

Q.1) “Many government schemes fail not because of poor intent but due to weak planning and execution. How can better design and implementation improve development outcomes?” (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Despite good intentions, many schemes underperform due to planning and execution gaps. The **Second ARC Report** highlights that weak design and delivery mechanisms often limit impact, underscoring the need for deeper reforms in public service outcomes.

Body

Reasons for Failure: Gaps in Planning and Execution

- 1. Top-down Approach:** schemes may sometimes be designed with limited local consultation, resulting in plans that don't align with actual urban needs.
Example: The **2023 CAG performance audit** noted that Kohima Smart City projects had inadequate stakeholder engagement during planning.
- 2. Fund Flow Delays:** delay in inter-governmental transfers often disrupts service continuity and affects target outcomes.
Example: In 2022–23, only ~**53% of PM-Poshan funds** were released by year-end, causing significant meal service interruptions.
- 3. Weak Monitoring:** lack of real-time oversight and maintenance leads to infrastructure failure and misuse of resources.
- 4. Political Interference:** electoral pressures may shift focus from sustainable reforms to short-term gains, hampering long-term objectives.
Example: States announcing farm loan waivers affected DBT schemes like PM-KISAN.
- 5. Inadequate Capacity:** frontline implementation fails when staff training and institutional support are insufficient.
Example: NITI Aayog's 2022–23 Annual Report highlighted skill gaps in rural development cadres.
- 6. One-size-fits-all Models:** nation-wide frameworks often fail to account for regional diversity, reducing scheme relevance.
Example: PMKVY training modules underperformed in tribal Odisha due to lack of local context adaptation.

Better Design and Implementation: Key Areas for Improvement

- 1. Context-Specific Design:** adapting scheme architecture to local geography and socio-economic contexts enriches relevance.
Example: **PM Awas Yojana** in flood-prone Assam used stilt-based housing designs to reduce climate-related damage.
- 2. Community Involvement:** active local participation during planning and execution builds ownership and ensures effective delivery.
Example: **Kerala's Kudumbashree** network mobilised women-led Gram Sabhas to successfully implement community projects.
- 3. Use of Technology:** digital integration improves transparency, efficiency, and leak-proof delivery.
Example: **JAM trinity** integration in PM-GKY enabled swift and targeted pandemic relief.

4. **Strengthening Frontline Staff:** investing in capacity building and incentives ensures better last-mile delivery.
Example: Additional training for **ASHA workers** under **Janani Suraksha Yojana** improved institutional deliveries in Madhya Pradesh.
5. **Institutional Coordination:** inter-department synergy avoids duplication and improves holistic service delivery.
Example: **POSHAN Abhiyaan** used unified dashboards combining Health, ICDS, and sanitation data for better nutrition tracking.
6. **Simplified Procedures:** reducing documentation and bureaucratic hurdles increases scheme uptake among vulnerable populations.
Example: **Ujjwala 2.0** simplified enrolment procedures and enabled online self-registration, accelerating adoption.

Conclusion

Fulfilling India's vision of **inclusive and effective governance** demands schemes that are **contextually designed** and **efficiently delivered**. Strengthened planning and execution can bridge intent with impact, ensuring real progress for all sections of society.

Q.2) “Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), as part of the third sector, play an important role in India’s development landscape. Discuss the challenges they face in contributing effectively to the development process and suggest solutions” (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

India has nearly **3.4 million NGOs** engaging across sectors like health, education, livelihoods, and rights. They offer grassroots reach and innovation but face operational hurdles. Their effective role remains contingent on strengthening institutional and regulatory support.

Body

Important Role Played by NGOs

1. **Grassroots Reach & Community Linkages:** NGOs operate closely with local populations, understanding context and tailoring interventions.
Example: **Pratham** has improved foundational literacy in rural India through community-specific teaching models.
2. **Innovation & Flexibility:** NGOs can pilot novel models like social enterprises, mobile clinics, skill hubs.
Example: **SELCO Foundation** has pioneered solar-powered micro-grids and solar lighting for off-grid villages.
3. **Mobilising Resources & Networks:** NGOs bring together government grants, CSR, foreign donors, volunteers and media for comprehensive outreach.
Example: **Goonj** mobilised pan-India relief efforts during COVID-19 using donations, CSR, and local volunteer networks.

4. **Advocacy & Policy Influence:** NGOs amplify marginalised voices and inform policy through research and advocacy.
Example: CHRI (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative) was instrumental in promoting RTI legislation in India.
5. **Service Delivery & Monitoring:** Implementing on-ground projects and acting as watchdogs enhances accountability in public schemes.
Example: MKSS (Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan) pioneered social audits under MGNREGA in Rajasthan.

Challenges: Operational Hurdles Faced by NGOs

1. **Financial Constraints & Dependency:** Heavy reliance on donor funding and CSR makes NGOs vulnerable to funding cuts.
Example: Many small education NGOs like **Ekal Vidyalaya** have faced disruptions due to irregular CSR inflows.
2. **Regulatory and FCRA Restrictions:** Stringent Foreign Contribution Regulation Act norms restrict flexibility and impose compliance burdens.
Example: **Greenpeace India** faced repeated FCRA licence suspensions affecting its environmental campaigns.
3. **Capacity & Governance Gaps:** Many NGOs lack professional staff, strong governance structures and impact measurement systems.
Example: Numerous smaller NGOs in northeastern states lack audited accounts or structured evaluation processes.
4. **Political and Bureaucratic Interference:** NGOs working on sensitive issues sometimes face resistance or curbs on operations.
Example: **Amnesty International India** was forced to halt operations after its accounts were frozen under FCRA scrutiny.
5. **Inadequate Registration and Verification Mechanisms:** A large number of NGOs are either unregistered or not compliant with existing registration norms.
Example: A **CAG report** found many NGOs receiving funds without being registered under **NITI Aayog's DARPAN portal**.
6. **Lack of Credible Evaluation Frameworks:** Absence of third-party audits or accreditation affects trust and credibility.
7. **Adverse Intelligence Bureau (IB) Reporting:** Intelligence reports have alleged that certain NGOs negatively impact national development by stalling projects.
Example: An **IB report in 2014** claimed that foreign-funded NGOs delayed infrastructure projects worth billions by opposing them.

Solutions: Strengthening NGO Effectiveness

1. **Accreditation & Transparency Framework:** As recommended by the **2nd ARC**, develop a national NGO council to maintain registries, enforce audit norms, and publicly rate performance.
2. **Capacity Building & Professionalisation:** As suggested by the **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice (2023)**, initiate structured training programs in partnership with larger NGOs and state agencies to enhance governance and delivery standards.
3. **Funding Diversification & Sustainability:** Promote hybrid revenue models and incentivise public and CSR donations through tax benefits.

4. **Convergence & Coordination Platforms:** Set up district-level forums to encourage collaboration among NGOs and alignment with local government plans.
5. **Enabling Legal Environment:** Reform FCRA compliance processes to be less arbitrary while safeguarding genuine operations, especially for rights-based NGOs.

Conclusion

To fully harness the **third sector's** potential, NGOs need professional capacity, funding resilience, transparency and enabling regulation. With **strategic support and collaborative ecosystems**, NGOs can amplify development outcomes and foster inclusive growth across India.

Q.3) Participatory local planning is vital to realizing the vision of grassroots democracy in India. Discuss its significance and examine the key challenges in institutionalizing bottom-up planning at the Panchayat and municipal levels. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

India has over **2.5 lakh Panchayats** and **4,000+ Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)**, constitutionally empowered to undertake planning. Yet, institutionalizing genuine bottom-up planning remains a challenge due to capacity, coordination, and structural limitations.

Body

Significance of Bottom-Up Local Planning

1. **Need-Based and Contextual Development:** Bottom-up planning ensures resource allocation is aligned to local priorities.
Example: In **Kerala**, participatory planning led to localised irrigation and farming projects.
2. **Social Inclusion and Empowerment:** Local planning processes empower marginalized communities to voice their needs.
Example: **SC/ST women in Kerala's NHGs** contributed to livelihood and housing plans.
3. **Efficient Service Delivery:** Decentralized planning improves last-mile delivery of welfare schemes.
Example: **Karnataka** linked MGNREGA to local land and water needs.
4. **Enhanced Accountability and Transparency:** Citizen involvement in planning reduces leakages and builds trust.
5. **Strengthening Democratic Governance:** Participatory planning deepens democracy and civic engagement.
Example: **Maharashtra's Gram Sabhas** influenced school development plans.

Challenges in Institutionalising Bottom-Up Planning

1. **Capacity Deficits:** Panchayats and ULBs often lack technical staff and planning expertise.
Example: North-Eastern states report low technical support to local bodies.

2. **Fragmented Planning Processes:** Parallel schemes by line departments weaken integrated local planning.
Example: CSS often bypass Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs).
3. **Weak Data Systems:** Absence of reliable local data hampers evidence-based planning.
Example: Many villages lack updated socio-economic or GIS data.
4. **Low Gram Sabha Participation:** Attendance remains poor due to apathy, social barriers, or lack of awareness.
Example: Bihar's Gram Sabhas often don't meet quorum.
5. **Political Interference and Elite Capture:** Local elites manipulate plan priorities to suit vested interests.
Example: In some states, dominant caste groups skew fund allocation.
6. **Urban Governance Constraints:** ULBs lack clarity on planning roles and often depend on parastatal agencies.
Example: Delhi's DDA, not ULBs, leads city planning.
7. **Poor Convergence Mechanisms:** Lack of coordination across levels of government leads to duplication or underutilization of funds.
Example: District Plans often exclude Panchayat inputs.

Solutions: Strengthening Participatory Local Planning

1. **Capacity Building of Local Institutions:** Train Panchayat and municipal staff in spatial, financial, and sectoral planning; recommended by the **15th Finance Commission**.
2. **Integrated Planning Platforms:** Use platforms like the PlanPlus and ActionSoft under eGramSwaraj for synchronized rural-urban planning.
3. **Robust Local Data Systems:** Develop village and ward-level dashboards using SECC, GIS and community mapping.
4. **Incentivise Gram Sabha Participation:** Link **performance grants** to active citizen involvement and quorum-based decisions.
5. **Decentralisation of Planning Powers:** Implement recommendations of the **Parliamentary Standing Committee** on Local Governance to give ULBs greater planning autonomy.

Conclusion

Institutionalising **bottom-up planning** can revolutionize **inclusive development**, but it requires structural reforms, digital tools, and community ownership. Empowered local governments are pivotal to achieving **people-centric, sustainable governance** from the grassroots.

Q.4) Self-Help Groups (SHGs) play a critical role in rural development and women's empowerment in India, yet their full potential remains unrealized. Discuss the key structural and socio-cultural barriers that limit their effectiveness, and suggest measures to enhance their impact. (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

Over **12 million SHGs** operate in India, many linked to banks under schemes like **DAY-NRLM**. Though crucial for grassroots empowerment, especially of women, SHGs face institutional and cultural barriers that constrain their full developmental impact.

Body

Important Role Played by SHGs

1. **Promoting Financial Inclusion:** SHGs improve access to savings, credit, and insurance among the rural poor.
Example: **Kudumbashree in Kerala** offers micro loans to women.
2. **Enabling Women's Empowerment:** SHGs foster decision-making, confidence, and community leadership among women.
Example: **SHG women in Andhra Pradesh** run local canteens and tailoring units.
3. **Enhancing Livelihood Opportunities:** SHGs enable income-generating activities via collective entrepreneurship.
Example: **MAVIM in Maharashtra** links SHGs to markets and training; **Lakhpati Didi** promotes rural women micro-entrepreneurs.
4. **Community Mobilisation & Social Capital:** SHGs foster solidarity and participatory governance in villages.
Example: **SHGs in Tamil Nadu** lead sanitation and anti-liquor campaigns.
5. **Contributing to Public Welfare Delivery:** SHGs assist in running ration shops, midday meals, and health awareness campaigns.
Example: **SHGs in Bihar** support PDS and health outreach under **World Bank** support.

Challenges: Structural and Socio-Cultural Barriers

1. **Inadequate Financial Literacy and Digital Access:** Many SHG members lack formal education and struggle with digital banking.
Example: In Jharkhand, women depend on male intermediaries for transactions.
2. **Limited Market Linkages and Value Addition:** SHGs face challenges in scaling up production and accessing markets.
3. **Weak Federations and Oversight:** Poor handholding and capacity support reduce the collective strength of SHGs.
Example: **NABARD** flagged weak support systems in Odisha SHGs.
4. **Patriarchal Norms and Resistance:** Traditional gender roles limit participation and autonomy of women in SHGs.
5. **Caste-Based Discrimination and Exclusion:** Marginalised groups often face exclusion or token participation in SHGs.
6. **Irregular Meetings and Low Group Cohesion:** Migration or domestic work hinders regular SHG activity.
Example: Participation drops during harvest season in MP.
7. **Credit Utilisation Gaps and Loan Misuse:** Borrowed funds are used for consumption rather than productive use.

Solutions: Strengthening SHG Impact

1. **Financial Literacy and Digital Training:** Train SHG members in digital banking and credit planning through convergence with **Digital India**, **PMGDISHA**, and capacity-building via **SHAKTI Portal**.

2. **Robust Federation Building:** Implement continuous capacity-building support through **DAY-NRLM** and link SHGs with producer groups and Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs).
3. **Market Access and Branding Support:** Facilitate tie-ups with e-commerce platforms, government fairs, and branding initiatives like **ODOP** (One District One Product).
4. **Inclusive SHG Formation Norms:** Enforce caste and gender **representation quotas** in SHG formation and leadership to foster equity and diversity.
5. **Community Sensitisation Campaigns:** Leverage ASHA workers, PRI leaders, and social media to challenge patriarchal norms and promote SHG autonomy across states.

Conclusion

SHGs have the potential to transform rural India socio-economically, but this requires tackling deep-rooted structural and cultural limitations. A **multi-pronged support strategy** can empower SHGs as true engines of inclusive rural development.

Q.5) "Development today is no longer the sole domain of the government. Critically examine the role of donors, charities, community-based organizations and institutional stakeholders in shaping India's development agenda." (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

India's development landscape has evolved into a **multi-stakeholder ecosystem**. According to **NITI Aayog**, non-state actors contribute significantly to sectors like health, education, and livelihoods, complementing state efforts, especially in areas where public service delivery remains inadequate.

Body

Complementary Roles of Non-State Actors

1. **Donors and Philanthropic Foundations:** Provide funding, technical expertise, and policy advocacy. Example: **Gates Foundation** supports immunization with WHO and Gavi.
2. **Charities and Faith-Based Organizations:** Deliver last-mile services to marginalized communities. Example: **Akshaya Patra** serves 2 million midday meals.
3. **Community-Based Organizations (CBOs):** Enable participatory development and grassroots accountability. Example: **SEWA** organizes 2.5 million informal women workers.
4. **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Institutional Stakeholders:** Drive innovation and scale through CSR mandates (Companies Act, 2013). Example: **Tata Trusts** works with NITI Aayog on digital literacy.
5. **Bridging Governance Gaps:** Operate in underserved regions (e.g., conflict zones, tribal areas). Example: **PRADAN** supports tribal livelihoods in Jharkhand.

Challenges in Multi-Stakeholder Governance

1. **Fragmentation and Lack of Synergy:** Parallel initiatives waste resources (e.g., NGO and government schools in tribal areas with no shared learning).

2. **Accountability Gaps:** 20,000+ NGOs lost FCRA licenses since 2014 for non-compliance (MHA data), but misuse cases like fund diversion persist.
3. **Urban and Sectoral Bias:** 70% of CSR funds target education and health (India CSR Report 2023), while rural sanitation and disability receive <5%.
4. **Donor-Driven Agendas:** Foreign-funded NGOs sometimes prioritize donor templates over local needs (e.g., generic nutrition programs ignoring regional diets).
5. **Political Resistance:** Regulatory crackdowns on critical NGOs (e.g. Amnesty International's 2020 exit after FCRA freeze following human rights reports).

Way Forward

1. **Formalize State-Civil Society Partnerships:** Create NITI Aayog-led platforms for joint planning (e.g. Aspirational Districts Program).
2. **Reform FCRA/CSR Frameworks:** Simplify compliance while enforcing transparency (e.g., FATF-aligned donor disclosures).
3. **Localize Development:** Align NGO projects with Panchayat-level plans (e.g. Kerala's Kudumbashree model).
4. **Incentivize Community Ownership:** Scale up participatory budgeting (e.g., Meghalaya's Village Councils).
5. **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Share real-time data via platforms like DISHA (Digital Infrastructure for Social Impact).

Conclusion

India's development future hinges on **structured collaboration**. By balancing innovation with accountability, non-state actors can amplify state efforts, ensuring **equitable and sustainable growth**.