

Role of Gram Panchayat in Providing Basic Services: A Case Study of Beguru Village

Dr. Sushma R

Associate Professor of Economics, Government First Grade College, Vijaya Nagar, Bengaluru-560104

Abstract

Following the historic enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992, rural local bodies (Panchayati Raj Institutions) in India were institutionalized as constitutional units of self-governance. At the foundational tier of this structure sits the Gram Panchayat, tasked with the vital responsibility of providing core civic amenities and executing socio-economic welfare schemes. This study evaluates the performance, systemic capacity, and service delivery efficiency of the Beguru Gram Panchayat in Karnataka. Employing a mixed-methods empirical approach, the paper integrates structural household surveys, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and physical field observations. The quantitative findings indicate high citizen satisfaction levels in fundamental utilities such as drinking water supply (78%) and street lighting (72%), driven by centralized schemes like the Jal Jeevan Mission. However, vital sanitation and municipal services exhibit substantial delivery deficits, with satisfaction rates dropping for basic sanitation infrastructure (60%) and rural drainage operations (55%). Key structural barriers include volatile fiscal dependency on top-down state/central grants, acute technical administrative staff shortages, elite capture in institutional decision-making, and minimal community mobilization during local planning processes. The article provides a series of comprehensive policy interventions—including digital fiscal reforms via e-GramSwaraj, institutionalizing mandatory social audits, capacity building for local representatives, and optimizing local property tax collections to ensure grassroots democratic institutional sustainability.

Keywords: Keywords: Gram Panchayat, Local Self-Governance, 73rd Constitutional Amendment, Public Service Delivery, Rural Infrastructure, Peri-Urban Governance, Karnataka.

1. Introduction

The institutional landscape of rural governance across the Republic of India experienced an epochal transformation with the passage of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992. This landmark legislative reform explicitly accorded structural constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), positioning them as authentic instruments of grassroots democratic self-governance. By setting up a standardized three-tier federal governance architecture, the amendment sought to decentralize planning, developmental execution, and administrative power away from centralized state capitals directly down to rural community spheres. Operating at the lowest operational level of this structure is the Gram Panchayat (GP), which acts as the direct regulatory interface between the state apparatus and rural communities. Under the operational provisions of Karnataka's Gram Swaraj and Panchayat Raj Act of 1993, Gram Panchayats are statutorily mandated to serve as the principal executing vehicle for the delivery of vital civic infrastructure and core services. These essential responsibilities encompass safe drinking water

provisions, environmental sanitation systems, solid waste management, internal village asphalt/concrete roadways, public street lighting installation, monitoring primary education infrastructure, and running local public healthcare campaigns. The provision of these utilities is not merely an administrative obligation, but serves as a core foundation for enhancing human development indicators, reducing deep-seated rural inequalities, and cultivating balanced economic growth.

However, the operational environment of many Gram Panchayats in contemporary India has grown highly complex due to rapid peri-urbanization. Villages located around primary metropolitan economic growth corridors—specifically within the Bengaluru Rural district context—face distinct demographic and operational pressures. These peri-urban clusters experience rapid population inflows, converting traditional agricultural landscapes into dense residential areas, straining local groundwater tables, and exponentially escalating demands for solid waste management and infrastructure support. This article examines the Beguru Gram Panchayat, utilizing it as a localized institutional case study to evaluate how effectively these grassroots authorities manage service delivery pipelines amid distinct fiscal constraints and capacity limitations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Foundational Models of Democratic Decentralization

The foundational principles of democratic decentralization in independent India trace back to the pioneering framework established by the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957), which first advocated for a institutionalized three-tier system to facilitate genuine public participation in rural development. This model was further developed by the Ashok Mehta Committee (1978), which explicitly recommended empowering these local organs with substantial financial and administrative capabilities, transforming them from mere developmental extensions of state secretariats into strong units of local self-governance. Pioneering scholars like George Mathew (1994) argue that decentralized institutional structures drastically bridge the structural gap between marginalized communities and state planners, thereby vastly improving local bureaucratic accountability.

2.2 Service Delivery and Grassroots Realities

Recent empirical scholarship reveals significant variation between the statutory powers given to local bodies and actual service delivery on the ground. Rao, Premanandam, and Naga Raju (2024) underscore that decentralized institutions compress public feedback loops; by localizing administration, citizens can hold elected ward representatives directly accountable for infrastructural failures. Similarly, Chathukulam et al. (2021) maintain that because the Gram Panchayat stands as the primary institutional point of contact for rural inhabitants, any system failure directly compromises the broader legitimacy of local governance. Empirical field research conducted by Ilangovan et al. (2026) demonstrates that targeted public programs, such as the Jal Jeevan Mission, successfully expand baseline drinking water coverage, yet long-term operational sustainability remains a persistent challenge.

2.3 Institutional Challenges, Elite Capture, and Fiscal Dependency

A major strain running through contemporary literature centers on the institutional weaknesses of Gram Panchayats. Investigations by the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) highlight a widespread crisis of fiscal autonomy, showing that the vast majority of local councils remain almost entirely dependent on central and state tied grants. This dependency restricts their operational flexibility to design localized, demand-driven budgets. Furthermore, research by Bhattacharya et al. (2022) addresses the socio-political challenges of 'elite capture,' wherein local wealthy elites or dominant social groups control Panchayat

decision-making processes, steering resources away from vulnerable blocks. Administrative reports from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj consistently point out staff deficits, specifically lacking technical officers and full-time secretaries, as a key factor slowing down fund utilization and project execution.

3. Contextual Profile of the Study Area

The subject of this empirical investigation is the Beguru Gram Panchayat, situated within the Hosakote Taluk of the Bengaluru Rural District, Karnataka. According to demographic baselines established by the Census of India, the focal village settlement of Beguru houses a population of approximately 1,436 individuals structured across 315 distinct households, while the entire Gram Panchayat cluster encompassing surrounding habitations reaches a broader population of roughly 3,000 citizens. The demography of the area features a literacy rate of 77.22%, outperforming the national and state averages, and includes a significant proportion of marginalized communities, with Scheduled Castes (SCs) constituting 18.18% and Scheduled Tribes (STs) representing 12.15% of the local population.

Demographic Indicator	Beguru Village Baseline	Karnataka State Average
Total Settlement Population	1,436	61.10 Million
Total Household Units	315	12.80 Million
Aggregate Literacy Rate	77.22%	75.36%
Gender Sex Ratio (Females/1,000 Males)	954	973
Scheduled Caste (SC) Share	18.18%	17.15%
Scheduled Tribe (ST) Share	12.15%	7.02%

Beguru presents a distinct peri-urban ecosystem. Historically defined by rainfed agrarian activities focused on ragi, maize, and small-scale dairy farming, the village's close proximity to Bengaluru's major technology corridors—such as Whitefield and the industrial zones of Hosakote—has driven extensive land-use changes. This rapid urbanization has introduced mixed housing units, multi-story apartments, and small commercial entities into the village borders. Consequently, the Beguru Gram Panchayat faces the complex task of managing urban-scale challenges—such as high-volume dry solid waste processing, industrial runoff, and severe groundwater depletion—while operating under a rural administrative structure and constrained fiscal allocations.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Hypotheses Framework

This study uses a mixed-methods convergent case study design, collecting quantitative metrics and qualitative narratives simultaneously to triangulate findings and ensure analytical rigor. To structure the field inquiry, the following hypotheses were evaluated:

- **Null Hypothesis (H_0):** There is no significant relationship between public involvement in the Gram Sabha and citizen satisfaction regarding local public service delivery.
- **Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):** Higher levels of citizen participation in local Gram Sabha decision-making processes correlate with higher public satisfaction regarding basic service delivery pipelines.

4.2 Sampling Framework and Data Collection Strategies

The empirical sample was selected using systematic random sampling drawn from the official voter lists

provided by the Gram Panchayat office. A sample size of 100 representative household heads was surveyed using a comprehensive, pre-tested structural questionnaire written in the local language (Kannada). This quantitative survey was supplemented by six targeted Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted with essential local actors, including the Gram Panchayat Secretary, the Sarpanch, local Anganwadi workers, and primary school teachers. Qualitative data was further gathered via three distinct Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) organized with specific demographics—a women's group, an agricultural workforce group, and a marginalized-caste cohort—to evaluate equity challenges across the delivery framework. Direct field observation checklists were utilized to physically verify the operational status of local public assets, including borewells, drainage lines, primary schools, and Primary Health Centres (PHCs).

5. Data Analysis and Institutional Interpretation

The quantitative data collected from the field survey was compiled to evaluate two critical dimensions of rural governance: the citizen satisfaction indices across primary service sectors and the distribution of major infrastructure problems reported by households.

5.1 Sectoral Analysis of Citizen Satisfaction Indices

The field survey measured household satisfaction levels across key infrastructure sectors. The empirical breakdown indicates that the Beguru Gram Panchayat has achieved solid success in specific traditional utility areas, while facing service delivery deficits in environmental sanitation and drainage.

Public Service Utility Sector	Measured Citizen Satisfaction Level (%)
Water Supply Operations	78%
Public Street Light Provision	72%
Health Services & Immunization	68%
Road and Connectivity Infrastructure	65%
Sanitation and Waste Management	60%
Drainage System Operations	55%

The high satisfaction score recorded for water supply operations (78%) is directly tied to the implementation of the central government's Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), which enabled the local council to establish functioning household tap connections across the primary settlement. Street lighting also achieved a strong satisfaction rating (72%), driven by the systematic deployment of energy-efficient LED fixtures funded by the 15th Finance Commission grants. Conversely, the low satisfaction scores for environmental sanitation (60%) and drainage systems (55%) indicate clear operational issues. Qualitative data from focus groups revealed that while households constructed individual toilets under the Swachh Bharat Mission framework, the lack of open public drainage networks and institutionalized solid waste disposal systems leads to frequent water logging and waste accumulation during the monsoon seasons.

5.2 Identification of Primary Structural Challenges

To identify specific execution gaps, respondents were asked to identify the primary structural problem impacting their daily households. The distribution of these responses highlights critical issues in local public utilities.

Reported Core Utility Problem	Number of Primary Respondents (N=100)
Irregular Water Supply Delivery	32
Poor Internal Road Maintenance	28
Garbage and Solid Waste Mismanagement	18
Drainage Blockage and Overflow Issues	12
Low Public Health Facility Access	10

Although water supply achieved high broad satisfaction, it was also identified as the most urgent daily problem by 32% of respondents, who noted issues with supply irregularity. Key Informant Interviews with the Gram Panchayat Secretary confirmed that the local council faces frequent electricity load-shedding and rapid groundwater depletion, which disrupts regular pumping schedules and causes water shortages during the dry summer months. Poor internal road maintenance was cited by 28% of the sample, driven by heavy truck traffic related to commercial warehouse development in the peri-urban zone, which rapidly damages asphalt surfaces managed by the Panchayat.

5.3 Financial Analysis and Budgetary Allocation Realities

An evaluation of the Gram Panchayat's internal accounts reveals a heavy reliance on top-down fiscal flows. Over 85% of the total revenue budget is derived from tied central and state programmatic transfers—specifically through the 15th Finance Commission guidelines and schemes like MGNREGA. The internal budget allocation across sectors follows a specific expenditure pattern: Water Infrastructure commands the highest share at 35%, followed by Road Infrastructure at 25%, Sanitation Operations at 15%, Health Programs at 15%, and Primary Education Infrastructure receiving the remaining 10%. This distribution reflects a clear priority toward capital-intensive physical infrastructure (water and roads), which accounts for 60% of total expenditure. However, this focus leaves inadequate funding for daily maintenance, public health monitors, and educational quality upgrades. Interviews indicated that local revenue collection—such as property taxes on local stores and residential structures—remains limited due to outdated property valuation registries and weak enforcement mechanisms, which restricts the Panchayat's ability to fund flexible, localized public projects.

6. Key Findings and Comprehensive Discussion

- **Asset-Execution Disconnect:** The introduction of centralized programs like the Jal Jeevan Mission and the Swachh Bharat Mission has successfully built foundational public assets across Beguru, expanding baseline water access and household toilet coverage.
- **Sanitation and Drainage Deficits:** A significant operational gap exists between asset construction and long-term maintenance. Open public drainage channels are frequently blocked by solid waste, leading to unsanitary conditions during monsoon periods.
- **Fiscal Vulnerability and Grant Dependency:** The Gram Panchayat remains heavily reliant on tied fiscal transfers from central and state governments, which restricts its financial flexibility to reallocate resources to address emergent local issues.
- **Minimal Community Mobilization:** Public attendance at statutory Gram Sabha meetings remains low, ranging between 10% and 20% of local households. This limited engagement reduces transparency and allows local elites to disproportionately influence resource distribution.
- **Peri-Urban Environmental Strains:** Rapid peri-urban development has placed heavy pressure on local groundwater resources and road infrastructure, highlighting a mismatch between standard rural

administrative capacities and urban-scale challenges.

7. Strategic Policy Recommendations

To enhance the administrative efficiency and long-term sustainability of the Beguru Gram Panchayat, the following policy interventions are recommended:

- **Modernizing Local Revenue Systems:** The Gram Panchayat should modernize its local revenue systems by conducting digital property GIS mapping to register all commercial store expansions and new residential units, ensuring full collection of statutorily allowed property and water taxes.
- **Institutionalizing Solid Waste Management:** Establish formal solid waste collection models, utilizing e-rickshaws for door-to-door garbage segregation, and partner with regional recycling enterprises to generate local revenue from dry plastic waste.
- **Strengthening Administrative Capacity:** State authorities should deploy full-time technical engineers and accounting staff to the Gram Panchayat via the e-GramSwaraj portal, reducing project delays and ensuring accurate tracking of local expenditures.
- **Enhancing Citizen Accountability:** Introduce mandatory social audits and active ward sabhas before final project funds are released, requiring geo-tagged project photos to prevent asset diversion and ensure transparency for citizens.
- **Sustainable Groundwater Management:** Develop localized rainwater harvesting projects and lake restoration initiatives around the Beguru lake basin using MGNREGA labor, helping to stabilize groundwater levels against commercial extraction pressures.

8. Conclusion

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act established a valuable institutional framework for grassroots democracy, yet its ultimate success depends on the operational capacity and financial autonomy of individual Gram Panchayats. This case study of the Beguru Gram Panchayat indicates that while the local body has made solid progress in delivering major physical infrastructure—such as household water connections and street lighting—it continues to face operational challenges in solid waste management, public drainage maintenance, and local revenue generation. As peri-urban development continues to alter rural environments around major metropolitan hubs, Gram Panchayats must be equipped with stronger administrative tools, reliable internal revenue mechanisms, and active citizen participation. Implementing structural fiscal reforms, deploying dedicated technical staff, and institutionalizing downward accountability through transparent social audits will enable local councils to evolve into genuinely self-reliant, sustainable units of local self-governance, fulfilling the constitutional promise of grassroots democracy.

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