

# RURAL GOVERNANCE IN CENSUS TOWNS: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MODEL GP CLUSTERS PROJECT IN GRAM PANCHAYAT DEVELOPMENT PLAN (GPDP) IN INDIA

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## **Abstract**

*The 2011 census indicates a decline in demographic growth in metro cities and mushrooming of census towns (CTs). India's census recognizes these census towns as urban settlements but they largely continue to be governed as rural settlements in most of the states. As a result "These settlements continue to grow as urban while being governed by rural local bodies, which have a limited capacity to provide basic urban services such as water supply, sanitation, and street lighting (Samanta, 2014). As a local government, GP (Gram Panchayat) is responsible for the delivery of basic services to local citizens and at the same time also concerned with the vulnerabilities of poor and marginalized ones in these census towns. This can only be achieved through the implementation of well-thought-out plans through efficient and responsible utilization of available resources in these towns. "Initiatives such as Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) and Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) all are entrusted with the sole objective of strengthening Gram Panchayats as an institute of local self-government" (MoPR & MoRD, GoI 2018). The purpose of the "Model GP Clusters Project" is to demonstrate the institutional capacity of local self-government and to prepare GPDP efficiently as per the guidelines to achieve the objectives of decentralized planning and the wellbeing of the people. The descriptive-analytical approach of this paper seeks to explore the problems associated with achieving the success of decentralized planning in the previous decades in GP (Gram Panchayat), the governing institutions of census towns, and the role of the "Model GP Clusters Project" in enhancing the level of capacity of GPs to achieve the goal of GPDP, as "Rural Local Bodies (RLB)" known as "Gram Panchayats" are not efficient enough to deal with the changing characteristics result from the urbanization in these census town.*

**Index Term:** Census Towns, Rural Local Bodies, Gram Panchayats, Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP), Model GP Clusters Project, Decentralized Planning,

## **INTRODUCTION:**

The 2011 census confirmed a tremendous growth in the number of census towns, which almost tripled between 2001 and 2011, rising from 1,362 to 3,894. This increased share near about one-third (29.5 percent) of the total increase in the urban population during the same period. A review of the literature indicates that the boom of CT results in some basic problems like insufficient infrastructure, low level of economic activities, bad land-use planning, and additionally issues which include resettlement of people, land acquisition, invasion, slums, substandard housing, mental disturbance, legal and law order related problem, absence of political system, social and environmental problems. But, those issues cannot be neglected due to the fact those census cities are the muse of the country's destiny urbanization. As a local government, Gram Panchayats (GPs) are responsible for the delivery of basic services to local citizens of these census towns. Hence, an efficient and robust planning process as part of GP's core functioning becomes necessary. Gram

Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs) are one of the tools to achieve an efficient and robust planning process. The GPDPs are to be prepared in a fair, inclusive, transparent manner within the available resources or expanding the resources through people's participation, ownership, and enlightened leadership. "Over the last twenty-five years, several initiatives have been taken by the Government of India, as well as State Governments to realize the constitutional mandate by enabling the GPs to prepare decentralized participatory plans" (MoPR,GoI 2018). The rules regulation and guidelines are issued and changed by MoPR, and GoI, from time to time on Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs). The Model GP Clusters Project is one of such guidelines. The Model GP Clusters Project aimed to empower panchayats at the grassroots level to organise and implement plans on twenty-nine subjects mentioned within the eleventh schedule of the Indian Constitution for ensuring economic development and social justice which will be equipped properly to contend with the dynamic characteristics caused by the urbanization in these census towns.

### OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Based on both secondary data and in-depth empirical research done in census towns and decentralised planning of its governing institution i.e. gram panchayat, the primary goal of this paper is to

1. To explore India's contemporary urbanization, with special reference to the characteristics of census towns, governance deficiency, and contribution of census towns to India's contemporary urbanization.
2. To examine the efficiency of gram panchayat as rural local bodies (RLBs) in decentralized planning and delivery of basic services to local citizens of the Census Towns in India.
3. To explore emerging issues and challenges hindering the pace of formulation of holistic, comprehensive, and visionary plans of the gram panchayats.
4. To examine the role of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) in strengthening gram panchayats as an institute of local self-government.
5. To explore the role of the Model GP Clusters Project in intensifying the Capability Building & Training of the gram panchayat to grow as an institution of self-government for demonstrative economic development and social justice and also motivate the other GP to follow their activities and good practices.

### CENSUS TOWNS IN MODERN URBANIZATION AND THEIR GOVERNANCE

Statutory towns are administratively declared urban settlements by a state law that includes a municipality, corporation, cantonment board, or notified town area committee. According to the census approach census towns are settlement units that are classified as urban areas if they have the following urban characteristics, viz, (i) minimum population of 5,000 and (ii) Density of a minimum of 400 persons per square kilometer, and (iii) at least 75% of male workforce in the non-farm sector. Although these settlements are declared as census towns, they are governed by rural local bodies (RLB).

Table 1: Growth of Statutory/Non-Statutory Towns (CTs) in India, 1971-2011

Census Year	Statutory Towns	Census Towns	Total Urban Centers	Census Towns to Urban Centres (%)
1971	2345	248	2593	9.56
1981	2758	1271	4029	31.54
1991	2996	1693	4689	36.10
2001	3798	1363	5161	26.40
2011	4041	3894	7935	49.07

Source: Census of India 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001 AND 2011

From the figures, it can be seen that the share of census towns in the total urban population was low which was equal to 7.4% in 2001 and their numbers were growing steadily. The focus on census towns was limited up to 2001. Though, the unexpected increase in the number of census towns has highlighted the need for more attention to this class of settlements.

## WHY PLANNING IN GRAM PANCHAYAT (GP) AS RURAL LOCAL BODIES (RLB)

As the census towns are governed by the GP, every GP is responsible to provide basic public services and also take up development works relating to the functions devolved to them in these census towns. Under Article 243G of the Constitution of India, panchayats have been mandated to function as an institution of self-government. Therefore, GPs need to cater basic services to the people of their area. Accordingly, the 14<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission has recommended basic grants to the GPs for delivering basic services. The basic services include water supply, sanitation including septic management, sewage, and solid waste management, stormwater drainage, maintenance of community assets, maintenance of roads, footpaths, street-lighting, burial, and cremation grounds, etc. Therefore, the focus of GPDP should be on analysing the development gaps in the socio-economic sectors, public service delivery, and capturing the needs and aspirations of the vulnerable and marginalized groups. “One of the challenges for the GP will be to prioritize the socio-economic development issues and inclusive development of marginalized sections of the community over routine infrastructural developments as the experience had been bulk of the investment is flowing towards such infrastructure creation”(MoPR,GoI 2018). Thus, Gram Panchayat Development Plan must concern to address the various issues of socio-economic development parameters to achieve holistically and inclusive development on twenty-nine matters mentioned in the Indian constitution. According to the guidelines for the preparation of Gram Panchayat Development Plans, 2018 by, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, the Government of India “the focus areas may include basic services, economic development & poverty reduction, human development, social development, ecological development, public service delivery, effective governance, SDGs, skill development, child protection and development, spatial planning, digital enablement including enablement of Panchayat for good governance and public service delivery, critical infrastructure development, etc”.

## EMERGING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN PLANNING IN RURAL LOCAL BODY (RLB)

Since 1990, several initiatives have been taken by both the state and the central government to encourage a participatory planning process at the grassroots level. It has been stated in the guidelines for preparation of Gram Panchayats Development Plan, 2018 that due to various challenges such as inadequate resources, people’s participation, facilitation, and capacity have hindered the pace of formulation of holistic, comprehensive, and visionary plans. So, the situation has come to make Gram Panchayat Development Plans more comprehensive with high quality, time-bound, and also with equity, and inclusiveness. GPDP should give maximum weightage to people’s needs and aspirations, provide basic services, and prioritize the available resources. So, It should be participatory, inclusive, and transparent in nature.

A review of the literature indicates all the issues listed below are the challenges that need to be addressed and deliver of utmost importance to the GPDP to reach out and fulfill the development aspirations of the local people and that can be an effective decentralised participatory planning by the GPs.

1. ‘No involvement of technical people in the planning process. During the preparation of the 5-year plan, none of the technical people were involved in the process. The estimated cost put in plan 7 was highly inaccurate; few works which need 10,000 they put it as 100000 and vice versa is true’(CTARA, 2019).
2. The preparation of estimates by technical people was prepared based on the cost provided in the five-year plan which was not sufficient with ground reality as a result project or plan has to adjust based on available funds.
3. Due to the overlapping of different meetings and training programs some key persons were not able to attend the training session. It discloses a lack of coordination and importance of the GPDP plan to government departments.
4. “No support from the trainer once the five-year plan was prepared. No support from them while planning of annual plan” (CTARA, 2019)

They should available throughout the program for effective planning of GPDP.

5. Before making an estimate or giving technical sanctions, this work should be verified on the ground and the amount estimated is overestimated or underestimated should be validated.
6. Program should allow GP to hire a technical person for planning or provide temporary support during planning.



7. "Time allotted for planning activities was not adequate according to Gramsevak, they made plans in a hurry" (MoPR, 2018) Hence, there is a need for revised guidelines for addressing emerging challenges and opportunities in the integrated planning process up to the district level.

## **MODEL GP CLUSTERS PROJECT AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN PLANNING IN RLB (RURAL LOCAL BODY)**

The 73rd Amendment Act 1993 of the Indian Constitution empowers panchayat through Article 243G to function as an institution of local self-government. The objective of Article 243G was to empower panchayats at the grassroots level so that they can prepare and implement plans on twenty-nine subjects mentioned in the eleventh schedule of the Indian Constitution which will ensure economic development and social justice. At the same time, state-level changes were also made in the corresponding state acts and rules to achieve the goal. "In the years to come, initiatives such as Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) and Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) all are entrusted with the sole objective of strengthening Gram Panchayats as an institute of local self-government" (MoPR & MoRD, GoI 2021).

"A majority of its 2.53 lakh Gram Panchayats (GP) in India are yet to demonstrate their institutional capacity as local self-government and preparing GPDP as per the guidelines to achieve the objectives" (MoPR & MoRD, GoI 2021). Various studies show due to poor quality of GPDP results from the incapability of elected representatives of GP for preparing GPDP leads to slow growth of economic development and social justice in these census towns. Keep into consideration these issues the National Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (NIRD&PR) 2019 implemented the 'Action Research Project for 100 plus Clusters Development Programme' aiming to facilitate the creation of Model GP Clusters. The model GPs then will motivate the other GP to follow their activities and good practices. According to the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) the total number of clusters under the initiative was 125 covering 545 GPs in 55 districts across 11 States. However, releasing the scope of creating Model GPs, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) has approved in favour of NIRD&PR to expand the project on "Creation of 250 Model GP Clusters across all States and Union Territories during 2020-22" (MoPR & MoRD, 2021). It is clear that the two initiatives by MoPR and NIRD&PR would thus help to cover 375 (125 + 250) clusters having around 1400 GPs across India. The main thrust of the project is to strengthen the institutional capacity of GPs and enabling preparing of quality GPDP. By providing technical guidance and handholding support to GPs in 250 clusters so that they can achieve holistic and sustainable human development.

### **OBJECTIVES OF MODEL GP CLUSTERS PROJECT:**

In its document in 'People's Plan Campaign for Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)' from 2nd October 2020 – 31st January 2021 the Ministry of Panchayati Raj & Ministry of Rural Development Government of India set the objectives of the Model GP Clusters Project are as follow

- (i) To make competence the GPs selected for the project intense Capability Building & Training to grow as institutions of self-government for demonstrative economic development and social justice.
- (ii) To provide careful support to GPs through qualified professionals to increase institutional capabilities and quality GPDP.
- (iii) To infuse science and technology in planning and to demonstrate a true sense of convergence of schemes and efforts.
- (iv) To support GPs to become schools of practice and lighthouse of GPs to inspire other GPs across the country to follow them as models.
- (v) To facilitate large social or economic returns on investments over 3 years.

### **PROJECT PARTNERS:**

The Project has been designed with multiple partnerships in its implementation with MoPR, NIRD&PR, the Panchayati Raj & Rural Development Department of the States/UTs, and UNDP with the consideration of the varied objectives of the project. The partner institutions of the project as documented in 'People's Plan Campaign for Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)' by the Ministry of Panchayati raj & Ministry of Rural Development Government of India are (i) The State Rural Livelihoods Mission for PRI-SHG Convergence. (ii) The asserted Line Departments are to be operating through their functionaries at District, Block, and GP levels. (iii) Various Credit Institutions for support to entrepreneurs for economic development

in these model GP (iv) Mission Samridhi for IT support and structured Exposure. (v) For Training on motivation, leadership, No-Cost voluntary actions, etc. With the Vyakti Vikash Kendra India under the Art of Living Foundation (vi) Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) with an aim to train how Economic Development can be done through Natural Resource Management, Watershed Development techniques, Spatial Planning, and a nationwide rich database for planning. (vii) Anode Governance Lab for strengthening governance and enabling public institutions to function effectively for organisation development and benchmarking of capabilities of GPs. (viii) Madhukar Livelihood Foundation for support Governments, Institutions, and Enterprise to achieve Integrated socio-economic development for the benefit of its people (ix) Ultimate Management Solutions, India for Training on the event of youths as volunteers. (x) Nehru Yuva Kendra for the development of their personality and skills of youth (xi) Organisation like for Training on Constitutional rights. (xii) UNICEF (Child-Friendly GPs). (xiii) Many other organisation like CSOs, Local NGOs, local CBOs including SHGs and their Federations, Local Youth Clubs, Volunteers, etc. (xiv) Other well-meaning organisation willing to affix the mission.

### **KEY PROJECT FUNCTIONARIES AND THEIR MAJOR RESPONSIBILITIES**

Key functionaries of the Model GP Clusters Project as recorded in the document in 'People's Plan Campaign for Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)' from 2nd October 2020 – 31st January 2021 are

- (i) There will be a Project Management Unit (PMU) under the Centre for Panchayati Raj, Decentralised Planning & Social Service Delivery of the NIRD&PR.
- (ii) The State Link Officers from the NIRD&PR
- (iii) A total twelve number of State Programme Coordinators (SPC) selecting one for every 2-4 States & UTs
- (iv) Total two hundred fifty qualified Young Fellows (YF) selecting one for each cluster.
- (v) A total of two hundred fifty Clusters Level Resource Persons (CLRP) were selected, one for each cluster.
- (vi) Total numbers of one hundred twenty-five Beacon Panchayat Leaders, one for every two Clusters

The Project would entitle the GPs to be at the center stage of all the main activities at the GP level. The objectives of the activities in this project are associated with the development of the institutional capability of the GPs and making them efficient in the preparation, implementation, and monitoring of GPDP. Efficient support from the Young Fellow, support from the line department functionaries operating at the GP/Block levels like the department of agriculture, department of drinking water, etc. support from volunteers called as Gram Panchayat Planning Facilitating Team (GPPFT), and also the Ward Planning Facilitation Team (WPFTs) would guarantee the communication, collaboration, and convergence of varied programs, schemes, efforts, and resources of varied stakeholders. Strong support for GP also encourages and motivates direct people's participation in the decentralized planning process which is one of the most important aspects of the success of decentralised planning. This project also encourages and ensures the participation of SHGs, CSOs, local NGOs, other CBOs, and also community participation in all initiatives taken by the GP under GPDP. All of these lead to enriching the standard of GPDP by addressing the requirements of the citizens at the grassroots level.

### **CONCLUSION**

It is clear from the study that since 1990, several initiatives have been taken by both the State and the Central Government to encourage a participatory planning process at the grassroots level i.e., at the Rural Local Body level but due to various challenges it has not been successful, hindered the pace of formulation of holistic, comprehensive, and visionary plans. So, the challenges need to be addressed and delivered of utmost importance to the GPDP to reach out and fulfill the development aspirations of the local people and that can be an effective decentralised participatory planning by the GPs.

The states have a crucial role to play in the capacity building of PRIs. The state may evolve strategies for capacity building of multi-level stakeholders for strengthening the participatory planning process in the three-tier Panchayati Raj System. One of the approaches may further be considered by the State Government for effective preparation and management of comprehensive GPDP in the state that is creating model success stories of the cluster of panchayats in the formulation of GPDP. Through this model cluster, the state can introduce innovations, new ideas, and best practises in local planning, and that should be the key feature as well as an important strategy of this initiative. Such success paves the way for GP level actions to leverage better results in decentralised participatory planning.

The rapid growth of census towns in India necessitates the development of holistic, comprehensive, and visionary plans to reach out to and fulfil the development aspirations of census town residents in order for them to sustain themselves. Otherwise, census towns will also start to degrade their liveability like urban areas and metro cities.

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