Polity & Governance · GS - II

"In contemporary development models, decision-making and problem-solving responsibilities are not located close to the source of information and execution defeating the objectives of development." Critically evaluate.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2025	GS - II	Polity & Governance

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Decentralisation, subsidiarity, local knowledge, 73rd and 74th Amendments, Gram Panchayat, participatory governance, centralisation, accountability, capacity constraints, digital governance

Model Answer

Introduction

Effective development requires decisions to be taken as close as possible to the people and institutions possessing relevant information and implementation capacity. Excessive centralisation creates an information and accountability gap.

1. Problems of distant decision-making

Centralised institutions may lack granular knowledge of local ecology, livelihoods, social relations and beneficiary priorities. Consequently, uniform schemes can generate inappropriate solutions.

For example, water management, tribal development and urban services often require location-specific interventions rather than standardised prescriptions.

Centralisation can also weaken accountability because citizens find it difficult to hold distant decision-makers responsible for implementation failures.

2. Importance of decentralisation

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments sought to institutionalise local self-government by assigning responsibilities to Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies.

Local governments can integrate community knowledge with administrative resources. Gram Sabhas can identify beneficiaries, monitor projects and improve social accountability.

The principle of subsidiarity suggests that a function should be performed by the lowest competent level of government, with higher levels providing finance, standards and technical support.

3. Critical limitations

Decentralisation alone cannot guarantee better outcomes. Local bodies frequently face inadequate finances, staff, technical expertise and effective devolution of the 3Fs—functions, funds and functionaries. Local elite capture can also reproduce inequalities.

4. Way forward

India needs genuine fiscal and functional devolution, capacity building, participatory planning, interoperable data platforms and outcome-based monitoring while retaining higher-level technical support.

Conclusion

Development is most responsive when information, authority and responsibility converge. The appropriate model is therefore not absolute decentralisation but empowered local governance within a supportive multi-level institutional framework.

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