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Q5

Analyse the role of local bodies in providing good governance at local level and bring out the pros and cons of merging the rural local bodies with the urban local bodies.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · GS II · 10 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

- Analyse the role of local bodies in providing good governance at the local level
- Bring out the advantages of merging rural local bodies with urban local bodies
- Bring out the disadvantages of that merger
- Use peri-urban growth and the three Fs as the test

Revision summary

The 73rd and 74th Amendments create panchayats and municipalities with the **Eleventh and Twelfth Schedules**.

Good local governance needs functions, funds and functionaries, plus live Gram Sabhas and ward committees.

Merger helps peri-urban planning, tax and utilities.

Merger hurts rural voice, PESA areas and the distinct 73rd settlement.

Article 243Q already invents the nagar panchayat as a half-merge.

Metropolitan planning committees can share utilities without killing the Gram Sabha.

The test is the peri-urban belt, not a nationwide glue.

Introduction

- **Local bodies are the third stratum after the 73rd and 74th Amendments:** panchayats for the village, municipalities for the town. Good governance at that level is water, streets, primary health, schools, property tax and a grievance that does not need a yatra to the Secretariat. Whether rural and urban bodies should **merge** is the question the census town and the peri-urban belt ask every decade.

Body**Local bodies and good governance**

The schedules are live only when functions, funds and functionaries move with them.

- **Peg: Articles 243G and 243W**, the **Eleventh and Twelfth Schedules**, and State conformity Acts name the functions; the **three Fs** decide whether the name is real.

- **Peg:** Where State Finance Commissions are timely, property tax is collected, and the Gram Sabha or ward committee actually sits, local bodies cut the last-mile gap that line departments cannot.
- **Peg:** Failures are familiar: parallel schemes that skip the panchayat, MP/MLA local-area funds that recreate a second executive, delayed elections, and a CEO who answers to the State more than to the elected chair.
- **Peg:** Urban bodies add planning, building bye-laws and transport; rural bodies add land, forests-as-livelihood and MGNREGA - the skill-sets are not identical.

Gains from merger

Census towns and villages glued to a municipal edge already share sewers, labour markets and crime.

- **Peg:** A nagar panchayat or a municipal merger can unify master plans and stop the jurisdiction shrug over a drain.
- **Peg:** A wider tax base and a city bus on the village road are real planning gains.
- **Peg:** Climate drainage and solid waste do not honour the 73rd/74th line; some States have folded peri-urban panchayats into corporations for that reason.

Costs of merger

The 73rd Amendment was a rural political settlement, not a waiting room for a corporation.

- **Peg:** Merge into a municipal corporation and the farmer's vote is diluted by an urban density that does not live on that land.
- **Peg:** PESA Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas are a further bar: merger without a **Fifth Schedule** conversation is a constitutional slight.
- **Peg:** Forced municipalisation is also a tax event - property tax, trade licence - that villages may not have asked for.
- **Peg:** The workable line is statutory agglomeration where the census already has: **metropolitan planning committees** (Article 243ZE) that actually meet, nagar panchayats for transitional areas, and shared utilities without extinguishing the Gram Sabha.

Flow diagram

73rd PRIs -> Local goods
 74th ULBs -> Local goods
 Peri-urban -> Merge or share
 Merge or share -> plan tax drain 74th ULBs
 Merge or share -> Gram Sabha PESA 73rd PRIs
 Nagar panchayat -> Merge or share

Conclusion

Local bodies govern well when the three Fs are real. Merging rural and urban houses can fix peri-urban mess. It can also erase a rural constitutional identity. Transitional forms beat a single nationwide glue.

Facts & figures

Article 243Q of the Constitution

Provides for nagar panchayats in transitional areas - the Constitution's own half-merge.

Article 243ZE of the Constitution

Metropolitan planning committees are meant to coordinate peri-urban planning across rural and urban bodies.

Fifteenth Finance Commission

Tied a large share of grants to rural and urban local bodies, including drinking-water and sanitation conditions.

Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996

Gives Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas powers that a casual municipal merger would dilute.

Eleventh and Twelfth Schedules

Illustrative lists of functions for panchayats and municipalities; they bite only when States devolve the three Fs.

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