



EDITORIAL: BUSINESS LINE

GENERAL STUDIES 2: WELFARE SCHEMES

TOPIC: COMMUNITY WORKS

DATE: 03.01.2025

WHEN DO COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES WORK?

Advocacy for Decentralised Community Action

- **Focus on Evidence-Based Benefits:**

Decentralised community action has demonstrated benefits in terms of:

- Improving human development indicators.
- Reducing multi-dimensional poverty.
- Increasing incomes and enhancing livelihoods.

- **Balanced Advocacy Needed:**

While decentralised action has significant advantages, it also has limitations, such as risks of misuse and inefficiency without accountability. Highlighting both aspects is crucial to guide policymakers in setting the right priorities.

Importance of Accountability in Decentralisation

- **Risks of Decentralisation Without Accountability:**

- Instances like Panchayat leaders misusing funds (e.g., purchasing luxury cars with MGNREGS funds) highlight the dangers of unchecked authority.
- Monopolistic power leads to arbitrary decision-making and poor governance.

- **Role of Community Organisations:**

- Institutions like women's collectives, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), farmer producer companies, and cooperatives can act as counterbalances to hold local governments accountable.
- Convergence frameworks (e.g., SHG-Panchayat collaboration) strengthen local governance.

- **Impact of Reservation:**

- Reservation of seats for women and socially vulnerable groups has improved participation and representation in local governance, ensuring inclusivity.

Role of Technology in Governance

- **Enhancing Transparency and Participation:**

- Technology enables real-time tracking of Gram Panchayat accounts and activities.



- It helps in developing calendars for Gram Sabhas, ensuring proper scheduling and attendance monitoring.
- **Examples of Technology in Action:**
 - Geo-tagging of Gram Sabhas ensures accurate data collection on meetings and participation.
 - Adoption of digital tools in the Gram Panchayat Development Planning (GPDP) process has improved transparency and community involvement.
- **Avoiding Top-Down Approaches:**
 - Scheduling Gram Sabhas must align with local needs and resources rather than being arbitrarily imposed by higher authorities.
 - This fosters local ownership and efficiency in governance.

Mission Antyodaya: Data-Driven Development

- **Survey Significance:**
 - The Mission Antyodaya Survey, initiated in 2017, evaluates gaps in rural development and aligns local priorities with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
 - It includes 208 data points to assess developmental deficits across panchayats.
- **Public Data for Accountability:**
 - Data is vetted by women's collectives and Panchayat representatives and made public to ensure transparency.
 - Real-time data allows for actionable interventions, such as improving sanitation in villages where open defecation claims were found inaccurate.
- **Impact on SDG Achievements:**
 - Panchayat-level progress on SDGs directly affects national development outcomes. Without improvements at the grassroots, India cannot meet its global commitments.

Professional Recruitment for Effective Governance

- **Limited Role of Panchayats in Recruitment:**
 - Panchayats should recommend candidates, but the actual selection process should be external and professional to ensure fairness and meritocracy.
- **Examples of Successful Models:**
 - **Shiksha Karmi Project (Rajasthan):**
 - Local governments provided teacher candidate lists, but final selection and capacity building were managed by civil society organisations.



- **ASHAs (Accredited Social Health Activists):**
 - Community-proposed candidates were professionally selected by health and women welfare teams. ASHAs have significantly improved health outcomes, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Community Resource Persons (CRPs):**
 - Women who overcame poverty under the Rural Livelihood Mission were trained as CRPs to help transform other women's lives.
- **Failures Due to Arbitrary Selection:**
 - In 2005, Bihar faced challenges when Panchayat members arbitrarily selected teachers, leading to inefficiencies.

Urban Challenges in Decentralised Action

- **High Population and Lack of Structures:**
 - Urban wards are densely populated, making decentralised community action difficult.
 - Local chieftains and muscle power often dominate governance in urban slums.
- **Proposed Solution:**
 - Establish **elected Basti Samitis** (similar to rural Gram Panchayat wards) in urban areas to improve accountability and service delivery.
 - This does not require constitutional amendments but only a political will to decentralise governance in urban contexts.

Untied and Adequate Funds for Local Action

- **Local Approval for Expenditures:**
 - Central and State governments should not allocate funds for local sectors (as per the 11th and 12th Schedules of the Indian Constitution) without approval from local governments.
- **Evidence-Based Financing:**
 - Mission Antyodaya data can guide fund allocation to address specific gaps and deficits.
 - Untied funds empower local governments to address priorities effectively rather than being constrained by centralised schemes.

Developing a Theory of Practice for Decentralised Community Action

- **Learning from Evidence:**
 - A systematic theory of decentralised community action must be developed based on field experiences and evidence to address challenges and improve outcomes.



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- **Urgency for Local Convergence:**

- Local decentralisation and convergence across sectors are essential to achieving human development goals and making governance more participatory and effective.

Conclusion

Decentralised community action offers immense potential to drive human development and sustainable growth, but only if it is implemented with a well-thought-out accountability framework, inclusive participation, and evidence-based planning. Local governments must be empowered through adequate funds, professional recruitment, and technological tools, while community organisations act as accountability mechanisms. A robust theory of practice for decentralisation is needed to unlock its full potential and secure India's developmental aspirations.

Source: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/when-do-community-programmes-work/article69054767.ece#:~:text=Must%20be%20close%20to%20the,basic%20services%20in%20urban%20slums.>

