

Driving Digital Transformation in Gram Panchayats



For Prelims: Digital India , Gram Panchayats , Bhashini , SVAMITVA , BharatNet , Gram Sabha , eGramSwaraj .

For Mains : Understanding digital initiatives for Panchayats requires a holistic examination of their necessity, socio-economic impact, benefits, implementation challenges, and the necessary corrective measures.

Source: PIB

Why in News?

The **Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR)** has launched **digital reforms** for **Gram Panchayats** , aligned with **Digital India** and **Atmanirbhar Bharat** , to promote **transparent** , **efficient** , and **inclusive rural governance** .

What are the Key Digital Initiatives Related to Gram Panchayats?

- **SabhaSaar:** Launched in **August 2025** , SabhaSaar is an **AI tool** that produces structured **minutes of meetings** from Gram Sabha and other Panchayat gatherings. Integrated with **Bhashini** , it supports **14 Indian languages** , providing real-time, **accurate** , and **unbiased records** .
- **SVAMITVA:** **Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas**
Scheme grants rural households legal **ownership papers** for their homes and land facilitating **bank loans** , dispute resolution, and asset utilisation.
 - As of **August 2025** , under the **SVAMITVA Scheme** , **2.63 crore property cards** have been issued across **1.73 lakh villages**.
- **BharatNet:** **BharatNet** aims to deliver **broadband** via **Wi-Fi hotspots** , **Fibre to the Home (FTTH)** connections, and other services, with over 13 lakh **FTTH connections** commissioned so far.
- **eGramSwaraj:** This comprehensive application integrates core **Panchayat** functions like **planning** , **budgeting** , **accounting** , **monitoring** , **reporting** , **asset management** , and online **payments** , serving over 2.7 lakh **Panchayati Raj Institutions** across 28 **States** and 6 **UTs**.



- **Meri Panchayat App:** The Meri Panchayat App functions as an integrated mobile governance platform, promoting transparency , accountability , and citizen participation in Panchayat affairs. It serves over 25 lakh elected representatives and nearly 95 crore rural residents across 2.65 lakh Gram Panchayats .
- **Panchayat NIRNAY:** The portal schedules **meetings** , notifies citizens of **agendas** , records **Gram Sabha** decisions, and replaces paper-based processes with automated **workflow**.
- **Gram Manchitra:** Gram Manchitra provides a unified digital **map** to visualise developmental works, align them with the **Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GDP)** , identify project sites, track **assets** , estimate **costs** , and assess impacts.

How do Digital Initiatives Enhance the Functioning of Panchayats?

- **Clarity in Governance:** Citizens can instantly view **panchayat finances** , and **project statuses** on mobile phones, while **AI-generated** meeting summaries provide impartial **records** , fostering public trust.
- **Administrative Productivity:** Automation of **minute-taking** and **report generation** allows officials to concentrate on **implementation of projects** and **problem-solving** , while unified systems streamline **planning** , **fund allocation** , and **expenditure tracking** .
- **Inclusivity:** Platforms like Bhashini support **multiple Indian languages** , ensuring rural communities across diverse regions are included in the digital governance framework.
- **Digital Inclusion:** **BharatNet** provides high-speed **internet** , enabling **e-governance** , **e-health** , **e-education** , and **e-commerce** services in villages, bridging the **digital divide** and bringing rural India closer to urban **connectivity** standards.
- **Data-Driven Development:** **Geographic Information System (GIS)** technology visualizes village **assets** and **terrain** on a digital **map** , supporting data-driven **resource allocation** and informed decisions on locating new **infrastructure** like roads or water sources for maximum impact.

What Factors Limit the Effectiveness of Digital Reforms in Panchayati Raj Institutions?

- **Infrastructure Deficit:** Despite **BharatNet** , remote **Panchayats** face slow **internet** , frequent

- power outages** , inadequate **hardware (computers, printers)** , and limited **broadband infrastructure** , restricting the use of online services like **eGramSwaraj** .
- **Digital Literacy Gap:** A significant portion of rural residents and elected **representatives** lack basic **digital skills** , limiting effective use of apps like **Meri Panchayat** . Inadequate **training** for **Panchayat secretaries** and officials on complex **platforms** leads to errors or non-use.
- **Linguistic and Cultural Barriers:** **Language diversity** and lack of support for **local dialects** may limit accessibility despite multi-language tools. Low **awareness** and **resistance to change** due to reliance on traditional methods hinder adoption of digital tools.
- **Implementation Hurdles:** The effectiveness of **Gram Manchitra** relies on accurate **data** ; outdated or incorrect input leads to flawed **planning** .
 - Lack of local **technical support** threatens **maintenance** and **sustainability** , while overlapping and **siloed systems** increase **workload** and cause frustration.
- **Gender Digital Divide :** **Women** in rural areas face lower **literacy** and limited **phone access** , leading to a **gender digital divide** .

How can Digital Governance Initiatives be Improved at the Panchayat Level?

- **Ensuring Reliable Access:** Augment **BharatNet** with last-mile **Wi-Fi hotspots** or **broadband kiosks** set up by **local entrepreneurs** . Provide **solar backup** in Panchayat offices. Standardize **hardware** with functional **computers** , **printers** , **scanners** , and dedicated **internet** .
- **Deepening Capacity Building:** Establish **Digital Sathis** — trained local youth providing on-ground support. Develop **vernacular** , **video-based training** for apps like **eGramSwaraj** and **Meri Panchayat** .
 - **Incentivize usage** by linking timely platform use to **performance-based rewards** or faster **fund disbursements** .
- **Enhancing User Experience:** Create a **unified login portal** (e.g., **Digital Panchayat Dashboard**) for apps like **eGramSwaraj** , **Gram Manchitra** etc with **simplified interfaces** featuring intuitive, icon-based designs.
- **Fostering Participatory Governance:** Establish women-operated **digital literacy centres** and **self-help groups** to use apps like **Meri Panchayat** .
 - Add **offline** and **voice-based features** like **IVR (Interactive Voice Response)** to enable data access and grievance reporting despite **internet** or **literacy** limitations.
- **Support and Monitoring Framework:** Set up a **Panchayat IT Helpdesk** with a toll-free **helpline** for real-time **technical support** , and prioritise **quality of use** via **dashboard analytics** over mere adoption.

Conclusion

Digital initiatives are transforming **rural governance** by improving **transparency** and **efficiency** . Focusing on robust **infrastructure** , continuous **capacity building** , and **inclusive design** can bridge the **digital divide** and empower **Panchayati Raj Institutions** .

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. "Digital tools for Panchayati Raj Institutions promise transformative governance but face significant implementation challenges." Critically examine this statement in the Indian context.

[Watch Video on YouTube: [▶ https://www.youtube.com/embed/CqIUQVQ9pEk](https://www.youtube.com/embed/CqIUQVQ9pEk)]

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Local self-government can be best explained as an exercise in (2017)

- (a) Federalism
- (b) Democratic decentralisation
- (c) Administrative delegation
- (d) Direct democracy

Ans: (b)

Q. The fundamental object of the Panchayati Raj system is to ensure which among the following? (2015)

1. People's participation in development
2. Political accountability
3. Democratic decentralization
4. Financial mobilization

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b) 2 and 4 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: (c)

Mains

Q1. To what extent, in your opinion, has the decentralisation of power in India changed the governance landscape at the grassroots? (2022)

Q2. Assess the importance of the Panchayat system in India as a part of local government. Apart from government grants, what sources can the Panchayats look out for financing developmental projects? (2018)

India's Vaccination Drive



For Prelims: Vaccination , Public health Interventions, Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) , National Health Family Survey , Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) , Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) , Mission Indradhanush , Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV), Accredited Social Health Activist.

For Mains: India's Immunization Programme, Challenges and Reform.

Source:TH

Why in News?

India's Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP), the world's largest, vaccinates 2.6 crore infants and 2.9 crore pregnant women annually.

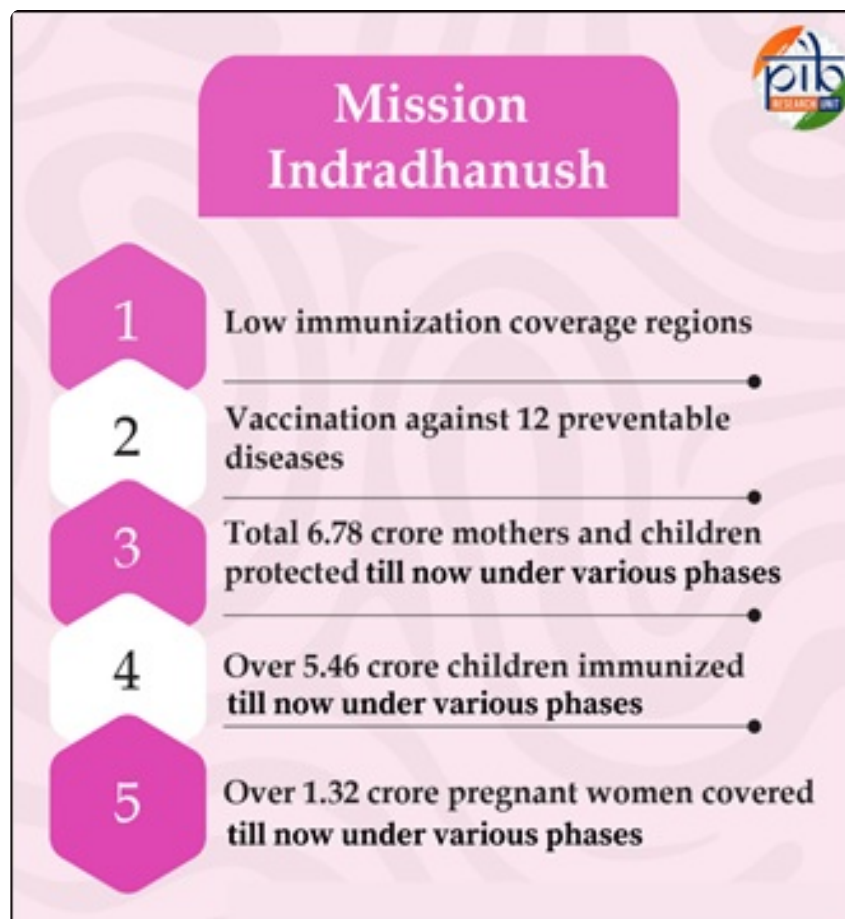
- Despite these significant numbers, **challenges persist in reaching remote and migratory populations** , clusters with low awareness, and communities grappling with vaccine hesitancy.

What is the Status of Immunisation in India?

- **UIP:** It is **one of India's most comprehensive public health initiatives** , aiming to provide life-saving vaccines to millions of newborns and pregnant women each year.
 - The UIP **offers free immunisation against 12 diseases** .
 - **Sub-nationally** : Rotavirus, Pneumococcal Pneumonia, and Japanese Encephalitis.
 - **Nationally** : Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, Polio, Measles, Rubella, Childhood Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B, and Meningitis/Pneumonia (caused by Haemophilus Influenzae type B).
 - **Initially launched in 1978 as the Expanded Programme on Immunization** , it was **rebranded as the UIP in 1985** when its coverage was extended beyond urban centres to rural areas, addressing disparities in healthcare access.

India and Vaccines			
Vaccine	Global Introduction	Introduction In India	Gap
COVID-19	December 2020	January 2021	One Month
IPV	1955	2015	60 Years
Measles & Rubella	1971	2017	46 Years
Pneumococcal	2000	2017	17 Years
Rotavirus	2006	2016	10 Years

- **Mission Indradhanush:** The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched **Mission Indradhanush** in December 2014 as a special drive to vaccinate all unvaccinated and partially vaccinated children under UIP.
- To further intensify the immunization programme, the Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) was launched in October 2017.
- **Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) 5.0, 2023** is a catch-up vaccination campaign for children up to 5 years of age and pregnant women, who were left out.
- The **Full Immunization coverage of the country is around 98% for the FY 2024-25.**



• Key Achievements

- **Polio Free:** India's achievement of polio-free status in 2014 represents one of the most significant successes in global public health.
- **Tetanus Elimination:** India is the first country to be officially acknowledged as being **Yaws-free**. India was validated for **Maternal and Neonatal Tetanus Elimination (MNTE)** in April 2015, much ahead of the global target date of December 2015.
- The **U-WIN Digital Platform:** It was **launched nationwide** to provide **end-to-end vaccination tracking** for pregnant women and children up to 16 years, **building on the success of Co-WIN**, and enabling **anytime-anywhere access**, especially for **migratory populations**.
- **Logistics and Vaccine Stock Management:** The **electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN)** system is a real-time monitoring platform that manages vaccine logistics and is integrated into the broader health infrastructure under the **Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission**.

What are the Challenges to Achieving Universal Immunization in India?

- **Remote Populations:** Reaching remote, and tribal, remains particularly difficult in India due to geographic isolation, weak health infrastructure, and high mobility of communities , which significantly limits the reach of routine immunisation services .
 - Especially in states like **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and parts of the Northeast** .
- **Vaccine Hesitancy:** Vaccine hesitancy continues to persist in specific clusters , often driven by misinformation, cultural beliefs, and anti-vaccine narratives .
- **Pandemic Disruption:** The **COVID-19 pandemic** caused unprecedented disruption to routine immunisation services , resulting in temporary immunity gaps and localized resurgent measles outbreaks across India, particularly in areas with previously low coverage .
- **Low Awareness:** Clusters with low awareness and limited access to healthcare services continue to substantially hinder universal coverage , particularly in densely populated slums and marginalised areas , where health system outreach is often inadequate .

What Measures can be Taken to Achieve Universal Immunization in India?

- **Strengthening National Immunization Days (NIDs):** The success of initiatives like **National Immunization Days (NIDs)** should be replicated in other vaccination drives, ensuring that special campaigns, like the Pulse Polio program, reach every child, year after year.
- **Expanding Strategic Interventions:** Continued focus on advocacy, social mobilization, interpersonal communication at the family level, and media engagement needs to be intensified to raise awareness and drive higher immunization coverage.
- **Strengthening Task Forces at All Levels:** Initiatives, such as **strengthening State, District, and Block Task Forces on Immunization (STFI, DTFI, BTFI)**, should be further emphasized to ensure better coordination and effective program implementation across all regions.
- **Scaling Up Supplementary Immunization Campaigns:** More extensive supplementary immunization campaigns should be conducted in areas with low coverage to target left-out and drop-out children , as well as pregnant women, ensuring no one is left behind.
- **Enhancing Village Health and Nutrition Days (VHND):** Organizing more frequent and widespread VHNDs can ensure greater access to immunization services, particularly in remote and underserved villages.
- **Promoting Digital Tracking with UWIN Portal:** Expanding the use of the **UWIN portal** for digital registration and tracking of vaccinations should be a priority to ensure accurate record-keeping and easy monitoring of immunization events.

Conclusion

India's Universal Immunization Programme is a **global model in public health** , showing remarkable progress through **strategic campaigns, digital innovations, and international collaborations** . Addressing remaining **gaps in coverage, vaccine hesitancy, and outreach to underserved populations** is essential to maintain and further enhance public health outcomes.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. Discuss the importance of vaccination for healthcare, particularly in developing countries like India. Also, discuss the measures taken by India to ensure universal immunisation of our population.

[Watch Video on YouTube:

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/embed/zUe-Pz14-m8>

]

UPSC Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. 'Mission Indradhanush' launched by the Government of India pertains to: (**2016**)

- (a) Immunization of children and pregnant women
- (b) Construction of smart cities across the country
- (c) India's own search for Earth-like planets in outer space
- (d) New Educational Policy

Ans: A

WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies



Source: ET

Why in News?

India is in the process of ratifying the **World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies**, positioning itself as a strong voice for sustainable fishing practices and the protection of small-scale fishers.

- The move comes amid **global efforts to curb harmful subsidies** that drive overfishing and threaten marine biodiversity.

What is the World Trade Organization (WTO)

Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies?

- **About:** The **WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies** is a **binding multilateral agreement** , aimed at promoting environmental sustainability and fair trade in global fisheries.
 - It is the **first WTO agreement focused on ocean governance and protecting marine resources** . The agreement was adopted at **WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference in 2022** , under the **Geneva Package** ; it entered into force in September 2025 after two-thirds of WTO members deposited their acceptance instruments.
- **Key Objectives: Prohibit subsidies that contribute to overfishing, overcapacity, and depletion of fish stocks.**
 - Safeguard the livelihoods of millions dependent on fisheries for nutrition and income.
 - Provide a level playing field by disciplining subsidies that distort competition.
- **Key Features:**
 - **Subsidy Prohibitions:** Prohibits government support for illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, fishing of overfished stocks, and fishing on unregulated high seas.
 - **Transparency Mechanism:** WTO members must notify their subsidies and fishing activities for monitoring.
 - **Implementation Support:** The **WTO Fish Fund** was established to aid developing countries and **Least Developed Countries (LDCs)** by providing technical support and funding.
 - **Committee on Fisheries Subsidies:** Provides a forum for regular dialogue, compliance review, and technical assistance.

What is India's Stance on WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies?

- **Protection for Small Fishers:** India seeks **policy space and exemptions** to safeguard livelihoods of small-scale and artisanal fishers. India advocates for **precise and effective Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT)** , including a **25-year transition period** for developing countries and LDCs, compared to 5-7 years proposed by developed nations.
- **Per Capita Subsidy Basis:** India proposes that subsidy disciplines be calculated **per fisher** , not on total subsidy amounts, highlighting the disparity between high subsidies in developed countries (USD 76,000 per fisher) **versus India (USD 35 per fisher)**.
- **Stricter Rules for Historical Subsidisers:** Calls for stricter rules targeting countries that have historically given high subsidies contributing to overfishing, while protecting nations with low-impact fisheries.
- **Sustainability Focus:** Emphasizes that rules should **not penalize nations working toward sustainable fishing** and should support long-term marine conservation.

What are India's Initiatives and Schemes to Promote Sustainable Fisheries?

- **Blue Revolution Scheme (2015-16)** : Focused on increasing fish production and productivity through aquaculture and marine fisheries development.
- **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY, 2020)** : **PMMSY** aimed at transforming the

fisheries sector by enhancing productivity, creating jobs, and promoting sustainable practices.

- **Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF, 2018-19)** : Provides financial support for infrastructure development in marine and inland fisheries.
- **National Policy on Marine Fisheries (NPMF, 2017)** : Ensures sustainable marine resource management and conservation of fish stocks.
- **State Specific Marine Fishing Regulation Acts (MFRA)** : States like Maharashtra, Kerala regulate fishing in **India's Exclusive Economic Zone**, including fishing bans and the prohibition of destructive practices.
- **ICAR-Central Institute of Fisheries Education (CIFE)** : Provides education and research in sustainable fish farming and aquaculture practices.



UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. The terms 'Agreement on Agriculture', 'Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures' and 'Peace Clause' appear in the news frequently in the context of the affairs of the (2015)

- (a) Food and Agriculture Organization
- (b) United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change
- (c) World Trade Organization
- (d) United Nations Environment Programme

Ans: (c)

Mains:

Q. WTO is an important international institution where decisions taken affect countries in a profound manner. What is the mandate of WTO and how binding are their decisions? Critically analyse India's stand on the latest round of talks on Food security. (2014)

National Initiative on Water Security



Source:PIB

The Union Government has launched the **National Initiative on Water Security** under **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005** , prioritizing water conservation across rural India

- **National Initiative on Water Security:** It aims to address depleting groundwater levels and ensure long-term rural water security. To implement this, the MGNREGA Act, 2005, was amended to make water conservation works mandatory by allocating funds, providing a statutory backing to the initiative.
 - In ‘over-exploited’ blocks, 65% of MGNREGA funds will be used for water-related works.
 - In ‘semi-critical’ blocks, 40% of MGNREGA funds will be spent on water conservation.
 - Even in blocks without water scarcity, at least 30% of funds will go towards water-related works.
 - It shifts focus from ad hoc water works to systematic water security planning, and reflects India’s commitment to water conservation through campaigns like ‘Catch the Rain’ and ‘Amrit Sarovars’ .
- **Achievements of MGNREGA in Water Conservation:** MGNREGA has become the world’s largest social welfare program , creating over 1.25 crore water conservation assets like farm ponds and check dams.
 - These efforts have reduced water stress in rural areas. Under Mission Amrit Sarovar , more than 68,000 reservoirs were constructed or rejuvenated in the first phase.

Read more: Water Management: From Scarcity to Sustainability