



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 \(GDPDP\)](#), 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.

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)