Strengthening capacities of local governance institutions.
A Study on Revamped Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan(RGSA).

[1]devireddy Pujitha Reddy, [2]Dr.T.Nagaraju
[1]M. A. Political Science, Dept. of Political Science and Public Administration, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam.
[2]Faculty, Dept. of Political Science and Public Administration, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam

Introduction

Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) was introduced in the Union Budget 2016–17 to help Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) strengthen their capacity to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Centrally Sponsored Scheme of RGSA was authorised by the Union Cabinet on April 21, 2018, for implementation from Financial Year 2018–19 to 2021–22, in accordance with this announcement and the recommendations of the Committee chaired by the Vice Chairman-NITI Aayog. According to the RGSA evaluation, the complexities and difficulties of training programs necessitate strong institutional competence in terms of building infrastructure, gaining access to cutting-edge training tools and equipment, and combining faculty and resources through collaboration with top-tier institutions. Additionally, via sufficient Capacity Building & Training (CB&T) initiatives in key PRI areas and developing demands arising with the shifting governance mechanism, the findings urge for more coordinated procedures for Panchayat-level governance reform. The study suggested that the RGSA program be continued in order to enhance PRIs, and it acknowledged the interventions that were undertaken under it. Consequently, the Revamped RGSA concept was developed.

2.1 Objectives of the Study:

i. To understand the objective of RGSA thoroughly.

ii. To asses the efficiency of the scheme.

iii. To illustrate the shortcomings of the scheme.

iv. To identify ways for more effective outcomes.

3.1 Methodology

● In this paper secondary resources were used from government websites, National newspapers like the Hindu and few online resources were also used.

3.2 Focus areas of the scheme

● Basic orientation for Elected representatives of panchayats within 6 months of their elections

● Strengthening of panchayat SHG Governance

- Hybrid mode of trainings leveraging emerging technologies such as Augmented reality , visual reality, Metaverse etc.
- Training of additional Trainers in 9 thematic areas of localisation of SDG's
- Building of Capacity of PRI's on digital literacy etc.

3.3 To Fill Gaps In

- Capacity building and Training with more focus on Northeastern states.
- Gap filling support of Economic Development and Income Enhancement projects.
- Hand-holding support for GPDP formulation by Academic Institutions/Institutions of excellence/CSO/CBOs/NGOs (registered at NGO Darpan of NITI Aayog).
- e-enablement of Panchayats for e-governance to enhance efficiency and transparency with thrust on integration of Applications developed by the Ministry.
- Facilitate renting of office space for SPRS/DPRC/BPRC and hiring of training infrastructure for short term basis at District and Block level.
- National component for setting protocols and building capacities.

4.1. Funding structure

Sharing pattern: The Centre contributes 60% and the corresponding State contributes 40% in the 60:40 funding-sharing arrangement. Notably, the North-Eastern (NE) and hilly states benefit more from this ratio, which has a greater central support ratio of 90:10. The government's dedication to equitable development across is demonstrated by this specific regard for the Northeast and hilly states, which takes into account the particular difficulties and developmental requirements of these areas.

Therefore, the funding structure shows the government's dedication to promoting rural development in a variety of states, guaranteeing efficient attention to each region's particular needs and objectives.

State Component (Excluding northeastern states)	North Eastern States	Union Territories
Central Government contribution:60%	Central Government contribution :90%	Central Government contribution:100%
State Government contribution:40%	State Government contribution :10%	State Government contribution:0%

4.2. Eligibility of states and union territories in receiving funds under RGSA

The following requirements must be fulfilled by States/UTs in order to receive funding under the updated RGSA Scheme: A prerequisite condition

(i) In order to release the first instalment in accordance with GFR 238(2) and GFR 239, the state must provide the Utilisation Certificate (UC) in GFR-12C format for the prior year. (ii) The state is required to provide the audit report from the previous fiscal year, which was provided by the independent agency.

(iii) State-provided financial and physical progress reports for the previous years are required. (iv) RGSA-MIS and the Training Management Portal (TMP) are regularly updated to reflect developments.

(v) The state government must open separate budget lines for the federal and state shares, and the state budget must include the required funding for each component.

vi) The program requires the creation of a Single Nodal Agency (SNA) and the mapping of a Single Nodal Account with the Public Finance Management System (PFMS). (vii) The designated Single Nodal Account (SNA) should show the expenses incurred throughout the fiscal year as well as the total amount of money that was not spent.

(viti) The state treasury should be mapped to the state scheme, and complete integration must be achieved.

(ix) Within 21 days of receiving the Central share in its account with the RBI, the State Government must move it to the account of the relevant SNA. The State Government may not transfer the central share to the Personal Deposit (PD) account or any other account.

FOR UT's
  i.   In non-Part IX areas, elections are often held for Panchayats or other small rural bodies.
  ii.   Panchayats must have at least one-third of their seats reserved for women.
  iii. The State Finance Commission's (SFC) constitution is reviewed every five years, and the State legislature receives the Action Taken Report (ATR) including the SFC's recommendations.
  iv.   All districts must establish District Planning Committees (DPCs) and issue guidelines and regulations to ensure their operation.
  v.   PRIs' yearly comprehensive State Capacity Building Plan is prepared and submitted.
  vi.   Before being submitted to the Ministry for consideration, the Economic Development and Income Enhancement projects must receive the permission of the appropriate Panchayat (GP for GP level projects, Block Panchayat for Block level projects, and District Panchayat for District level initiatives).

4.3. BUDGETS FOR CENTRAL COMPONENTS;

S.N.	Central Components	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	Total
1	National Plan for Technical Assistance	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	28.00
2	Mission Mode Project on e-Panchayat	20.00	20.00	20.10	20.10	80.20
3	Incentivization of Panchayats	50.00	47.00	47.00	48.00	192.00
4	Action Research & Publicity	13.00	8.00	8.00	10.00	39.00
5	International Cooperation	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.80
6	NIRD&PR and other Institutes of Excellence (Agency services)	20.00	8.00	8.00	8.00	44.00
	Total	110.20	90.20	90.30	93.30	384.00

In detail, National Plan for Technical Assistance (NPTA), This component includes technical assistance for a range of activities necessary for the scheme's seamless operation and implementation, such as the National Programme Management Unit (NPMU), which is staffed with knowledgeable and experienced experts and consultants from related fields or themes; support staff, including translators, data entry operators, office assistants, secretarial staff, MTS, etc.; the acquisition of office supplies, such as computers, laptops, printers, copier, and furniture; the rental or outsourcing of vehicles; and other such activities that are occasionally required for the scheme's effective implementation. It is clear that there was no increase in the budget for the above mentioned following years.

As part of the overall framework for training, capacity building, and technical support for PRIs, cooperation with academic institutions, national prestigious institutions, and institutions of excellence working in the field of capacity building, such as the State Institutes of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (SIRD&PR) and the National Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (NIRD&PR), will be undertaken in order to provide capacity building to PRIs under the RGSA program . There is less concentration on this matter as there was a significant downfall in 2023 budget allocations onwards.

By making PRIs more open, responsible, and efficient as branches of decentralised self-governing organisations, the Mission Mode initiative on e-Panchayat seeks to fundamentally alter how PRIs operate. The initiative intends to strengthen local administration and enable democracy to function at the grassroots level by automating internal workflow operations for all PRIs nationwide, which will benefit PRI employees and about 32 lakh elected representatives.

To facilitate work-based accounting, e-GramSWARAJ, a unified program, was created. PRI's are now required to onboard for their transactions via the e-Gram SWARAJ-PFMS Interface (eGSPI).

Awards have long served as a powerful source of motivation, and given credit for exceptional work, recipients are incentivised to streamline government, particularly at the local level. Under its Incentivisation of Panchayats plan, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj incentives top-performing Panchayats, States, and UTs with prizes and cash incentives in appreciation of their hard effort to improve the delivery of public goods and services.

Two Central Sector schemes, namely (a) Media & Publicity and (b) Action Research & Research Studies (AR&RS), were combined to establish the Action Research & Publicity Scheme. By enabling two-way contact between policymakers and PRIs through various mediums, such as workshops, conferences, seminars, and similar events, information, education, and communication (IEC) play a crucial role in engaging with stakeholders.

A non-governmental organization founded in 1995, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) is present in over 40 Commonwealth nations and is made up of several groups that represent both national and state ministries of local government.

The Forum offers a forum and a voice for member nations to share ideas and information in order to support local government and rural development initiatives. In addition to meeting various MoPR mandates on the performance of Rural Local Bodies, the activities under RGSA will benefit from the various CLGF activities, including international seminars, workshops, publications, research, and interface with international organizations and exchange programs in local governance.

Institutional Framework for National Implementation, Monitoring, and Management At the national level, the following institutional mechanisms are planned: these include National steering committees (NSC), Central Empowered Committee (CEC) ,

National Project Management Unit (NPMU) , National Advisory Committees (NAC).
4.4 Budget for state components ;

(Rs. in crore)

S.N.	State Components	2022-23	2022-24	2022-25	2022-26	Total
1	Capacity Building & Training	466.77	533.57	584.36	590.16	2174.86
2	Institutional Infrastructure and Human Resource	129.03	129.03	129.03	129.03	516.12
3	Distance learning Facility through SATCOM/IP based virtual Class room/ similar technology	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	40.00
4	Support for Panchayat Infrastructure	100.00	175.00	350.00	375.00	1000.00
5	Programme Management Units (PMU)	190.60	295.20	230.26	279.98	996.04
6	E-enablement of Panchayats	7.50	7.50	7.50	7.50	30.00
7	Special Support for strengthening Gram Sabhas in PESA Areas	105.69	105.69	105.69	105.69	422.76
8	Support for Innovation (Innovative activities)	17.00	17.00	17.00	17.00	68.00
9	Project based support for Economic development & income enhancement	23.00	23.00	23.00	23.00	92.00
10	IEC Activities (2%)	20.99	25.92	29.14	30.75	106.80
11	Programme Management (1.5%)	15.74	19.44	21.85	23.06	80.09
	Total	1086.32	1341.35	1507.83	1591.17	5526.67

Institutional Infrastructure and Human Resources, Distance Learning Facility, Panchayat

Infrastructure Support, Program Management Unit, E-enablement of Panchayat, Special Support for bolstering Gram Sabhas in PESA Areas, Support for Innovation (Innovative activities), Project-based support for Economic Development & Income Enhancement, IEC Activities, and Program Management are the other activities that fall under the scheme. States are expected to create plans for central funding so they can carry out the activities on the list of activities allowed under the scheme, according to their needs and priorities.

5.1. RGSA in achieving the goals of SDG's
 The nation's primary developmental issues – poverty, public health, education ,gender, sanitation, drinking water, livelihood creation, etc, Aligned with SDG's and are in the purview of panchayats. Therefore by identifying 9 different themes at grassroot level and implementing them by 2030, the panchayats have been highlighted as major participants in the localization of the SDG's using a thematic approach.

PRI's play a major role in this endeavour as a result. To achieve the various SDG's , several Ministries and departments have been mapped as a nodal Ministries and Departments. The ministry of Panchayati raj has been supporting efforts to achieve the SDG's by having

Panchayats adopt nine thematic approaches that span nearly all of the SDGs, despite not being listed as a central ministry. The nine themes with their corresponding SDG mappings are:

 These nine themes are interconnected and cross-cutting, encompassing all 17 SDGs. Although NITI Aayog has mapped the 17 SDGs to various Ministries, a given subject addresses many SDGs and, as a result, plays a significant role in the achievement of multiple Ministries and State departments. It is necessary for many Ministries and Departments to come together in order to fully embody the "Whole of Government Approach" and focus on a single issue.

6.1. Various Challenges to RGSA

i.   Insufficiently trained personnel: Lack of competent data entry operators, junior engineers, secretaries, and computer operators in panchayats.

ii.   Poor instruction: insufficient training programs on important topics including project planning, financial management, and disaster management for elected leaders and Panchayat officials.

iii.   Poor levels of literacy: Participation in government processes is hampered by rural inhabitants' low literacy rates.

iv.   Financial Limitations:Disparities in implementation might result from unequal financial distribution, which varies among states according to their requirements.

v.   Fund release delays: Issues with the prompt distribution of federal funding to states that affect project implementation.

vi.   Governance Difficulties:The impact of political figures obstructs Panchayat-level decision-making. Inability to hold Panchayat officials responsible for providing services: This is a problem .

vii. Inadequate Infrastructure:The digital gap is the lack of internet and digital infrastructure in rural regions, which makes e-governance efforts more difficult.

viii. Poor physical infrastructure: Many villages lack basic amenities like water supplies, roads, and sanitary facilities. ix.   Inequality of gender: Insufficient representation and involvement of women in Panchayat decision-making.

x.   Social exclusion: Underprivileged groups have a hard time getting benefits from programs.

7.1. Andhra Pradesh being one of the successful state:

Under the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA), Andhra Pradesh has made notable progress, demonstrating its dedication to empowering rural communities and bolstering grassroots government.

The State made impressive strides in infrastructure development, inclusive governance, and capacity-building between August and November 2024, demonstrating a methodical and well-organised approach to empowering rural communities and bolstering panchayats. Andhra Pradesh had set the lofty goal of training three lakh elected officials and employees of the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI).1.36 lakh of these sessions, which focused on the localized Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), had been finished by November, and another 1.04 lakh were scheduled for December.In order to accomplish these training goals, the Andhra Pradesh State Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (APSIRDPR) was given ₹22 crore in two installments.One significant administrative change was the transfer of APSIRDPR from the GVWV & VSWS Department to the Department of

Panchayati Raj and Rural Development.While in New Delhi recently, Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan appealed for ₹20 crore to build a permanent APSIRDPR building in Amaravati.

8.1. Way Forward

i.   While the RGSA has led to substantial improvements, challenges persist, particularly regarding connectivity, literacy, and revenue generation. Many Panchayats still struggle with low digital literacy, limited internet access, and inadequate funding. While the PES system and e-Panchayat initiatives have improved transparency and accountability, more support is needed to ensure all Panchayats have the digital infrastructure to participate fully in the scheme.

ii.   Another challenge lies in sustaining the infrastructure and human resources required for effective local governance. While the RGSA has made strides in capacity building, many

Panchayats face significant turnover in trained staff, creating gaps in knowledge and operational continuity. Building a steady pipeline of trained personnel, possibly through local institutes or partnerships with academic institutions, could bridge this gap and help ensure that knowledge and skills are retained within PRIs. iii.   A critical next step for RGSA is to deepen its focus on revenue generation, making Panchayats financially independent. A more self-reliant Panchayat is not only empowered to make decisions aligned with local needs but can also respond more effectively to unforeseen challenges. In some regions, pilot projects focusing on property tax collection, leasing community assets, and offering paid services have shown promise in boosting Panchayat revenue. Scaling these models across different regions could help create financially resilient local bodies capable of sustaining development projects independently.

9.1. Conclusion

The Rural Governance Support Program (RGSA) has been a game-changer in promoting better development and governance in rural regions. In order to improve the provision of vital services at the local level, RGSA has made a substantial contribution by strengthening institutional capacity, encouraging participatory governance, and assisting community empowerment. However, resolving current issues like guaranteeing fair access, getting past resource constraints, and bolstering local leadership are necessary for the program to succeed. Maintaining and expanding on the program's accomplishments in the future will require more funding, more policy interventions, and improved stakeholder cooperation. The RGSA offers a model for efforts of a similar nature that aim to support inclusive, sustainable development in rural communities across the globe, as well as important lessons in rural governance.

10.1. References

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