



PANCHAYATI RAJ

Kurukshetra April 2023



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1. Empowering Panchayati Raj Institutions

Introduction:

With **6.50 lakh villages** and 65 per cent of population living in villages, India's development agenda is rural development. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are the pillars of democracy. PRIs ensure social and political empowerment of the people of about **2.6 lakh Panchayats with 31.5 lakh elected representatives**, out of which about **46 percent** are **women**.

The **73rd** Amendment Act with insertion of **Part IX (Article 243)** in the constitution granted constitutional status to Panchayati Raj systems. **Article 243G** of the Constitution stipulates that Panchayats should plan for and implement schemes for local economic development and social justice. Government vision is to empower the Panchayats and make them self-sufficient. Implementation of **PESA Act** has made it possible to recognise the traditional panchayats across the country according to their rules and regulations

Capacity Building of Panchayati Raj Institution (PRIs):

Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) is implementing the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of **Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)** since 2018-19. So far **1.42 crore participants** including ERs, Panchayat functionaries and other Stakeholder have been **trained**. In 2022-23 alone an amount of Rs. 610.05 crore has been spent on capacity building of PRIs.

Thematic Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP):

Since Panchayats are constitutionally **mandated** to prepare their **developmental plan**, MoPR has taken a novel initiative of adopting thematic approach for **localisation of Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs)**. Therefore 17 SDGs have been mapped into **9 themes** for preparation of targeted developmental plan by pulling resources and converging activities of Central and State Governments. These 9 themes are:

- Healthy Village
- Child-Friendly Village
- Water Sufficient Village
- Clean and Green Village
- Village with Self-Sufficient Infrastructure
- Socially Just and Socially Secured Villages
- Village with Good Governance
- Women Friendly Village
- Poverty Free and Enhanced Livelihoods Village

Provision of Basic Services through Commission Funding:

PRIs receive funds through the Central Finance Commission, State Finance Commission and a number of Centrally sponsored schemes to provide basic services to rural population like drinking water, sanitation etc. **Fifteenth Finance Commission** has recommended Rs. **2,36,805 crores** for the award period 2021-2026.

National Panchayat Awards:

The National Panchayat Awards have been **aligned with nine LSDG themes** since 2022. It enables theme-wise **ranking of all Gram Panchayats**, Block Panchayats and District Panchayats on the basis of performance.

The awards will be conferred under the categories of **Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar** for the performance under **individual LSDG** theme and **Nanaji Deshmukh Sarvottam Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar** for the **aggregate performance** under all 9 LSDG themes.

e-Governance and ICT Initiatives: A **Simplified Work Based Accounting Application**, e-Gram was launched in 2020 to **strengthen e-Governance** in the PRIs. MoPR has Ministry has integrated **e-GramSwaraj with PFMS** to ensure better financial management of PRIs.

Over 2.55 Lakh Gram Panchayats or equivalent bodies have prepared their Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP) for 2022-23 and **90% of the Gram Panchayats** are successfully making **online transactions** using eGSPI.

The e-Gram SWARAJ is also being integrated with Government e-Market place (GeM) to enable seamless procurement and accounting. AuditOnline Application has been developed to allow online audit of Panchayat accounts and enhance transparency and accountability. For 2019-20, **all** the States **except Arunachal Pradesh**, have completed the target of **auditing 25 per cent Gram Panchayats**.

Citizen Charter Campaign: MoPR carried out Citizen Charter campaign under the aegis of **Meri Panchayat, Mera Adhikaar Jan Sevaayein Hamare Dwaar**, in sept, 2021 with an intent to making the Panchayats and their elected representatives directly accountable to the people.

Common Service Centres (CSCs): CSC act as **single access points** for delivery of all **digital services** in Gram Panchayats and generate opportunities of employment by promoting rural entrepreneurship.

SVAMITVA Scheme:

(Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas) is implemented by MoPR to provide the '**Record of Rights**' to village household owners possessing houses in inhabited rural areas in villages and **issuance of property cards** to the property owners. As on 1st March 2023, drone survey has been completed in 2.32 lakh villages.

Aim of Ministry of Panchayati Raj at Amrit Kaal

- **Vibrant Gram Sabha** to realise the dreams of '**Gram Swaraj**'
- Adequate devolution of Funds, Functions and Functionaries (3Fs) to the Panchayats to attain localization of Sustainable Development Goals.
- Provision of Panchayat-Secretariat/Gram Sachivalaya to all Panchayats.

- Ensuring Financial Instruments to the Panchayats like market borrowing.
- Strengthening of Statutory Standing Committees of Gram Panchayats to achieve SGDs.
- Bridging the Rural - Urban divide to ensure ease of living and Quality of life.
- Master Spatial Plans for Gram Panchayats clearly demarcating areas for agriculture, residence, markets, parks, water bodies, industries, institutional areas etc
- Adequate Own Sources of Revenue (OSR) for the GPs to make them self-reliant.
- Effective Disaster Management Plan for Gram Panchayats.
- Energy empowerment of villages through Gram Urja Swaraj.

2.e-GramSwaraj

Introduction:

The empowering effects of today's information technology and communication for governance have prompted nations of the world to increasingly adopt processes and practices of electronic governance. The PRIs are no exception to it.

Panchayats and E-Governance:

- It is imperative to ensure smart governance right at the community level at the PRIs. E-governance in PRIs is expected to help in enhancing and redefining various socio-economic, environmental, technological aspects of community development.
- In this context, eGramSwaraj has been a potent example of '**Minimum Government and Maximum Governance**'.

Good Governance through e-GramSwaraj:

- In India, the Government of India Act of 1935, provided for devolution of powers to the provinces. Subsequently, committees such as **Balwant Mehta, Ashok Mehta, G.V.K. Rao and L.M. Singhvi**, recommended democratic decentralisation in independent India.
- United Nations lays down eight characteristics of good governance, viz. (i) participatory, (ii) consensus-oriented, (iii) accountable, (iv) transparent, (v) responsive, (vi) effective and efficient, (vii) equitable and inclusive and (viii) following the rule of law.
- The Ministry of Panchayati Raj launched eGramSwaraj, a work-based comprehensive application for panchayati raj institutions in 2020. This application is mandated to facilitate effective monitoring and evaluation of works taken up in Gram Panchayats.
- Being integrated with the **Public Financial Management System (PFMS)**, it is able to facilitate online payments to material vendors and service providers.

Progress of eGramSwaraj:

There are **6,62,841 villages** in the country, for which there are **2,71,770 Gram Panchayats** (GPs)/ Rural Local Bodies (RLBs). For 2022-23, as many as **2.56 lakh**

GPDPs were uploaded. Undoubtedly the e-Panchayats strives towards making Panchayati Raj Institutions more transparent, accountable and effective.

Turning Challenges into Opportunities:

- The challenge before the Panchayats is to ensure rightful documentation of the plan and after due consultations with the experts in the field.
- The GPDPs also need to identify and review the available schemes and the resources attached to the schemes for appropriate convergence.
- However out of 2,71,770 Gram Panchayats across the country, 51,508 do not have their own buildings.
- A basic **pre-requisite for eGramSwaraj** is the availability of **internet connectivity**.
- Therefore, governments are connecting Gram Panchayats with high-speed broadband/through optical fibre/radio/satellite at a much faster rate.
- Encouraging people to adopt digital means is itself a challenge.
- Further, the devolution of powers to Panchayats across States needs to be made uniform.
- **Common Service Centres (CSC)** were started to propel e-governance in the country.
- Aim of each CSC was to cover **at least six villages** and Convergence of CSC with eGramSwaraj will be another bolstered step towards e-governance.

Conclusion: For eGramSwaraj to meet its objectives effectively and efficiently awareness generation and training of all stakeholders involved are essential. By reaching out to the grassroots, eGramSwaraj is transforming rural India and strengthening the foundation of e-governance. Therefore, with the surge in information technology usage in Panchayats, the PRIs are going to see a beneficial and quick transformation of their businesses and delivery of mandated services with a human touch.

3. Good Governance at Grass-root Level

Introduction:

Our parliamentary system seems to be influenced by the British political system. But not the same could be said about the most primary unit of our democratic system -that is village level governance model. This model is called Panchayati Raj governance system.

Rural Governance System: Indian Context:

PRI in its modern avatar was introduced in India in 1992. But, roots of this model of governance can be traced back to many centuries.

- **Rig Veda** mentions **Sabha, Samiti and Vidatha** as the units of local self-governance.
- In Ramayan, the village level unit of governance used to be called as Janpad, while there used to be a caste panchayat all across the kingdom.
- **Shanti Parva** in **Mahabharata, Manu Smriti and Kautilya's Arthshastra** also had references of rural units of governance in contemporary times.
- The **history of rural governance in India remained strong** in almost all the time periods **until 5th century** when Gupta Kingdom fell down.

- Later during medieval period rural governance system was reinstated to some extent.

Panchayati Raj in British India:

- **Mayo resolution of 1870** granted local institutions more power and scope of functioning.
- **Lord Rippon's laws in 1882** provided democratic framework of these institutions.
- In 1907, for the first time the need of panchayats on village level was recognised by a **Royal Commission** chaired by **CEH Hobhouse**.
- Gandhi was a fierce proponent of the idea of Panchayati Raj and he strongly pleaded for decentralisation of powers.
 - However, Gandhi was **opposed by Ambedkar** who believed that the villages represented regressive India, a source of oppression.
 - As a result, the 'panchayats' could find a mention only **in Article 40** of the **DPS** initially.

Panchayati Raj in Independent India:

- In **1952, Community Development Programs (CDPs)** were started on national level, but it could not cut much ice.
- **Balwant Rai Mehta** committee constituted **in 1957** concluded that CDP was not able to achieve its objectives because of the lack of public participation.
- The committee recommended three- tier structure of Panchayat.
- Finally, the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 actually added Part IX titled "The Panchayats" in the constitution.

Panchayati Raj: A tool for Empowering Weaker Sections

- PRIs have played a significant role in the **political empowerment of women**.
- Greater female representation in local level government system has ensured **reporting of crime against women at a greater number**.
- Along with women, PRIs have also **strengthened weaker social groups** like **ST/ST and OBC**.

Governance by People for People:

Gram Panchayat Institutions are the entities which take care of all the basic necessities of the public. **PRIs have 3 sources of funding:**

- ✓ **Grants received from the local bodies**
- ✓ **Funds** from the **centrally-sponsored schemes**
- ✓ **Funds** received by the state governments on the advice of **State Finance Commissions**.

The PRIs perform 2 types of roles i.e.

- ✓ **Mandatory:** primary health, construction of public wells, construction of public toilets, social health and primary and adult education, vaccination, irrigation etc
 - ✓ **Optional:** establishment of reproduction centres for animals, promoting agriculture, plantation alongside the roads, welfare of new born and mother etc.
- **Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP):** It was launched with a mandate to prepare the Panchayat Development Plan (PDP) for economic development and social justice utilising the resources available to them.

GPDP should be comprehensive and based on participatory process involving the Gram Sabha, and in convergence with schemes of all related Central Ministries related to **29 subjects listed in the 11th Schedule of the Constitution**. The guidelines for preparing the GPDP has been issued by Ministry of finance.

- **Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)**: The '**Transformation of Aspirational Districts**' program that aims to quickly and effectively transform selected districts was launched in **2018**. It aims to bring people propelled development at the ground level.

These districts were selected on parameters like poverty, public health, nutrition, education, gender, sanitation, drinking water, livelihood generation which are in sync with **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and fall within the realm of Panchayats.

- **SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages And Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas)**: Launched in 2020, The scheme aims to revolutionise property record maintenance in India. It aims to provide rural people with the right to document their residential properties so that they can use their property for economic purposes.
- **e-Panchayat**: The e-Panchayat scheme aims to bring transparency and efficiency to the functioning of Panchayati Raj institutions through the use of technology. It provides a platform for online reporting, monitoring, and management of Panchayat activities.
- **Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Sashaktikaran Yojana (DDUPSY)**: The DDUPSY scheme was launched in **2014** to **strengthen Panchayati Raj institutions** by providing them with the **necessary resources and capabilities** to undertake their constitutional duties. The scheme aims to empower Panchayati Raj institutions to undertake planning, implementation, and monitoring of development programs.
- **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan**: Launched in **2014**, aims to make India clean and open-defecation free. The scheme focuses on creating a **culture of cleanliness** and **promoting the use of toilets in rural areas**. Panchayati Raj institutions play a crucial role in the implementation of the scheme at the grassroots level.

4.SVAMITVA Scheme for Providing Property Validation

Introduction

Land, Labor, Capital, and Entrepreneur are four **factors of production**. **Land** is the basis of production for any business and it can be used as an **instrument to obtain credit**. However, Indian economy is not able to harness the full potential of land due to inaccurate land records and ambiguous land ownership details.

The absence of quality land records specifically affects the ability of marginal farmers to gain access to credit from formal institutions. This suppressing a significant channel of credit and capital to the agricultural sector which impacts the economic prospects of poor farmers and consequently the agrarian sector as a whole.

To resolve this issue, government launched '**SVAMITVA Scheme**' in 2021. It aims to provide an **integrated property validation solution for rural India**, engaging the latest drone surveying technology, for demarcating the inhabitant (Abadi) land in rural areas.

This scheme is a collaborative effort of the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj**, State Panchayati Raj Departments, State Revenue Departments, and the **Survey of India**

Need of the Scheme: The effects of poor land record management, land disputes, and ambiguous right to property have some far fetching consequences like:

- **India loses nearly 1.3 per cent of economic growth annually** as a result of **disputed land titles**.
- Several projects linked with land become dysfunctional due to litigation-related delays.
- Land-related disputes are also a heavy burden on the judiciary.
- These disputes affect the supply of capital and credit for investment adversely and reduce productivity.
- The clean land records and clear ownership of land facilitates the use of land as a factor of production.
- India's **Ease of Doing Business ranking** can further improve if litigation free land can be provided to investors.
- Clear ownership of rural land will enable the **gram panchayats to levy property taxes**.

Objectives of the Scheme: The broad objectives of the Svamitva scheme are:

- **Capitalising property** as a financial asset by the nation's rural population.
- Reduction in land or property-related disputes in rural areas.
- Creation and updation of land records for rural planning.
- Provide the right of property to the true owner of rural land
- Empowering the gram panchayats to levy and collect property tax
- Creation of survey infrastructure and GIS (Geographical)

Process of the Scheme

- An MoU is signed between Survey of India and respective states government to enable drone-based survey and provisions for Property Cards.
- To sensitise the local population about the benefits of the scheme.
- Geo-referencing, ground truthing, and demarcation of Land.
- Notification of villages for the survey, and demarcation of boundaries of Abadi and parcels.
- **Drone survey** of Rural inhabited (**Abadi**) areas by **Survey of India**.
- Creation of property maps and high-resolution Spatial data.
- Resolution of disputes by Gram Sabha and correction in the maps through post-ground verification.
- Printing and distribution of property cards to village household owners to be done by State.

Challenges and Recommendations:

- The **legal sanctity of the property cards** issued under the scheme. It is important that the state Revenue Act, list the property cards as documents requiring stamp duty payment.

- Implementation of the scheme is **not feasible if the local population is not satisfied**.
- The **record keeping practise** of the states need to be aligned to the process.
- The Scheme does not spell out the **mechanism to resolve the property-related conflicts**.
- The legislature of some states has not rendered the power to levy a property tax to their gram panchayats.
- It is quite necessary that while undertaking the mapping exercise, the rights of the weak and marginalised communities are also preserved.

Overall, the SVAMITVA scheme is a solution-based approach to the land related woes of rural India. It helps poor rural residents to mobilise funds through the monetisation of their residential assets. Therefore, it will not be an exaggeration to call the "SVAMITVA Scheme" the flag bearer of the new Aatma Nirbhar Bharat.

5. Women Empowerment

Introduction:

As a result of reservation for women, there are around **10.5 lakh elected women**, including women belonging to the SCs/STs, as members and chairpersons in the PRIs. This is a paradigm shift in the history of political empowerment of women in decentralised political decision-making.

Situational Analysis:

- **Participation of Women in the PRIs**, which was 18.18 per cent in 2017-18 has been increased to **21.08 percent in 2019-20**.
- The unemployment rate among women, was 3.80 per cent in 2017-18 that has come down to 2.63 per cent in 2019-20.
- The **presence of women in agriculture sector has increased** from 2017-18 to 2018-19 whereas **their presence in industry and service sectors have been decreased**.
- It can be said that women' economic empowerment might have motivated them to function effectively in local governance.

Women's Representation in Panchayats Before and after 73rd Amendment:

- Before the 73rd Amendment Act, it was not mandatory on the part of the States to provide reservation for women in Panchayats.
- The **Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report** on the Panchayati Raj (1957) had recommended **nomination of two women as members of the Panchayats**.
- In 1974, the Committee on the Status of Women in India recommended the establishment of statutory Women's Panchayats at the village level.
- **Ashok Mehta Committee Report (1987)** suggested that **two women** might be made **member of Zila Parishad**.
- **The 73rd Amendment Act** provided not less than **one-third reservation** for women in Panchayats as mandatory.
- Over a period of time as many as **22 States/UTs made 50 percent reservation** for women (2021).
- In percentage terms **Uttarakhand (56%) has highest representation of women in PRIs**, followed by Chhattisgarh (55%) and Assam (54%).

- At national level women as Members and Presidents of Panchayats constitute about 46 per cent of total elected representatives in PRIs.

Women Participation in Panchayats; An Assessment:

- A large number of women in the PRIs were from more marginalized groups of society. Educationally, twenty percent were illiterate, but the gender gap was significant.
- Economically, Pradhans (president of Gram Panchayat) had a better economic status and there is no gender difference.
- Reservation facilitated the first entry into politics for 83 per cent of women elected representatives.

Quality of Participation of Elected Women Representatives:

Overall, the quality of participation of women assessed across various dimensions turned out to be reasonably good however women participation in village development was less than 25 percent pointing out for better community mobilisation by elected representatives.

Determinants of Good Performance:

The important determinants of good performance are:

- (i) A longer duration of being an elected representative.
- (ii) Training
- (iii) Education up to middle school and above.
- (iv) Active involvement in Panchayat work.

The **high performers among elected women representatives were from Kerala**, followed by Karnataka, Tripura, Maharashtra. On the other hand, the **performance score was on the lower side in Orissa, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar** and Gujarat.

Impact of Participation of Women and Community Development: Women participation in PRIs impacted them positively as majority of women representatives realised enhancement in their self-esteem, confidence, capacity of decision-making and respect in community.

Recommendations for further empowerment of women in PRIs:

- **Enhancement of educational levels** of elected representatives.
- encouragement of joining of **younger women in politics**.
- Imparting **regular training** and capacity building.
- Giving adequate **honoraria**
- **Association of women in various groups** including Self-help groups

Government of India constituted an Expert Committee entitled: '**Towards Holistic Panchayati Raj: Twentieth Anniversary Report of the Expert Committee on Leveraging Panchayats for Efficient Delivery of Public Goods and Services**' 2012.

The committee in its report highlighted the findings of various studies:

- **'Women invested more in infrastructure** relevant for rural women's needs like water, fuel, roads while their counterparts invested more in education'. -- Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2001)

- **'Villagers are less likely to pay bribes in Gram Panchayats with office of chairperson reserved for women'**--- Duflo and Topalova (2004)
- Bardhan et.al (2005) studied the effect of women's reservation on the targeting of various local programmes and found improvement in the targeting of subsidised loans to marginalised groups.
- Study of Besley, Pande and Rao (2005) revealed that "Panchayats led by women are no worse or better in their performance than those with male leaders, and women politicians do not make decisions in line with the needs of women.

The Task Ahead:

- The MoPR has brought out the **roadmap for the Panchayati Raj (2011-17)**. Some of the steps suggested for empowerment of women are:
 - A provision of women component plans in PRI budgets.
 - Linkages with SHGs in all levels of PRIs.
 - Leadership training programmes for elected women representatives.
 - Training of other functionaries on gender issues.
 - Separate quorum for women participation in Gram/Ward Sabha.
 - Sharing good practices and exposure visits.

The Constitution has enabled women to be instrumental in deepening decentralised governance through PRIs. Women understanding of infrastructure development for rural development is more than their counterparts. Therefore, they could play their role in a more effective way.

6.2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Introduction:

To fast track the agenda of '**Sabka Sath-Sabka Vikas**' and to address the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in rural India, Ministry of Panchayati Raj constituted an expert group to provide recommendations for **localisation of SDGs through PRIs**.

The Sustainable Development Goals (**SDGs**) are a new, universal set of goals, targets and indicators that **193 countries** in the world have jointly set. Starting January **2016**, countries are expected to frame their agendas and policies to end poverty, protect the planet, enjoy peace and ensure prosperity for all by **2030**.

The linchpin of this Agenda are **People, Prosperity, Peace, Partnerships and the Planet**.

In a country where 65% of the population lives in Rural areas, the PRIs have been a critical component of local self-governance. In this backdrop MoPR and UNDP have signed a joint statement of understanding on localisation of Sustainable Development Goals.

The Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) mandates to capacitate elected representatives and functionaries of PRIs to deliver on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through participatory local planning at the Gram Panchayat level.

The twin objectives of Panchayati Raj System as envisaged by the Indian Constitution are to ensure local economic development and social justice.

They are expected to play an effective role in the planning and implementation of functions related to **29 subjects enlisted in the Eleventh Schedule** of the Constitution. **Many SDG targets fall within the purview of these subjects.**

The **Gram panchayats (GPs)** across the country have a highly **significant role in the attainment of SDGs** and therefore Panchayats were advised to mandatorily integrate the Village Poverty Reduction Plans (VPRPs) into Gram Panchayat Development Plans.

The total number of Elected Representatives is more than 3.1 million out of which around 46 per cent are women.

Substantial resources have been devolved to the Gram Panchayats i.e., Rs. 4.36 lakh crore for the period 2021-2026 under 15th Finance Commission award.

If India is to achieve its goals by 2030, it must build a mechanism for effectively localising the SDGs.

The role of panchayats in the attainment of SDGs, is summed up in the following way:

- **Convergent Implementation of the Schemes:**

Government should ensure effective implementation of flagship programmes pertaining to livelihood like NRLM, MGNREGS, SBM etc. there should be focus on Swachh Bharat Mission.

- **Participatory Outcome Based Planning for Local Development:** Gram Sabha as participatory forum for local development, coordinated functioning with the SHGs.
- **Specific Governance Interventions in Panchayats:** Effective functioning of Standing Committees, clear community-based monitoring and tracking mechanisms, **Universal birth registration, social audit of the local planning and implementation process, Digitisation of Panchayats.**
- **Interventions across Tiers of Panchayats:** Convergent between the three-tiers of Panchayati Raj, Effective functioning of the District Planning Committees, co-ordination for service delivery and implementation of flagship schemes.

The 2030 Agenda puts the principles of equality and non-discrimination at its heart. The overall co-ordination for **implementation of SDGs** in India is handled by **NITI Aayog** which is driven by spirit of cooperative and competitive federalism.

Government's thrust on **digital governance** and **people centric governance** has paved the way for **citizen friendly localisation.**

The 2022 edition of SDG Index covers all **17 Goals** and **120 indicators**. The utility of the Index extends beyond progress monitoring. SDG localisation process is not limited only to government interventions but also includes civil society organisations.

In spite of the pandemic, there has been remarkable progress witnessed in some crucial SDG goals. For e.g., Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

Driven by flagship schemes, significant achievements have come in areas such as access to electricity, sanitation and housing. Equally noteworthy are efforts towards food security; Universal Health Coverage; education, improving youth skills and employment etc.

Its world-class digital governance systems increasingly drive India's efforts to strengthen service delivery systems for the most marginalised. India's extensive response to COVID-19 pandemic illustrated this approach.

In the 2022, ranking, **India (with score of 66 out of 100) slipped from 117th to 121st position in the attainment of SDGs.** That means **India is behind all south Asian nations except Pakistan.** Among states **Kerala ranked first**, followed by Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh. While **Jharkhand and Bihar are the least prepared to meet the SDGs** by the target year 2030.

Obstacles in the path of SDGs?

- The pandemic and the lockdown that followed put all progressive work towards SDGs attainment to a standstill.
- Climate change and its consequences like heatwaves, droughts, wildfires and floods are affecting billions of people around the globe.
- Geo-political conflicts like the Russia-Ukraine crisis have caused food, fuel and fertiliser prices to skyrocket disturbing the global trade supplies and causing the financial markets to tumble.
- Despite some progress, serious data gaps exist in SDG monitoring.

Therefore, **to realise SDGs, it is crucial that Village/Gram Panchayats develop their own action plan.** The vulnerable sections need special attention from the service providing agencies.

Strengthening the stakeholder participation in governance can make significant changes for example, if the stock of essential drugs at the beginning of the month is displayed in the Primary Health Centre, the access to free medicines can be improved.

Each village panchayat must **rationalize the usage of their assets.** Primary focus must be given to five key services:

- Anganwadi
- Primary education (Universal literacy, especially among girls)
- Drinking water and sanitation
- Access to public health services
- Access to public distribution system and food availability in Anganwadi and mid-day-meal will address malnutrition

Therefore, the Gram Panchayat Development Plan, needs to be a holistic and result based plan contributing to the SDGs from **local to global.**

Besides establishing a **robust data sharing and monitoring mechanism** linked to performance of Ministries and PRIs on Localising SDGs, is the need of the hour. To conclude accelerated efforts are needed to **boost sustainable solutions** to the challenges we face. The solutions must be transformative economic, social and environmental.

7. Water Management through Panchayats

Introduction:

Water is one of the most important renewable natural resources for sustaining life and livelihoods, especially in rural areas. However, water is increasingly becoming a scarce

commodity mainly due to over-exploitation of the sources, increasing pressure of population and deficits in natural replenishment and fast growth in water-consuming sectors (agriculture, industries, construction etc.)

National Water Policy (2012) advocated involvement of local bodies in planning of water resource projects. People's participation makes water management more responsive towards local needs and also ensures transparency and equity in distribution.

Recently, Prime Minister reiterated that Gram Panchayats should prepare roadmap for an action plan for the next five years. He also urged states to prepare a water budget for each panchayat. **'Pani Samiti' or 'Pani Panchayat'**, should be created for local and participatory management of surface irrigation systems.

Water being a state subject, water resource projects are planned, funded, executed and maintained by State Governments, while the central government provides technical support.

Panchayats for Participation:

- Gram Panchayats own and manage the water supply scheme for communities, while **Gram Sabha takes larger decisions** like quantity, source and nature of water supply.
- Pani Samiti is a standing committee of the GP and is responsible for planning, implementation, operation, maintenance and management of village drinking water security.
- Regular monitoring and **sampling of ground water** drinking sources is essential to keep diseases, such as **fluorosis** and **arsenical dermatitis** at bay.
- Pani Samiti/ **Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC)** while preparing the Water Security Plan also needs to take into account needs of **livestock**.
- **Mitigation plans** like rooftop rainwater **harvesting**, groundwater **recharge** revival/**rehabilitation** of traditional water storage tanks, are prepared and implemented.
- **Separate water budget** is framed for **summer** and **winter** seasons and it takes into account different usages like agriculture, human consumption, livestock consumption, local industries etc.
- **Social audit** is a key responsibility of GP/**VWSC** that ensures transparency in implementation.

Management at Ground

- India is the world's **largest user of groundwater**. Groundwater serves 85% of domestic water supply in rural areas, 45% in urban areas, and over 60% of irrigated agriculture.
- According to the Central Groundwater Board, about 17 percent of groundwater blocks are over-exploited. Situation is alarming in the north-west, west and south-peninsular regions.
- In this backdrop, Government launched the comprehensive '**Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABY)**' in 2020, with the overall goal to **improve groundwater management** in critical areas.
- The scheme is operational in 8,565 Gram Panchayats of **80 districts** in **seven states**. It aims to bring **behavioural change** at the community level.

- Successful containment of declining ground water levels would lead to improvement in ground water regime.
- **World Bank** has been collaborating with Government of India to enhance groundwater management in stressed areas. WB stressed the need to integrate supply side measures with demand side management for a sustainable solution.
- **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY)**, launched in **2015-16**, aims to accelerate supply-side and demand-side management through Repair, Renovation and Restoration (RRR) of water bodies.
- **PMKS** is an umbrella scheme of **Ministry of Jal Shakti**. Its two major components are:
 - ✓ **Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP)**.
 - ✓ **Har Khet Ko Pani (HKKP)**.
- The '**per drop more crop**' is a component of Har Khet Ko Pani, that is being implemented by the department of Agriculture and Farmers welfare.
- **District Irrigation Plans** are the cornerstone for planning and implementation of PMKSY.
- It is estimated that **1.25 lakh farmers** have benefitted under different components of PMKSY since 2015.

Association for Actions:

- **Water Users' Association (WUA)** is a co-operative association of individual water users who wish to undertake irrigation related activities for their mutual benefit.
- WUA plays coordinative role in **recovery of irrigation water rates** from the beneficiary farmers.
- **Design and construction of new works** with provision of drinking water from canals are also undertaken by WUAs.
- The State Governments are liable to create an **enabling environment** through policy resolutions to ensure success of WUA.
- Various States have enacted their own Acts and Rules for statutory backing to WUAs.
- Government of India in partnership with State Governments is implementing an ambitious **Jal Jeevan Mission - Her Ghar Jal** with the vision to provide tap water supply to every rural household of the country by **2024**.
- **States are the implementing agency** for 'Har Ghar Jal' while centre provides technical and financial assistance.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission aims to create a **Jan Andolan** for water, thereby making it a priority for everyone.

8.Human Development through Panchayat Raj Institution

Introduction:

New modes of decentralised governance like 'democratic decentralisation', 'participatory development', and 'civil society' have gained immense importance in the development paradigm.

While in 1974, only 39 countries had electoral democratic governance at local level, today around 123 countries have decentralised governance.

Decentralisation implies transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the Central Government to subordinate levels. There are three basic types of decentralisations:

- ✓ Political decentralisation
- ✓ Administrative decentralisation
- ✓ Financial decentralisation

In India, the existence of decentralised governance can be traced back in ancient time. Post-independence, the legal framework was laid through 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992.

Panchayat System in India: A Historical Perspective:

- India has adopted decentralised and participatory governance system since the inception of the five-year plans.
- The need for Panchayati Raj system is traced as far back as the recommendations of the **Balwant Rai Mehta committee** in **1957**, that recommended a **three-tier** Panchayat system at district, block and village levels.
- The **National Development Council** approved the recommendations of the **Mehta Committee** in January **1958** and suggested that each state should implement this as best suited to its own particular conditions.
- The **Dantwala Committee on Block Planning**, formed in **1978**, prescribed integration of block-level plans with district plans.
- **Ashok Mehta Committee** in **1978** recommended political decentralisation.
- **L.M Singhvi Committee**, recommended the involvement of Panchayati Raj institutions in basic planning so that PRIs can serve as institute of Self Governance.
- The **73rd** Constitutional Amendment, in 1992, have formalised such an institution by giving PRI the constitutional provision to constitute three-tier panchayat system in each state.
- PRIs, under the law, are **required to prepare plans** for **economic development** and **social justice** for their areas, and also implement them.

Panchayati Raj Institution in India:

Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) is a **three-tiered structure** in India. It includes **Gram Panchayats** at village level, **Panchayat Samiti** at Block level and **Zila Parishad** at district level.

After the 73rd Constitutional Amendments, these bodies have been **granted greater powers** and additional financial resources to promote local economic and social development.

The **Article 243ZD (1)** recommended for the constitution of the District Planning Committee at the district level to integrate plans prepared by panchayats and municipalities and to prepare draft development plan for the district.

Implication of Panchayati Raj Institution and Decentralised Governance:

UNDP describes the decentralised governance as ‘the restructuring of authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between institutions of governance at the central, regional and local levels.’

Decentralised governance is expected to contribute to key elements of good governance, like increasing people's participation in decision making, enhancing government responsiveness, transparency, and accountability, as well as delivery of goods and services to people for their wellbeing.

According to **Drez** and **Sen**, and **Webster**, the poor functioning of the local public services in India relates to the centralised and non-participatory nature of their management.

According to **World Bank** 'devolving administrative authority to local governments improves public service delivery because of better information availability and better monitoring capacity at the local level.

The spaces like '**Ward Sabha**' and '**Gram Sabha**' have been created to ensure the participation of people in village planning. Representation of women and weaker sections have been ensured through reservation.

For fiscal decentralisation, states are supposed to establish the **State Finance Commissions** to provide recommendations on **revenue-sharing** arrangements and **grants** to these institutions.

Role of Panchayat in Human Development:

Post 73rd Constitutional Amendment, most of the states have amended the Panchayat Act accordingly, to facilitate the devolution of fund, function and functionaries to Panchayats.

The 29 subjects under 11th Schedule are instrumental to guide in this process. The 29 subjects include:

- Agriculture
- land improvement
- Irrigation and water management
- Animal husbandry,
- Fisheries,
- Social forestry,
- Minor forest production,
- Small scale industries,
- Khadi and cottage,
- Rural housing,
- Cultural activities,
- Market and fairs,
- Sanitation and health,
- Women and child development,
- Family welfare,
- Social welfare
- Public distribution system,
- Drinking water,
- Fuel and fodder,
- Road and communication,
- Electrification,
- Non-conventional energy,
- Poverty alleviation programme,
- Education,
- Vocational training,
- Non-formal education,
- Libraries and community asset.

These 29 subjects have direct impact on **infrastructure** development, **livelihood** development and **service delivery** in rural areas.

Most of these subjects have direct impact on **human development** in rural areas. The **UNDP** defines Human Development as "**the process of enlarging people's choices**".

The Central idea of Human Development concept is the **Capability Approach**, which is defined by **Amartya Sen** as the “various combinations of functioning that the person can achieve.”

Since the publication of **Human development report** by UNDP in 1990, **income, education** and **health** have been identified as three important dimensions of human development.

The efficient delivery of targeted public services has the potential to reduce economic inequalities which have been rising in rapidly growing economies, such as China and India.

Rural populations in India are **socio-economically vulnerable** due to their dependence on **agriculture** and related activities for their livelihood.

Rural development schemes like **NRLM** and **MGNREGS** are programmed to enhance livelihood opportunities through self and wage employment and remove poverty through participatory approaches.

In rural areas a large number of services are provided through the active engagement of the PRIs. PRI system improves the targeting of resources towards the needy.

Role of Panchayat in Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management

- **Rural people** are highly dependent on natural resources and **ecosystem services** and highly **vulnerable to climate change**.
- Climate change presents a **livelihood disturbance**, especially when adaptive mechanisms are limited. Therefore, the rural policies need to be justified to cater the needs of material aspects ecosystem services.
- Active **participation of PRIs** in rural areas are important for the implementation of any local **disaster risk reduction programme**.
- The PRI can also play a crucial role in **community training** related to climate change and **disaster preparedness**.

Conclusion: On the one hand PRIs are the immediate providers of public services and on the other, they are naturally situated amongst citizens to play an instrumental role in building awareness related to climate change and disaster preparedness.

9. Universal Health Coverage with Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWC)

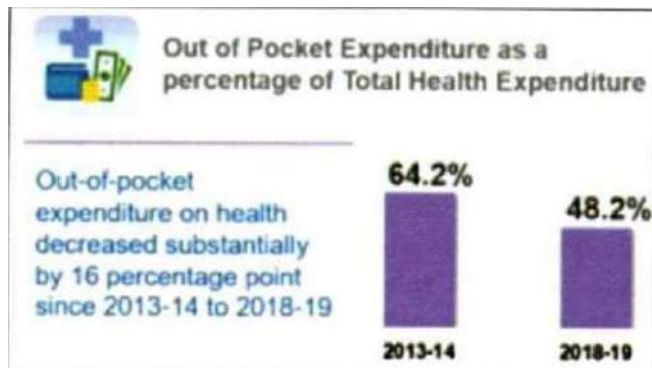
WHO defines **Universal Health Coverage** as “All people having access to the quality health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship.”

The focus of UHC is on preventing diseases and towards overall health and wellbeing. It includes full continuum of essential health services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and care.

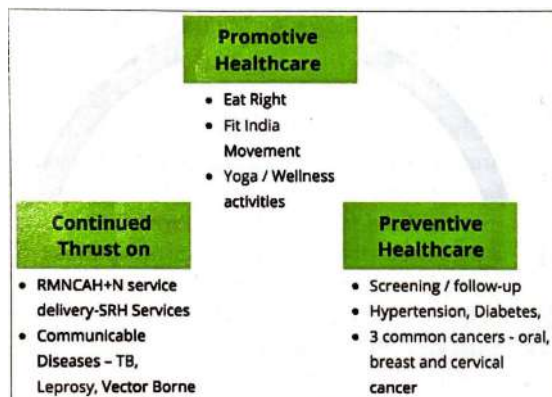
The National Health Policy launched in 2017, positions primary healthcare to be comprehensive and universal. It envisages to provide assured comprehensive primary health care through 'Health and Wellness Centres.

In February 2018, government announced the creation of 1,50,000 Ayushman Bharat- Health and Wellness Centres (HWC). These HWC will deliver Primary Health Care closer to the homes of people, covering both maternal and child health services along with non-communicable diseases, and provisioning of free essential drugs and diagnostic services.

Through Ayushman Bharat HWC, health services would be provided through outreach services, mobile medical units, camps, and community-based care. It also shifts the focus towards preventive and promotive healthcare with collective responsibility.



Ayushman Bharat-HWCs is to significantly reduce out of pocket expenses and financial hardship through affordable, accessible and quality healthcare closer to the communities.



AB-HWCs reflect multiple reforms in the health sector like service delivery, human resources, financing, access to essential medicines and diagnostics, community participation coupled with ownership and governance.

More than 1.5 lakhs AB-HWCs has already been made functional across states and UTs.

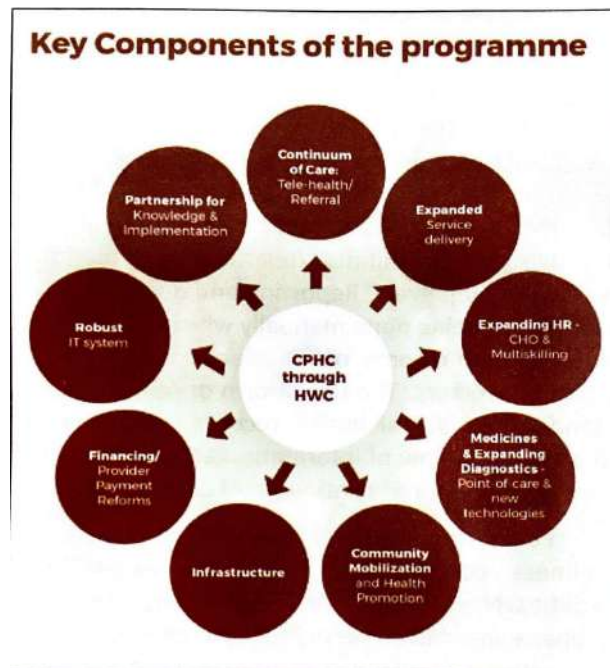
Service Package:

The service care at AB-HWC includes care in pregnancy and child birth, neo-natal and infant health care services, childhood and adolescent health care services, family planning, contraceptive services and other reproductive health care services.

Besides it also includes management of common communicable disease and out-patient care, non-communicable diseases and chronic communicable diseases like Tuberculosis and Leprosy.

The services being added in an incremental manner are basic oral health care, common ophthalmic and ENT problem, mental health ailments, elderly and palliative health care services and emergency medical services.

Key Component of Ayushman Bharat-HWC



Community Engagement: An essential part of AB-HWC is healthcare workers working closely with the communities. The team enable empowerment of individuals, families and communities with knowledge and skills to take responsibility for their own health.

Institutional structures such as Jan Arogya Samitis, with representation from PRIs, SHGs and patients, enable community ownership and accountability of AB-HWC team.

Access to Free Essential Medicines and Diagnostic Service: The AB-HWCs serve as the hub for dispensing medicines at the PHC. This ensures

uninterrupted availability of medicines to ensure adherence and continuation of care and reduce patient's hardship.

Robust IT Systems: The IT system includes the provision of a smart phone to the ASHA and a tablet to the Multipurpose Worker and CHO. This has enabled registration of all individuals' record of services and outcomes, increasing the quality of care and accountability.

Tele-consultation services: The AB-HWCs provide teleconsultation services, whereby every level of service provider is able to access higher level of consultation, including with specialists in secondary and tertiary centres. It reduces the physical travel, cost and burden on patients.

Health and Wellness Ambassadors and Messengers: AB-HWCs also include school health activities. Teachers in every school are being trained to serve as Health and Wellness Ambassadors and students as messengers.

Why are AB-HWCs seen as game changers?

Before the establishment of AB-HWC, primary health care was largely limited to Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) and communicable diseases, which was addressing only 20 per cent of the health care needs.

Now an expanded range of health services has been included to include chronic disease conditions and non-communicable diseases.

Furthermore, earlier there was limited focus on wellness component now, wellness activities including Yoga are mainstreamed into the health care delivery system at primary health care facilities.

Conclusion:

Primary healthcare is cornerstone of an effective and sustainable health system for achieving universal health coverage, which is viewed as the centrepiece of SDG-3. The revamped health system at the grassroots through the AB-HWCs has the potential to play a major role in providing Universal Health Coverage. Therefore, it forms an integral cog in the wheel of Universal Health Coverage.