



Mains Practice Question

Q. Decentralization of power through Panchayati Raj Institutions is crucial for participatory democracy and development at the grassroots level. Comment. **(250 words)**

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Approach

- Introduce by mentioning 73rd Amendment
- Delve into Benefits of Decentralization of Power through PRIs
- Highlight the Roadblocks to Effective Decentralisation of Power to PRI
- Suggest Way Forward
- Conclude positively.

Introduction

Panchayati Raj Institutions have emerged as a cornerstone of growing emphasis on grassroots governance. Functioning as the **bedrock of rural governance**, PRIs hold immense potential to transform democracy by fostering active citizen participation and driving development.

Body

Benefits of Decentralization of Power through PRIs:

- **Empowerment and Participation:** PRIs provide a platform for local communities to directly participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives.
 - This fosters a sense of ownership and accountability, leading to more inclusive development.
- **Needs-based Development Planning:** PRIs have a deeper understanding of local needs and priorities.
 - They can allocate resources more effectively to address issues like **sanitation, water supply, primary education, and rural infrastructure**.
 - The **Hiware Bazar village in Maharashtra** transformed from a drought-prone area to a model of sustainable development through effective need-based planning.
- **Improved Service Delivery:** Decentralization brings governance closer to the people, facilitating **better monitoring and improved service delivery** in crucial areas like healthcare and social welfare.
- **Women's Empowerment:** PRIs with reserved seats for women provide a platform for women's leadership and participation in decision-making processes.
 - This can lead to a more **gender-inclusive approach to development**.
 - The emergence of leaders like **Chhavi Rajawat, India's youngest sarpanch with an MBA degree**, illustrates how PRIs can nurture women-leadership.

Roadblocks to Effective Decentralisation of Power to PRI:

- **Inadequate Devolution of Functions:** Many states have **not fully devolved the 29 functions mentioned in the 11th Schedule** of the Constitution to PRIs.

- This limits the scope of PRI authority and decision-making power at the local level.
- **Financial Constraints:** PRIs often lack adequate financial resources to carry out their functions effectively. They earn only **1% of their revenue through taxes**.
 - This indicates high dependence on central and state government transfers.
- **Capacity and Skill Gaps:** Many elected representatives in PRIs lack the necessary skills and knowledge for effective governance.
 - **Example:** A 2018 study found that more than **50% of the elected representatives in Uttar Pradesh** did not receive any training after even one year of being in their positions.
- **Irregular Elections:** Some states **fail to conduct regular PRI elections**, undermining the democratic process. This leads to gaps in local governance and representation.
- **Gender Gap:** Despite reservations, women's participation in PRIs remains low due to the prevalence of **Pradhan-Pati Culture**. This hinders the inclusion of women's perspectives in local governance.
- **SPV Bypassing PRIs: Special Purpose Vehicles**, often set up by central or state governments, bypass PRIs in implementation of development projects at the local level.
 - This undermines the authority and decision-making power entrusted to PRIs by the 73rd Amendment.

Way Forward

- **Clear Functional Demarcation and Promote Fiscal Federalism:** Establish clear-cut demarcation of functions for each government tier as recommended by the **2nd Administrative Reforms Commission**.
 - Ensure **genuine fiscal autonomy** with accountability to promote effective financial management at the local level.
 - Encourage **outsourcing of specific functions to public or private agencies** to improve service delivery efficiency.
- **Strengthen Financial Resources and Management:** Focus on major **Own Source Revenues** like property tax and user charges as suggested by the **Expert Committee Report on OSR of rural local bodies**.
 - Provide comprehensive training on financial management and resource mobilization to PRI members and officials.
 - Ensure timely and adequate fund transfers from higher government levels to support local development initiatives.
- **Enhance Capacity and Infrastructure:** Develop and implement comprehensive training programs for PRI members on **governance, administration, and development planning**.
 - Improve digital infrastructure and implement e-governance initiatives to enhance transparency and efficiency.
 - Strengthen physical infrastructure of Panchayat offices to ensure proper functioning and service delivery.
- **Promote Inclusive and Participatory Governance:** Ensure regular and timely PRI elections to maintain democratic representation at the grassroots level.
 - Strengthen Gram Sabhas as platforms for participatory decision-making and community engagement.
 - Implement participatory planning and budgeting processes to ensure local needs are adequately addressed.

Conclusion

By strengthening PRIs and promoting a collaborative approach with other development actors, India can unlock the true **potential of grassroots democracy** and build a **more vibrant, equitable future for all**.

