

# When Voices Lead Change: A Story of Participatory Governance in Ranajhali



On 26 January 2026, Ranajhali Gram Panchayat in Ganjam district, Odisha, witnessed more than just a routine Gram Sabha it became a powerful platform where voices from the community shaped the future of their villages. The meeting, held as part of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) process, brought together 58 community members, including 39 women and 19 men, reflecting a growing shift towards inclusive and participatory governance.

For many, especially women, this was not just a meeting it was a rare and meaningful opportunity to speak, be heard, and influence decisions that directly affect their daily lives. Women who had often remained silent in public spaces stepped forward with confidence, sharing concerns about water, sanitation, safety, and basic services. Their participation added strength and depth to the discussions, ensuring that development planning reflected real needs.

Members of various Citizen Groups played a key role in guiding the conversation. Leaders from Pichhuli village formally submitted memorandums demanding the renovation of their village pond and the construction of toilets issues that had affected daily life, hygiene, and dignity for years. Across the gathering, voices emerged around poor road conditions, lack of safe drinking water, electricity challenges, and the absence of basic infrastructure like dress changing rooms for women.

The open and inclusive nature of the Gram Sabha created a space for honest dialogue between the community and local authorities, including the Sarpanch and Panchayat Executive Officer

Instead of being passive recipients, community members actively participated in identifying problems and proposing solutions.

As discussions progressed, a Village Development Action Plan was prepared collectively, ensuring that the priorities of the people were clearly reflected. The Panchayat also shared progress on key initiatives, including the installation of water purification systems in 14 Anganwadi Centres and the distribution of sanitation materials to schools and centres small but important steps towards improving health and hygiene.

**“Earlier, we would attend meetings but rarely speak. This time, we shared our problems openly, and our voices were taken seriously. It gives us hope that change is possible,”** shared a woman participant from Pichhuli village.

The meeting concluded with a sense of ownership and renewed trust. For the people of Ranajhali, this was not just about planning it was about reclaiming their role in governance.

This story highlights how participatory platforms like Gram Sabhas can empower communities, strengthen accountability, and ensure that development is inclusive, responsive, and grounded in the lived realities of the people.

