**Powers and Responsibilities of Panchayats**

State Legislatures may endow Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable the Panchayats to become institutions of self-government at the grassroots level.

Responsibility may be given to them to prepare plans for economic development and social justice. Schemes of economic development and social justice with regard to 29 important matters mentioned in XI schedule such as agriculture, primary and secondary education, health and sanitation, drinking water, rural housing, the welfare of weaker sections, social forestry and so forth may be made by them.

### **Three-tier Structure of Panchayati Raj**

**Panchayat Samiti**

The second or middle tier of the Panchayati Raj is Panchayat Samiti, which provides a link between Gram Panchayat and a Zila Parishad.

The strength of a Panchayat Samiti also depends on the population in a Samiti area. In Panchayat Samiti, some members are directly elected.Sarpanchs of Gram Panchayats

**Sarpanchs of Gram Panchayats**are**ex-officio members of Panchayat Samitis**. However, all the Sarpanchs of Gram Panchayats are not members of Panchayat Samitis at the same time.

The number varies from State to State and is rotated annually. It means that only chairpersons of some Gram Panchayats in a Samiti area are members of Panchayat Samiti at a time.

In some panchayats, members of Legislative Assemblies and Legislative Councils, as well as members of Parliament who belong to the Samiti area, are co-opted as its members. **Chairpersons of Panchayat Samitis are, elected indirectly- by and from amongst the elected members thereof**.

**Zila Parishad**

Zila Parishad or district Panchayat is the uppermost tier of the Panchayati Raj system.

This institution has some directly elected members whose number differs from State to State as it is also based on population. Chairpersons of Panchayat Samitis are ex-officio members of Zila Parishads.

**Members of Parliament, Legislative Assemblies and Councils belonging to the districts are also nominated members of Zila Parishads.**

The chairperson of a Zila Parishad, called Adhyaksha or President is elected indirectly- by and from amongst the elected members thereof. The vice-chairperson is also elected similarly.Zila Parishad meetings are conducted once a month. Special meetings can also be convened to discuss special matters. Subject committees are also formed.

Zila Parishad **meetings** are conducted **once a month**. Special meetings can also be convened to discuss special matters. Subject committees are also formed.

### **Functions of Panchayat**

All Panchayati Raj Institutions perform such functions as are specified in state laws relating to panchayati raj. Some States distinguish between obligatory (compulsory) and optional functions of Gram Panchayats while other States do not make this distinction.

* The civic functions relating to sanitation, cleaning of public roads, minor irrigation, public toilets and lavatories, primary health care, vaccination, the supply of drinking water, constructing public wells, rural electrification, social health and primary and adult education, etc. are obligatory functions of village panchayats.
* The optional functions depend on the resources of the panchayats. They may or may not perform such functions as tree plantation on roadsides, setting up of breeding centers for cattle, organizing child and maternity welfare, promotion of agriculture, etc.
* **After the 73rd Amendment, the scope of functions of Gram Panchayat was widened.**Such important functions like preparation of annual development plan of panchayat area, annual budget, relief in natural calamities, removal of encroachment on public lands and implementation and monitoring of poverty alleviation programmes are now expected to be performed by panchayats.
* Selection of beneficiaries through Gram Sabhas, public distribution system, non-conventional energy source, improved Chullahs, biogas plants have also been given to Gram Panchayats in some states.

### **Functions of Panchayat Samiti**

* Panchayat Samitis are at the **hub of developmental activities.**
* They are **headed by Block Development Officers (B.D.Os)**.
* Some functions are entrusted to them like agriculture, land improvement, watershed development, social and farm forestry, technical and vocational education, etc.
* The second type of functions relates to the implementation of some specific plans, schemes or programmes to which funds are earmarked. It means that a Panchayat Samiti has to spend money only on that specific project. The choice of location or beneficiaries is, however, available to the Panchayat Samiti.

### **Functions of Zila Parishad**

* Zila Parishad **links Panchayat Samitis within the district**.
* It coordinates their activities and supervises their functioning.
* It prepares district plans and integrates Samiti plans into district plans for submission to the State Government.
* Zila Parishad looks after development works in the entire district.
* It undertakes schemes to improve agricultural production, exploit ground water resources, extend rural electrification and distribution and initiate employment generating activities, construct roads and other public works.
* It also performs welfare functions like relief during natural calamities and scarcity, the establishment of orphanages and poor homes, night shelters, the welfare of women and children, etc.
* In addition, Zila Parishads perform functions entrusted to them under the Central and State Government sponsored programmes. For example, Jawahar Rozgar Yojna is a big centrally sponsored scheme for which money is directly given to the districts to undertake employment-generating activities