
UNIT 5 Role of Local Bodies

Structure

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5.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the concept of local bodies;
- Analyse the role played by local bodies in socio-economic development;
- Discuss the various advantages of local bodies; and
- Examine the challenges faced by local bodies..

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Socio-economic development is the prime responsibility of the State. No matter what the form of government or level of government, it always strives hard for development and the welfare of the people. In the modern times of good governance, the State tries to maximise the participation and facilitate social justice for all the citizens of the country. The level of people's involvement in the development process is ensured by the degree of decentralised governance. Hence, the role of local bodies becomes more important in the social and economic development of the country. Local governments are directly responsible for development at the lowest level of government. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts of 1992 specifically recognised rural and urban local bodies as the nodal agencies for social and economic development by giving them certain specific powers in the 11th and 12th Schedules of the Constitution. In this unit, we shall examine the role played by the local bodies and their functions as agents of development.

5.2 CONCEPT OF LOCAL BODIES

Local governments are functioning in all parts of the globe and in almost all settings of the State, whether it is a parliamentary form of government or presidential, unitary government or federal state. In all countries, they are known by different names such as local government areas, local councils, local authorities, districts, etc. Along with their names their status, responsibilities and funding can vary from one state to another. The concept of democratic governance in any society is considered important as it is seen as the medium that nurtures a sense of self-fulfilment and pride in the people. Democratic governance is seen operating at the smallest level of society. The term local self-governance emphasises the concept of people's participation in the discharge of the functions in their daily life. The central or the state government under a formal and fairly specified medium allows certain functions to be carried out at grassroots level only. These especially encompass those functions which are more nearly affiliated to the citizens' everyday lives, and where the national government may consider that delegating the same shall on one hand give further satisfaction to the people and, on the other hand, allow time for the central government to have time for concentrating on more important issues. It is predicated on the idea that people should have a say in choices that have an impact on their lives and that local issues should be addressed at that level.

Local government is also known as the third level of government. People of a small area, for example, a village, city, or megacity, attempt to operate their routine functions through local government. The following are the essential characteristics of local government:

- It operates within a limited local area.
- It enjoys statutory status as it is formulated by laws of legislatures.
- Local governments are independent bodies. They are envisioned to exercise their powers and perform their functions in accordance with the enactment.
- It is characterised by the participation of local people in decision-making and administration.
- It provides for local responsibility that ensures responsive actions by the representatives as they are in direct touch with the local residents.
- They are allowed to raise funds through levies and impositions, so local finance is another point.
- It provides civic amenities to the people at its door.
- It provides a republic at its grass roots as it gives an opportunity to the people to manage their own affairs. It encourages the participation of the people in public affairs.
- This medium is more competent to break the original problems down as a state government, due to its size, may not be suitable to concentrate on certain issues that may be important to the people. But through this medium the existing problems and conditions can be assessed in a more comprehensive and detailed manner, therefore enabling a suitable response to the problem.
- It serves as a training academy for people to understand the sense and significance of community thinking for furnishing service to all. They understand the complications involved in the identification of conditions and the allocation of resources.

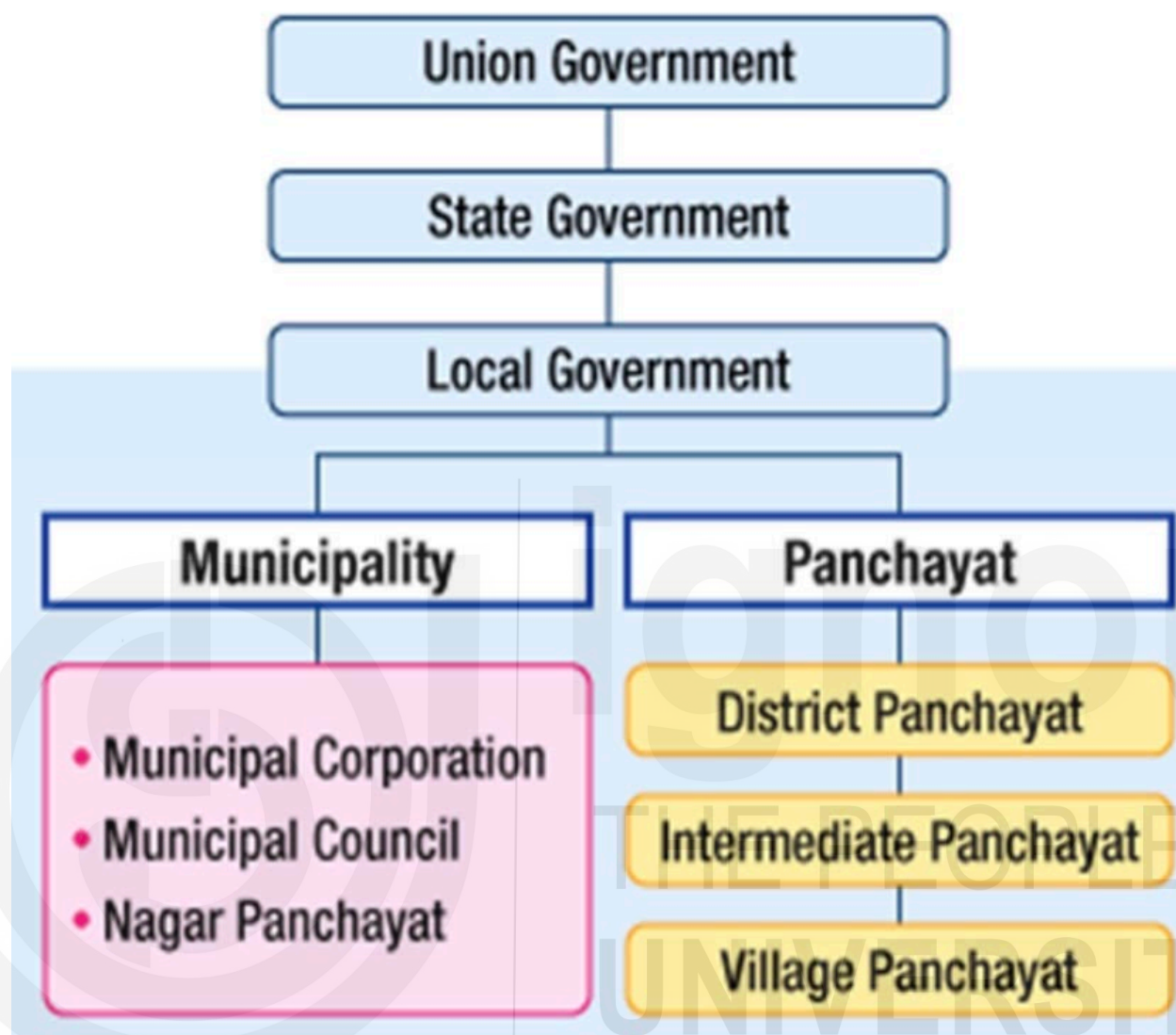
- It reduces the burden of central government in time and cost.
- It serves as a channel of communication between people and the government.
- Both are veritably important in the case of development administration, as the extended reach and participation are there.
- It paves the way for overall public progress.

Local governments support the well-being of their inhabitants by making sure that public services such as healthcare and education through strategic planning and management are made effective and accessible to the people.. This being the third tier of government, members of the community are aware of the issues that they face. It results in effective democratic decision – making with citizens empowered to manage their own public affairs.

5.3 LOCAL BODIES IN INDIA

In India, local government is a state subject, figuring as item 5 in List II of the VII Schedule to the Constitution of India. Rajasthan was the first state to legislate the local government in 1959, followed by Andhra Pradesh. But the process of this grass-root decentralisation through local government gained prominence with the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts, 1992. After this local government came in a Constitutional form. The goal was to establish democratic, independent, and financially sound local organisations that could develop and carry out programmes for their individual regions and provide decentralised governance to the populace. We have already discussed these aspects in detail in the Courses on Urban and Rural local governance.

The democratically chosen local government entities in India are known as "municipalities" in urban areas and "Panchayati Raj Institutions" (PRIs) in rural areas. According to population, there are three different types of municipalities: Municipal Corporations (Nagar Nigam), which have more than 1 million residents, Municipal Councils (Nagar Palika), which have more than 25,000 but fewer than 1 million residents, and Municipal Committees (Nagar Panchayats), which have more than 10,000 but fewer than 25,000 residents. Gram panchayats are located at the village level, Mandal or block panchayats are located at the block level, and Zilla panchayats are located at the district level in PRIs. The structure of local bodies can be understood from the following flow chart:



5.4 ROLE OF LOCAL BODIES

The types of tasks carried out by local bodies have changed in recent years. Local governments now have a variety of responsibilities when it comes to identifying and incorporating the social, economic, and political demands of their area. Local government has a vital role to play and several potential uses. Local governments play a variety of roles, including executive, judicial, and legislative. Local government bodies have the authority to, in keeping with their mandates to advance social fairness and local economic development and evolve development strategies for the regions they serve, implement a wide range of programmes pertaining to 18 areas for urban local bodies and 29 areas for rural local government. PRIs play several key roles in rural development, such as improving socio-economic welfare through the promotion of rural

industries, health, education, women's, and children's welfare; among other things; administrative tasks such as keeping village records up to date; building, maintaining, and repairing roads, tanks, wells, and so forth. Separate courts or nyaya panchayats or gram panchayats can also conduct judicial duties, including trying minor civil and criminal issues such as minor thefts and money disputes.

Urban municipal government roles can be categorised as:

- **Obligatory duties:** Those that they are required to carry out, such as maintaining public health and sanitation, offering public services such as water and electricity, and providing education.
- **Discretionary Duties:** Transportation, the development and upkeep of public places, among other things, fall under the category of discretionary functions, which are dependent on the availability of funding.

Social and Economic Development

The idea of self-governance or decentralisation has historically been regarded as a key democratic tenet. Decentralisation was based on the principle that social fairness and economic development should start at the local level. Local institutions, local residents, and the private sector collaborate to improve the local economy. They help in building the social, economic, and political infrastructure of the local area.

- **Social infrastructure:** On a social level, towns frequently experience class inequality and discrimination based on caste, race, creed, religion, gender, and other factors. Local government organisations seek to create social cohesion in the area, which aids in advancing national integration. It also advances the interest of underprivileged sections of the society through measures of inclusive governance, hence facilitating social development.
- **Economic infrastructure:** From an economic perspective, issues such as resource scarcity, unemployment, and poverty are prevalent in small places. Local bodies mobilise people and resources for such issues.
- **Political infrastructure:** The administrative tasks are improved politically through direct local government oversight. Local governments are compelled to contribute to the regional economy in this manner. State governments provide funding to local governments. Local governments are essential to the growth of the local economy. They are in charge of providing the physical infrastructure, which includes areas such as energy, water supply, waste management, and networks for communication and transportation and so on. It is possible to encourage participation from all facets of society locally, which shall lead to macroeconomic growth and development.

Local bodies have a wide range of powers, which help them to provide legislative, executive, and judicial support to socio-economic development. It performs the following role:

- **Legislative Role:** The panchayats in rural areas have the power and authority to legislate on the 29 subjects in accordance with what is stated in the eleventh schedule. Similar to the eleventh schedule, the twelfth contains 18 areas that are governed by local laws. In order to maintain democratic principles at the local level, citizens must take part in elections and local body meetings.
- **Executive functions:** Local bodies are required to carry out numerous policies and give their constituents access to fundamental civil amenities. In addition to educating the public about the centrally supported programmes, it carries out its required duties, including water supply, drainage, and the advancement of women and children.
- **Judicial function:** Administrative duties are based on the concepts of self-governance and autonomy at the local level. It implies that towns and panchayats must establish systems for justice that give communities practical answers to disputes. For instance, managing and overseeing civil, criminal, and revenue justice are tasks assigned to municipal organisations. To ensure that residents abide by the law of the land, it regulates their subjects.

Besides, the role of local bodies in development can be understood as below:

- **Better Approach to Multidimensional Issues**

It is a well-known fact that local communities are more conscious of the issues they face. As a result, these individuals may discover more effective answers to the socioeconomic, cultural, and political issues they encounter. Utilising resources wisely and effectively is the first step towards resolving current issues.

- **Increasing Community Development Prospects**

The community development of various regions is improved by high levels of community participation. Renewing democracy and reducing barriers to policy execution depend on community development.

- **Improved Public Facilities**

The local residents and the local government work together in a way that help the citizens receive better services. Development at local levels is a prerequisite for national development. Therefore, an increase in the civic facilities accessible to citizens locally contributes to the general growth of a nation.

- **Greater Participation**

Local entities assist residents in taking part directly in democratic decision-making through their constituent representatives chosen at the local level. It promotes the idea of a robust democratic society with watchful and engaged citizens. It is crucial to remember that the local community /citizens should have an equal chance to voice its political protests or thoughts.

- **Cultivating Future Leaders**

The practice of local self-governance helps develop future leaders. It gives budding politicians hands-on experience with the democratic decision-making process.

- **Inclusive Development**

Through the reserve of seats, local governments can support female participants as political actors and candidates. Additionally, a certain number of seats are set aside for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. In this sense, the third tier of our system can protect interests of all sections of the community. This promotes inclusive development.

- **Greater Transparency in Operations of the Central government**

It is common to think of local administration as serving as a bridge between various communities and the national government. The institution acts as a connecting point between the two ideas. The government's policies and activities are made known to common citizens. On the other side, the union government becomes aware of the needs of the people.

- **Access to Quality Infrastructure**

In addition to being a part of the central government, local governments offer a forum for expressing societal political demands. It is to ensure that people have access to daily necessities including clean water, electricity, and sanitation at the local level.

- **Increased Accountability and Responsibility**

Locals frequently feel politically alienated due to state administrations' slow response times and weak accountability. Inclusion and increased accountability to the government authorities are encouraged by the devolution of authority to regional and district levels.

- **Protecting each person's identity**

The municipal authorities have the authority to protect the personal and cultural identities of numerous groups. It supports the pluralism principle, which is the cornerstone of democracy.

The local government can protect problems pertaining to a person's political ambitions and quality of life, allowing the federal government to concentrate on important matters like national security and defense. The local entities are in charge of collecting taxes, dispensing justice, and managing legal matters, in addition to the political dialogue that takes place between local governments and the citizens they govern.

5.5 LOCAL BODIES : CHALLENGES

Local governments nevertheless encounter several challenges in their daily operations, which include the following:

- **Dearth of Political Will:** There is a dearth of political will among the populace to participate in direct decision-making, despite the fact that the functioning of local government depends heavily on the active participation of its members and constituents.
- **Inadequate Resources:** Local governments generally encounter budgetary limitations in performance of their duties. For instance, state governments frequently violate their revenue-sharing agreement, which makes it difficult for local organisations to raise the necessary funds for their initiatives.
- **Lack of Accountability:** The state governments, which are expected to carry out programmes such as poverty alleviation, are unable to act efficiently due to the lack of communication between the state and local governments.
- **State Government's Attitude:** State Governments do not provide congenial environment to local bodies. Most states have only formally complied with the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts. The actual functional autonomy has not yet been devolved by the state governments. Apart from financial dependency elections for local bodies are also postponed, with the administration citing several reasons. Lack of support in funds, functions and functionaries leads to half-hearted functioning of local bodies.
- **Lack of Infrastructure:** Due to lack of physical infrastructure and human resources, local institutions are constrained in providing their services effectively.

- **Prevalence of Multiple Bodies:** Less coordination exists between bureaucrat-led state-level organisations with overlapping duties, such as developmental authorities. As a result, there is lack of coordination in financing and spending, which has resulted in fragmented government. The country's growing number of special purpose agencies is usurping their authority.

5.6 CONCLUSION

Therefore, local administration serves as a conduit to consolidate efforts for national development. In a variety of ways, it encourages the formulation and execution of government-led programmes and policies. Local government entities are aware of the ongoing issues in the area due to the close and active contact between citizens and them. Local governments have the authority to make choices about issues that directly affect the community, such as housing, health, education, and environmental protection. The democratic spirit of this third tier of government might be hampered by the participation of local governments without enough fiscal decentralisation. It is also crucial to mention there is no denying that the presence of local organisations has increased the number of people participating in active process of development. It needs to be strengthened in terms of funds, functions and functionaries so that they serve as an effective mechanism of socio-economic development.

Activity

Visit the nearby office of any local body and talk to the elected representatives and officials about the various activities being performed and the problem areas.

5.7. References

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