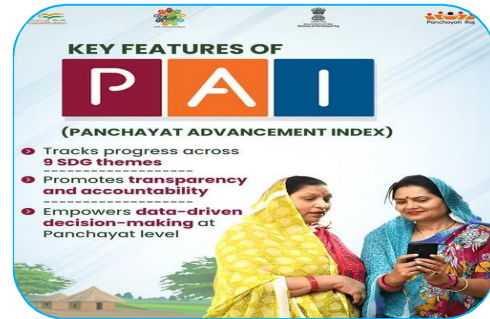




**PANCHAYAT ADVANCEMENT INDEX: TOOLS FOR EVIDENCE-BASED
AND PARTICIPATORY RURAL GOVERNANCE**

Mr. Upendar Korra¹ and Dr. M. Swarnalatha²¹Research Scholar, Kakatiya University.¹Head, Dept.of Sociology & Social Work, KU, Warangal, TS.**ABSTRACT:**

Panchayats play a pivotal role in decentralized governance and rural development in India. However, the absence of disaggregated, real-time data and inadequate integration of schemes has limited the effectiveness of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP). In response, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj introduced the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) to institutionalize data-driven planning and performance benchmarking. This study evaluates the structural evolution and operational effectiveness of PAI, with specific reference to two Gram Panchayats in Telangana: Mariyapuram (Warangal) and Ramadugu (Karimnagar). Using a combination of multi-stage sampling and secondary data analysis, the research assesses thematic performance across nine LSDG-aligned dimensions. The findings reveal that Mariyapuram outperforms Ramadugu across most themes, highlighting both the utility of PAI 2.0 and the scope for policy-driven convergence. The paper concludes with recommendations to strengthen participatory planning, inter-Panchayat competition and local data ecosystems.



KEYWORDS: Panchayat Advancement Index, Evidence-Based Rural Governance, Local Sustainable Development Goals.

INTRODUCTION

The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), along with its thematic components and the Local Indicator Framework (LIF), serves as a comprehensive tool for assessing and tracking developmental progress at the grassroots level. Panchayats, the cornerstone of India's decentralized governance system, are constitutionally empowered to design and implement development plans across various domains, including agriculture, health, education, and social inclusion. The Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) was conceptualized to institutionalize participatory planning at the grassroots. However, the effectiveness of the GPDP process has been hindered by fragmented data systems, inadequate convergence of schemes and the absence of robust performance tracking mechanisms (PAI, 2025).

To overcome these challenges, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has introduced the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI). These indices aim to transform local governance by fostering data-driven decision-making, aligning Panchayat activities with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and establishing measurable accountability frameworks among Panchayats. This paper explores the

conceptual, structural, and operational contours of PAI and evaluates their relevance in strengthening rural development (MoPR, 2023).

By focusing on nine thematic areas, the PAI facilitates targeted interventions to enable the rapid transformation of Panchayats. In addition to conventional socio-economic and infrastructure indicators, the PAI also addresses emerging developmental concerns such as environmental sustainability, mental health, waste management and the use of renewable energy. This inclusive approach promotes sustainable development and helps identify and replicate best practices across different sectors and regions. It further supports participatory planning through data-backed GPDPs, encourages multi-sectoral convergence and enhances evidence-based policymaking.

Moreover, the PAI fosters accountability, motivates stakeholder engagement, enables real-time monitoring, and contributes to more equitable allocation of resources by generating reliable financial and developmental data. Ultimately, the PAI enhances transparency and ensures that no one is left behind in the development process.

An analysis of the PAI framework and its proof of concept in Maharashtra reveals promising potential for localizing the SDGs through theme-based indicators and community-level data validation. While this model provides a strong mechanism for tracking grassroots development, wide variations in the capacities and developmental status of the 2.65 lakh Panchayats across India pose significant challenges. The ambition to bring all Panchayats under a unified index calls for coordinated, multi-dimensional efforts. Critical areas of focus include building the capacity of Ministries, Departments and Panchayats to align with the Localisation of SDGs (LSDGs), adopting enabling technologies that support grassroots innovation, encouraging alignment among States despite Panchayati Raj being a state subject, and fostering a cultural shift among local institutions and communities towards goal-oriented, sustainable planning and execution (Pradhan, 2023).

OBJECTIVES

- To conceptualize The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) as instruments of participatory and evidence-based rural governance.
- To analyze the structural design and methodological framework of PAI in the context of the Local Indicator Framework (LIF).
- To assess the implementation challenges and opportunities emerging from the thematic performance of two selected Gram Panchayats under PAI 2.0.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a multi-stage sampling technique for primary selection and relied on secondary data from the My Panchayat thematic scoring framework. Two Gram Panchayats were selected randomly:

- Mariyapuram, Geesugonda Mandal, Warangal District
- Ramadugu, Ramadugu Mandal, Karimnagar District

Each Panchayat was evaluated across nine themes aligned with PAI 2.0 and the LSDG framework. Comparative analysis was conducted to highlight implementation gaps and performance variation. Thematic scores were interpreted to assess localized progress and planning needs.

DISCUSSION

The thematic assessment of Mariyapuram and Ramadugu reveals important insights into their developmental progress:

Table 1: Comparative Thematic Scores – Mariyapuram vs Ramadugu

S.No	Name of the Theme	My Panchayat Thematic Score	
		GP: Mariyapuram	GP: Ramadugu
1	Poverty free and enhanced livelihoods village	81.58	80.56
2	Healthy village	96.10	92.08
3	Child friendly village	82.53	69.23
4	Water sufficient village	79.26	72.66
5	Clean and Green village	83.74	63.87
6	Self-sufficient infrastructure in village	68.27	67.18
7	Socially Just and Socially secured village	77.99	62.89
8	Village with Good Governance	79.42	70.13
9	Women Friendly village	80.03	78.78

Source : <https://pai.gov.in/>

The thematic assessment of Mariyapuram and Ramadugu Gram Panchayats reveals valuable insights into their progress toward holistic rural development as envisioned under the concept of "My Panchayat." While both Gram Panchayats perform reasonably well across most themes, Mariyapuram consistently demonstrates relatively stronger performance in nearly all areas.

In the domain of a Poverty-Free and Enhanced Livelihoods Village, Mariyapuram scores 81.58, slightly surpassing Ramadugu's 80.56. This marginal difference suggests that both villages have implemented effective livelihood initiatives such as skill development, MGNREGS participation, and SHG-driven economic activities, with Mariyapuram maintaining a slight advantage. Regarding the Healthy Village theme, both Panchayats exhibit strong health indicators—Mariyapuram scoring 96.10 and Ramadugu 92.08 indicating robust implementation of nutrition services, immunization drives, and accessible primary healthcare, likely supported by active ASHA and Anganwadi workers.

However, the Child-Friendly Village theme shows a marked contrast. Mariyapuram scores 82.53 compared to Ramadugu's 69.23, pointing to more effective early childhood care, better school infrastructure and stronger child protection mechanisms in Mariyapuram. In the Water-Sufficient Village category, Mariyapuram again leads with 79.26 over Ramadugu's 72.66, which may reflect more successful water resource management, rainwater harvesting practices and execution of schemes like Jal Jeevan Mission.

A significant disparity is observed under the Clean and Green Village theme, where Mariyapuram scores 83.74 while Ramadugu lags at 63.87. This 20-point gap highlights Mariyapuram's better sanitation practices, waste management systems and plantation efforts. Ramadugu appears to require renewed focus under Swachh Bharat and similar initiatives. For Self-Sufficient Infrastructure, both GPs perform similarly Mariyapuram at 68.27 and Ramadugu at 67.18 suggesting comparable availability of essential infrastructure like roads, public buildings and street lighting. Nevertheless, further infrastructure investments are needed in both Panchayats.

Under Socially Just and Socially Secured Village, Mariyapuram's higher score of 77.99 compared to Ramadugu's 62.89 indicates more effective inclusion of marginalized groups, timely delivery of pensions and responsive grievance redress mechanisms. In terms of Good Governance, Mariyapuram scores 79.42 against Ramadugu's 70.13, reflecting stronger participatory processes, better transparency and citizen engagement, particularly in the functioning of Gram Sabhas.

Finally, in the Women-Friendly Village theme, both villages perform well Mariyapuram at 80.03 and Ramadugu at 78.78 demonstrating a shared commitment to women's safety, representation and empowerment. However, minor improvements in gender-sensitive service delivery could further enhance these scores. Overall, Mariyapuram emerges as the relatively stronger performer, with Ramadugu showing potential for growth through targeted planning and programmatic convergence.

SUGGESTIONS

- Strengthen Data Literacy at Panchayat Level: Build capacities of local elected representatives and functionaries in data interpretation, entry, and utilization to ensure accurate and timely updates to the PAI portal.
- Institutionalize Scorecard-Based Planning: Integrate PAI findings into annual GPDP preparation to prioritize high-deficit areas with realistic action plans.
- Encourage Inter-Panchayat Competition: Introduce incentives and recognitions at district and state levels to promote healthy competition and innovation in service delivery.

CONCLUSION

The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) represent a significant paradigm shift in India's rural governance landscape. By anchoring development in measurable indicators, they enhance accountability, promote transparency and foster a culture of evidence-based planning. The comparative analysis of Mariyapuram and Ramadugu confirms that localized data, when correctly interpreted, can meaningfully inform participatory development. The transition from PAI 1.0 to 2.0 characterized by rationalization of indicators and improved technology interface further enhances the scope for scalable implementation. Moving forward, institutionalizing these tools within the GPDP cycle and nurturing a robust data culture at the grassroots will be critical to achieving the vision of Atmanirbhar Panchayats.

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