

Panchayati Raj institutions are the pillars of democracy. To strengthen these institutes the central government has made many efforts in the last eight years and in the upcoming time even more rigorous efforts will be made in the Amrit Kaal. In order to empower the gram panchayat through public participation the most important link is to empower the active and effective participation of the people in the gram sabhas.

Capacity Building of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)

- Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) is implementing the centrally sponsored scheme of Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA). Since the inception of this scheme in 2018-19, 1.42 crore participants including ERs, Panchayat functionaries and other stakeholders have been trained.
- The MoPR has taken a novel initiative of adopting thematic approach for localization of sustainable development goals (LSDGs) where 17 SDGs have been mapped into 9 themes-
 - i. “Poverty free and enhanced livelihoods village” that aims to create avenues of enhanced income levels of the poor and to ensure eligible beneficiaries are covered under Social Protection Schemes and MGNREGA like schemes.
 - ii. “Healthy village” to ensure healthy lives and well-being for all through health checkups, 100 percent immunization, institutional delivery, nutrition and early child care through ICDS etc.
 - iii. “Child friendly village” that strives to attain 100 percent enrollment in schools, reduce dropout ratio, quality education, 100 percent immunization of children, 100 percent labour free village, no child trafficking, protected environment from all kinds of violence against children.
 - iv. “Water sufficient village” providing potable water to every household, grey water treatment and purification, addressing groundwater depletion, arsenic contamination, rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge etc.
 - v. “Clean and green village” aiming for 100 percent ODF villages, solid and liquid waste management, shift to renewable source of energy, enhanced green cover, conservation of biodiversity etc.
 - vi. “Village with self-sufficient infrastructure” with the aim of providing basic infrastructure villages such as GP Bhawan, AWC, Schools, health centres, CSC, separate toilets for boys and girls in schools with water supply, all weather roads, solar streetlights etc.
 - vii. “Socially just and socially secured villages” for improving the living standards of the BPL, destitute, socially disadvantaged groups, social protection through various schemes to the eligible, infrastructure facilities for person with disability etc.
 - viii. “Village with good governance” ensuring better public delivery, regular ward/ Mahila/ Bal-Balika /Gram sabhas, functional standing committees in localization of SDGs, coordination and convergence among various institutions/ stakeholders for preparation of GDGP.
 - ix. “Women friendly village” to ensure 100 percent immunization of pregnant women, 100 percent institutional deliver, 100 percent ANC/ PNC, reduce crimes against women in socio-political, economical activities etc.

Basic Provisions Through The Finance Commission Funding

Panchayats provide basic services to the rural population such as supply of drinking water, maintenance of sanitation and ODF status etc. To carry out such activities, panchayats receive funds through the Central Finance Commission, State Finance Commission and a number of centrally sponsored schemes.

National Panchayat Awards

- The National Panchayat Awards have been revamped w.e.f. year 2022 aligning with nine LSDG themes. This would create a baseline for PRIs to assess their status under each of the LSDG theme and enable them to achieve SDGs in a phased manner through graduated planning by the year 2030.
- The awards will be conferred under the category of Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Satat Vikas Puruskar for the performance under individual LSDG theme and Nanaji Deshmukh Sarvottam Panchayat Satat Vikas Puruskar for the aggregate performance under all 9 LSDG themes.

e- Governance and ICT Initiatives

- E-GramSwaraj , was launched to ensure better financial management of panchayats for enhancing transparency and accountability in maintenance of accounts. e- GramSwaraj PFMS interface (eGSPI) is one of its kind for Gram Panchayats to make real time payments to vendors/ service providers.
- The e-GramSwaraj is also being integrated with government e-Market place (GeM) to enable seamless procurement and accounting experience to the Panchayats.
- Audit Online Application has been developed to allow online audit of panchayat accounts and to enhance transparency and accountability in the audit.

Citizen Charter Campaign

Carried out under the aegis of Meri Panchayat, Mera Adhikaar- Jan Sevaayein Humare Dwaar from 1st July- 30th September 2021 with an intent to making the panchayats and their elected representatives directly accountable to people.

Common Service Centres (CSCs)

The primary objective of CSC is to act as single access points for delivery of all digital services in gram panchayats and to generate opportunities of employment by promoting rural entrepreneurship.

SVAMITVA Scheme

- The scheme SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village Areas) is implemented by MoPR to provide 'Record of Rights' to village household owners possessing houses in inhabited rural areas in villages and issuance of property cards to the property owners.
- The record of rights through property cards is going to prove a big game changer in asset monetization in the rural areas besides enabling the Panchayats in assessing and collecting property tax soon in their endeavor to enhancing their own sources of revenue.

Social Media Activities

To further enhance the rural outreach through effective communication system, the MoPR operates various social media accounts to facilitate two-way communication with the major target segments- Panchayats across the country.

Conclusion

During the period of Azaadi ka Amrit kaal, we are moving fast in the direction of panchayat with education, panchayat with employment, clean Panchayat, green panchayat, and self-sustainable panchayat etc. and gradually we will achieve these goals.

With the objective of empowering village panchayats to effectively function as units of self-government, certain essential features were enshrined in the Indian constitution through the 73rd amendment enacted in the 1992. The amendment defined powers, responsibility and authority by providing for devolution of powers with respect to preparation of plans for economic development and social justice, powers to impose taxes, maintenance of accounts by the panchayats and the auditing of such accounts etc.

Panchayats and e-Governance

- E-Governance in Panchayati Raj Institutions is expected to help in enhancing and redefining various socio-economic, environmental, technological aspects of community development. In this context, e-Gram Swaraj has been a potent example of 'Minimum Government and maximum Governance'.
- Propelled by the ICT resolution, it serves the multiple objectives of the effective decentralization, enhancing accountability of the money used for public service, optimum utilization of scarce resources, and raising public awareness about various aspects of local governance processes and practices.

Good Governance Through e- GramSwaraj

- United Nations lays down eight characteristics of good governance, viz.
 - i. Participatory
 - ii. Census- oriented
 - iii. Accountable
 - iv. Transparent
 - v. Responsive
 - vi. Effective and inclusive
 - vii. Following the rule of law
- The application is mandated to facilitate effective monitoring and evaluation of works taken up in Gram Panchayats. It enables uploading of Gram Panchayat development Plans (GPDP) and financial and physical progress reports by gram panchayats.
- Being integrated with the Public Financial Management System (PFMS), it can facilitate online payments to material vendors and service providers.

Progress of e-GramSwaraj

- There are 6,62,841 villages in the country for which there are 2,71,770 Gram panchayats/Rural local bodies (RLBs). For the financial year 2022-23 and 2021-22 as many as 2.56 lakh GPDPs were uploaded, while in 2020-21, the corresponding figures were 2.43 lakh.
- Ministry of Panchayat has devised an online audit application for Panchayat accounts for maintaining audit records and audit paras.
- Through schemes such as Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyaan and its revamped version introduced in 2022-23, the central government helps in capacity building and training of elected representatives/functionaries of Panchayati Raj institutions; provides financial incentives to best performing panchayats; and through Mission Mode Project on e-Panchayats strives towards making Panchayati Raj institutions ore transparent, accountable and effective.

Turning Challenges into Opportunity

- The challenge before the panchayats is to ensure rightful documentation of the plan after due consultations with the experts in the field.
- The GDGPs also need to identify and review the available schemes and the resources attached to the schemes for appropriate convergence.
- There is a need to ensure feasible convergence with schemes and programmes of all related central ministries / Departments related to the 29-subject listed for PRIs in the eleventh schedule of the constitution.
- A basic pre-requisite for e-GramSwaraj is the availability of internet connectivity. The Output-Outcome monitoring framework captures parameters such as target for connecting gram panchayats with high-speed broadband/ through optical fibre/ radio/ satellite etc.
- Encouraging people to adopt digital means itself is a challenge which needs rolling out of a massive awareness generation programme.
- Issues such as content availability, information security, privacy, integrated service delivery, etc. need to be addressed. The devolution of powers of Panchayats across the states needs to be uniform.
- Convergence of CSC with e-GramSwaraj will be another bolstered step towards e-governance.

Conclusion

E-GramSwaraj is transforming rural India and strengthening the foundation of e-Governance, besides setting new standards of effective decentralization. E-GramSwaraj is potent enough to significantly change how the local self-government function both internally and outside. The e-self-government not only improves public service delivery quality but also it acts as a reform tool for governance transformation.

GOOD GOVERNANCE AT GRASS-ROOT LEVEL

Part IX of the constitutions stipulates that in states or Union territories with more than two million inhabitants there should be three levels of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs):

1. The Gram Panchayat at village level
2. The Mandal Parishad or Block Samiti or Panchayat Samiti at block level.
3. The Zila Parishad at district level.

Rural Governance System: Indian Context

- Roots of this model of governance can be traced back to many centuries in the Indian history. As far as in Rig Veda, Sabha, Samiti and Vidatha were mentioned as the units of local self-units. As per the details of these powerful units, the contemporary kings needed to take approval from these units in many instances.
- The level unit used to be called as Janpad, while there used to be caste panchayats across the kingdom, each of them was represented in the council of ministers in the king's court by one elected person.
- 'Shanti Parva' in Mahabharata, Manu Smriti, and Kautilya's Arthashastra also had references of rural units of governance.
- The history of rural governance in India remained strong almost all the time till around 5th century AD when the Gupta Dynasty fell, central power weakened and so did the local system of self-governance. Later in the dynasties like Delhi sultanate, Mughal Empire, rural governance was reinstated to some extent.

Panchayati Raj in British India

- Panchayati Raj institutions found their modern form mostly in British Raj when in 1870 Mayo resolution was brought into. The objective was to decentralize the taxation system to grass root levels.
- Mayo resolution was followed up by democratic framework of these institutions through Lord Rippon's laws in 1882.
- Then in 1907, for the first time in British India, the need of panchayats on village level was recognized by a Royal commission chaired by CEH Hobhouse.
- MK Gandhi was a fierce proponent of the idea of Panchayati Raj. He strongly pleaded for decentralization of powers.
- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar himself was opposed to the idea of Panchayati raj. He believed that the villages represented regressive India, a source of oppression.
- As a result of these debates, panchayats could find a mention only in Article 40 of the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution initially.

Panchayati Raj In Independent India

- To understand the reason of failure of Community Development Programs (CDPs), a committee headed by Balwant Rai Mehta was constituted in 1957 which concluded that the CDP was not able to achieve its objectives because of lack of public participation and it recommended the formation of 3-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)- Gram Panchayat at village level, Panchayat Samiti at block level and Zila Parishad at district level.
- 73rd and 74th together paved the way for local self-governance in rural and urban India. The 73rd Amendment added the Part IX titled "The Panchayats".

Panchayati Raj: A Tool for Empowering Weaker Sections

Studies show that greater female representation in local government system has ensured reporting of crime against women at a greater number. Also districts with female sarpanch's have made significantly greater investments in basic amenities like drinking water and public goods. It has also been playing important role in strengthening weaker social groups like ST/ST and OBC/ Seats and sarpanch/ Pradhan positions are reserved for SC/ ST and OBC candidates.

Governance by People for People

- PRIs have 3 sources of funding: grants received from the local bodies, funds from centrally sponsored schemes and funds received by State Finance Commission.
- There are two categories of work that PRIs are supposed to do. One is mandatory category and the other is optional.
- Optional set of work depends upon the available resources with a PRI such as: establishment of reproduction centers for animals, promoting agriculture, etc.
- Under the mandatory category comes following set of works: primary health, construction of public wells, construction of public toilets, etc.
- Panchayats are playing commendable role in not only administration but also in managing law and order situation.
- Village panchayats make plan of development with people's participation.

- Acknowledging the crucial role Panchayati Raj Institutions can play in the implementation of successful and good governance, government has launched several schemes aimed at strengthening and empowering Panchayati Raj Institution the country.
- 1. **Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)**- It was launched with a mandate to prepare the Panchayat Development Plan (PDP) for economic development and social justice utilizing the resources available to them. It should be comprehensive and based on participatory process involving the community particularly gram Sabha, and in convergence with schemes of related to 29 subjects listed in the constitution.
- 2. **Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)**- With an objective to bring people propelled development at the ground level, the government launched the 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' program that aims to quickly and effectively transform selected districts in 2018. These districts were selected on parameters like poverty, public health, nutrition, education, gender, sanitation, drinking water, livelihood, generation which are in sync with Social Development Goals (SDGs) and fall within the realm of Panchayats. RGSA was proposed to be implemented as a core centrally sponsored scheme (CSS) for four years from 2018-19 to 2021-22 with states and Central shares.
- 3. **SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages and Mapping with improvised Technology in Village Areas)**- Launched to map residential land ownership in the rural sector using modern technology like the use of drones. The scheme aims to revolutionize property record maintenance in India. It aims to provide rural people with the right to document their residential property so they can use their property for economic purpose. This scheme is for surveying the land parcels in rural inhabited area using drone technology.
- 4. **E-Panchayat**- 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.
- 5. **Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Sashaktikaran Yojana (DDUPSY)**- This scheme aims to empower Panchayati raj institutions to undertake planning, implementation, and monitoring of development programs.
- 6. **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan**- It focuses on creating a culture of cleanliness and promoting the use of toilets in rural areas.

SVAMITVA SCHEME FOR PROVIDING PROPERTY VALIDATION

The economy is not able to harness the full potential of land due to inaccurate land records and ambiguous land ownership details. This impacts the economic prospects of poor farmers and consequently the agrarian sector. Apart from it, it hinders infrastructure projects and overall ease of doing business in India. To resolve this issue at least at the village level, the government of India has launched "SVAMITVA Scheme". 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.

Need of The Scheme

- Most villages were surveyed, and cadastral maps were prepared at 1:4,000 to 1:10,000 scales during the late 19th and early 20th century. There is a need to update those maps and link them to Record of Rights (RoRs).
- Due to litigation-related delays, several projects linked with land become dysfunctional.
- Land related disputed are also a heavy burden on the judiciary of the nation. These disputes affect the supply of capital and credit for investment adversely and reduce productivity, as insecure landowners have less incentive in their land.

- The clean land records and clear ownership of the land facilitates the use of land as a factor of production.
- If the ownership of rural land is clear, then the records of rights can be updated which will enable the gram panchayats to levy property taxes. This will not only empower them but also help in development of rural India.

Objectives of The Scheme

- 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.
- Providing the right of property to the true owner of rural land.
- Empowering the gram panchayats to levy and collect property tax, which would be available to the panchayat for local use/ development work.
- Creation of survey infrastructure and GIS (Geographic Information System) maps that can be used by any department or agency for proper planning of the area.

Process of The Scheme

- MoU is signed between the Survey of India and respective state government in which state government oblige to undertake amendments in states/ UTs Rule and Acts to take the drone-based survey and provisions for Property Cards under the SVAMITVA scheme.
- To sensitize the local population and take them through scheme methodology and benefits, IEC activities will be undertaken in the identified villages by the panchayats.
- Sites will be identified for the establishment of a Continuously Operating Reference Stations (CORS) network.
- There will be notification of villages for the survey and demarcation of boundaries of Abadi and parcels using chuna lines will be undertaken.
- Rural inhabited (Abadi) areas would be mapped by a Survey of India using a drone survey.
- Images obtained through drone surveys are then processed by Survey of India for the creation of property maps and high-resolution spatial data.
- Activities include the ground truthing of the maps and ownership data collection by the state revenue department and gram panchayat.
- The Printing and distribution of property cards to village household owners are done by the state.
- To monitor the scheme, online monitoring statements have been placed and program management units are constituted at the national and state level.

Challenges and Recommendations

- Legal sanctity of the property cards issued under the scheme is the biggest challenge. Therefore, to give them legal validity, it is important that under State Revenue Act, the property cards should be listened as documents requiring stamp duty payment.
- The participation of the local population in the whole process is very important. Until the population under the question is not satisfied with the process of mapping Abadi areas, the implementation of the scheme in the area is not feasible.

- The implementation of scheme in the state requires the state governments to amend their various land revenue Acts. Also, various states have different record- keeping practices under the schemes, all these practices have to be aligned.
- The legislature of some states has not rendered this power to the gram panchayats. Therefore, all states must review their property tax-related laws, their assessment and recording practices to capture all property details for tax assessment and ensure the timely updation of tax registers.
- It is quite necessary that while undertaking the mapping exercise, the rights of the weak and marginalized communities are also preserved.

Overall, the SVAMITVA scheme is a solution-based approach to the land related woes of the rural India. It will not be an exaggeration to call the “SVAMITVA scheme” the flag bearer of the new Aatma Nirbhar Bharat.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

As a result of reservation for women, there are 14,54,488 elected women, including women belonging to the SCs/STs, as members and Chairpersons at three Tiers of Panchayati Raj System i.e. Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti And Zilla Panchayat. This is a paradigm shift in the history of political empowerment of women in decentralised political decision making.

Situational Analysis

- Some findings from Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) conducted by the National Statistical Office of the Ministry Of Statistics And Programme Implementation, Government of India show that an attempt has been made to identify where women are standing on the scale of work participation and level of unemployment.
- Usual status or principal status of women, which was 18.18% in 2017-18 has been increased 21.08%, indicating an increase of 35.75% in 2019-20 from 2017-18.
- Over a period of 3 years, although participation rate of both men and women has been increased but level of increase is far more among women as compared with their counterparts..
- Unemployment rate was higher among women as compared to their counterparts.
- Presence of women in agriculture sector has been increased from 2017-18 to 2018-19 whereas their presence in industry and service sectors have been decreased.

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 2 women as members of the panchayat who have interest in women and child development.
- It was recommended by the Ashok Mehta Committee Report (1987) that 2 women who got the highest number of votes in Zilla Parishad elections might be made member of it if no women could contest, elections to women might be co-opted at this level and at the level of Mandal panchayat.
- The National Perspective Plan for Women (1988), among others, had recommended 30% reservation of seats for women as members and chairpersons at all levels of the panchayats.
- The 73rd Amendment Act has provided not less than 1/3 reservation for women in panchayats as mandatory. As a result of this provisions a large number of women were elected as members and chairperson of panchayat.

- Subsequently, over a period of time, as many as 22 states or UTS made 50% reservation for women.

Women Participation in Panchayats: An Assessment

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj Government of India has conducted a nationwide study entitled “Study on Elected Women Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions” in 2008. Main findings of the study are:

- In terms of social groups, a large number were from more marginalised groups of society. 20% were illiterate, but the gender gap was significant. (Women-24%, men-6%).
- Getting associated with local politics in contesting the local body election for the first time was found to be very small, implying that the majority of the elected representatives did not have long standing political linkages.
- Reservation facilitated the first entry into politics for 83% of women elected representatives.

Quality of Participation of Elected Women Representatives

As many as 86% of female president of Panchayats reported executing important role of being a local Panchayati Raj functionary whereas their counterparts percentage in this regards was 93.

Determinants of Good Performance

- i. Longer duration of being elected being an elected representative.
- ii. Training.
- iii. Education up to middle school and above.
- iv. Active involvement in panchayat work.

Impact of Participation of Women and Community Development

- Women's participation in PRIs impacted them positively as 79% of women representatives realised enhancement in their self-esteem.
- 81% percent perceived in enhancement of confidence and 74% realised their enhanced capacity in decision making ability.
- 67% women opined that after become elected representatives of Panchayats their respect has been enhanced within family and 82% women opined enhanced their respect in community.

Main Recommendations of The Study

- Enhancement of educational levels of elected representatives.
- Encouragement of joining of younger women in politics.
- Imparting relevant training and capacity building regularly.
- Covering multiple dimensions, including rules and regulations, administrative issues, budgeting, and finance and the implementation of development schemes.
- Giving adequate honoraria.
- Association of women in various groups, including self-help groups and committees for increasing their visibility in villages.

Findings of Some Studies

- Chattopadhyay and Duflo in 2001 conducted a study of 105 gram panchayats in West Bengal on providing public goods to people by the panchayats headed by women and by others. It showed that women invested more in infrastructure relevant for rural women's needs like water, fuel, roads while their counterparts invested more in education.

- Study done by Duflo and Topalova in 2004 show that villagers are less likely to pay bribes in gram panchayats with office of chairperson reserved for women. Yet residents of these villages are less satisfied with the public goods, including goods that are beyond the jurisdictions of the panchayats. This less satisfaction can be seen to reflect the patriarchal mindset, not accepting women's leadership role or quality.
- Bardhan et.al in 2005 studied the effect of women's reservation on targeting of various local programmes and found improvement in the targeting of subsidised loans to marginalised groups.

The Task Ahead

- A provision of women component plans in PRI budgets.
- Linkages with SHGs in all levels of PRI.
- Adequate training and capacity building of elected women representatives.
- Leadership training programs for elected women representatives.
- Training of other functionaries on gender issues.
- Peer to peer and horizontal learning from success stories.
- Sharing good practices and exposure visits.
- Opportunity should be given to women candidates to serve a full term.

Suggestions

- Mobilization of women into their own collectives for better outcomes. For example, Kudumbashree network in Kerala.
- Devolution of powers and authority to panchayats, enabling them to function as institution of self-government.
- Reservation for women in services.

Conclusion

Women have contributed positively in the delivery of goods and services to masses. The understanding is more for infrastructure development for rural development than their counterparts. They could play their role in a more effective way if the suggestions given in the paper may be put into practice.

2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

To address the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in rural India through Panchayati Raj institutions, Ministry of Panchayati Raj constituted an expert group to provide recommendations and way forward for localisation of SDGs through PRIs. The report undoubtedly proved to be a welcome initiative to better understand how the SDGs can be localised to engage PRIs and all stakeholders in rural India.

Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)

- It is approved for implementation from 2020-23 to 2025-26 and mandates to capacitate elected representatives and functionalities of PRIs to deliver on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through participatory local planning at the Gram panchayat level.
- The scheme is demand driven and funds are released to States and Union territories on the basis of their annual action plans as approved by the Central Empowered Committee of RGSA.
- The PRIs provide research and education and facilitates collaboration to help investors align their responsible investment practices with the broader sustainable objectives of society as currently best defined by the SDGs.

Role of Gram Panchayats

- The role of gram panchayats or rural local bodies in attainment of SDGs has been found in valuable owing to its position as a link to reduce social, economic as well as urban rural divide so far as local economic development and social justice is concerned.
- To ensure the essence of SDG is mainstreamed into Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) to deliver tangible, measurable and enduring state of wellbeing to the last mile and the last citizen, development of an effective capacity building strategy at the state level is crucial.
- Substantial resources have been rewarded to the gram panchayats ₹4.36 lakh crore for the period of 2021-26 under 15th Finance Commission.

Role of Panchayats in Attaining SDGs

1. Convergent Implementation of the Schemes:

- Focus on Swachh Bharat Mission.
- Take leadership for behaviour change management for sanitation and hygiene.
- Plan and implement drinking water and sanitation projects in Panchayats.
- Focus on poverty reduction through convergent planning, integrating MGNREGS and NRLM.
- Set local development targets for eradication of poverty and mobilised peoples participation and resources for the same.
- Have equitable systems for management of common property resources.
- Develop resource mapping based planning.

2. Participatory Outcome Based Planning for Local Development:

- Prepare local development plans that touch on economic, social and environmental concerns through participatory processes.
- Integrating ecosystem and biodiversity values.
- Ensure coordinated functioning in tandem with SHGs and their collectives.
- Institute Outcome Based planning that sets baselines and monitors advancement in development indices.
- Ensure equitable provision of basic services to citizens through the allocated resources.

3. Specific Governance Interventions in Panchayats:

- Effective functioning of standing committees and functional committees of the panchayats.
- Strengthening different fora for Community participation.
- Institution of clear community based monitoring and tracking mechanisms and information feedback to the community.
- Universal Birth Registration insured in all states where panchayats are birth registration authorities.
- Preparation and Management of Local Biodiversity Registers by Panchayats.
- Digitization to support governance at panchayat level.
- Improved revenue generation, budgetary and record keeping practices.

4. Interventions Across Tiers of Panchayats:

- Effective convergent planning between the 3 tiers of Panchayati Raj.

- Effective functioning of the district planning committees which link rural and urban planning.
- Coordination for service delivery and implementation of flagship schemes.

Government Initiatives

- SDG India Index, spearheaded by NITI Aayog since 2018 and published annually since then, plays the pivotal role in SDG localization by measuring performance by using globally accepted methodology and ranking them accordingly. The 2022 edition of SDG Index covers all 17 goals and 120 indicators.
- India's second VNR (Voluntary National Review) entitled "Decade of Action: Taking SDGs from global to local" at the 2020 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development adopted a "whole of society" approach.
- In spite of the Pandemic, there has been remarkable progress witnessed in some crucial goals, for example, Goal 3 (Good Health and wellbeing), Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation), Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), Goal 11 (Stainable cities and communities) and Goal 12 (Responsible consumption and production).
- Driven by flagship schemes, significant achievements have come in areas such as scaled up access to electricity, sanitation, housing, ensuring food security, Universal health coverage, Quality education, Improving youth skills and employment.
- During COVID-19 pandemic, government combined some of the world's largest social protection and food security programmes with States and UTS playing the central role, brought policy reforms and economic packages to protect the economy and also proved India's leadership in developing and supplying COVID-19 vaccines not only for its population, but also for other countries in need.

SDG Score

India slipped from 117th to 121st rank on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted as a part of the 2030 agenda. It's SDG score was 66 out of 100. The reasons behind it are-

1. **COVID-19:** It pushed the countries to impose lockdowns that brought all progressive work towards SDG attainment to a standstill.
2. **Climate Change:** The world is facing a major climate catastrophe due to increased heat waves, drought and apocalyptic wildfires and floods which are affecting billions of people around the globe.
3. **Geopolitical Conflicts:** The Russia Ukraine crisis has caused food, fuel and fertiliser prices to skyrocket. It also disturbed global trade supplies and cause the financial markets to tumble.
4. **Data Gaps:** Serious data gaps exist in SDG monitoring, this includes data in terms of geographic coverage, timeliness and level of disaggregation.

Suggestions

- The village of Gram panchayats should develop their own action plan to improve living conditions.
- There is need to be more inclusive in addressing the problems of people from different sections. Many vulnerable families and persons coming from the Dalit community windows, single women, old people, children without care and protection persons with disability need special attention from all the service providing agencies and village community as a whole.
- Strengthening stakeholder participation in governance, particularly in decision making, is the second most important point.
- Primary focus must be on-
 - Anganwadi as it has direct link with child development and curbing malnutrition as well.

- Primary education, which is linked with universal literacy, particularly among girls.
 - Drinking water and sanitation having direct linkage with the health status.
 - Access to public health services. This will improve institutional delivery and healthy life.
 - Access to public distribution system and food availability in anganwadi and midday meal. It will address malnutrition.
- Establishing a robust data sharing and monitoring mechanism covering all the LIF targets and indicators and linked to reports of performance for departments/ministries and PRIs on localising SDG is the need of the hour.
- To conclude, accelerated efforts are needed to boost sustainable solutions to the biggest challenges we face.

WATER MANAGEMENT THROUGH PANCHAYATS

Panchayats have assumed greater significance as vehicles of programme implementation and localised planning. Parallel Development Water Users Association, commonly called “pani samiti” or “pani panchayat”, have been created for local and participatory management of surface irrigation systems.

Panchayats for Participation

- In the context of water governance or water management, the Gram panchayats own and manage the water supply scheme for communities and also approve investment plans, annual budgets and user fee charges after discussion in the gram sabha.
- After free and fair deliberations, Gram Sabha approves village plans and also undertakes social audit as per mandate.
- Pani Samiti or Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC) is a standing committee of the gram panchayat and is responsible for planning, implementation of operation, maintenance and management of village drinking water security.
- Pani Samitis also implement demand side management strategies, especially for curbing wastage of water at domestic and community level.
- Creation of awareness for keeping water clean and safe is also a key agenda of Pani Samiti's.
- Regular monitoring, sampling and analysis of groundwater drinking sources is essential to keep crippling diseases such as fluorosis and arsenical dermatitis at bay.
- VWSC liaisons with Primary Health centres in NRHN workers (Asha) to monitor incidence of water borne diseases.
- Gram panchayats get support from District Water and Sanitation Mission in finalising water plans and setting priorities.
- Block Resource Centres helps communities prepare and implement plans by providing motivation and training along with organising technical support.
- The members of VWSC and planning team take an extensive field survey to gather information on the sources of water and water supply infrastructure which is used to prepare the village plan.
- Water budget is framed for summer and winter season separately and takes into account the water usage for different purposes such as agriculture, human consumption, livestock consumption, local industries and other users.

- Social audit is the key responsibility of Gram Panchayat/VWSC that ensures transparency, implementation and also helps in identification of gaps for better results.

Management at Ground

- Atal Bhujal Yojana with the overall goal to improve groundwater management critical areas is operational in 8565 gram panchayats of 80 districts in 7 states. It is targeted at sustainable groundwater management, mainly through convergence among various ongoing schemes with the active involvement of local communities and stakeholders.
- It is promoting and motivating active participation of communities in various activities such as formation and strengthening of water users, association, water budgeting and preparation of gram panchayat wise water security plans and their implementation.
- As an activity of international cooperation, the World Bank has been collaborating with the Government of India to enhance groundwater management in stressed areas. World Bank also stressed the need to integrate supply side measures with demand side management for a sustainable solution.
- Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY) aims to accelerate supply side and demand side management by taking up very specific measures such as increasing on-farm water use efficiency, watershed development and Repair, Renovation and Restoration (RRR) of water bodies etc.
- The programme Har Khet Ko Pani consists of 4 sub-components- Command Area Development and Water Management (CAD&WM), Surface Minor Regulation (SMI), RRR of Water Bodies and Groundwater Development.
- In addition to this, Per Drop More Crop component is being implemented by Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, whereas watershed development component is being implemented by Department of Land Resources.
- Pani panchayats play a critical role and ensure people's participation for better impact.

Association for Actions

- Water Users Association (WUA) is a cooperative association of individual water users who wish to undertake irrigation related activities for their mutual benefit.
- WUAs co-operate with each other to form federations and take over large canal subsystems. They recommend best cropping patterns and package of agricultural practices for minimising water use and enhancing water efficiency.
- They facilitate and help to arrange for other inputs for undertaking irrigated agriculture. They also arrange farmers training for taking up conjunctive water use, including community lift irrigation. It has a management committee which looks after day to day functioning and monitoring progress with identification of bottlenecks.

Jal Jeevan Mission

- Jal Jeevan mission- Har Ghar Jal is being implemented with the vision to provide tap water supply to every rural household of the country by 2024.
- The major responsibility of its implementation lies with the states while the Government of India provides technical and financial assistance.
- State and district action plans are prepared by respective Water and Sanitation Mission while water budget is framed as part of village action plan by gram panchayat.

- Mission is based on community approach to water and includes IEC (Information, Education And Communication) as a key component of the mission.
- The JMM looks to create a Jan Andolan for water, thereby making it a priority for everyone.

Thus, appropriate planning supported by peoples participation is imperative to maintain the quality and availability of water resources in future.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTION

Through the 73rd Constitutional amendment, the 3-tier Panchayat system has been made a legal compulsion in rural areas. It is expected that the administrative and political devolution to make the system more pro, poor and conducive for the well-being of rural population.

Panchayat System in India: A Historical Perspective

- The need for Panchayati Raj system is traced as far back as the recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee 1957 which recommended a 3-tier panchayat system at district, block and village levels.
- Dantwala Committee on Block Planning, formed in 1978, prescribed integration of block level plans with district plans.
- LM Singhvi Committee recommended the involvement of Panchayati Raj institutions in basic planning and implementation of development projects and consider Panchayati Raj Institutions as Institute of Self Governance to facilitate the participation of the people in the process of planning in development.
- The 73rd constitutional amendment in 1992 formalised such an institution by giving Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), the constitutional provision to constitute 3-tier Panchayat system in each state as well as emerge as an institute of self-governance.

Panchayati Raj Institution in India

PRIs include-

1. **Zila Parishad (ZP) or District Panchayat**: one in each district.
2. **Block Panchayat (BP) or Panchayat Samiti**: Each block in the said district has one Panchayat Samiti.
3. **Gram Panchayat**: A gram consists of a single village or a cluster of adjoining villages. It is divided into a minimum of 5 constituencies. From each of these constituencies, one member is elected. Body of these elected members is called the gram panchayat. The size of the gram panchayats vary widely from state to state.

Implication of Panchayati Raj Institution and Decentralised Governance

- Decentralization increases the overall quality and effectiveness of the system of governance while increasing the authority and capacities of sub national levels.
- It is expected to contribute to key elements of good governance, such as increasing people's opportunities for participation in economic, social and political decisions, assisting in developing people's capacities and enhancing government responsiveness, transparency and accountability, as well as delivery of goods and services to people for their wealth.
- It improves public service delivery because of better information availability, better knowledge of citizens preferences or better monitoring capacity at the local level.
- The representation of women and weaker sections has been ensured through the reservation of seats in each tier of PRI.

Role of Panchayat in Human Development

- At rural level, the PRI system is expected to work as an institute of self-governance and play a crucial role in planning, implementation and monitoring of different programs and initiatives related to education, health and service delivery.
- It is argued that quality of governance has direct impact on economic growth, poverty alleviation and nutrition.
- Public provision of service delivery at the local level help the poor to supplement nutrition intake and beat the vicious circle of undernourishment, unemployment and poverty.
- The efficient delivery of targeted public services over the years as the potential to reduce economic inequalities which have been rising in rapidly growing economies such as China and India.
- Rural development schemes like National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA) 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 served with active engagement of PRI system. It not only engages in implementation of different schemes related to livelihood enhancement and service delivery, they also ensure people's participation in the process.
- The PRI play significant role in creating conducive environment for collective action in respect to public services.

Role of Panchayat in Education: A Case of Madhya Pradesh

- The responsibility of managing school education for classes 1 to 12 was transferred to 3-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions in 1996.
- Standing committees on education of PRIS at District Panchayat and block panchayat and Village Education Committee at gram panchayat level were created for looking after management of school education.
- In 2002, the Parent-Teachers Association was established as a statutory body at school level with administrative and financial powers given to these bodies.
- Studies found that there was phenomenal growth in enrolment of children in the age group of 6 to 14 and narrowed down the gap of non-enrolled children between 2003-04 to 2006-07.
- Only progress of enrolment of disadvantaged groups had decreased during this period.
- However, it was not free from challenges.
- Panchayati Raj institutions are generally entrusted with the responsibility of recruitment, transfer and decision making, they face inadequacy of capacity building programmes for them.
- While participation of the local community in school management is increased to a great extent, a good number of children still remain out of school.
- Coordination between Panchayati Raj institutions and various bodies of educational administration at district, block and habitation levels has also found to be a major concern.

Role of Panchayat in Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management

- With changing rural ecosystem, the rural policies need to be justified to cater the needs of material aspects (food production etc.), ecosystem services (water, biodiversity, clean air etc.) and contribution of rural areas to the mitigation of climate change.
- The active commitment and leadership of local government institutions, namely panchayat in rural areas, are important for the implementation of any local Disaster Risk Reduction programme.

- Leadership of the PRI system is crucial for political momentum and support among external stakeholders in this regard. The PRI is expected to play a pivotal role. In one hand they are the immediate providers of public services and the other they are naturally situated amongst citizens to play an instrumental role in building awareness.

Conclusion

Worldwide as well as in India, there are evidences that introduction of PRI system has brought the scope to influence the service delivery as per the need of the people as well as the quality of service delivery has improved. In the current context, the rural development strategy is experiencing transformation by incorporating need for plan to reduce impact of climate change.

UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE WITH AYUSHMAN BHARAT HEALTH AND WELLNESS CENTRES

Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres are envisaged to deliver an expanded range of services to address the primary healthcare needs of beneficiaries, thereby expanding access and universality of healthcare services being provided close to the community. Such care will be provided through outreach services, mobile medical units, camps, home and community based care. This represents a paradigm shift as it views health holistically and paves the way for India's aims of universal health coverage.

Service Packages

- Includes care in pregnancy and childbirth, neo-natal and infant healthcare services, childhood and relevant healthcare services, family planning, contraceptive services and other reproductive healthcare services.
- They also include management of common communicable disease and outpatient care for acute simple illness and minor ailments, screening, prevention and management of non-communicable diseases and chronic communicable diseases like tuberculosis and leprosy.

Key Components

- Expanded Service Delivery
- Expanding HR- CHO & Multiskilling
- Medicines & Expanding Diagnostics
- Community Mobilization & Health Promotion
- Infrastructure
- Financing
- Robust IT System
- Partnership for Knowledge & Implementation
- Continuum Of Care

Community Engagement

- The team enable empowerment of individuals, families and communities with knowledge and skills to take responsibility of their own health.
- Preventive & promotive healthcare being essential aspects of wellness, AB-HWCs also focus on improving health literacy through inter-personal communication, and media including social media for promotion of healthy lifestyles- diet, yoga, exercise, tobacco cessation and self-care for those with chronic disease conditions.
- Jan Arogya samitis, with representation from local bodies and panchayats , self-help groups and patients enable community ownership and accountability of AB-HWC teams.

Access to Free Essential Medicines and Diagnostic Services

The AB-HWCs serve as a hub for dispensing medicines at the PHC. These not only ensure uninterrupted availability of medicines to ensure adherence and continuation of care but also reduce any patient hardship by providing medicines closer to their homes.

Robust IT Systems

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

Teleconsultation services

The AB-HWCs provide teleconsultation services, whereby every level of service provider from CHO at Sub Health Center-HWCs to Medical Officer at Primary Health Centres-HWC is able to access higher level of consultation, including with specialists in secondary and tertiary centres so that physical travel by patients can be minimised, reducing costs and any potential hardship.

Health and Wellness Ambassadors and Messengers

Teachers in every school are being trained to serve as Health and Wellness Ambassadors; and students as messengers. This initiative will enable creating healthy habits in school leading to early action and encouragement to adopt healthy behaviours at young age, leading to prevention of chronic diseases later in life.

Why are AB-HWCs seen as game changers?

Before the establishment of AB-HWC, selective 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. But after the introduction of comprehensive primary health care, an expanded range of health services has been included to include chronic disease conditions and non-communicable diseases.

Conclusion

The idea of revamping the health system at the grassroots through the AB-HWCs has the potential to play a major role in reduction of morbidity and mortality burden due to many chronic and non-communicable disease, promote healthier lifestyle, reduce out-of-pocket expenditure of the community which is usually incurred at the district/state level hospitals and also reduce the patient load at the district and state level hospitals.