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Q13

The strength sustenance of local institutions in India has shifted from their formative phase of 'Functions, Functionaries and Funs' to the contemporary stage of 'Functionality'. Highlight the critical challenges faced by local institutions in terms of their functionality in recent times.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · GS II · 15 marks · Governance and Policy

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Core demand of the question

- Local institutions in India were promised the 3Fs - funds, functions and functionaries - yet the real test is functionality. Critically examine the challenges in that shift
- Honour the stem's 3Fs-to-functionality frame. Use the **73rd and 74th Amendments**, **State Finance Commissions**, and parallel bodies
- Keep the examination within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

3Fs - funds, functions, functionaries - were the devolution bundle after the **73rd and 74th Amendments**.

Eleventh and **Twelfth Schedule** lists are not self-executing; States still hold the real map.

Grants and Centrally Sponsored Schemes often outrun own tax and SFC awards.

Staff remain with line departments, so elected chairs lack a team.

Functionality fails where elections, audits, and basic services do not follow the paper devolution.

Introduction

The **73rd and 74th Amendments** constitutionalised panchayats and municipalities so that local government would not depend on a State's mood. The reform slogan was the 3Fs: funds, functions, functionaries. Functionality - whether a gram sabha or a ward actually delivers water, streets, and accountability - is still the weaker third of that promise.

Body**From 3Fs as design to functionality as test**

- **Functions:** the **Eleventh and Twelfth Schedules** list 29 and 18 subjects; devolution is a State-legislature choice, so maps differ from Kerala to a reluctant State.
- **Funds:** **State Finance Commissions**, **Union Finance Commission** local grants, and own taxes (property tax, profession tax) were meant to replace begging for scheme crumbs.

- **Functionaries:** a local cadre or control over teachers, engineers, and sanitary staff was meant to match the function list.
- Functionality is none of these on paper. It is regular elections, sitting gram sabhas, audited accounts, and a citizen who can get a birth certificate without a party worker.

Critical challenges on each F

- **Functions stay truncated:** departments keep parallel schemes; District Rural Development Agencies and Union missions often bypass the elected panchayat.
- **Funds remain grant-heavy and tied:** own-source revenue is weak; SFC recommendations are delayed or ignored; **XV Finance Commission** grants help but do not create a local tax State.
- **Functionaries:** staff are State employees on devolution in theory; transfers, unions, and line-department control leave the sarpanch without a team.
- The shift to government-grant dependence, which critics of 'self-help' noted, is the fiscal face of failed 3Fs: activity follows the CSS more than the Schedule.

Functionality-specific challenges

- **Capacity:** many elected representatives, including those in reserved seats, get little training; Mission Antyodaya and RGSA try, coverage is uneven.
- **Accountability:** social audit and disclosure exist in MGNREGA more than in municipal contracts; proximity does not automatically mean transparency.
- **Elite and patriarchal capture:** reservation opened the chair; husbands, contractors, and party bosses still often run the file.
- **Metropolitan complexity:** 74th Amendment mayors without powers, parastatal development authorities, and State-appointed municipal commissioners split the city.
- Delimitation, prolonged administrator rule, and delayed elections in some municipalities make 'local institution' an intermittent fact.

What would make functionality real

- Activity mapping that actually moves the Twelfth/**Eleventh Schedule** off the State secretariat, with one employee accountable to the elected body for that function.
- Enforce SFC awards as seriously as Union FC awards; raise property-tax coverage and user charges with hardship shields.
- A local cadre with tenure, plus the right of the panchayat or council to write a confidential report on deputed staff.
- **Recommendation:** treat functionality metrics - water hours, O&M of assets, audit disposal - as the score, not the number of schemes named after the local body.

Flow diagram

73rd and 74th Amendments -> Funds
 73rd and 74th Amendments -> Functions
 73rd and 74th Amendments -> Functionaries
 Funds -> Functionality services and voice
 Functions -> Functionality services and voice
 Functionaries -> Functionality services and voice
 Parallel schemes and grant dependence -> Functionality services and voice

Conclusion

The 3Fs were the constitutional toolkit for local government; functionality is the political outcome those tools have only partly produced. Parallel departments, tied grants, and missing staff keep institutions busy as last-mile agencies of the Union and the State. Critical examination therefore keeps the **73rd and 74th Amendments**, but scores them on service and accountability, not on the Schedule printed in the Constitution.

Facts & figures

73rd and 74th Amendments

Part IX and IXA; panchayats and municipalities as constitutional local governments.

Eleventh and Twelfth Schedules

Indicative function lists of 29 rural and 18 urban subjects.

State Finance Commission

Article 243-I and 243-Y body to recommend sharing of State taxes with local bodies; often weakly implemented.

Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan

Union capacity-building mission for panchayats; a functionality tool, not a substitute for 3Fs.

XV Finance Commission local grants

Tied and untied support that raised money without completing functional devolution.

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