Science & Technology · GS - II

The strength sustenance of local institutions in India has shifted from their formative phase of 'Functions, Functionaries and Funs' to the contemporary stage of 'Functionality'. Highlight the critical challenges faced by local institutions in terms of their functionality in recent times.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2020	GS - II	Science & Technology

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments; devolution of powers; functions, functionaries and funds; administrative capacity; fiscal autonomy; accountability; urban governance; Gram Sabhas; digital capacity

Model Answer

Introduction

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments gave constitutional recognition to rural and urban local governments. Their effectiveness, however, depends not merely on their formal existence but on their ability to deliver services and exercise meaningful authority.

Critical functionality challenges

- **Incomplete devolution:** Many states have not fully transferred the functions listed in the Eleventh and Twelfth Schedules to local bodies.
- **Inadequate finances:** Heavy dependence on grants and limited taxation powers restrict local planning and service delivery.

- **Staff shortages:** Local institutions often lack qualified engineers, accountants, planners and public-health personnel.
- **Overlapping authorities:** Parastatal agencies and development authorities may exercise powers that weaken elected municipal bodies.
- **Weak accountability:** Gram Sabhas, ward committees and social audits do not always function regularly or effectively.
- **Political and bureaucratic control:** Excessive interference can constrain local decision-making and delay implementation.
- **Capacity gaps:** Limited training, data systems and technical expertise affect budgeting, procurement and project monitoring.
- **Urban challenges:** Rapid urbanisation, informal settlements, waste management, water scarcity and flooding place growing demands on municipal institutions.
- **Uneven digital capacity:** Digital governance can improve efficiency, but inadequate connectivity and skills may exclude smaller or poorer local bodies.

Measures to strengthen functionality

Implement the principle of the three Fs—functions, functionaries and funds—in practice. Strengthen State Finance Commissions, improve local revenue mobilisation, build professional cadres, empower Gram Sabhas and ward committees, and introduce transparent performance audits.

Conclusion

Constitutional recognition is only the first step towards effective local self-government. Adequate resources, trained personnel, genuine decision-making authority and citizen participation are essential to make local institutions functional and accountable.