THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN RURAL INDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF ENABLERS AND CONSTRAINTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the effectiveness of local governments (LGs) in rural India in contributing to the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Drawing on the literature on decentralisation, local governance, and SDG localisation, this study explores the opportunities and challenges faced by rural LGs, particularly within the context of India's Panchayati Raj system. It analyses how administrative capacity, financial sustainability, political will, and civil society engagement impact SDG implementation at the grassroots level. It aims to provide insights, policy recommendations and further research suggestions for enhancing the capacity and performance of rural LGs in driving sustainable development outcomes in India.

Keywords: Sustainable development; local government; rural sustainability; participatory democracy; Sustainable development Goals; Grass-root governance.

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1. Background: The Global Agenda and Local Action for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the 193 member states of the United Nations (UN) in 2015, represents a significant step for international sustainable development. This global transformative programme includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets, aiming to improve the world and ensure prosperity for both the planet and its people by 2030.[2]

These 17 SDGs serve as a universal call to action, integrating social, economic, and environmental aspects. They build upon the Millennium Development Goals, which guided global action from 2000 to 2015, and address pressing challenges such as poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and injustice. The concept of sustainable development, as defined by the Brundtland Commission in its 1987 report "Our Common Future," refers to "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This foundational idea underscores the importance of a multidimensional approach that balances economic, social, and environmental considerations.[3]

The SDGs were conceived as a comprehensive agenda for the entire world, expecting actors across different sectors and governance levels to embrace these globally defined goals and align their actions accordingly. This commitment, endorsed by 196 countries, serves as a binding agreement and a powerful impetus for collective action.[4]

This paper argues that while India's Panchayati Raj system provides a robust constitutional framework for localizing the SDGs , its potential is systematically undermined by a confluence of political clientelism, inconsistent decentralisation, and administrative constraints. By synthesizing recent literature on decentralisation, governance, and SDG implementation, this study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the specific barriers to SDG localisation within the unique context of rural India. Achieving the 2030 Agenda in rural India therefore requires a renewed focus on strengthening financial autonomy and fostering genuine

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[2] Pedro-Jose Martinez-Cordoba et al., "Achieving Sustainable Development Goals. Efficiency in the Spanish Clean Water and Sanitation Sector," 12 *SUSTAINABILITY* 3015 (2020), at p. 1.

[3] Marco Bisogno et al., "Financial Sustainability and Sustainable Development in Local Governments: Empirical Insights," 47 *PUBLIC PERFORMANCE & MANAGEMENT REVIEW* 784–811 (2024), at p. 784.

[4] Volkan Gocoglu and Ipek Didem Gocoglu, "Local potentials for achieving sustainable development goals: qualitative evidence from local governments in Türkiye," 51 *LOCAL GOVERNMENT STUDIES* 651–72 (2025), at p. 652.

civic participation at the grassroots level.

2. Local Governments as Pivotal Actors in SDG Implementation

Local governments hold a unique and pivotal position in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), primarily due to their direct proximity to citizens and their inherent responsibility for delivering essential public services.[5] This close connection allows them to effectively translate global aspirations into tangible, people-relevant actions that have a direct impact on the ground.[6]

Their responsibilities often include managing and providing crucial services that are directly linked to several SDGs, such as:

- **Water and Sanitation (SDG 6):** Local governments are typically responsible for ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, including drinking water supply, sewerage, and wastewater treatment.[7]

- **Health (SDG 3):** They play a critical role in rural healthcare delivery, maternal and child health, and promoting health awareness at the local level, as seen in India's Panchayati Raj system.[8]

- **Education (SDG 4):** Local authorities are involved in enhancing education and training institutions within their jurisdictions.[9]

- **Waste Management:** This is a common obligatory service managed by local governments.[10]

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[5] Abdur Rehman Cheema, Iftikhar Ahmad and Abid Mehmood, "Aligning local governance with SDGs: a study of local government systems in Pakistan," 11 *Development Studies Research* 2414028 (2024), at p. 1.
[6] Magdalena Bexell et al., "Accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level: Unpacking governance processes and tensions," 25 *Earth System Governance* 100264 (2025), at p. 1.
[7] Suman Das and Sthitapragyan Ray, "Civil society, local government and rural health in an eastern Indian state," 32 *Contemporary South Asia* 489–503 (2024), at p. 490.
[8] Abdur Rehman Cheema, Iftikhar Ahmad and Abid Mehmood, "Aligning local governance with SDGs: a study of local government systems in Pakistan," 11 *Development Studies Research* 2414028 (2024), at p. 3.
[9] *Ibid.*, , at p. 2.
[10] Rafal Boguszewski, Adam Pilat and Pawel Wegrzyn, "Global lessons from local actions: A typology of polish local government approaches to sustainable development," 32 *SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT* 682–95 (2024), at p. 2.

- **Infrastructure and Economic Development (SDGs 8, 9, 11):** They are key in developing local infrastructure, providing housing, and fostering economic growth and employment, thereby being central to SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).[11]

- **Social Well-being and Inclusion (SDGs 1, 5, 10, 16):** Local governments are tasked with supporting and improving the overall well-being of the community, addressing issues like poverty alleviation, social inequalities, and facilitating citizen participation in governance and decision-making processes.[12]

- **Environmental Protection (SDGs 7, 12, 13, 14, 15):** Given that many environmental problems originate locally, local governments are critical actors in environmental protection, climate action, and sustainable resource management.[13]

This direct engagement means local governments are best situated to coordinate and develop place-based responses, assess local needs and resources, develop multi-stakeholder partnerships, and implement policies aligned with global SDGs.[14] Their ability to foster active civic engagement and bottom-up initiatives is crucial for enhancing local government performance and responsiveness in service delivery.[15] Ultimately, while global goals are set at higher levels, their meaningful achievement and integration occur at the local scale.[16]

3. Decentralisation and Local Governance in India

India's decentralisation efforts were significantly advanced by the **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments**, adopted in 1993. These amendments marked a paradigm shift from a centralised, top-down development planning approach, which India had followed for over four decades since independence, towards a more participatory, bottom-up model.

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[11] Abdur Rehman Cheema, Iftikhar Ahmad and Abid Mehmood, "Aligning local governance with SDGs: a study of local government systems in Pakistan," 11 *Development Studies Research* 2414028 (2024), at p. 2.
[12] Marco Bisogno et al., "Financial Sustainability and Sustainable Development in Local Governments: Empirical Insights," 47 *PUBLIC PERFORMANCE & MANAGEMENT REVIEW* 784–811 (2024), at p. 786.
[13] Jianguo Du et al., "What drives the green development behavior of local governments? A perspective of grounded theory," 10 *HELIYON* e27744 (2024), at p. 2.
[14] Jan Fazlagic and Elzbieta Izabela Szczepankiewicz, "The Role of Local Governments in Supporting Creative Industries-A Conceptual Model," 12 *SUSTAINABILITY* 438 (2020), at p. 1.
[15] Nora Annesi et al., "Integrating sustainability into local government strategy: a configurational analysis on the role of administrative capacity" *PUBLIC MONEY & MANAGEMENT* (2025), at p. 8.
[16] Dianty Ningrum et al., "Transformative potential in sustainable development goals engagement: Experience from local governance in Australia," 80 *GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE-HUMAN AND POLICY DIMENSIONS* 102670 (2023), at p. 1.

The **73rd Amendment** primarily established the **Panchayati Raj system** for rural areas, granting constitutional recognition to rural local bodies as institutions of self-government. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, specifically created statutory village Panchayats at the lowest level of elected government in rural India. This system is a three-tiered structure for development planning, comprising:

a. **Gram Panchayats** (village councils) at the level most proximate to people.

b. **Block Panchayats**, which bring together multiple Gram Panchayats.

c. **Zila Parishads** (district councils), aggregating several Block Panchayats.

The **74th Amendment** guided urban local governance, which is not tiered but based on the size of urban areas.

The overarching goal of these amendments was to:

- **Democratise the development process** by giving people at the grassroots level a voice in shaping and choosing development projects for their villages.[17]

- **Empower local bodies** by devolving decision-making and funding from national and state governments.[18]

- **Promote public participation** in the development planning process, elevating the role of collective and community action.[19]

The Panchayati Raj system was envisioned to operate with local needs identified at the Gram Panchayat level. **Gram Sabhas** were designed to provide open forums for discussing local problems and identifying priorities, especially for those at the lowest income levels. Project ideas were expected to flow from the Gram Panchayat level upwards to the Zila Parishad, with project funding flowing in the reverse direction after state-level review and technical assistance. This process was also intended to reduce potential corruption by state officials, with

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[17] Jerry Anthony and Emily Seiple, "Economic growth and community development through decentralized planning: the case of Thalikulam Vikas Trust in Kerala, India," 6 *Local Development & Society* 303–20 (2025), at p. 311.
[18] *Ibid.*, , at p. 316.
[19] *Ibid.*, , at p. 304.

the state bureaucracy supporting grassroots-level projects.[20]

Under this framework, 29 types of governing functions were identified for transfer from the state to the new Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). PRIs were empowered with expanded planning and implementation functions, granted taxing authority, and allocated portions of the state budget. Specific provisions included compulsory elections, reservation of seats for disadvantaged people and women, and the requirement for a finance commission to determine state allocations to PRIs. For instance, Panchayats were authorised to manage rural health, water, and sanitation services and were tasked with preparing Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs) based on community needs assessments.[21]

Despite this comprehensive legal framework, the extent to which these amendments altered the pre-1993 *status quo* varied across Indian states, as they only *encouraged* rather than *required* state-level efforts to empower grassroots planning and community development.[22] For instance, states like Kerala have demonstrated significant success in devolving power and resources to Panchayats, leading to improved development outcomes, whereas in other states, the transfer of functions has been merely symbolic, retaining effective control at the state level.

4. Challenges of SDG Localisation in Rural India

The persistent challenges of SDG localisation in Rural India are multifaceted, encompassing political, social, administrative, and economic factors:

a. Political and Governance Issues:

- **Ruling Party Hegemony and Clientelism**: In some regions, local governments are closely linked to the ruling regime, losing their independent, participatory character. This leads to clientelistic top-down politics where the ruling party uses local government structures, like Women's Self-Help Groups (WSHGs) and youth clubs, to advance its political agenda by delivering goods and services in exchange for votes,

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[20] *Ibid.*, , at p. 309.
[21] Suman Das and Sthitapragyan Ray, "Civil society, local government and rural health in an eastern Indian state," 32 *Contemporary South Asia* 489–503 (2024), at p. 490.
[22] Jerry Anthony and Emily Seiple, "Economic growth and community development through decentralized planning: the case of Thalikulam Vikas Trust in Kerala, India," 6 *Local Development & Society* 303–20 (2025), at p. 310.

hindering the formation of autonomous community organizations.[23]

- **Inconsistent Decentralisation Implementation**: While the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act of 1992 aimed to empower village Panchayats for rural health, water, and sanitation, the extent of devolution varies significantly across Indian states. Many states have not fully transferred governance functions or funding to local bodies, undermining the spirit of decentralisation.[24]

- **Centralised Governance**: Some states, despite having abundant natural resources, exhibit a highly centralised and top-down model of governance, where the vacuum of democratic civic engagement is sometimes filled by violent movements or state co-option strategies.[25]

- **Lack of Political Will**: The absence of conscious political attempts to mobilise community participation and civic engagement is a barrier to improving decentralised service delivery.[26]

b. Civil Society and Community Engagement:

- **Weak Civil Society and Subaltern Mobilisation**: A significant challenge is the absence of a strong civil society and democratic mobilisation of marginalised (subaltern) groups, which is considered a reason for uneven development in poorer states.

- **Fractured Communities**: Local communities can be fractured, with little to no history of civil society mobilisation, making collective action difficult.

- **Nominal Functioning of Gram Sabhas (Village Assemblies)**: Gram Sabhas, intended as deliberative and participatory foundations of the Panchayat system, often function unevenly. Gram Sabha meetings are thinly attended, lacked quorums, and suffered from low awareness, illiteracy, inadequate information, non-circulation of

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[23] Suman Das and Sthitapragyan Ray, "Civil society, local government and rural health in an eastern Indian state," 32 *Contemporary South Asia* 489–503 (2024), at p. 489.
[24] *Ibid.*, , at p. 490.
[25] *Ibid.*, , at p. 491.
[26] *Ibid.*, , at p. 500.

agendas, political apathy, and limited contact with local politicians. Participation is often restricted to ruling party supporters with material incentives.

- **Communal Divides**: Social divisions, such as communal strife, can also negatively impact community participation in local governance.[27]

c. Administrative and Resource Constraints:

- **Resource Limitations**: Local governments and other local actors face significant limitations in financial and human resources, impeding their capacity to effectively implement SDGs.[28]

- **Fragile Healthcare Infrastructure**: Rural areas often possess scant healthcare resources, making them particularly vulnerable during public health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.[29]

- **Difficulties with Long-Term Planning**: Single-year budget requirements and frequent changes in local government personnel make it challenging to develop and sustain long-term plans crucial for SDG implementation.[30]

d. Socio-Cultural Factors:

- **Low Awareness and Literacy**: Low literacy rates and a general lack of awareness among the population regarding the purpose and functions of local governance mechanisms, like Gram Sabhas, hinder meaningful participation.[31]

- **Embedded Power Relationships and Socio-Economic Disparities**: Elected local governments alone are often insufficient to overcome entrenched power relationships

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[27] *Ibid.*, , at p. 500.
[28] Hiromi Masuda et al., "Exploring the role of local governments as intermediaries to facilitate partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals," 82 *SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND SOCIETY* 103883 (2022), at p. 1.
[29] Jerry Anthony and Emily Seiple, "Economic growth and community development through decentralized planning: the case of Thalikulam Vikas Trust in Kerala, India," 6 *Local Development & Society* 303–20 (2025), at p. 317.
[30] Magdalena Bexell et al., "Accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level: Unpacking governance processes and tensions," 25 *Earth System Governance* 100264 (2025), at p. 5.
[31] Jerry Anthony and Emily Seiple, "Economic growth and community development through decentralized planning: the case of Thalikulam Vikas Trust in Kerala, India," 6 *Local Development & Society* 303–20 (2025), at p. 318.

and socio-economic disparities, which can be deeply rooted in rural areas.[32]

- **Lack of Women's Empowerment**: Conditions such as a low level of women's empowerment, unlike in states like Kerala, can constrain meaningful community participation in local development efforts.[33]

These challenges are not isolated; they are deeply interconnected. For example, a lack of financial resources can exacerbate clientelistic politics, as local bodies become dependent on ruling parties for discretionary funding. Similarly, weak civil society engagement allows for a lack of political will to go unchallenged, further entrenching top-down governance models.

5. Policy Implications and Recommendations for Enhanced SDG Implementation

Successfully achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 necessitates a robust, multi-faceted approach, with local governments playing a pivotal role. The following recommendations address key areas for strategic enhancement:

a. Strengthening Local Governance Capacity and Autonomy:

- **Increase Financial Resources and Independence:** Local governments require adequate funding and sound financial management to implement SDGs effectively.[34] This can be achieved through increasing taxes associated with services, introducing private management where appropriate, and actively seeking external funding such as grants and specific bonds.[35] Budget allocation systems should explicitly include SDGs as spending lines. Central governments must support sub-national and local authorities with appropriate means of implementation, including financial backing.[36]

- **Develop Human Capital and Technical Expertise:** Invest in specialised human capital and provide training for local government officials on sustainability issues and

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[32] Suman Das and Sthitapragyan Ray, "Civil society, local government and rural health in an eastern Indian state," 32 *Contemporary South Asia* 489–503 (2024), at p. 1.

[33] Jerry Anthony and Emily Seiple, "Economic growth and community development through decentralized planning: the case of Thalikulam Vikas Trust in Kerala, India," 6 *Local Development & Society* 303–20 (2025), at p. 318.

[34] Marco Bisogno et al., "Financial Sustainability and Sustainable Development in Local Governments: Empirical Insights," 47 *PUBLIC PERFORMANCE & MANAGEMENT REVIEW* 784–811 (2024), at p. 802.

[35] Pedro-Jose Martinez-Cordoba et al., "Achieving Sustainable Development Goals. Efficiency in the Spanish Clean Water and Sanitation Sector," 12 *SUSTAINABILITY* 3015 (2020), at p. 10.

[36] Nora Annesi et al., "Integrating sustainability into local government strategy: a configurational analysis on the role of administrative capacity" *PUBLIC MONEY & MANAGEMENT* (2025), at p. 9.

strategic management.[37] Addressing the shortage of specialised skills and limited understanding of global priorities at the local level is crucial.[38]

- **Ensure Administrative Structures and Political Stability:** Implement reforms to review and improve organisational structures and human resource management within local governments.[39] While political stability is generally an enabler, attention should be paid to nuanced forms of political instability that can impact SDG localisation.[40] Local governments should be empowered through structures that facilitate cross-departmental and cross-sectoral collaboration to tackle complex sustainability challenges.[41]

b. Enhancing Participatory Governance and Stakeholder Engagement:

- **Foster Multi-stakeholder Partnerships:** Local governments should act as intermediaries to facilitate partnerships with private sectors, civil society, academic institutions, and citizens. These partnerships are crucial for sharing knowledge, overcoming capacity limitations, and accelerating sustainable development.[42]

- **Promote Bottom-up Mobilisation and Citizen Participation:** Conscious political attempts to mobilise community participation and civic engagement are essential for effective decentralised service delivery.[43] Encourage bottom-up initiatives and collective activism for sustainable development, utilising digital platforms for two-way dialogue between institutions and citizens.[44] Explicitly include citizen demand and participation in strategic plans, particularly for addressing social concerns like gender

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[37] Bin Guan, "Does Local Government Competition Reduce Environmental Governance Performance? The Role of Public Value Conflict and Media Sentiment," 55 *ADMINISTRATION & SOCIETY* 824–67 (2023), at p. 860.
[38] Nora Annesi et al., "Integrating sustainability into local government strategy: a configurational analysis on the role of administrative capacity" *PUBLIC MONEY & MANAGEMENT* (2025), at p. 8.
[39] NakHyeok Choi, "Analyzing Local Government Capacity and Performance: Implications for Sustainable Development," 13 *SUSTAINABILITY* 3862 (2021), at p. 12.
[40] Nora Annesi et al., "Integrating sustainability into local government strategy: a configurational analysis on the role of administrative capacity" *PUBLIC MONEY & MANAGEMENT* (2025), at p. 4.
[41] Hiromi Masuda et al., "Exploring the role of local governments as intermediaries to facilitate partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals," 82 *SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND SOCIETY* 103883 (2022), at p. 7.
[42] *Ibid.*, , at p. 11.
[43] Suman Das and Sthitapragyan Ray, "Civil society, local government and rural health in an eastern Indian state," 32 *Contemporary South Asia* 489–503 (2024), at p. 500.
[44] Nora Annesi et al., "Integrating sustainability into local government strategy: a configurational analysis on the role of administrative capacity" *PUBLIC MONEY & MANAGEMENT* (2025), at p. 8.

equality.[45]

- **Increase Transparency and Accountability:** A well-designed statutory responsibility could introduce reporting components to target greater support to councils that need it.[46] Transparency and accountability are essential, with mechanisms like continuous peer review of local SDG implementation to ensure ambitions align with global goals.[47]

c. Developing Robust Governance Frameworks for Sustainability:

- **Establish Statutory Responsibilities and Clear Mandates:** Consider introducing statutory responsibilities for climate action and SDG implementation, ensuring they are well-designed, resourced, and adaptable to varying local capabilities.[48] This can level the playing field and guarantee a minimal level of ambition, while allowing more capable local authorities to go further.[49]

- **Integrate Planning and Ensure Policy Coherence:** Integrate SDGs into existing strategic municipal planning frameworks, policies, and budgeting processes rather than creating separate, additional strategies.[50] This supports long-term commitment and avoids policy overload. National and regional policies should encourage local governments to incorporate SDGs into their planning processes.[51]

- **Implement Sustainability-Oriented Performance Measurement and Reporting:** Develop and utilise sustainability-oriented performance measurement systems that are multidimensional, evaluating environmental, social, and economic factors

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[45] Volkan Gocoglu and Ipek Didem Gocoglu, "Local potentials for achieving sustainable development goals: qualitative evidence from local governments in Türkiye," 51 *LOCAL GOVERNMENT STUDIES* 651–72 (2025), at p. 666.

[46] Alice Garvey et al., "'How could it be our responsibility?' The equity of Local Authority climate action in England," 30 *Local Environment* 81–97 (2025), at p. 81.

[47] Magdalena Bexell et al., "Accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level: Unpacking governance processes and tensions," 25 *Earth System Governance* 100264 (2025), at p. 7.

[48] Julian Dobson and Jamie Redman, "Environmental wellbeing: a concept and principles for research, policy and action" *Local Environment* 1–21 (2025), at p. 14.

[49] Alice Garvey et al., "'How could it be our responsibility?' The equity of Local Authority climate action in England," 30 *Local Environment* 81–97 (2025), at p. 91.

[50] Jens Weiss, "Strategizing for Sustainable Development: How German Local Governments Use Ideas of Strategic Management for Implementing the 2030 Agenda," 57 *ADMINISTRATION & SOCIETY* 827–54 (2025), at p. 849.

[51] Magdalena Bexell et al., "Accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level: Unpacking governance processes and tensions," 25 *Earth System Governance* 100264 (2025), at p. 4.

simultaneously.[52] These systems should include clear targets, indicators, and regular reporting to monitor progress, inform decision-making, and ensure accountability.[53]

- **Guard Against Over-Formalisation:** Be cautious of over-formalisation in strategic management, as it can create excessive administrative burdens, undermine effectiveness, and reduce acceptance of SDG management. Integrate SDG strategies into existing structures and foster strategic management beyond merely focusing on formalised documents.[54]

d. Navigating Global Aspirations with Local Realities:

- **Cultivate Reciprocal Linkages:** Actively establish and maintain a continuous, reciprocal link between global SDG goals and local conditions.[55] Combinations of top-down (e.g., national incentives) and bottom-up (e.g., local advocacy) mechanisms can enable this alignment.[56]

- **Contextualise and Translate Global Goals:** Promote inclusive localisation strategies where local actors interpret and act on SDGs in ways that resonate with local cultural frameworks and needs, translating global aspirations into tangible local actions.[57] Policy entrepreneurs can play a vital role in linking global goals to local problems.[58]

- **Balance Long-term Vision with Short-term Cycles:** Acknowledge the tension between the long-term horizons of SDGs and short-term local political cycles.[59] Integrate SDGs into the longest possible formal planning processes of municipalities to nurture a long-term perspective, while also demonstrating short-term, visible

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[52] Nora Annesi et al., "Integrating sustainability into local government strategy: a configurational analysis on the role of administrative capacity" *PUBLIC MONEY & MANAGEMENT* (2025), at p. 3.

[53] Jan Fazlagic and Elzbieta Izabela Szczepankiewicz, "The Role of Local Governments in Supporting Creative Industries-A Conceptual Model," 12 *SUSTAINABILITY* 438 (2020), at p. 15.

[54] Jens Weiss, "Strategizing for Sustainable Development: How German Local Governments Use Ideas of Strategic Management for Implementing the 2030 Agenda," 57 *ADMINISTRATION & SOCIETY* 827–54 (2025), at p. 849.

[55] Magdalena Bexell et al., "Accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level: Unpacking governance processes and tensions," 25 *Earth System Governance* 100264 (2025), at p. 6.

[56] *Ibid.*, , at p. 7.

[57] Nicole L. Immler and Hans Sakkers, "The UN-Sustainable Development Goals going local: learning from localising human rights," 26 *The International Journal of Human Rights* 262–84 (2022), at p. 264.

[58] Magdalena Bexell et al., "Accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level: Unpacking governance processes and tensions," 25 *Earth System Governance* 100264 (2025), at p. 5.

[59] *Ibid.*, , at p. 7.

progress to maintain community engagement and political support.[60]

e. Fostering Political Will and Leadership:

- **Cultivate Leadership and Commitment:** Strong political commitment from local leadership, including mayors and top managers, is a critical prerequisite for driving transformative change and initiating SDG implementation.[61] Their willingness to uphold green development principles and develop regional plans and goals is essential.[62]

- **Prioritise and Strategise for Sustainability:** Local governments should strategically focus on SDGs that prioritise climate change, environment, clean energy, sustainable production, and social inequalities, moving beyond traditional urban management issues (e.g., SDG11) where commitment is already high.[63]

- **Promote a Culture of Innovation:** Encourage and support innovative approaches, pilot projects, and experimentation to test new technologies and schemes for SDG localisation. This also includes creating new intermediary organisations to provide flexibility and better resource management.[64]

These recommendations underscore the need for a deliberate and ambitious transformation driven by governance institutions, moving beyond incremental changes.

Summary Table	
Identified Challenge	**Corresponding Policy Recommendation**
Inconsistent Decentralisation & Lack of Funding	Strengthen Local Governance Capacity and Autonomy (e.g., Increase financial resources, establish clear mandates)

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[60] *Ibid.*, , at p. 8.
[61] Nora Annesi et al., "Integrating sustainability into local government strategy: a configurational analysis on the role of administrative capacity" *PUBLIC MONEY & MANAGEMENT* (2025), at p. 8.
[62] Jianguo Du et al., "What drives the green development behavior of local governments? A perspective of grounded theory," 10 *HELIYON* e27744 (2024), at p. 9.
[63] Volkan Gocoglu and Ipek Didem Gocoglu, "Local potentials for achieving sustainable development goals: qualitative evidence from local governments in Türkiye," 51 *LOCAL GOVERNMENT STUDIES* 651–72 (2025), at p. 668.
[64] Hiromi Masuda et al., "Exploring the role of local governments as intermediaries to facilitate partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals," 82 *SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND SOCIETY* 103883 (2022), at p. 10.

Weak Civil Society & Low Participation	Enhance Participatory Governance (e.g., Foster multi-stakeholder partnerships, promote bottom-up mobilisation)
Ruling Party Hegemony & Clientelism	Increase Transparency and Accountability (e.g., Implement reporting mechanisms, conduct peer reviews)
Short-term Political Cycles vs. Long-term SDG Vision	Navigate Global Aspirations with Local Realities (e.g., Integrate SDGs into long-term planning, balance with short-term wins)

6. Further Research

a. How do local governments in rural India integrate the SDGs into their planning and implementation processes?

This is a vital question to go to the reality on the ground. As determined in the paper, Panchayati Raj framework was to be bottom-up planned with Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs), which were to be requested by the community. The substantive effects of implementing this decentralised model differ greatly among states. Such a question would be answered by research showing possibly practical mechanisms, successes and failures that happen when global objectives are converted into local action plans, identification of the disconnect between policy purpose and purpose. A comparative case study approach with a qualitative approach would be very useful.

b. What are the key internal (e.g., administrative capacity, financial sustainability, political will) and external (e.g., civil society engagement, higher-level government support) factors enabling or constraining the effective achievement of SDGs by rural LGs in India?

This question aims at finding out the most critical success or failure factors. The constraints identified in the paper include limited financial and human resources, lack of political will, weak civil society and the politics of the ruling party. It is important to establish the most important of these factors in order to make effective policy intervention. It can assist policy makers in prioritizing resources in order to tackle the most crucial bottlenecks that undermine the realization of SDG at the local level. It would be best to adopt a mixed-method approach.

c. How does the local context (e.g., historical mobilisation, socio-economic disparities) influence the performance of rural LGs in delivering SDG-related services?

This question highlights the fact that villages are not similar. The paper has recognised socio-economic inequality, fragmentation of communities that has never mobilised, and division of communities as factors which can influence local performance. Knowledge of the exact effect of these contextual factors is important in order to design development strategies. The same policy might not succeed in a highly divided village because it worked well in a socially cohesive community, and therefore analysis based on circumstances is crucial to achieve equal and optimal SDG delivery. A comparative qualitative study would be the most suitable.

7. Conclusion

Even though the Indian constitutional structure, especially the Panchayati Raj system, offers a potent template of localization of the Sustainable Development Goals, it has a very limited effect in reality. The path of global dreams to local reality is a risky one, with the problems of clientelistic politics, uneven devolution of financial and administrative authority of the state into local institutions, the inability of civil society to participate, etc. All these are not single setbacks but are the problems that run parallel to each other helping to solidify a top-down approach to governance, loosening the bottom-up, participatory ethos of the 73rd Amendment.

These obstacles cannot be solved but through a conscious strategic change. The recommendations in question enhance the financial and human capital of local authorities, build multi-stakeholder alliances, and provide stable and responsible structures of governance leading to a desired change. Finally, the success of the 2030 Agenda in rural India does not only depend on stitching local plans with global aspirations, but on whether or not its local democratic institutions are empowered in truth. It is all about overcoming the obvious discrepancy between the legislative will and the reality of governance in the village level and thus making sure that the sustainable development promise is fulfilled across the board.