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Gram Sabha: Tradition, Responsibility, and a New Beginning of Hope:

With the support of SIGN, several *tola* Gram Sabha meetings were organized in different villages of Garhwa district in Jharkhand during January 2026. In these meetings, villagers came together to discuss important issues related to their forests, community life, and families, and they made collective decisions for the welfare of the village.

On 8 January 2026, a Gram Sabha was held in Khirakhad Tola of Tenhdi village in Bargarh block, where members of the Korwa community reside. Under the leadership of the village head, Harkhu Singh, villagers discussed the protection of their forests, medicinal plants, water sources, and other natural resources. The community decided to stop illegal tree cutting, prevent the exploitation of medicinal plants, and strictly prohibit setting fires in the forest. They also resolved to protect their forests from outside contractors and timber mafias.



On 10 January 2026, a Gram Sabha meeting in Sembar Tola of Gothani village addressed a different kind of issue. It was discovered that about Rs 25,000 belonging to a Self-Help Group had been spent by children. Upon inquiry, it came to light that the children had taken the money unknowingly and, over three months, used it to buy food and snacks from local shops. The children admitted their mistake, and their parents accepted responsibility to repay the amount. The incident reminded everyone how important it is for parents and guardians to give their children time, guidance, and care.



On 11 January 2026, a family dispute between a couple from the villages of Gothani and Kalakhajri was peacefully resolved in the Gram Sabha. As the couple had been

living separately for a long time, the Gram Sabha allowed them to live apart with dignity. Their five-year-old daughter expressed her wish to stay with her grandmother. Considering the child's emotional bond with her, the Gram Sabha entrusted the responsibility of the child's upbringing and education to the grandmother. The decision was both compassionate and humane.



Similarly, on 24 January 2026, villagers in Barkol Kala village decided to take steps toward demarcating their village forest**.** They planned to invite the concerned government officials as well as neighboring villages to participate in the process.

These meetings once again showed that the Gram Sabha is not merely a gathering but the living spirit of the community**.** It is a place where people come together to protect their forests, care for the future of their children, and resolve conflicts with respect and understanding.

Through the support of **SIGN**, these efforts to strengthen Gram Sabhas are bringing **a** renewed sense of responsibility, unity, and hope in the villages.

Awareness on Tribal Heritage and the PESA Act: A New Hope Growing in the Villages:

SIGN organized a series of one-day workshops on Tribal Heritage and the PESA Act were organized in several tribal villages of Garhwa district in January 2026. The aim of these workshops was to create awareness among villagers about their rights, traditions, and the power of the Gram Sabha.

On 11 January 2026, a workshop was held in Bandua village of Ranka block**,** where members of the Kharwar, Bhokta, and Korwa communities participated with great enthusiasm. This was followed by another workshop on 12 January 2026 in Tenhdi village under Bargarh police station area. In both workshops, the resource person Mr. Sunil Minj explained in detail the PESA Act of 1996 and the recently implemented Jharkhand PESA Rules 2025. He highlighted that through this law, tribal communities have been given the right to self-governance, management of natural resources, and decision-making through the Gram Sabha**.**



He further explained that the Gram Sabha plays an important role in managing village resources such as land, forests, water sources, local markets, and minor forest produce. If land is required for any development project, the consent of the Gram Sabha is essential. The Gram Sabha also plays a central role in resolving social disputes and ensuring justice within the village.

On 16 January 2026, another workshop was organized in Bishrampur–Banskatia village of Ranka area, where special discussions were held on tribal heritage and history. Mr. Sunil Minj explained that the identity of tribal communities is not only connected with land and forests but also with their folk songs, stories, and traditions. Referring to the heroic struggle of Nilamber and Pitamber, the brave freedom fighters of Garhwa district, he said that tribal songs and stories carry the memories of their ancestors' courage and their harmonious relationship with nature.



The workshops also emphasized the importance of Gram Sabha consent and social impact assessment in development projects, which helps communities protect their rights while moving toward balanced development.

Continuing this initiative, another workshop was organized on 24 January 2026 in Kombhikona village of Bargarh block, where around 70–80 villagers participated. The session focused on understanding the Jharkhand PESA Rules 2025, including the formation of Gram Sabhas, quorum, decision-making processes, and the role of various committees. Participants were reminded that the Gram Sabha is not merely a meeting but the highest decision-making body of the village, representing the collective voice of the community in matters related to land, forest, and water.



These workshops created a new sense of awareness and confidence among villagers about their rights, traditions, and collective responsibility. The efforts of SIGN are not only helping to preserve tribal heritage but also strengthening Gram Sabhas, thereby promoting self-governance and community unity in the villages.