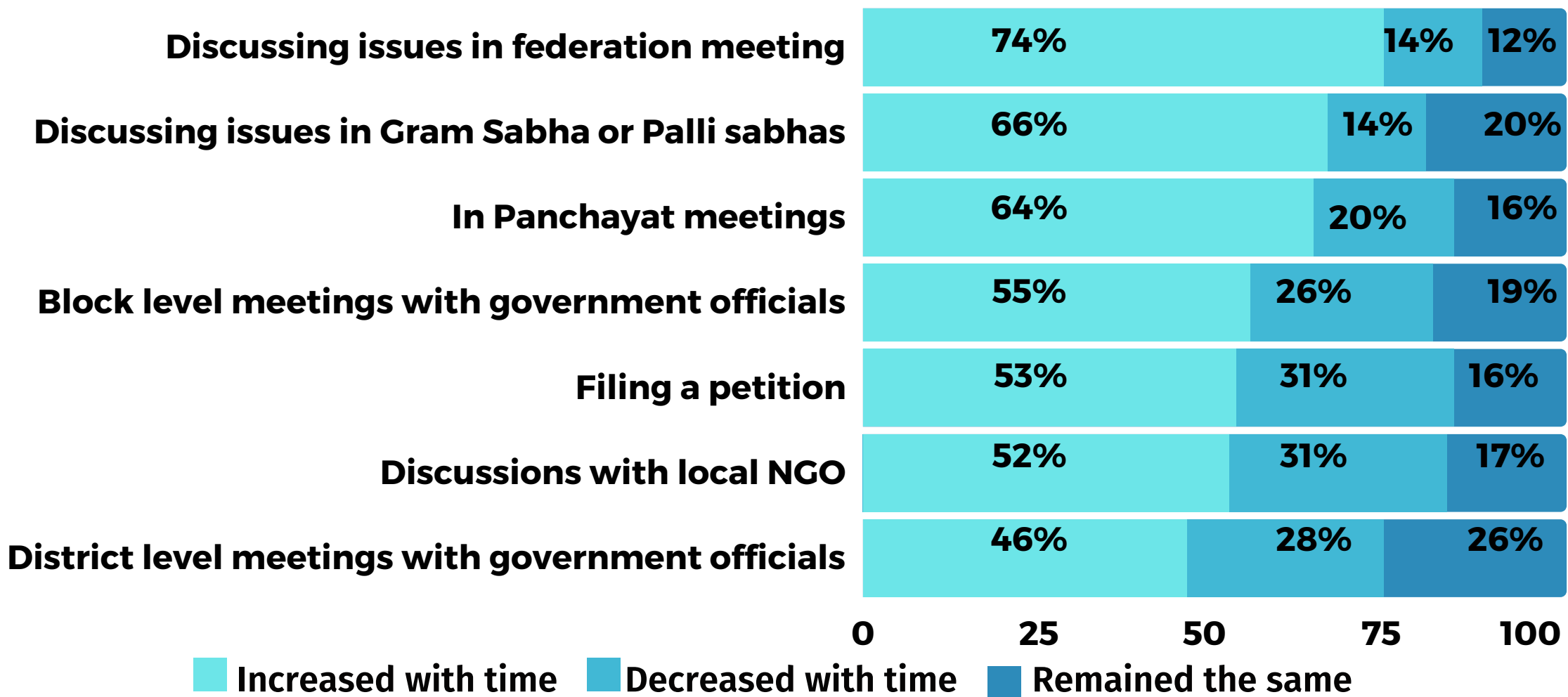
EWRs **identified regular and systematic update of beneficiary lists** for government schemes, **especially PDS (ration) and MGNREGS** also an important area of action needed by the EWR federation.

Internal Monitoring Data

5,000 community members were provided with **ration or cooked meal**; and **1222 children** were provided with **mid-day meal kit** during the second wave lockdown of the COVID pandemic in 2021.
10,000 community members linked to MGNREGS or work orders under the scheme.

Agency

Change in level of involvement of EWRs since 2017



THP field staff from Harbhanga discussed that before their intervention, women from here never ventured outside and could not speak much, “THP encourages them to join meetings and share their experiences, and now they are more comfortable in speaking with outsiders”



A block official from Tarava mentioned that EWRs come to them regularly bringing up various issues. He was of the opinion that EWRs are efficient at their work and are learning very quickly. This widespread recognition is a further catalyst in improving the self-confidence of the EWRs and improving their own belief in their ability.

Stakeholders supporting EWRs who face discrimination



96%
Family



82%
ALIBHA
Federation



68%
Friends



64%
MAS

Kind of support received from different stakeholders



71%

Help in raising the matter in
Panchayat meetings



54%

Help in raising the matter in
the Gram sabha/Palli sabhas



50%

Support in discussion
with village elders



21%

Help in lodging formal
complaint to the police

Places for which EWRs need to seek permission to visit:

Places for which EWRs need to seek permission from their spouse or any other household member	President	Vice-President	Ward-members	Overall
Religious place	65%	79%	79%	77%
Outside village for personal work	76%	88%	91%	88%
Outside village for personal work involving overnight stay	88%	100%	95%	95%
Local event/fair	53%	83%	82%	79%
To conduct Panchayat related duties	47%	83%	88%	82%
Training/Workshops without overnight stay	76%	100%	91%	91%
Training/Workshop with overnight stay	88%	100%	95%	95%
To meet government officials	53%	96%	86%	84%
To meet media personnel	47%	100%	83%	82%
Taking part in community meetings	41%	92%	88%	82%
Community responsibility	59%	96%	89%	86%



MAS members at Harbhanga concurred that the forum has made them self-sufficient. Their financial activities help women so that they don't have to ask for little amounts of money from their husbands anymore.



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Women from **Ramanaguda MAS** stating that they do not seek permission from their spouse or family members for attending meetings. They have full autonomy to go in and out of the house.



A **block official from Harbhanga** highlighted a practical problem of mobility for women, explaining that a male can go anywhere on their own, whereas a woman would need a supporting staff with her to go to block offices or other districts.

Impact of ALIBHA Federation

On LEADERSHIP & AGENCY of EWRs



Almost the entire study region reported proliferation of ALIBHA federation among EWRs, with Jamankira, Lephripara, Ramanaguda and Raruan block having 100% participation; and Koraput and Tarava block having ~94% and 82% respectively.

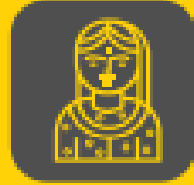
81%

EWRs reported functioning better as part of the ALIBHA

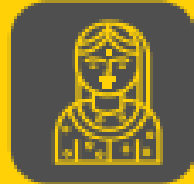
Steps followed to advocate for the issues raised in meetings	Percent
Discuss in federation meetings	92%
Identify and prioritize issues in Gram Sabhas and Panchayat meetings	65%
Submitting a petition	53%
Raise and follow up issues with authorities	39%
Take support of Mahila Arogya Samiti members	13%
Don't know	1%

Help from Federation meetings (since 2017)	Percent
Improved confidence and decision making	89%
Provide a space where I can freely discuss issues	60%
Meet and interact with other Elected women representatives regularly	59%
Helped in resolving conflicts with elected men representatives or other officials	41%
Helped in resolving technical challenges related to work (for example: understanding of panchayat budgets, government policies/ programs/ schemes etc.)	36%
Build a support structure for myself with the other Elected women representatives	35%
Acted as a support structure in undertaking development activities in panchayat related to infrastructure development, livelihood programs etc.	35%
Acted as a support mechanism in dealing with and resolving instances of discrimination based on caste, gender, etc.	30%
Help build a united front	22%

Impact of MAS



MAS women from Ramanaguda commented that in case they come to know of any child marriage, they first try to amicably solve it by talking to the people involved. If that does not solve the problem, they then approach CDPO Madam and if even that doesn't solve the problem, they file a police complaint.



During the MAS FGD in Tarava, respondents narrated that after they come to a consensus about any topic, they first approach the Sarpanch and if that does not solve the problem, they sometimes go to the block office as well. One woman added that going individually they might not be heard, but officials take them seriously when approached as a part of the association.

Discussions in MAS, Ramanaguda revolved around an incidence of **domestic violence** where one man used to get drunk and beat his wife for giving birth to five girls. Once the victim informed one of the members, they went to meet the man the next day and threatened him with legal action; after which the beating stopped.

Tarava MAS FGD revealed how the women closed an alcohol shop in the village. They first went from their association and gave notice to the owner, but when that did not yield any result, they demolished the shop itself. One participant said, “**Our husbands used to come home drunk and there was always a shortage of money in the house because of the liquor store. We had to destroy it**”.

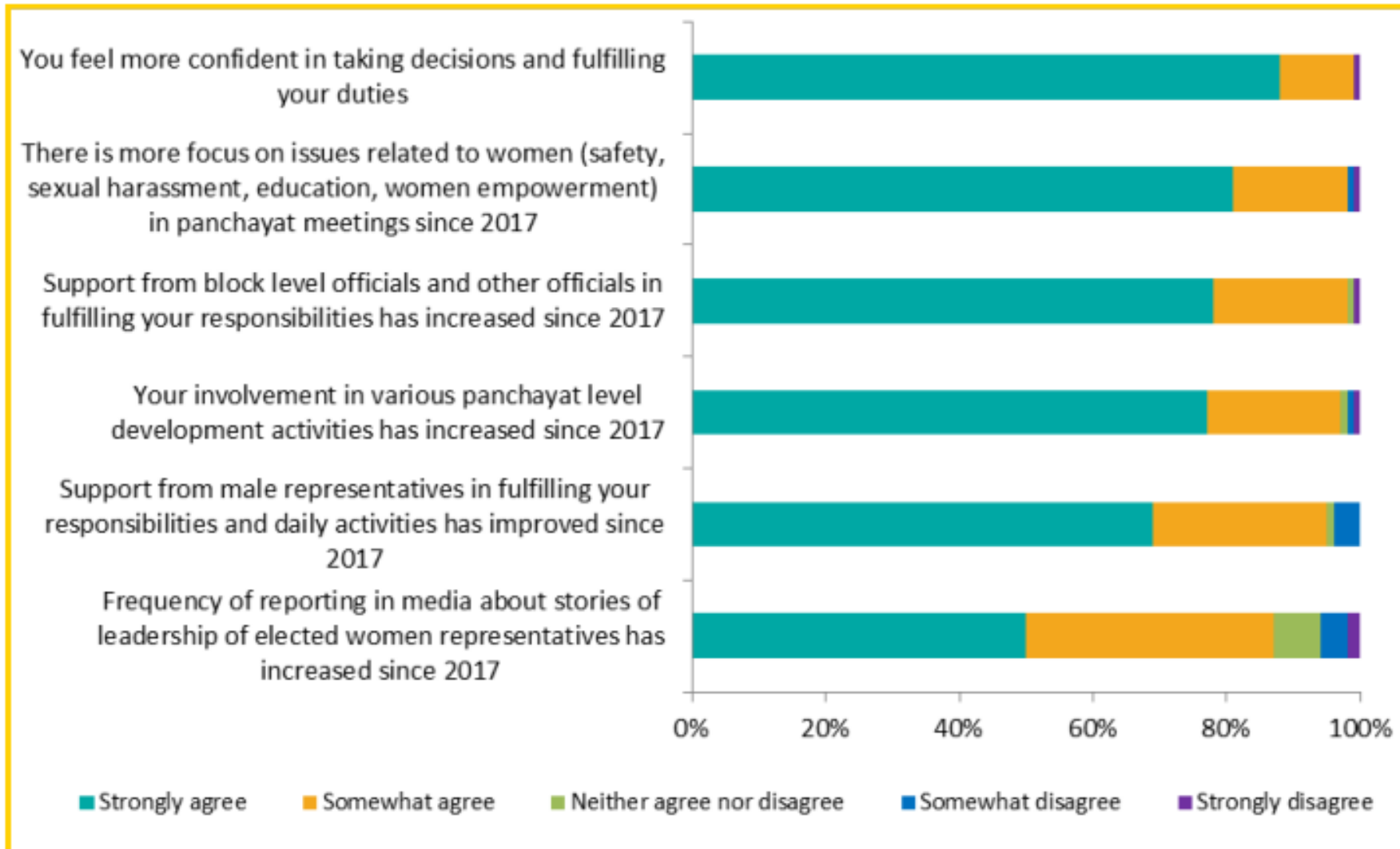


All members of the Harbhanga MAS meeting that were present in the FGD confirmed the significant impact the forum has had in the last few years.

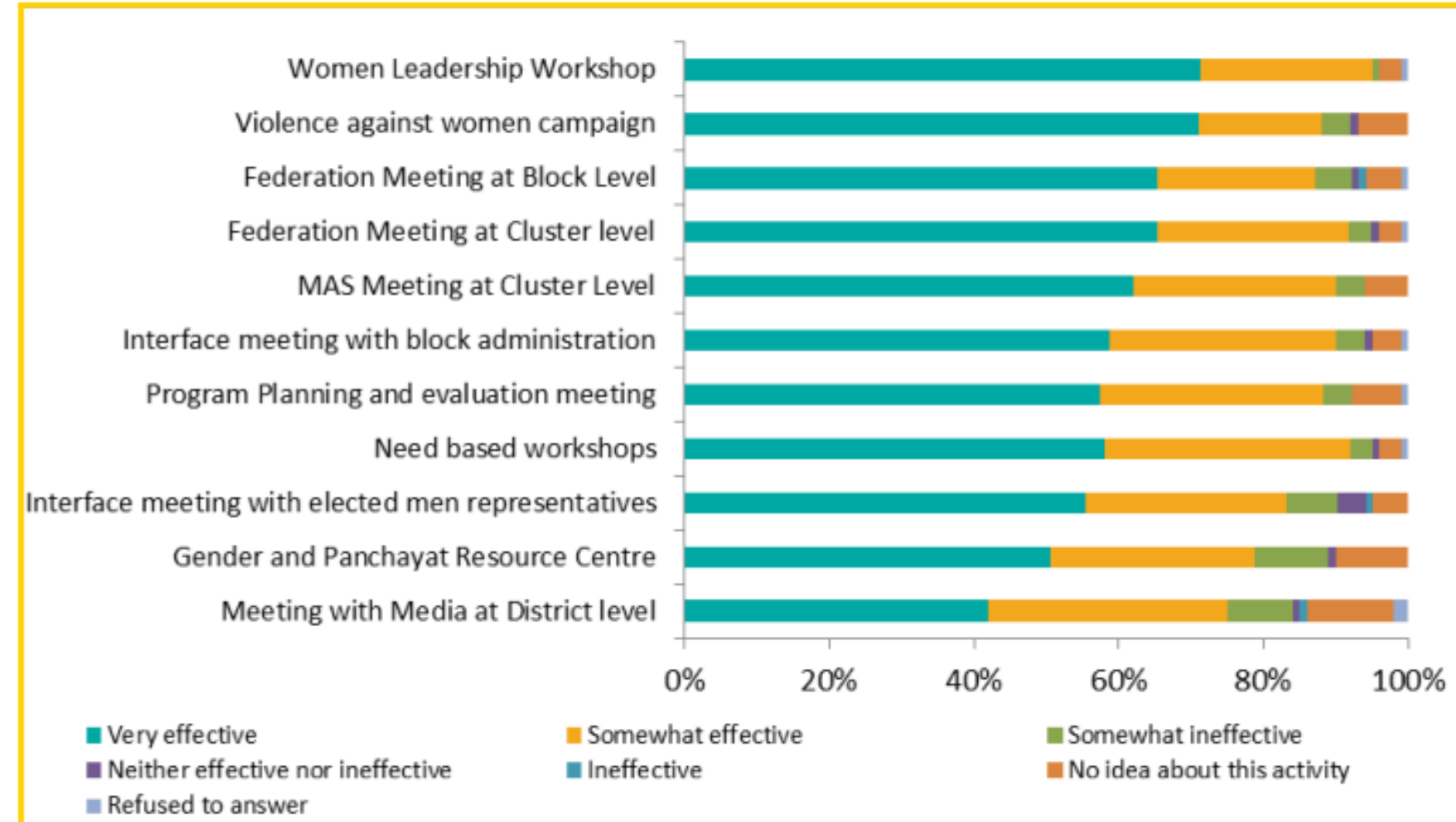
Impact of THP's intervention

EWRs perspective on:

Change in work environment since 2017



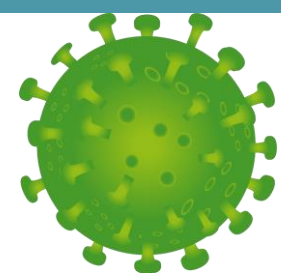
Effectiveness of different programs organised by THP



One THP trainer engaged in Harbhanga commented that local villagers reap the benefits of THP intervention. They see better outcomes when their elected representative is female. So this gives the image of women having more power which increases their respect overall.



An NGO worker interviewed in Tarava mentioned, "THP does not only train individuals, but they bring people together. This association is the most important part of THP intervention".



Impact of COVID-19

Impact of COVID in Panchayat



92%

Reported loss of
sources of income



62%

Reported closure
of schools



58%

Reported inability to arrange
for basic necessities



45%

Reported problem of food
insecurity

Steps taken by EWRs during COVID



72%

Regularly urging community
members to use mask, sanitizers,
wash hands, etc.



68%

Ensuring ration supply for
households not covered
under PDS



67%

Undertook relief measures like
providing the community members
with food-kits, medicines etc.



55%

Facilitating the arrangements
of quarantine/isolation
centers

THP modified their approach to aid the EWRs with their COVID preparedness, increased duties during the pandemic and relief distribution in general. **EWRs were very active** during COVID by **spreading awareness, distributing relief material** among community members. **THP staff** supported them by visiting villages and **conducting meetings to inform EWRs** about the changing situation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Capacity Strengthening of EWRs

- **Special attention required on improving the knowledge of EWRs about panchayat budget and Gram Panchayat Development Plan**
- **Increased focus on blocks which are lagging behind, for example - Harbhanga, Koraput and Ramanaguda**

Ensuring Acceptance of EWRs as Local Leaders

- **Encouraging EWRs to use methods like petitions to bring forth local issues so as to make them more relevant in the eyes of the community members.**
- **Increased promotion of activities undertaken by EWRs via local media**
- **Continuation of the role of ALIBHA and interaction of EWRs via this platform to discuss and resolve their issues and improve their level of confidence as a local leader**

Conclusion and Recommendations

Engagement of rural communities with the local governance system

- Ensure that meetings, workshops etc. are held at the local level, not too far away from the area of the EWRs to make it more convenient for them to attend.
- Increased attempts to make people/ community aware of the importance of EWRs work and how autonomy and mobility are crucial components for their work.
- Measures to be taken to improve negotiation skills and ability to be authoritative of EWRs, especially with private actors where they are habitually discriminated against.

Capacity Strengthening of Local Partners

- Need for a mechanism to ensure better interaction between MAS women and EWRs and more transparency in the actions taken post discussions at MAS.
- Resolving some of the infrastructural deficits identified in the field - such as lack of room to organize meetings and other activities. This will go a long way in solidifying the burgeoning trend of getting community women out of their house and engaging them in the public sphere.



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