

PANCHAYATS TO GET RS. 10 LAKH CR. TILL 2026

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Devolution of Powers & Finances up to Local Levels and Challenges therein - Panchayats & Municipalities

Desilting on at a village in Andhra Pradesh.K.R. DEEPAK

The Panchayati Raj Ministry has pitched for a fivefold increase in Finance Commission funding for rural local bodies.

In a meeting with the 15th Finance Commission on Thursday, the Ministry asked for Rs. 10 lakh crore to be allocated for the 2020-21 to 2025-26 period, in comparison to the Rs. 2 lakh crore allocated under the 14th Finance Commission. It noted that allocations had tripled between the 13th and 14th Commissions as well.

An impact evaluation study showed a 78% utilisation rate for FC grants between 2015 and 2019, the Ministry told the Commission, according to a presentation seen by *The Hindu*.

Road construction and maintenance, as well as drinking water supply have been the major projects carried out by panchayats using FC grants. The 2.63 lakh panchayats across the country have 29 functions under their ambit, according to the 11th Schedule of the Constitution.

Panchayats have also gained importance as crucial nodal points in times of crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they ran 38,000 quarantine/isolation centres, apart from medical camps and contact tracing.

However, the Ministry admitted that a major challenge during the pandemic and lockdown was that most panchayats could not provide cooked food at short notice. It has proposed that community kitchens be set up in each panchayat to be operated by local self-help groups.

Going forward, the new Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyan will depend on panchayats to generate employment for newly returned migrant workers. The Chief Ministers of Bihar, Jharkhand, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Kerala, Odisha are holding regular video-conferences with sarpanches to review COVID-19 control and employment generation measures, said the Ministry presentation.

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