

LOCALIZATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS TO STRENGTHEN GRASS ROOT DEMOCRACY: A STUDY OF PUNJAB

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Abstract

By the 73rd amendment in constitution of India in 1992, India embraced a decentralized method in its local governance structure with a more active and area-based approach to rural development. It has a very significant place in the Constitution's eleventh schedule and part 9th, which provides details of power conferred with PRI's and its composition etc. It's been 32 years since the 'Government of India' amended the constitution to provide constitutional status to the PRI's in our country but still there are many loopholes exists in this system. Indeed, if we see PRI's through the ideographic approach, the problems existed at the local level are the reflection of world's problem, so localization of SDG's would be game changer initiative to solve the issues and problems of PRI's and people living in villages and sub-urban areas of the country. This study is qualitative in nature and based on the secondary data available in the forms of books, journals, government reports and newspaper articles. The Locale of the study is state of Punjab. The objective of the study is to understand the various issues existed at the Panchayati raj institutions level in Punjab and to suggest various reforms regarding the same by applying and localize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Findings of the study reveals that, there are many issues at the grass root level like leakage of funds, the power has not been decentralized properly by the state to the PRI's and there is shortage of staff at all three levels etc. in Punjab, which needs proper attention and redressal.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Reforms, People participation, Accountability

INTRODUCTION

The cornerstone of India's socio-economic progress in the twenty-first century is Panchayati raj. By the 73rd amendment in the constitution in 1992, India embraced a decentralised method in its local governance structure with a more active and area-based approach to rural development. It has a very significant place in the Constitution's eleventh schedule and part 9th, which provides details of power conferred with PRI's and its composition etc. respectively. In rural areas, Panchayati Raj institutions represent India's grassroots direct democracy experiment. The "Balwant Rai Mehta Committee of 1957" was the creative force behind the current three-tier system. This committee was constituted to study the failure of community development plan and National extension system. The Balwant Rai committee suggested that there is no concrete structure of PRI's in our country and every state had adopted the system according to their convenience and there is dire need to streamline the panchyati raj structure and then he suggested 3 tier structure which includes gram panchayat at village level, panchayat samiti at block level and zila parishad at the district level.

It's been 32 years since the government of India amended the constitution of India to provide constitutional status to the PRI's in our country but still there are many loopholes exists in this system. There is leakage of funds, the power has not been decentralised properly by the state to the PRI's, there is shortage of staff at all three levels etc. which needs proper attention. The sustainable development goals formulated by the United Nations are the areas which cover all the major problems of the world. "The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a set of international development goals from 2016 to 2030, which was adopted by the UN Sustainable Development Summit held in September 2015, The 2030 Agenda listed Sustainable Development Goals consisting of 17 goals and 169 targets in order to eradicate poverty and realize a sustainable world. The SDGs are universal goals applicable, not only to developing countries but also developed countries, and pledge Leave no one behind through the implementation process. If we see PRI ideographically, the problems existed at the local level are the reflection of world's

problem per se, so localisation of SDG's would be game changer initiative to solve the problems of PRI's and people living in villages and sub-urban areas" (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2019).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are:

1. To understand the various issues existed at the Panchayati raj institutions level in Punjab.
2. To suggest various reforms regarding the Panchayati raj institutions issues by applying and localize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

RESEARCH METHDOLOGY

This study is qualitative in nature and based on the secondary data available in the forms of books, journals, government reports and newspaper articles. The Locale of the study is state of Punjab. Due care has been taken in selecting the resources and mostly government data and good journal papers have been cited in the paper to make the paper authentic in every sense.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMNET GOALS AND INDIA

As part of Agenda 2030, the "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs) underwent significant revisions in 2015 as a result of broad stakeholder consultation with experts, politicians, and institutions. The "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs) functioned as a potent tool that offered member states a workable development route that guaranteed equilibrium between the environmental, social, and economic aspects of sustainable development. India, one of the developing countries, is crucial to the acceptance and success of the SDGs due to its significant share of the world's problems, including extreme socioeconomic and demographic inequality that has a significant impact on global growth rates. On the social front, India's top concerns are growing gender disparity, insufficient and difficult-to-access healthcare facilities, ineffective government, poor quality education, and less women's empowerment. High rates of hunger, malnutrition, unemployment, corruption, and other issues were other major social concerns.

Figure 1.1

Sustainable Development Goals



Source: <https://unod.org/content/sustainable-development-goals-sdgs>

Figure 1.1 shows the 17 “Sustainable Development Goals”. The NITI Aayog of India has taken the responsibility to keep vigil over the parameter of SDG’s at national level and keep check on each indicator so that there will be balanced development in the country. The recent report of NITI Aayog has categorically stated that “To ensure needs of the past and future generations are met, there is a need of balanced approach which takes into account critical areas such as climate action, sustainable consumption and production, food security, innovation; than to follow a silos approach that focus only on health and education infrastructure” and also stated that “rural areas of the country are way behind in adopting the SDG’s because of less awareness and illiteracy and it is the responsibility of the state governments to take quick action on it” (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2019).

PRESENT STRUCTURE OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS

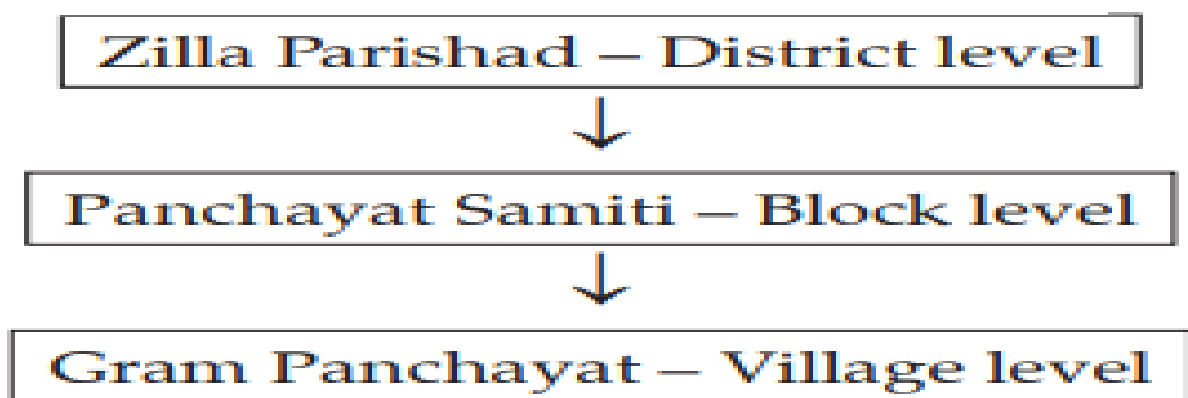
The Ministry of Panchayati raj has been setup in our country in the year 2004. The purpose of the Panchayati Raj Ministry is to oversee the execution of the 73rd Amendment Act of 1992 and fortify the role of PRIs as regional hubs for social justice and economic growth. Thus far, the results of its operation have been uneven, as PRIs persist in facing challenges related to capacity constraints, financial constraints. “Making sure that the administrations of the state governments' union territories distribute

resources, duties, and personnel to the PRIs in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Constitution will be a key responsibility of the ministry. Additionally, this ministry is in charge of advocating for the Panchayats' provisions (extension to scheduled areas) Act, 1996. Functions of Panchayati Raj Ministry are monitoring of the implementation of 73rd Amendment, Making PRIs to secure economic and social justice in the respective areas, Funding research studies, workshops and seminars for development of panchayats, Funds, Grants-in-aid and Panchayat's power to levy taxes, the village panchayats are allowed to levy and collect appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees in accordance with state laws to generate their own revenue as per Article 234 H of the Constitution" (Pathak & Deshkar, 2023).

As far as Punjab is concerned there is "Department of Rural Development and Panchayats" under the Cabinet rank minister who oversees the development in this particular sector in the state. Under the minister there is Administrative Secretary of the department and other officers who manage various schemes running under the department.

Figure 1.2

Structure of PRI



Source: <https://www.sarthaks.com/222814/explain-the-organization-of-panchayati-raj-system>

There is three tier system in PRI's in India. At the village level there is Gram Panchayat which is chaired by the sarpanch or Pradhan, at the block level there is panchayat samiti

which is chaired by the “Block Development Officer” (BDO) and its team of extension officers and at the district level there is zila parishad which is chaired by Chairperson who is indirectly elected by the samiti members. The same system is existed in state of Punjab as well. The Table 1.1 show the various powers lies with the PRIs under Article 243 (G) of the constitution.

Table 1.1

Various subjects under the PRIs (Schedule 11th of Constitution, Art 243 G)

Sr. No.	Subjects (Powers to PRIs)
1.	Agriculture, including agricultural extension
2.	Soil conservation, Land improvement and land reforms
3.	Watershed development, Minor irrigation and Water management
4.	Poultry, Animal husbandry and Dairying
5.	Fisheries
6.	Farm forestry and Social forestry
7.	Minor Forest Produce
8.	Small-scale industries, including food processing
9.	Khadi, village, and cottage industries
10.	Rural housing
11.	Drinking or Potable water
12.	Fuel and fodder
13.	Waterways, bridges, Roads, culverts, ferries and other means of communication
14.	Rural electrification including distribution of electricity
15.	Non-conventional energy sources
16.	Poverty alleviation programs
17.	Education including both primary and secondary schools
18.	Vocational education and Technical training
19.	Non-formal and Adult education
20.	Libraries
21.	Cultural activities
22.	Markets and fairs

23.	Health and sanitation including dispensaries, primary health centers and hospitals
24.	Family welfare
25.	Women and child development
26.	Social welfare, including the welfare of the disabled and marginalized groups
27.	Welfare of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other backward classes
28.	Public distribution system (PDS)
29.	Maintenance of community assets

Source: <https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/pdf1/S11.pdf>

STATE PROFILE OF PUNJAB AND NITI AAYOG RANKING

Punjab is a state in northwest region of India. According to the Census of 2011, total population of Punjab is 2,77,43,338. The total area of the state is 50,372 square kilometer. Figure 1.3 shows the map of Punjab.

Figure 1.3
Map of Punjab



Source: <https://firenoc.lgpunjab.gov.in/images/map.jpg>

It is bounded on the west by Pakistan, on the north by Jammu and Kashmir, in northeast by Himachal Pradesh and south by Haryana and Rajasthan. Chandigarh is the capital of Punjab. It is divided into 5 administrative divisions i.e. Jalandhar, Patiala, Firozpur, Faridkot and Ropar and there are total 23 districts, 237 towns (Cities) and total 12581 villages (Census, 2011).

“National Institution of Transforming India” (NITI) is a think tank of the Union Government and publishes various reports and indexes time to time on various issues in the country. In the same series NITI aayog every year publish SDG ranking.

Figure 1.4
SDG Ranking index by NITI Aayog



Source: <https://sdgindiaindex.niti.gov.in/#/statecompare?goal>

The figure 1.4 shows the SDG ranking index of NITI Aayog. In the latest index released by the NITI Aayog the state Kerala has been categorized as best performer followed by Uttarakhand, Tamilnadu, Goa, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. The Rank of Punjab is 6th

in the 2023-24 ranking. As per the parameters, Punjab is performing well in the most of the goals except few like gender equality (SDG 5) and Life below water (SDG 14). The overall score of State of Punjab is 76. If we compare previous year ranking of Punjab we can observe that Punjab has shown improvement in goals like Quality education (SDG 4), Clean water and sanitation (SDG 6) and Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) etc.

If we go by number and compare the performance of Punjab and Kerala we can observe that, the difference of score between these two states is very minimal i.e. only 3 number. So if Punjab starts focusing on the goals or parameters where Kerala is performing well, Punjab can also be the best performing state. So after thoroughly examining the data this paper finds that lacking areas for Punjab are: Good Health and Well being (SDG 3), Quality Education (SDG 4), Gender equality (SDG 5), Clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), Climate action (SDG 13) and Life on land (SDG 15).

FINDINGS OR ISSUES OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN PUNJAB

As per the NITI aayog ranking and parameters where Punjab is lacking and analyzing other sources the table 1.2 shows the Findings of the study and various issues related to the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Punjab.

Table 1.2

Issues related to Sustainable Development Goals in PRIs

Sr. No.	Sustainable Development Goals	Issues related to PRIs
1.	No Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of jobs and opportunities at village level because no focus on cotton industry, skill development and revamping of schemes like MGNREGA.
2.	Zero Hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low productivity in agriculture, Public Distribution System (PDS) not effective.
3.	Good Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shortage of Doctors, staff

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less focus on primary health care at rural level • Lack of awareness about health programs running by government.
4.	Quality Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor school infrastructure in government schools • Dropout rate more in rural areas • Post-Matric scholarship delays.
5.	Gender Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation of women is less in decision making process at gram panchayat level • Less focus on Self Help Groups to generate employment for women (Pathak & Deshkar, 2023).
6.	Clean Water and Sanitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declining ground water level. • Water pollution (Buddah Nala, Ludhiana) • Lack of waste management.
7.	Affordable and Clean Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coal fuelled power plants • Less focus on renewable energy and no nuclear power plant in state.
8.	Decent work and Economic growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration out of state
9.	Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low investment in rural areas because of low connectivity of road, rail and internet. • No focus on village level MSME or small industries in Industrial

		policy of the state.
10.	Reduced Inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caste politics and marginalization
11.	Sustainable cities and Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unplanned urbanization • Inadequate waste management results in huge dumps and legacy waste.
12.	Responsible Consumption and Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of organic farming and excess use of fertilizers/pesticides • Wastage of food in large social gatherings like marriages etc.
13.	Climate Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deforestation, • Rising air and water pollution, • Inadequate climate policies
14.	Life below water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water contamination due to industrial and sewage waste results in harm to aquatic animals.
15.	Life on land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soil degradation • Biodiversity loss • Pollution • Disasters
16.	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scams and corruption, • Weak law enforcement by the state • Drugs and Narcotics • Border area control
17.	Partnership for the goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak coordination between Union, State and PRIs

Source: Author

SUGGESTIONS AND REFORMS THROUGH LOCALISATION OF SDG'S IN PRIs

After analyzing various issues in Punjab, there is need to rectify these issues as soon as possible so the Table 1.3 shows the various suggestions related to reforms in Panchayati Raj Institutions through localizing Sustainable Development Goals in Punjab.

Table 1.3
Various suggestion on PRI reforms in Punjab

Sr. No.	Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Suggestions
1.	No Poverty	1. Make robust the implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). 2. Promote self-help groups (SHGs) for rural entrepreneurship. 3. Ensure efficient use of PRI funds for poverty alleviation programs. 4. Focus should be given on promoting cottage industries and Skill enhancement of youth of rural areas.
2.	Zero Hunger	1. Support organic and sustainable farming practices. 2. Establish community food banks and nutrition awareness programs. 3. Link farmers with local markets and cooperative societies. 4. Use of Artificial Intelligence to strengthen the Public Distribution System to avoid leakages at all the stages.
3.	Good Health	1. Upgrade rural healthcare centers and promote telemedicine.

		<p>2. Organize free health check-ups and mobile health services.</p> <p>3. Implement sanitation and hygiene awareness campaigns.</p> <p>4. Recruitment of Doctors and other para-medical staff in all level healthcare centers/hospitals.</p> <p>5. Awareness campaigns at village level to inform people about various schemes of government ex. PMJAY.</p>
4.	Quality Education	<p>1. Improve school infrastructure and digital learning facilities.</p> <p>2. Conduct skill development and vocational training at village levels.</p> <p>3. Encourage community participation in school monitoring.</p> <p>4. Adopt measures to reduce the dropout rate in rural schools.</p> <p>5. All the dues to post matric scholarships should be cleared on priority basis.</p>
5.	Gender Equality	<p>1. Ensure 50% reservation for women in PRIs and leadership roles.</p> <p>2. Strengthen women's self-help groups (SHGs) for financial independence.</p> <p>3. Enforce laws against gender discrimination and violence.</p>
6.	Clean Water and Sanitation	<p>1. Promote rainwater harvesting and watershed management.</p> <p>2. Implement waste management and sewage treatment at village levels.</p> <p>3. Ensure access to safe drinking water</p>

		through local water supply schemes.
7.	Affordable and Clean Energy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote solar energy and biogas plants in rural areas. 2. Provide subsidies for households to adopt clean energy solutions. 3. Encourage the use of energy-efficient equipment. 4. Nuclear power plant in state for clean electricity.
8.	Decent work and Economic growth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish rural skill training centers in collaboration with industries. 2. Promote agro-based and cottage industries for employment. 3. Develop micro-financing options for small businesses. 4. More government Universities and colleges should be open, to promote the higher education as per the norms of NEP 2020.
9.	Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve rural roads, bridges, and digital connectivity. 2. Establish local e-governance centers for better access to services. 3. Encourage rural start-ups and digital economy initiatives in villages.
10.	Reduced Inequalities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure effective implementation of social welfare schemes. 2. Strengthen affirmative action for marginalized communities. 3. Promote participatory governance to include diverse voices.
11.	Sustainable cities and Communities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop waste management and recycling

		<p>initiatives and aware people about waste segregation at source.</p> <p>2. Improve local transport facilities and village planning.</p> <p>3. Prevent unplanned rural-urban migration through better opportunities.</p>
12.	Responsible Consumption and Production	<p>1. Encourage sustainable farming and organic certification.</p> <p>2. Implement local policies to reduce agricultural waste.</p> <p>3. Promote eco-friendly packaging and biodegradable products.</p> <p>4. Ban on wastage of food through strict law.</p>
13.	Climate Action	<p>1. Implement village-level climate action plans.</p> <p>2. Promote afforestation and green energy projects.</p> <p>3. Train farmers in climate-resilient agricultural practices.</p>
14.	Life below water	<p>1. Monitor and prevent industrial and agricultural water pollution.</p> <p>2. Implement community-led water conservation projects.</p> <p>3. Promote aquaculture and sustainable fishing practices.</p>
15.	Life on land	<p>1. Strengthen afforestation and soil conservation programs.</p> <p>2. Implement strict land-use regulations to prevent degradation.</p> <p>3. Promote biodiversity conservation at the local level.</p>

		4. Disaster Resilient development.
16.	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve transparency in PRI governance through digital tools. 2. Strengthen local dispute resolution mechanisms. 3. Ensure citizen participation in policy-making and governance. 4. Police reforms to make police officers more accountable. 5. Border area control through strict vigilance and AI sensors to stop smuggling of drugs.
17.	Partnership for the goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthen collaboration between PRIs, NGOs, and private sector. 2. Develop public-private partnerships for rural infrastructure. 3. Use technology and data-driven approaches for local planning.

Source: Author

REFORMS/SCHEMES INTRODUCED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF PUNJAB

As far as the reforms/schemes to uplift the standard of living in villages of Punjab are concerned, there are various schemes which are being run by the Department of Rural Development and Panchayats, which are as follows:

1. Punjab State Rural Livelihood Mission (PSRLM): This particular mission pursues its activities under the “National Rural Livelihood Mission” (NRLM). The “Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) was initiated in 1999. It was later reorganised into the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) in the year 2010–2011 to create time-bound and targeted delivery of results of the scheme. NRLM was renamed Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM) on 29 March 2016. The mission’s main objective is to eradicate poverty by promoting sustainable livelihoods for the rural poor” (Kour and Neena, 2025). The components of PSRLM are Institutional and capacity building, financial inclusion, livelihood promotion and Social

Inclusion and Development. The finances are shared between union and state in the ration of 60:40. As per the information available on the official website of the department, in Punjab the PSRLM is implemented in 130 blocks of all the 23 districts.

2. Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyaan (SGSY): The “Government of India” is signatory of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and committed to achieve the target. The Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Yojna is also an initiative to achieve the SDGs. This is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme approved in the year 2018 to building capacities of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to deliver the SDGs. This scheme was revamped in 2022 with an outlay of Rs 5911 Crore to train the PRI staff and for further robust the infrastructure of PRIs in the country. Because “Restructuring of Panchayat Raj as Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan is expected to promote good governance and deliver on the sustainable development goals” (Agrawal, 2018).

3. Meri Pachayat Application: Government of Punjab to increase the participation of people in PRIs and gram sabha’s introduced this online application called Meri Panchayat. This application provides information related to the all the gram panchayats of Punjab. It is acting like a one stop center for citizens, panchayat secretaries and elected gram panchayat functionaries to fetch information related to their respective panchayat’s or other panchayat’ as well. It is linked with e-Gram Swaraj portal so stakeholders can check new circulars and notifications of Government of India related to PRIs etc. as well. In continuation of this Government of Punjab has recently prepared a “Punjab Rural Resurgence Plan 2025” so that Gram sabhas should be conducted state wide in every village to increase participation of people in development process of the state.

CONCLUSION

Integrating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the governance framework of Punjab’s Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) is essential for fostering sustainable and inclusive rural development. Despite challenges such as inadequate funding, limited awareness, gender disparities, and weak infrastructure, aligning PRIs with SDG objectives can drive meaningful progress. Strengthening PRIs through training programs, community involvement, and technology adoption can enhance their efficiency in addressing local development needs. Collaboration between government bodies, private

organizations, and civil society can further accelerate the implementation of sustainable initiatives at the grassroots level. By tailoring SDG strategies to local contexts and ensuring adequate resource allocation, Punjab's villages can move towards self-reliance and long-term sustainability. The localization of SDGs is not merely a policy recommendation but a transformative approach that can lead to resilient, equitable, and thriving rural communities.

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