

DETAILS OF INITIATIVE ON ELECTORAL REFORMS UNDER INNOVATIVE BANDA BY DM SH. HEERA LAL JI

1A. Title of initiative - Ek Lakshya 90%+ Matdaan

1B. Ministry / Department / State Govt. / District / Organization where the initiative was implemented - District Banda, Uttar Pradesh

1C. Area of Initiative - Others —> Electoral Governance

1D. Commencement of the initiative - February, 2019

1E. Has the outcome or impact of the initiative been audited or evaluated by any independent agency for reality check of the realized benefits vis-à-vis those envisaged?

Audited & encouraged by:

Hon. PM Sh. Narendra Modi

Sh. Venkateshwarlu - then CEO, U.P.

Sh. Rahul Verma - Fellow, Centre for Policy Research

Sh. Chandra Mishra - Managing Trustee, The CommonMan Trust

Sh. Aman Bandvi - Founder, The Purpose Coalition

Impact:

‘...the district magistrate is aiming for 100% voting; its a very commendable job. I would request Election Commission to study his efforts and make it a model for following elections across India...’ - **Hon. PM Sh. Narendra Modi**

“No voter left behind. DEO/DM Heera Lal did real ground work in Loksabha election 2019. None less than our PM appreciated his efforts in public rally held in Banda April 25, 2019. He increased the highest voting percentage increase compared to previous election in whole state. He has created a model which is worthy of emulation in the coming elections for the gross root level strengthening and quality participation in the democracy.” - **Sh. L. Venkateshwarlu - then CEO U.P.**

“The 90 Plus initiative to increase voter turnout during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections envisioned by Shri Heera Lal (former DM, Banda) was an unique and important achievement in the sphere of electoral outreach. The Banda model, if replicated across other districts, has the potential to further the SVEEP mandate of the Election Commission of India.” - **Sh. Rahul Verma, Fellow CPR, New Delhi**

1F. Was this initiative winner of any other award(s) instituted by any other National / International organization?

Best District Election Officer, 2019 - Presented by Hon. Governor, U.P

Best District Election Officer, 2020 - Presented by Hon. Governor, U.P

2. Please provide Detailed Write-up of the work done under the initiative between 1 st April, 2018 and 31 st March, 2020 covering the following:

2A. Objective of Initiative and how the initiative achieved those objectives.

A. OBJECTIVE OF INITIATIVE & HOW THE INITIATIVE ACHIEVED THOSE OBJECTIVES

Background:

Banda is a district of 1.8 million people in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Unfortunately, in recent years, Banda has become known for water scarcity, unemployment, farmer distress, underdeveloped agriculture, and corruption. These issues have spurred significant political rivalry; as a result, the Election Commission has identified 195 of the 1,454 polling booths in the Baberu, Banda, Naraini, and Tindwari constituencies as “critical”. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, only 53 percent of registered electors in Banda voted.

Leader’s Vision:

I set out to increase voter turnout and improve the sense of civic engagement in Banda, and involved the whole district administration towards this goal.

Objectives:

- Achieve 90%+ voter turnout for the district of Banda.

Objective fulfilment:

A total of 825,907 people voted in Banda District in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, out of 1,314,368 registered electors (62.8%). In 2014, the average total turnout was 53.38%. The mammoth 10-percentage point increase is remarkable, given the ground-level challenges that confronted the ambitious project target. The significance of this scheme was acknowledged by the Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, in a rally that he addressed here in the district.

B. INTRODUCING AND IMPLEMENTING AN INNOVATIVE IDEA/ SCHEME/PROJECT TO MEET STAKEHOLDERS’ REQUIREMENT.

Introduction - Ek Lakshya - 90%+ Voting

To achieve our ambitious target of 90% + voting in Banda, we devised the “90 Plus” strategy, which leveraged a plethora of initiatives and communication channels from the Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) programme.

Strategic outreach & implementation model:

This feat was achieved through untiring effort by the district administration, guided and supervised at every level by my constant attention. The crux of the initiative focussed on establishing direct contact and outreach channels with the voters. Through booth ambassadors, student interns and employees, citizens were made aware of the voting procedure and the importance of participative democracy. The methodology and implementing strategy are elaborated further in the following points.

Critical knowledge partnerships:

The innovative initiative to increase voter participation relied on a wealth of existing knowledge to synergize implementation with outcome. At the offset, we decided to take on-board political scientists from leading institutions such as Department of Political Science, University of California-Berkeley, USA and Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi for

- a) data analysis based inputs on the scope for intervention
- b) identification of potential booths for targeting voter turnout programme
- c) conducting a rigorous evaluation of our efforts to facilitate future replication and knowledge building

This helped combine the effort potential of the district administration with a rigorous methodology and brought forth fruitful results. Through a timely campaign that utilised existing infrastructure and also built upon it, we were able to spread the message of voter awareness across multiple media, ranging from social to mass media. Using innovative ideas such as a ‘selfie’ station and cultural programmes, we aimed to reach to all demographics of voters, and the final results attest to our success.

C. BRINGING PERCEPTIBLE IMPROVEMENTS IN PROCESSES/ SYSTEMS AND BUILDING INSTITUTIONS

Our primary responsibility is to ensure free and fair elections. Increasing voter participation in this process is not only an important mandate under SVEEP, but also an important pillar of local

governance and greater democratization. An important aspect of our achievement is the possibility of replicating this model to diverse locations.

Following are some of the systemic functions that, if paid proper attention to, can bring perceptible improvement in voter participation.

- **Identification of roadblocks to voter turnout:**
Identifying critical areas which impede turnout, can help the district administration evolve particular strategies to address them. Specifically, identifying booths vulnerable to capture and looting can pre-empt, and prevent any incident on polling day.
- **Engaging citizens:**
For this initiative to succeed, it is crucial that citizens are taken along in the task of increasing voter awareness. It is only when citizens feel a part of the endeavor, and when they strive to achieve something for collective and personal pride that such citizen-centric initiatives can be a success.
- **Community-based, small interventions:**
Ambitious plans are met with meticulous on-ground planning. Taking communities, and especially village panchayats along in the project was crucial for the success of this initiative. Small measures like setting up a tent near the booth and providing drinking water to queuing voters, can help ease the difficulty and encourage more voters to turn up.
- **Participatory methodology:**
Making stakeholders out of common citizens helps everyone feel connected to the initiative. The role of Gram Pradhan in this endeavour was crucial to the overall success, and to deliver the message from the district administration to every person.
- **Creating a well-oiled machine:**
As district administration, our responsibility was to oversee the implementation of this bold initiative. For this, we started early and engaged credible experts, energised cadre down to the BLOs and booth level officers, and ensured a constant stream of communication. This helped build an election machinery which could speedily redress issues from the field and ensure we remained on track.
- **Information utilisation:**
Our focus was to gain as much information about the district as possible. Gathering information on migrant workers, on vulnerable booths and critical stakeholders is a strategy that pays off well into the future. This allowed us to establish direct contact with the citizens, and an in-depth understanding of their challenges, even beyond the polling booth. The fact that citizens now feel connected with their district administration helps us deepen our impact and outreach.

D. APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY ADOPTED TO BRING INNOVATION.

The crux of our strategy was direct, targeted outreach from government officials and other volunteers to voters.

- **Booth Ambassadors** - Active and engaged people from the village were appointed as booth ambassadors to increase voter awareness. This involved door-to-door campaigns, group meetings, and also sharing video clips and other messages on social media.
- **Student interns** - Students were able to apply for an internship program to better understand how the election process and system functions. They received a list of the registered voters for that polling booth and their contact information so that they could give them information about the voting process and appeal to them to vote. Students reported the total number of voters contacted, as well as the number of people who said yes and no to the appeals to vote. Students who completed the internship were awarded certificates.
- **Government employees** - Similar to the student internship model, government officials “adopted” polling booths and became responsible for reaching out to the constituents for that polling booth.
- **Voter Awareness Meetings** - Separate meetings were organized in every part of the district, for every section of the society (women, third gender, workers, businessmen, pensioners, soldiers, religious leaders, journalists, farmers, home guards, bankers, sanitation workers, etc.). Women, migrants, and people with disabilities were particularly important target groups.
- *Special focus on below special priority groups of voters:*
 - **Women:** Throughout the month of April, several events and rallies were organized to target women voters. Over the days that followed, meetings were held at the block and district level to make women aware of their electoral responsibility, seminars were organized with mother’s groups, and in areas under the National Rural Livelihood Mission, a workshop was held for women to make them aware of health, sanitation and nutrition issues at stake in the election.

- **Migrant Workers** The district created a contact list for all migrant voters and asked their family members and friends to encourage them to come back home to vote. They also contacted employers and contractors to request that workers be given election day off to vote. BLOs contacted migrant workers directly with text and WhatsApp messages. The DM also wrote directly to the DMs of Fatehpur, Prayagraj, Kanpur Dehat, Kanpur Nagar and other bordering districts to ask them to send migrant voters home.
- **Disabled Voters** Banda's Officer of Disability Affairs, Dr. Pritilata Rajput, was put in charge of empowering disabled voters to come out and vote. Disabled voters were asked to fill out a form which had their personal information, mobile number, address, and polling station, in order to adequately prepare those polling stations for all voters. These forms also allowed disabled voters to report any issues with the polling stations so that they could be resolved before election day. Finally, arrangements were made for 350 tricycles, 18 wheelchairs, and other modes of transport to be available at polling booths on election day.

Other Communication Channels:

To reinforce this direct outreach, the district also employed a variety of creative mass communication channels.

- “90 Percent” Banners and Posters
- Letter-Writing Campaign
- Cultural Programmes
- Social Media
- SVEEP Shop
- Selfie Station
- Helpline
- Accessibility improvement of booths

E. IMPACTS/BENEFITS RESULTING FROM THE INITIATIVE:

As mentioned earlier, a total of 825,907 people voted in Banda District in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, out of 1,314,368 registered electors (62.8%). In 2014, the average total turnout was 53.38%.

- Due to our sincere efforts, there was a massive 10% jump in voter turnout.
- Banda was ranked as the best district in U.P for increase in voter turnout.
- DM Banda was adjudged as Best District Election Officer by Hon. Governor of Uttar Pradesh for two consecutive years 2019 & 2020.

- In 2014, no booth had 90% or more voter turnout, but in 2019, 7 booths recorded more than 90% voter turnout.
- 43 booths witnessed an unprecedented 80%-90% voter turnout, whereas in 2014 there were none.
- 281 booths witnessed a record 70%-80% voter turnout, whereas in 2014 there were only 26.
- 645 booths witnessed a significant 60%-70% voter turnout, whereas in 2014, there were only 191.

Other notable benefits of our campaign were:

- Women voters turning up in large numbers to the voting booth.
- Our drive to enroll more citizens as registered voters marked a record increase in enrollment on electoral rolls.
- Our multi-pronged strategy enabled us to address low turnout figures, faulty or incomplete electoral rolls, and to create a new civic consciousness.
- Proactive assignment of police teams in identified sensitive areas boosted voter's confidence.
- Regular confidence and complaint redressal meetings by senior officers, and checking on groups/people that have been identified as potential threats to the process added to voter trust in participating in elections.
- On election day, real-time voter turnout was monitored in identified booths to track any abnormally low numbers.
- Sector Magistrates made designated visits to vulnerable areas throughout the day, and senior officers were stationed at each booth to observe voter behaviour and instill confidence.
- Police pickets were also kept ready to set up in case of any obstruction of access to booths.

Impact for future elections: Knowledge Creation

Through this innovative exercise, we not only came closer to achieving our ambitious target, we also created a wealth of new knowledge that will be instrumental to replicate this success elsewhere.

- **Booth Size**

We found that average voter turnout decreases anywhere from ten to eighteen percentage points between polling stations with single booths and those with five or more booths. This could be because polling stations with multiple booths might be designed to serve more electors over a

larger geographic area, making it more difficult for people to reach the station and vote. Single booth stations, on the other hand, would cater to a smaller location and population and thus, be closer to habitations and more easily accessible - leading to higher turnout.

- **Migration**

Banda has one of the highest migration rates in the country. While efforts were made to encourage migrant workers to come home and vote, turnout could have been impeded by their reluctance to undertake the long and costly journey home.

Migration affects men and women disproportionately, and this difference can be observed in the different rates of turnout for men and women in the district of Banda. The graph below shows the percentage point difference in female and male turnout. With the exception of Baberu, in constituencies where migrants represent more than 35% of the electorate female turnout is significantly higher than male turnout. This difference shrinks significantly when you compare male and female turnout in areas with less than 5% migrants and 5-35% migrants. In the constituency of Banda, male turnout is actually higher than female turnout in polling stations where less than 5% of the electors are migrants.

- **Electorate size and Voter Turnout**

There is significant variation in electorate size across the district, ranging from 300 to 1,300 registered voters per polling station. To better understand the relationship between the number of voters per polling station and turnout, the polling stations were divided into three groups: less than 700 electors, with 700 to 1,100 electors, and those with more than 1,100 electors. We found that in each constituency, average voter turnout (as a percentage) is lower at polling stations with more than 1,100 registered voters compared to those with less than 700 electors.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONTEXT

Banda is a district of 1.8 million people in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. With 195 of its 1,454 polling booths classified as 'critical', and an average voting turnout of 53.8% in 2014 elections, taking an ambitious target of 90% + voting was truly a bold yet transformational goal.

OBJECTIVES

- Achieve 90%+ voter turnout for the district of Banda.

APPROACH

The Banda voter turnout initiative was driven by the need to increase citizen turnout at the polling booth. While a laudable goal in itself, increasing turnout also has the possibility of making democracy more participative, active and citizen-centric. For this, we envisioned an

ambitious goal of increasing voter turnout to 90%. The initiative enlisted help from experts in the field of political science, and built a participatory district model of engaging a vast number of people, ranging from student interns and volunteers, to Gram Pradhan and SHGs.

METHODOLOGY AND IMPACT

Through constant engagement with the goals of the project, we developed a model to address immediate and future roadblocks. We sought to minimize structural challenges such as obsolete electoral rolls, accessibility issues to the polling booth, and high rate of migration.

We engaged student interns and volunteers to help the administration in identifying these bottlenecks. Through updating electoral roll, identification of critical and vulnerable booths, providing additional transport to physically disabled voters, senior citizens and pregnant women, we also made it easier for citizens to access the polling booth.

With the aim of leaving no voter behind, we engaged Panchayat leaders, and frontline bureaucrats to ensure that the message reaches everywhere within the district. Cultural programmes and outreach initiatives also helped involve the local youth and start a regular conversation among people.

All these efforts resulted in a 10-percentage point increase in the overall turnout of voters in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

The percentage of women voters outstripped men in all the 4 assembly segments of Baberu, Banda, Naraini, and Tindwar that fall in the district. Furthermore, we were also able to gather insightful data that can help understand constraints to voter turnout. We found that single-booth polling stations recorded anywhere between 10 to 18 percent higher turnout than stations with more than five polling booths. We also found that voter turnout is lower in more populated polling stations, and higher in less populated ones. This wealth of information not only ensures better policy design for the future, but can also be used across different districts as a model turnout strategy.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Banda was the only district to be praised by Hon. PM Sh. Narendra Modi for its electoral efforts.
- Due to our sincere efforts, there was a massive 10% jump in voter turnout.
- Banda was ranked as the best district in U.P for increase in voter turnout.
- DM Banda was adjudged as Best District Election Officer by Hon. Governor of Uttar Pradesh for two consecutive years 2019 & 2020.
- In 2014, no booth had 90% or more voter turnout, but in 2019, 7 booths recorded more than 90% voter turnout.
- 43 booths witnessed an unprecedented 80%-90% voter turnout, whereas in 2014 there were none.
- 281 booths witnessed a record 70%-80% voter turnout, whereas in 2014 there were only 26.

- 645 booths witnessed a significant 60%-70% voter turnout, whereas in 2014, there were only 191.

OTHER NOTABLE BENEFITS OF OUR CAMPAIGN WERE

- Women voters turning up in large numbers to the voting booth.
- Our drive to enroll more citizens as registered voters marked a record increase in enrollment on electoral rolls.
- Our multi-pronged strategy enabled us to address low turnout figures, faulty or incomplete electoral rolls, and to create a new civic consciousness.
- Proactive assignment of police teams in identified sensitive areas boosted voter's confidence.
- Regular confidence and complaint redressal meetings by senior officers, and checking on groups/people that have been identified as potential threats to the process added to voter trust in participating in elections.
- On election day, real-time voter turnout was monitored in identified booths to track any abnormally low numbers.
- Sector Magistrates made designated visits to vulnerable areas throughout the day, and senior officers were stationed at each booth to observe voter behaviour and instill confidence.
- Police pickets were also kept ready to set up in case of any obstruction of access to booths.

Through our deep insights, we were also able to create a wealth of knowledge and evaluate its impact around:

- i. Booth Size
- ii. Migration
- iii. Electorate size and voter turnout

These findings can become instrumental in designing even more intelligent voter turnout promotion campaigns.

AWARDS

Best District Election Officer, 2019 - Presented by Hon. Governor, U.P

Best District Election Officer, 2020 - Presented by Hon. Governor, U.P

INITIATIVE VIDEOS

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhWFz-_dKX0&t=76s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IFBgReGYKQ>