



## 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.

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### **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)**

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