

# Be Mains Ready

**Q.** The role of 'Panchayati Raj Institutions' (PRIs) is very important in both disaster risk reduction and post-disaster management. Discuss. (250 Words)

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## Approach / Explanation / Answer

- Give a brief introduction about the PRI system.
- Discuss the Significance of PRIs in disaster management.
- Discuss the Challenges faced by the PRIs in its functioning.
- Suggest a Way Forward.

## Answer

Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) is a system of rural local self-government in India. PRIs were constitutionalized through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 to build democracy at the grass roots level and were entrusted with the task of rural development in the country.

In this context, the role of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in both disaster risk reduction and post-disaster management is very significant.

### Significance of PRIs in Disaster Management

- **Handling Disasters at Grass-root Level:** The devolution of power and responsibilities to the panchayats will result in flexible and committed response at the grass-root level in the case of natural calamities.
  - Effective and Strong PRIs, working in harmony with the state government, will help tackle the disaster through early warning systems.
- **Ensuring Better Relief Operations:** Local bodies being nearer to the people are in a better position to undertake relief tasks as they are more familiar to the requirements of the local people.
- **Transparency:** PRIs participation can ensure total transparency in working and usage of funds in disaster relief work as it involves people from the affected community.
- **Spreading Awareness and Gaining Cooperation:** PRIs have grass root level contact with people and they can help effectively in spreading awareness and ensure people's participation in fighting the crisis.
  - They are also ideal channels for NGOs and other agency's participation in the rescue and relief operations.

### Challenges faced by PRIs in Disaster Management

- **Interference from MPs and MLAs:** The interference of area MPs and MLAs in the functioning of panchayats adversely affects the performance of Panchayats.

- **Unavailability of Funds:** The Panchayats are not given enough funds and are bypassed by State-controlled line departments that continue to implement programmes falling within the rightful domain of the former.
- **Incomplete Autonomy:** Panchayats lack systems, resources and capacities to act independently due to numerous constraints imposed by district administrations and state governments.
- **Unclear Domains of Panchayats:** Though PRIs are a three tier integrated arrangement of the village, block and district level, they have remained largely ineffective as a consequence of ambiguous jurisdictions and unclear linkages.
  - Even in respect of National Disaster Management Act 2005, the powers and responsibilities of panchayats are inadequately defined and left to be determined by respective state governments.

## Way Forward

- **Legal Backing for Disaster Management Programmes:** It is crucial to include disaster planning and spending a part of Panchayati Raj development plans and local-level committees.
  - This will ensure citizen-centric mapping and planning of resources.
- **Resource Availability and Self-Reliance:** Local governance, local leaders and local communities, when empowered, respond to any disaster rapidly and effectively.
- **Shift in Disaster Management Paradigm:** There is an urgent need for a shift from a risk mitigation cum relief-centric approach in disaster management into an integrated plan for economic development with social justice.
- **Collective Participation:** Conducting regular, location-specific disaster-management programmes for the community and organising platforms for sharing best practices will strengthen individual and institutional capacities.
- **Financial Contributions from People:** Financial contributions from the community should be encouraged through the establishment of community disaster Fund in all gram panchayats.

PRIs need a proper mechanism for managing disasters like creating a hazard calendar, creation of a village disaster management authority (VDMA), infrastructure for proper training, & a regularly reviewed policy for such situations.

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