



Rural India: Progress and Problems

This editorial is based on [Rural poverty declines, but lifestyle issues emerge](#) which was published in The Hindu BusinessLine on 04/08/2023. It talks about the rural development and role of NITI Aayog in the progress of rural India.

For Prelims: [Multidimensional Poverty Index](#), [NITI Aayog](#), [National Rural Livelihood Mission \(NRLM\)](#), [The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 \(MNREGA\)](#), [Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin \(PMAY-G\)](#), [Public Distribution System \(PDS\)](#), [Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana \(PMAY\)](#), [Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana \(Saubhagya\)](#), [Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana \(PMUY\)](#)

For Mains: Challenges in Rural Development

India is a country of contrasts, where **rapid economic growth coexists with persistent poverty** and social problems. The rural areas, which house **about two-thirds of the population**, are undergoing significant changes in terms of living standards, education, health, and environment.

As India's rural landscape undergoes a transformative journey, **marked by a commendable decline in multidimensional poverty**, a complex tapestry of changes emerges. The updated [National Multidimensional Poverty Index](#) (MPI) released by [NITI Aayog](#) unveils an encouraging narrative of progress, **showcasing a substantial reduction in poverty rates between 2015-16 and 2019-21.**

What is NITI Aayog's National MPI?

- **About:** The National MPI is a **measure of poverty that captures the progress of a country** in three equally weighted dimensions - **health, education and standard of living.**
 - It considers **10 indicators, such as nutrition, child mortality, years of schooling, cooking fuel, sanitation, etc.**
- **Components of National MPI:** The National MPI can be broken into two components:
 - The **incidence of poverty** (the percentage of people who are poor) and the **intensity of poverty** (the average deprivation score of the poor).
- **Findings of the National MPI:** According to the Progress Review 2023 of NITI Aayog, India has made remarkable progress in reducing multidimensional poverty between 2015-16 and 2019-21.
 - The **incidence of poverty fell from 24.85% to 14.96%**, while the intensity of **poverty fell from 47.14% to 44.39%**.
 - The rural areas have also witnessed a **significant decline in poverty, from 32.59% to 19.28%**.
 - The improvement in rural poverty can be attributed to various targeted development initiatives taken by Union and State Governments along with other stakeholders.

What are the Signs of Improvement in Rural Living Standards?

▪ Enhanced Housing Infrastructure:

- Increased **access to pucca or semi-pucca houses** signifies improved structural integrity and better living conditions.
 - **Durable housing** fosters resilience against natural elements, ensuring safety and comfort for rural inhabitants.
- **Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G)** provided for availability for rural housing.

▪ Improved Sanitation Facilities:

- Greater **availability of toilets** reflects a heightened focus on hygiene and health, reducing open defecation and related health risks.
 - **Improved sanitation contributes** to community well-being and a cleaner environment.
- **For example:** Over 1 lakh villages declared themselves as **ODF (Open Defecation Free) Plus** under **Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen** (SBM-G)

▪ Extended Electricity Access:

- Widening **access to electricity empowers** rural communities with **improved connectivity, lighting, and opportunities** for economic activities.
 - Electricity enables **better educational outcomes**, increased productivity, and enhanced quality of life.
- **For example:**
 - **Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana (Saubhagya)** launched to enhance rural electrification.

▪ Clean Cooking Fuel Adoption:

- Increased usage of **clean cooking gas reduces indoor air pollution**, positively impacting respiratory health and overall well-being.
 - **Clean cooking fuel** supports sustainable environmental practices, promoting a healthier ecosystem.
- **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY):**
 - Under Ujjwala 1.0, the target was to provide LPG connections to 50 million women from BPL households by March 2020.
 - Under Ujjwala 2.0, an additional 10 million LPG connections were to be provided to the beneficiaries.

▪ Educational and Social Empowerment:

- Rising participation of girls in education reflects **progressive societal values and contributes to gender parity and inclusive development**.
- Knowledge dissemination through connectivity aids educational growth and fosters informed decision-making.
- **For example:** **Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana** aims to empower the villagers to make choices and provide them with opportunities to exercise those choices.

▪ Diversification of Income Sources:

- Growing **non-farm employment opportunities** diversify income streams, reducing dependence solely on agriculture.
 - Income diversification **enhances financial stability and resilience** against agricultural uncertainties.
- **For example:**
 - **MGNREGA:** The primary objective of the scheme is to **guarantee 100 days of employment in every financial year** to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work-related unskilled manual work.
 - **National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)** aims at creating efficient and effective institutional platforms of the rural poor enabling them to increase household income through sustainable livelihood enhancements and improved access to financial services.

▪ Other Government Initiatives related to Rural Development:

- **Public Distribution System (PDS)**
- **Mission Antyodaya**
- **Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana**
- **Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana**

What are the Challenges in Development of Rural India?

- **Poverty and Inequality:**
 - Widespread **poverty persists**, characterized by low income, limited access to basic services, and unequal distribution of resources.
 - Income **inequality between rural and urban areas** and within rural regions hampers equitable development.
- **Agricultural Distress:**
 - Dependence on **agriculture as a primary livelihood exposes** rural communities to risks posed by unpredictable weather patterns, market fluctuations, and crop failures.
 - Fragmented **land holdings, inadequate irrigation, and outdated farming practices** hinder productivity and income generation.
- **Unemployment and Underemployment:**
 - **Inadequate non-farm employment opportunities** lead to **seasonal unemployment and underemployment** in the agricultural sector.
 - Lack of skill development and market-oriented vocational training limits rural workforce engagement in diverse sectors.
- **Infrastructural Gaps:**
 - Insufficient rural connectivity, including roads, electricity, and telecommunication, limits access to markets, services, and information.
 - Basic amenities such as **clean drinking water, sanitation facilities, and healthcare remain inadequate** in many rural areas.
- **Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss:**
 - Rural areas are impacted by the effects of climate change, such as droughts, floods, **heat waves, and extreme weather events**.
 - These can affect the availability and quality of natural resources, such as water, soil, and forests, and the livelihoods of rural communities, especially farmers and pastoralists.
 - **For example**, the population of **farmland birds declined** by one-third between 1990 and 2016.
- **Migration and Urbanisation:**
 - Rural areas are experiencing a **high rate of out-migration**, especially of young and educated people, to urban and semi-urban areas in search of better opportunities and services.
 - This can **result in labour shortages**, land fragmentation, social isolation, and loss of cultural identity in rural areas.
 - On the other hand, urbanization can also bring some **benefits to rural areas, such as improved connectivity, market access, remittances, and innovation**.
- **Addiction and Mental Health:**
 - Rural areas are facing a rise in addiction to **tobacco, gutka, liquor, and social media** among rural youth and adults.
 - These can have negative impacts on the **health, productivity, social relations, and safety of rural people**.
 - Moreover, rural areas often lack adequate mental health services and awareness, which can lead to stress, depression, suicide, and violence.
- **Waste Management and Sanitation:**
 - Rural areas often **lack proper waste management systems** and facilities, such as segregation at source, composting/biogas plants/recycling units for organic/inorganic waste respectively.
 - This can lead to **environmental pollution, health hazards, aesthetic degradation, and loss of resources**.
 - Rural areas still face challenges in achieving universal access to sanitation facilities and hygiene practices.

What are the Possible Solutions to Address the Issues Related to Rural Development?

- **Localized Employment Opportunities:**
 - Focus on skill development and entrepreneurial opportunities can **anchor the workforce**

in rural areas.

- Creating more employment opportunities near villages through skill development programs, micro-enterprises promotion, rural infrastructure development, etc.
 - This can **reduce the need for migration, increase the income and livelihood security** of rural people, and enhance their self-reliance and dignity.
- **Curbing Addiction and Substance Abuse:**
 - Stricter regulations and awareness campaigns are essential to reduce tobacco, gutka, and alcohol consumption.
 - Holistic community interventions can promote healthier lifestyles and curb substance dependence.
- **Balancing Technology Usage:**
 - Raising awareness about the detrimental effects of excessive internet use can encourage healthier digital habits.
 - Community initiatives can foster interpersonal interactions and strengthen social bonds.
- **Comprehensive Waste Management:**
 - Keeping the focus of [Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0](#) on waste management **at the village level through segregation at source, composting/biogas plants/recycling units** for organic/inorganic waste respectively.
 - This can improve the environmental quality, health hygiene, aesthetic appeal, and resource efficiency of rural areas, and also generate income and employment opportunities for rural people.

How can NITI Aayog Play a Role in Addressing Rural Issues?

- **NITI Aayog can:**
 - **Devise policies that specifically target rural challenges** such as addiction, digital dependency, and waste management.
 - **Facilitate collaborations between government agencies, NGOs, private sector, and communities** for comprehensive solutions.
 - **Conduct research to understand the root causes of these challenges** and their regional variations, aiding in crafting effective solutions.
 - **Implement robust monitoring systems** can gauge the progress of initiatives and fine-tune strategies for optimal impact.
 - **Support and fund innovative projects** that address addiction, technology dependence, waste management, and more.

Drishti Mains Question:

Discuss the achievements and challenges of development of rural India in the light of the latest Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) report of NITI Aayog.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year's Question (PYQs)

Prelims:

Q. The Multi-dimensional Poverty Index developed by Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative with UNDP support covers which of the following? (2012)

1. Deprivation of education, health, assets and services at household level
2. Purchasing power parity at national level
3. Extent of budget deficit and GDP growth rate at national level

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (a)

Exp:

- The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) reflects the deprivations that a poor person faces simultaneously with respect to education, health and living standards, as reflected in the following table. Hence, statement 1 is correct.
- Therefore, option (a) is the correct answer.

Mains

Q. Despite Consistent experience of high growth, India still goes with the lowest indicators of human development. Examine the issues that make balanced and inclusive development elusive. **(2016)**

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/current-affairs-news-analysis-editorials/news-editorials/07-08-2023/print>

