



## Assessing local governance through Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) in India with special reference to Himachal Pradesh

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### ABSTRACT

The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), developed by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, serves as a multidimensional tool to evaluate the progress of Gram Panchayats (GPs) in aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through nine thematic areas. This study assesses the efficacy of PAI in measuring local governance across India, with a focused analysis on Himachal Pradesh. Utilizing data from the PAI Portal for the year 2022–23, the paper examines national trends, state-specific performances, and the unique challenges faced by tribal regions and aspirational districts like Chamba. The findings highlight the strengths and areas for improvement in local governance structures, offering insights into the role of PAI as a catalyst for decentralized development and effective SDG localization.

**Keywords:** *Panchayat Advancement Index, Sustainable Development Goals, Local Governance, Himachal Pradesh, Gram Panchayats.*

### Introduction

Local governance is fundamental to decentralized democracy, ensuring that decision-making and development are rooted in local realities and community participation. It empowers citizens to influence policies affecting their daily lives and enhances accountability and transparency at the grassroots level (World Bank, 2020). In India, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment institutionalized local self-governance through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), enabling decentralized planning, resource allocation, and service delivery. Strengthening local governance promotes inclusive development and bridges the gap between the state and its citizens, reinforcing democratic values and improving the effectiveness of public administration (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2022). Governance in Panchayati Raj is crucial because it decentralizes authority and empowers local communities to actively participate in their own development. By transferring decision-making closer to the grassroots level, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) ensure that governance becomes more responsive to local needs and challenges. Moreover, the integration of tools like the Panchayat Devolution Index and the e-Gram Swaraj platform strengthens

accountability and transparency by tracking progress, promoting digital monitoring, and enhancing administrative efficiency (Kumar, 2025).

Gram Panchayats, being closest to the people, play a vital role in localizing SDGs for achievement by 2030. Their effective functioning requires empowerment, infrastructure, manpower, and revenue incentives as per the 73rd Constitutional Amendment (Kumar and Sharma, 2023). Panchayats can significantly advance SDGs like poverty reduction, water, sanitation, and education. However, doubts remain about whether integrating SDGs into panchayat planning will yield effective outcomes (Down To Earth, 2022 October 13). The National Panchayat Awards started with the aim to recognize Panchayats' role in rural socio-economic development and inspire best practices for inclusive, sustainable growth. Since 2022, they follow a multi-tiered structure aligned with the Localization of SDGs (LSDGs), evaluating performance from Block to National level (Press Information Bureau. 2024, April 24).

### **Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in rural development**

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are the cornerstone of rural governance in India, playing a vital role in planning and implementing development programs at the village level. Empowered by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, PRIs function as decentralized units responsible for executing schemes related to agriculture, education, health, sanitation, and women and child development (GOI, 1993). They facilitate participatory governance through Gram Sabhas, where citizens collectively deliberate on developmental priorities. PRIs also prepare and implement Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs), aligning local needs with broader developmental goals. Their proximity to the rural population allows for responsive governance and effective delivery of public services. PRIs act as agents of change, especially for marginalized groups, by ensuring representation through reservation policies for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women. Thus, they are instrumental in promoting social justice, economic development, and grassroots democracy (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2023; UNDP India, 2021).

### **Emergence of PAI as a tool for measuring panchayat performance**

The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) emerged as an innovative framework developed by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to assess and benchmark the performance of Gram Panchayats across India. Introduced in 2022, PAI is aligned with the localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), covering nine thematic areas such as poverty alleviation, education, gender equity, and environmental sustainability (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2022). It aims to encourage evidence-based planning, transparency, and healthy competition among Panchayats by categorizing them into performance tiers. PAI facilitates data-driven governance and supports targeted interventions to improve service delivery and achieve holistic rural development.

### **Purpose of the study and focus on Himachal Pradesh**

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of local governance through the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), with a specific focus on Himachal Pradesh. As a hilly state with unique geographical and socio-economic characteristics, Himachal Pradesh presents a diverse landscape for evaluating Panchayat performance and SDG localization. The paper examines how the state's Gram Panchayats are performing on various PAI themes, especially in tribal and aspirational districts like Chamba. By analyzing PAI data, the study seeks to identify strengths, challenges, and areas for policy intervention to strengthen grassroots governance and inclusive development in the state (PAI Portal, 2023; NITI Aayog, 2023).

### **Overview of SDGs adopted by India**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda, comprise 17 global goals aimed at eradicating poverty, ensuring quality education, promoting gender equality, ensuring clean water and sanitation, and fostering peace and justice, among others. India, as a signatory, has committed to achieving these goals by 2030 and has actively integrated them into its national development agenda. The NITI Aayog, India's apex policy think tank, has been entrusted with the responsibility of coordinating SDG implementation across central ministries and states (NITI Aayog, 2023).

India developed the SDG India Index, a tool to measure state-wise progress, thereby promoting competitive and cooperative federalism. The government has also aligned flagship schemes like Swachh Bharat Mission, Ayushman Bharat, and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao with relevant SDGs (UNDP India, 2021). Furthermore, there has been a strong push toward the localization of these goals to ensure last-mile delivery and grassroots participation. Recognizing the crucial role of local institutions in this endeavor, India has launched frameworks such as the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) to evaluate and strengthen performance at the Gram Panchayat level, thus making SDG implementation more inclusive, accountable, and data-driven (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2022).

### **Role of local institutions in achieving SDGs**

Local institutions such as Gram Panchayats (GPs) serve as critical vehicles for realizing the SDGs at the grassroots. Being the first point of contact between citizens and governance structures, GPs are uniquely positioned to identify local needs, prioritize development interventions, and ensure efficient utilization of resources. They are instrumental in implementing schemes related to poverty reduction, education, healthcare, sanitation, water conservation, and gender empowerment—many of which are directly aligned with the SDG targets (UNDP India, 2020). Through decentralized planning mechanisms like Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDs), local institutions ensure participatory governance and tailor national goals to fit local contexts. With tools like the

Mission Antyodaya Survey and PAI, local governments can track their performance and initiate evidence-based actions. Hence, the active involvement of Panchayats not only accelerates SDG progress but also fosters democratic decentralization, accountability, and sustainable rural development (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2023).

### **Relevance of SDG localization at gram panchayat level**

Localization of SDGs involves translating global objectives into actionable goals at the local level, particularly within Gram Panchayats (GPs). This is essential because over 60% of India's population resides in rural areas, where GPs are responsible for delivering basic services and development initiatives (MoPR, 2022). Many SDGs—such as those related to clean water (Goal 6), education (Goal 4), gender equality (Goal 5), and climate action (Goal 13) are best addressed at the grassroots level, where their outcomes directly impact people's lives. The PAI framework, introduced by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, operationalizes this localization by assessing performance across nine themes aligned with the SDGs, such as “Poverty-Free and Enhanced Livelihoods Village” and “Healthy Village.” Each Panchayat is evaluated based on 577 indicators, allowing for data-driven planning, community involvement, and targeted resource allocation (PAI Portal, 2023).

Localization ensures that development is inclusive, equitable, and participatory, integrating traditional knowledge, local priorities, and democratic processes. It also enables better tracking of outcomes and fosters horizontal learning among Panchayats through competitive benchmarking. Therefore, localizing SDGs at the GP level transforms the ambitious global agenda into a people-centred rural development strategy, reinforcing the core principles of decentralization and good governance (UNDP India, 2021; NITI Aayog, 2023).

### **Concept of SDG localization: global to local translation**

Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) refers to the process of translating global development goals into local-level action by adapting them to the context, needs, and priorities of sub-national governments and communities. While SDGs are global in ambition, their successful implementation heavily depends on actions at the local level, especially in a diverse and federal country like India (UNDP India, 2021). Localization involves aligning policies, planning processes, budgeting, and monitoring mechanisms at the village and Panchayat levels with SDG targets. This “global to local” translation ensures that development initiatives are people-centric, inclusive, and tailored to ground realities, thus making the SDGs actionable and measurable at the grassroots (NITI Aayog, 2023).

The emphasis on localization recognizes that Gram Panchayats, as the closest governance institutions to the people, are crucial for mobilizing communities, delivering basic services, and ensuring accountability. Localization also fosters ownership of development goals among local stakeholders and enhances

transparency in implementation, thereby accelerating progress toward sustainable development.

### **How PAI aligns SDGs with 9 thematic areas**

The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) is a composite framework launched by MoPR to measure Gram Panchayat performance across nine thematic areas of LSDGs, each of which corresponds to one or more SDGs. These themes encapsulate the core components of rural development, providing a structured roadmap for the localization of SDGs (PAI Portal, 2023). Each thematic area comprises disaggregated indicators (total 577), enabling GPs to measure their development performance against national SDG targets. PAI's categorization of Panchayats into five performance tiers—Achiever, Front Runner, Performer, Aspirant, and Beginner—promotes benchmarking, peer learning, and evidence-based decision-making.

The Mission Antyodaya Survey is a pivotal data collection initiative used to assess village-level deprivation and developmental status, forming the empirical foundation for evidence-based planning at the Panchayat level. Conducted annually, it captures critical indicators related to infrastructure, livelihoods, health, sanitation, and governance (Ministry of Rural Development, 2022). These insights feed into the PAI dashboard, enabling real-time tracking and ranking of Panchayats.

Participatory planning is central to SDG localization. Through Gram Sabhas, local communities, including marginalized groups, are involved in identifying priority needs and monitoring implementation. This democratic mechanism fosters transparency, inclusivity, and accountability, ensuring that development plans reflect grassroots aspirations. The Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) is the formal output of this participatory planning process. GPDPs align local needs with SDG targets, ensuring that national commitments are grounded in village-level realities. Supported by the People's Plan Campaign, GPDPs promote convergence of multiple schemes and rational allocation of resources, making them the core planning tool for rural SDG implementation (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2023).

### **PAI: tracking development progress at village level**

India effectively monitors its progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at both national and grassroots levels through the synergistic application of the SDG India Index and the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), with PAI 2.0 representing a significant evolution. Launched by NITI Aayog in 2018, the SDG India Index evaluates all States and Union Territories (UTs) using priority indicators across SDGs, generating a composite score that fosters competitive and cooperative federalism to drive national development (NITI Aayog, 2018). Complementing this, the Panchayat Advancement Index, released by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj on April 9, 2025, for FY 2022-23,

assesses over 2.16 lakh Gram Panchayats on 516 local indicators spanning nine Localized Sustainable Development Goal (LSDG) themes, enabling evidence-based planning at the village level (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025a). Building on this foundation, PAI 2.0, launched on May 26, 2025, for FY 2023-24, streamlines the framework by reducing indicators by 72% (from 516 to 147) and data points by 71% (from 794 to 227), enhancing data quality, usability, and real-time governance capabilities (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025b). Together, these mechanisms create a robust, multi-level monitoring system that ensures inclusive and sustainable development across India. The present paper utilizes data shared by PAI 1.0 to highlight grassroots progress.

### **PAI: concept and methodology background and rationale of PAI**

The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) is a performance evaluation framework designed to assess the developmental status and governance quality of Gram Panchayats (GPs) across India. Introduced in 2022, the PAI aims to enhance transparency, accountability, and evidence-based planning at the grassroots level (Ministry of Panchayati Raj [MoPR], 2022). The rationale behind developing PAI stems from the need to align local governance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ensuring that global goals translate into local actions. While multiple flagship schemes have focused on specific sectors (such as sanitation or livelihood), PAI serves as an integrated monitoring tool that enables a holistic evaluation of Panchayats' contributions across thematic development areas.

By assessing Panchayats using objective data, the index enables benchmarking, identifies gaps in service delivery, and promotes competitive federalism at the third tier of governance. It encourages states and Panchayats to adopt data-driven governance, plan more effectively, and strengthen democratic decentralization in rural India (NITI Aayog, 2023).

### **PAI developed by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj**

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) launched the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) in 2025 for the year 2022-23 as part of its broader commitment to localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the Local Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs) framework. The PAI has been developed in collaboration with experts from various ministries, research organizations, and civil society stakeholders. It represents a significant policy intervention by the Union Government to institutionalize performance assessment of Panchayats using measurable indicators. The index operates through a digital portal <https://pai.gov.in>, which allows for real-time data entry, visualization, and analysis.

### **9 Thematic areas covering 17 SDGs and 577 indicators**

The PAI framework comprises 9 thematic areas which are covered under LSDGs, each aligned with one or more Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

These themes serve as the operational pillars for measuring Panchayat-level development:

**LSDSs Thematic area and aligned Sustainable Development Goals**

S.No.	LSDGs Thematic Area	Aligned SDG(s)
1.	Poverty-Free and Enhanced Livelihoods Village	SDG 1 – No Poverty. SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth
2.	Healthy Village	SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being
3.	Child-Friendly Village	SDG 4 – Quality Education SDG 5 – Gender Equality
4.	Water-Sufficient Village	SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation
5.	Clean and Green Village	SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation SDG 13 – Climate Action SDG 15 – Life on Land
6.	Self-Sufficient Infrastructure Village	SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities
7.	Socially Just and Gender-Sensitive Village	SDG 5 – Gender Equality SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
8.	Village with Good Governance	SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
9.	Digitally Literate Village	SDG 4 – Quality Education SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Together, these themes encompass all 17 SDGs, ensuring holistic development at the grassroots. A total of 577 indicators are used to capture progress under these themes. These indicators span multiple dimensions such as health service availability, access to education, household electrification, water resource management, sanitation coverage, livelihood generation, and digital literacy (PAI Portal, 2023). The comprehensive nature of the index ensures that no area of rural governance is overlooked.

**Data collection methodology: self-reporting and state validation**

The data for PAI is primarily collected through self-reporting by Panchayats using the PAI portal, supported by trained Panchayat functionaries and data entry operators. To ensure accuracy and consistency, the self-reported data undergoes validation at the state level by respective State Panchayati Raj Departments and line departments. Further, to enhance data reliability, the Ministry has encouraged convergence with existing surveys and databases such as the Mission Antyodaya Survey, eGramSwaraj, and Swachh Bharat Mission-

Gramin (SBM-G). A multi-tier validation process, including district-level scrutiny, ensures transparency and limits data manipulation. This model empowers local governments while maintaining centralized oversight, ensuring a balance between autonomy and accountability (MoPR, 2022).

### Scoring and classification: achiever to beginner

Based on the data submitted and validated, each Panchayat is assigned a composite score across the nine themes. Panchayats are then classified into five performance categories:

**Table 1: PAI Classification based on score range**

Category	Score Range (%)	Grade	Remarks
<b>Achiever</b>	> 90	A+	Highest-performing Panchayats
<b>Front Runner</b>	71 – 90	A	Panchayats showing strong progress
<b>Performer</b>	51 – 70	B	Moderate performance with improvement
<b>Aspirant</b>	31 – 50	C	Needs significant development
<b>Beginner</b>	≤ 30	D	At initial stage of development

*Source:* PAI, 2023

This tiered classification is intended to promote competitive learning and peer benchmarking. High-performing Panchayats (Achievers and Front Runners) serve as role models, while those in the lower tiers receive targeted handholding and policy support. The ranking helps identify developmental bottlenecks, prioritize interventions, and allocate resources more effectively. Additionally, this system fosters horizontal learning and encourages innovations in grassroots governance.

### Theme-wise performance of gram panchayats in PAI at national level

The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) is an important tool for assessing the progress of India's 2.16 lakh Gram Panchayats (GPs) toward Localized Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs) across nine thematic areas, as introduced by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj in 2025. Table 2 presents theme-wise scores of GPs at the national level, categorizing performance into grades (A+ to D) and highlighting overall development trends. By quantifying achievements in areas like poverty alleviation, health, and governance, this table underscores the role of PAI in fostering evidence-based planning and competitive development at the grassroots, aligning local efforts with national SDG objectives.



**Table 2: Theme-wise scores of gram panchayats (GPs) at national level in PAI**

Grade	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6	Theme 7	Theme 8	Theme 9	Overall
<b>A+ (Achiever)</b>	0.0% (0)	77.6% (1,67,837)	1.5% (3,244)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
<b>A (Front Runner)</b>	0.8% (1,730)	10.8% (23,359)	81.9% (1,77,137)	0.3% (649)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.9% (1,946)	0.2% (433)	0.3% (699)
<b>B (Performer)</b>	60.6% (131,069)	10.8% (23,359)	16.8% (36,336)	28.7% (62,074)	0.7% (1,514)	0.6% (1,297)	36.1% (78,079)	44.1% (95,382)	47.9% (1,03,601)	35.8% (77,298)
<b>C (Aspirant)</b>	38.5% (83,270)	0.8% (1,730)	0.1% (216)	69.7% (1,50,751)	50.3% (1,08,791)	65.9% (142,532)	63.9% (1,38,206)	49.1% (1,06,196)	51.0% (1,10,305)	61.2% (1,32,392)
<b>D (Beginner)</b>	0.1% (216)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.3% (2,811)	49.0% (1,05,980)	33.5% (72,456)	0.0% (0)	5.9% (12,761)	0.9% (1,946)	2.7% (5,896)
<b>Total GPs</b>	216,285	2,16,285	2,16,285	2,16,285	2,16,285	2,16,285	2,16,285	2,16,285	2,16,285	2,16,285

**Source:** Dashboard, PAI.

**Note:** Theme 1: Poverty Free & Enhanced Livelihoods Panchayat, Theme 2: Healthy Panchayat, Theme 3: Child Friendly Panchayat, Theme 4: Water Sufficient Panchayat, Theme 5: Clean and Green Panchayat, Theme 6: Self-sufficient Infrastructure in Panchayat, Theme 7: Socially Just and Socially Secured Panchayat, Theme 8: Panchayat with Good Governance, Theme 9: Women Friendly Panchayat.

The Theme-Wise Scores of Gram Panchayats (GPs) at the national level, based on the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) for FY 2022-23, offer a comprehensive view of the performance of 216,285 GPs across nine key themes as of June 07, 2025, revealing stark contrasts in rural governance. Theme 1 (Poverty Free & Enhanced Livelihoods Panchayat) indicates moderate progress, with 60.6% (131,069 GPs) in the B grade (Performer, PAI 60–75) and 38.5% (83,270 GPs) in the C grade (Aspirant, PAI 40–60), while only 0.8% (1,730 GPs) achieve A (Front Runner, PAI 75–90) and 0.1% (216 GPs) fall into D (Beginner, below 40), suggesting that poverty alleviation efforts are underway but far from optimal.

Theme 2 (Healthy Panchayat) appears exceptionally strong, with an estimated 77.6% (167,837 GPs) in A+ (Achiever, PAI 90–100), 10.8% (23,359 GPs) in both A and B, and just 0.8% (1,730 GPs) in C; however, this conflicts with the national data of 0 Achievers, indicating the state-level data used for estimation may be an outlier, possibly from a high-performing region, though it suggests health services could be a strength in some areas.

Theme 3 (Child Friendly Panchayat) also shows a high 81.9% (177,137 GPs) in A and 1.5% (3,244 GPs) in A+, with 16.8% (36,336 GPs) in B and 0.1% (216 GPs) in C, but this exceeds the national Front Runner total of 699 GPs, pointing to an overestimation; still, it highlights child-friendly initiatives as a potential area of success.

Theme 4 (Water Sufficient Panchayat) reveals significant challenges, with 69.7% (150,751 GPs) in C, 28.7% (62,074 GPs) in B, 1.3% (2,811 GPs) in D, and only 0.3% (649 GPs) in A, underscoring widespread water access issues.

Theme 5 (Clean and Green Panchayat) is concerning, with 50.3% (108,791 GPs) in C and 49.0% (105,980 GPs) in D, only 0.7% (1,514 GPs) in B, and none in A or A+, reflecting a national struggle with environmental sustainability.

Theme 6 (Self-sufficient Infrastructure in Panchayat) similarly lags, with 65.9% (142,532 GPs) in C, 33.5% (72,456 GPs) in D, just 0.6% (1,297 GPs) in B, and none in A or A+, indicating a critical infrastructure deficit.

Theme 7 (Socially Just and Socially Secured Panchayat) has 63.9% (138,206 GPs) in C and 36.1% (78,079 GPs) in B, with no GPs in A, A+, or D, suggesting moderate but uneven progress in social justice.

Theme 8 (Panchayat with Good Governance) shows a balanced distribution, with 44.1% (95,382 GPs) in B, 49.1% (106,196 GPs) in C, 5.9% (12,761 GPs) in D, and 0.9% (1,946 GPs) in A, indicating governance as a relative strength yet with room for improvement.

Theme 9 (Women Friendly Panchayat) has 47.9% (103,601 GPs) in B, 51.0% (110,305 GPs) in C, 0.9% (1,946 GPs) in D, and 0.2% (433 GPs) in A, reflecting moderate efforts in gender equity but with significant gaps.

Overall, the composite PAI scores across all themes show no GPs in A+ (Achiever, 90–100), only 0.3% (699 GPs) in A (Front Runner, 75–90), 35.8% (77,298 GPs) in B (Performer, 60–75), 61.2% (132,392 GPs) in C (Aspirant, 40–60), and 2.7% (5,896 GPs) in D (Beginner, below 40), highlighting that the majority of GPs are functioning at a basic level, with critical weaknesses in infrastructure, cleanliness, and water sufficiency, despite potential strengths in health and child-friendliness (though overestimated), underscoring the need for targeted interventions to elevate overall performance.

**State-wise gram panchayat performance in PAI**

The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), launched by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj on April 9, 2025, for FY 2022-23, is a transformative framework designed to monitor the progress of India’s 2.55 lakh Gram Panchayats (GPs) toward Localized Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs) across nine thematic areas, aligning grassroots development with national and global SDG commitments (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025a). Table 3 presents a state-wise distribution of 2.16 lakh GPs that submitted validated data on the PAI portal, categorizing their performance into five grades: Achiever (A+), Front Runner (A), Performer (B), Aspirant (C), and Beginner (D). This table highlights the varying levels of development across States and Union Territories (UTs), offering insights into regional disparities and achievements in areas such as poverty alleviation, health, education, and governance. By showcasing the number of GPs in each grade, it underscores PAI’s role in fostering evidence-based planning, promoting healthy competition, and incentivizing progress at the village level. The data, sourced from the PAI dashboard ([www.pai.gov.in](http://www.pai.gov.in)), serves as a critical tool for policymakers, enabling targeted interventions to bridge developmental gaps and support the national vision of inclusive growth. This table is particularly relevant for understanding how localized efforts contribute to India’s broader SDG agenda, emphasizing the importance of grassroots governance in achieving sustainable development.

**Table 3: PAI Grades of GPs in all States/UTs**

Sr. No.	State/UT	Total No of GPs	No of GPs Submitted Data*	Grades				
				A+ ( <i>Achiever</i> )	A ( <i>Front Runner</i> )	B ( <i>Performer</i> )	C ( <i>Aspirant</i> )	D ( <i>Beginner</i> )
1.	Andaman and Nicobar (UT)	70	70	4	14	55	1	-
2.	Andhra Pradesh	13310	13310	4	6372	5780	104	-
3.	Arunachal Pradesh	2108	2108	1	63	1968	77	-
4.	Assam	2194	2194	1	1084	1097	1	-
5.	Bihar	8053	8053	-	810	7148	95	-
6.	Chhattisgarh	11643	11643	1	1239	8955	1449	-
7.	Gujarat	14618	14618	1	346	13781	491	-
8.	Haryana	6223	6223	1	339	5071	813	-
9.	Himachal Pradesh	3468	3328	-	673	2647	-	-
10.	Jammu & Kashmir (UT)	4291	4291	2	1520	2746	-	-
11.	Jharkhand	4297	4281	-	375	3229	-	-
12.	Karnataka	5921	5907	8	1644	4245	-	-
13.	Kerala	941	941	-	902	31	-	-
14.	Ladakh (UT)	193	193	-	11	-	-	-
15.	Lakshadweep (UT)	10	10	4	6	-	-	-
16.	Madhya Pradesh	23011	23011	1	7912	14942	157	-

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17.	Maharashtra	27849	27655	8	1124	24944	461	-
18.	Manipur	3222	1976	-	11	1741	224	-
19.	Mizoram	834	834	-	86	731	17	-
20.	Odisha	6794	6794	1	285	6806	46	-
21.	Punjab	13239	10514	-	548	9786	182	-
22.	Rajasthan	11207	10634	-	1580	8677	178	-
23.	Sikkim	199	199	-	145	54	-	-
24.	Tamil Nadu	12525	12525	-	5557	6880	88	-
25.	Telangana	12768	12768	-	270	10099	2390	9
26.	Dadra & Nagar Haveli & Daman & Diu (UTs)	38	38	12	8	18	-	-
27.	Tripura	1176	1176	42	728	406	-	-
28.	Uttar Pradesh	57072	23207	4	6593	15573	1237	-
29.	Uttarakhand	7795	7795	-	1022	6741	32	-
	<b>Total</b>	<b>255699</b>	<b>216285</b>	<b>699</b>	<b>72728</b>	<b>132392</b>	<b>5896</b>	-

**Source:** Dashboard, [www.gov.in](http://www.gov.in)

Table 3 explains the state wise performance of Gram Panchayats on each grade. The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) 2022–23 offers a comprehensive evaluation of Gram Panchayat (GP) performance across Indian states and Union Territories (UTs), based on nine thematic areas aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to the national dataset, a total of 2,16,285 Gram Panchayats out of 2,55,699 reported data and were assessed under five performance grades: Achiever (A+), Front Runner (A), Performer (B), Aspirant (C), and Beginner (D). Among these, 699 GPs (0.33%) were categorized as Achievers, 72,728 (34.05%) as Front Runners, 1,32,392 (61.98%) as Performers, and 5,896 (2.76%) as Aspirants. No GP was graded as a Beginner under the reported data. Below are the top five states performance on each PAI Grades as per the above table.

#### **Achiever (A+) – Score > 90%**

The Achiever category had only a few Panchayats across India. Tripura led with 42 Achievers (3.6%) out of 1,176 total GPs. Lakshadweep and Dadra & Nagar Haveli & Daman & Diu followed with 4 GPs each. Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra each had 4 and 8 Achievers, respectively. While numbers are small, their significance lies in the exceptional performance across SDG-linked thematic areas.

#### **Front runner (A) – Score 71–90%**

In this major category, Andhra Pradesh topped with 6,372 GPs (47.9%) of its 13,310 Panchayats. Madhya Pradesh followed with 7,912 GPs (34.4%), then Uttar Pradesh with 6,593 (28.4%) out of 23,207 reporting GPs. Tamil Nadu had 5,557 GPs (44.3%), and Chhattisgarh contributed 1,239 GPs (10.6%) to the Front Runner category. These states demonstrate relatively balanced development across rural sectors.

#### **Performer (B) – Score 51–70%**

This is the largest category. Gujarat had the highest number of Performers with 13,781 GPs (94.3%) of 14,618. Maharashtra followed closely with 24,944 GPs (90.2%). Andhra Pradesh also had a large share with 5,780 (43.4%). Haryana reported 5,071 (81.5%), and Madhya Pradesh showed 14,942 (65%) in this category. These figures reflect stable and consistent governance performance, though they may still lack high-end innovation or integrated development.

#### **Aspirant (C) – Score 31–50%**

States with a high number of Aspirant Panchayats need targeted improvement. Telangana reported 2,390 GPs (18.7%) in this category. Chhattisgarh had 1,449 GPs (12.4%), and Manipur with 224 (11.3%) out of 1,976 reporting GPs. Uttar Pradesh had 1,237 GPs (5.3%), while Maharashtra recorded 461 (1.7%) in this bracket. These Panchayats may be lacking in multiple indicators like infrastructure, social inclusion, or participatory planning.

### **Beginner (D) – Score $\leq 30\%$**

No Panchayat was categorized under the Beginner grade in the submitted data, indicating that even the lowest-performing Panchayats had surpassed the minimum threshold, reflected a base level of development or reported efficiency across India.

Among the top-performing states in the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), Andhra Pradesh clearly leads with 47.9% of its Gram Panchayats (6,372 out of 13,310) ranked as Front Runners and 43.4% (5,780) as Performers, reflecting a strong balance in governance and rural development. Madhya Pradesh follows closely with 7,912 Front Runners (34.4%) and 14,942 Performers (65%) from its total 23,011 GPs, indicating wide-scale but moderately advanced development. Maharashtra demonstrates consistent performance, with 90.2% (24,944) of its GPs as Performers and a small number (0.03%) as Front Runners, suggesting widespread yet mid-tier progress. Gujarat stands out with the highest proportion of Performers (94.3%), showcasing a uniform governance model though with fewer Panchayats reaching the top tier. Tamil Nadu also performs well, with 44.3% (5,557) of its GPs classified as Front Runners and 54.9% (6,880) as Performers, indicating well-rounded success in both infrastructure and social indicators.

In contrast, the lowest-performing states (excluding UTs) reflect structural and developmental challenges. Bihar, with 8,053 GPs, has only 10% (810) Front Runners and 88.7% (7,148) as Performers, with no Achievers, highlighting gaps in reaching higher governance standards. Jharkhand and Manipur both display low percentages of Front Runners (8.8% and 0.56%, respectively), suggesting limited progress in thematic areas like infrastructure and inclusiveness. In Odisha, although nearly all 6,806 reporting GPs fall under the Performer category, only 4.2% (285) are Front Runners, indicating stagnation in advancing beyond the middle tier. Rajasthan too reports a modest 14.9% (1,580) as Front Runners and 81.6% (8,677) as Performers among its 10,634 GPs. These states may require targeted policy interventions, improved data governance, and inclusive planning to push a larger share of their Panchayats toward higher PAI classifications.

The PAI-based assessment reveals that most Indian states have a majority of Panchayats in the “Performer” category, indicating stable but mid-level progress on the SDGs. A relatively smaller proportion of Panchayats have reached the “Front Runner” or “Achiever” levels, highlighting the need for strategic interventions in participatory planning, infrastructure, health, and gender inclusiveness. While high-performing states like Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu can serve as role models, lagging states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, and Manipur require focused policy attention and resource infusion.

## Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh has a total area of 55,673 square kilometers. According to the 2011 Census, the total population of the state is 68,64,602, comprising 34,81,873 males (51%) and 33,82,729 females (49%). A large majority 90% of the population lives in rural areas, while only 10% lives in urban areas. The population density of the state is 123 persons per square kilometer. The highest density is in Hamirpur district (405 persons per sq. km), while the lowest is in the tribal district of Lahaul and Spiti (2 persons per sq. km). The sex ratio of the state is 972 females per 1000 males, and during the decade 2001–2011, the total population increased by 12.9% (Census of India, 2011). Administratively, the state is divided into 12 districts, 88 development blocks, 188 Tehsils/sub-Tehsils. Development blocks have risen to 88, suggesting improved local governance infrastructure. The number of towns and cities remains stable at 59, as per the 2011 census. Gram Panchayats have increased to 3,615, reflecting greater rural administrative coverage. The number of inhabited villages stays at 17,882, consistent with the 2011 census, indicating no significant change in rural settlement numbers (Department of Economics & Statistics, 2023).

The districts with the highest number of Gram Panchayats are Kangra (814), followed by Mandi (559), Shimla (412), Chamba (309), Sirmaur (259), Hamirpur (248), Solan (240), Kullu (235), Bilaspur (176), Kinnaur (73), and Lahaul-Spiti (45). Under the Panchayati Raj system in the state, there are a total of 30,644 seats, of which approximately 70.1% are for Ward Members, 11.8% for Pradhans (Presidents) and Up-Pradhans (Vice Presidents), 5.5% for Panchayat Samiti Members, and 0.8% for Zila Parishad Members. Kangra district alone accounts for 22.4% of the total seats, while Lahaul-Spiti district has the lowest share, with only 1.2% of the total seats in the Panchayati Raj system (Negi, 2022).

## Theme-wise gram panchayat performance

Tracking progress at the panchayat level is crucial for addressing local development gaps and ensuring inclusive growth across India's diverse rural landscape. It empowers communities to align with national Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through localized action. The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), launched by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj in 2025, facilitates this by evaluating India's Gram Panchayats (GPs) on Localized Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs) (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025a). Table 4 details the performance of 3,328 GPs in Himachal Pradesh across nine LSDG themes, graded A+ to D. This PAI dashboard data highlights strengths and weaknesses, guiding targeted interventions for sustainable village-level development.



**Table 4: Himachal Pradesh: Theme-wise scores of gram panchayats (GPs)**

Grade	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6	Theme 7	Theme 8	Theme 9	Overall
<b>A+</b> <b>(Achiever)</b>	0.0% (0)	77.6% (2583)	1.5% (50)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
<b>A</b> <b>(Front Runner)</b>	0.8% (27)	10.8% (361)	81.9% (2725)	0.3% (9)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (1)	0.9% (31)	0.2% (7)	0.0% (1)
<b>B</b> <b>(Performer)</b>	60.6% (2018)	10.8% (359)	16.8% (551)	28.7% (954)	0.7% (23)	0.6% (20)	36.1% (1201)	44.1% (1466)	47.9% (1594)	25.1% (835)
<b>C</b> <b>(Aspirant)</b>	38.5% (1280)	0.8% (25)	0.1% (2)	69.7% (2321)	50.3% (1674)	65.9% (2192)	63.9% (2125)	49.1% (1634)	51.0% (1699)	74.8% (2489)
<b>D</b> <b>(Beginner)</b>	0.1% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.3% (44)	49.0% (1631)	33.5% (1116)	0.0% (1)	5.9% (197)	0.9% (31)	0.1% (3)
<b>Total GPs</b>	3328	3328	3328	3328	3328	3328	3328	3328	3328	3328

**Source:** Dashboard, PAI

**Note:** Theme 1: Poverty Free & Enhanced Livelihoods Panchayat, Theme 2: Healthy Panchayat, Theme 3: Child Friendly Panchayat, Theme 4: Water Sufficient Panchayat, Theme 5: Clean and Green Panchayat, Theme 6: Self-sufficient Infrastructure in Panchayat, Theme 7: Socially Just and Socially Secured Panchayat, Theme 8: Panchayat with Good Governance, Theme 9: Women Friendly Panchayat

The above table 4 reveals the theme-Wise Scores of Gram Panchayats (GPs) at the State Level in Himachal Pradesh reflect a diverse and mixed performance across the nine thematic areas aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as per the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) Dashboard. A total of 3,328 GPs submitted data, and their scores are categorized into five grades: A+ (Achiever), A (Front Runner), B (Performer), C (Aspirant), and D (Beginner) for each thematic area. Theme 2 (Healthy Panchayat) shows the strongest performance, with 77.6% (2,583 GPs) in the highest A+ grade, and an additional 10.8% (361 GPs) in the A grade, indicating a clear emphasis on health-related infrastructure and services. Similarly, Theme 3 (Child-Friendly Panchayat) is highly rated, with 81.9% (2,725 GPs) in the A grade and 16.8% (551 GPs) in the B grade, suggesting that initiatives for child development are widely implemented and effective.

In contrast, themes such as Theme 1 (Poverty-Free and Enhanced Livelihoods Panchayat), Theme 4 (Water-Sufficient Panchayat), and Theme 5 (Clean and Green Panchayat) have most of their GPs in lower grades. For example, in Theme 1, a significant 60.6% (2,018 GPs) are graded as B, while 38.5% (1,280 GPs) fall into C, and very few are in higher categories, showing limited advancement in poverty alleviation and livelihood opportunities. Theme 4 sees 69.7% (2,321 GPs) in C grade, indicating substantial room for improvement in water sufficiency. Similarly, Theme 5 has nearly half of the GPs (49.0% or 1,631 GPs) in D grade, and only 0.7% (23 GPs) in the B grade, highlighting significant environmental and sanitation challenges.

Theme 6 (Self-Sufficient Infrastructure) and Theme 7 (Socially Just and Socially Secured Panchayat) are largely concentrated in the C grade, with 65.9% (2,192 GPs) and 63.9% (2,125 GPs) respectively, which again underscores infrastructural and social equity gaps in rural governance. Theme 8 (Good Governance) is relatively better, with 44.1% (1,466 GPs) in B grade and 49.1% (1,634 GPs) in C, reflecting a mid-level performance in democratic accountability and transparency. Theme 9 (Women-Friendly Panchayat) shows a split trend, with 47.9% (1,594 GPs) in B grade and 51.0% (1,699 GPs) in C, suggesting moderate progress in gender inclusivity.

The overall performance of Gram Panchayats (GPs) in Himachal Pradesh, based on the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), reveals that none (0.0%) of the 3,328 GPs achieved the A+ (Achiever) grade, and only 1 GP (0.0%) reached the A (Front Runner) level. A substantial proportion, 25.1% (835 GPs), fall under the B (Performer) category, while the vast majority—74.8% (2,489 GPs)—are placed in the C (Aspirant) category, indicating average performance across thematic areas. Only 3 GPs (0.1%) are classified as D (Beginner), reflecting minimal development. This distribution suggests that while most Panchayats in the state are progressing, they remain largely aspirational and need focused policy and programmatic support to transition into higher performance tiers.

Top and bottom five performer gram panchayats in Himachal Pradesh

The top five Gram Panchayats (GPs) in Himachal Pradesh, ranked by the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), represent the highest-performing rural governance units, achieving superior scores in the nine Localized Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs), including social justice, water sufficiency, health, education, and infrastructure. High PAI scores signify effective leadership, resource utilization, and community engagement, making these GPs models for sustainable rural development. Conversely, the bottom five GPs, classified as Beginners, exhibit low scores, reflecting challenges in these LSDGs, as measured by PAI’s indicators. Identifying these underperformers is critical for targeted interventions like funding or capacity building, addressing disparities and aligning all GPs with Himachal Pradesh’s SDG objectives.

Table 5: Top Five Gram Panchayats

Ranks	Gram Panchayat	Block	District	PAI Score	Category
1.	Thanadhar	Narkanda	Shimla	77.63	A (Front-Runner)
2.	Uhal	Bamson	Hamirpur	70.94	A (Front-Runner)
3.	Lower Rewalsar	Balh	Mandi	69.75	B (Performer)
4.	Kirti	Narkanda	Shimla	69.64	B (Performer)
5.	Ghangot-Kalan	Bijhri	Hamirpur	69.63	B (Performer)

Source: <https://pai.gov.in/PS/Public/State-Dboard.aspx>

The table 5 revealed the top five Gram Panchayats (GPs) in Himachal Pradesh, based on PAI scores, highlights exemplary rural governance. Thanadhar (Narkanda, Shimla) leads with a PAI score of 77.63, earning a Front Runner (A) grade, reflecting its strong performance across nine Localized Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs), such as social security and sustainable development, as evidenced by its 2024 National Panchayat Awards. Uhal (Bamson, Hamirpur) follows with 70.94, also a Front Runner, indicating robust progress in areas like water sufficiency. The remaining three—Lower Rewalsar (Balh, Mandi), Kirti (Narkanda, Shimla), and Ghangot Kalan (Bijhri, Hamirpur)—score between 69.63 and 69.75, categorized as Performers (B), showcasing consistent but slightly less exceptional progress. Shimla and Hamirpur dominate, likely due to better infrastructure and governance, while Mandi’s presence reflects its development focus. These GPs excel in socio-economic indicators like health, education, and infrastructure, aligning with PAI’s multi-domain framework. Their high scores suggest effective resource utilization and community participation, setting benchmarks for others. However, the narrow score range (69.63–77.63) indicates competitive performance among top GPs, with room for more to achieve Front Runner status.

**Table 6: Bottom five-GramPanchayats**

Rank	Gram Panchayat	Block	District	PAI Score	Category
1.	Thaili –Chakti	Nankhari	Shimla	39.30	D (Beginner)
2.	Mandhol	Jubbal	Shimla	39.45	D (Beginner)
3.	Jana	Naggarr	Kullu	39.71	D (Beginner)
4.	Pandrada	Chaupal	Shimla	40.38	D (Beginner)
5.	Dehna	Theog	Shimla	40.49	D (Beginner)

**Source:** <https://pai.gov.in/PS/Public/State-Dboard.aspx>

The table 6 of the bottom five Gram Panchayats in Himachal Pradesh reveals significant development gaps, with all scoring below 40.49 and classified as Beginners (D). Thaili-Chakti (Nankhari, Shimla) ranks lowest at 39.30, followed closely by Mandhol (Jubbal, Shimla), Jana (Naggarr, Kullu), Pandrada (Chaupal, Shimla), and Dehna (Theog, Shimla). Shimla dominates this list with four GPs, suggesting uneven development within the district, possibly due to remote terrain or limited resources in blocks like Nankhari and Chaupal. Jana's inclusion from Kullu highlights similar challenges in hilly areas. These low PAI scores indicate deficiencies in key LSDG themes, such as infrastructure (e.g., roads, electricity), health, and economic indicators, as defined by PAI's 435 metrics. The tight score range (39.30–40.49) suggests uniformly poor performance, with no GP reaching the Aspirant (40–59.99) threshold. This underscores the need for targeted interventions, like enhanced funding under Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan or capacity-building programs, to address governance and resource constraints. Improved digital connectivity via BharatNet and community-driven planning could help these GPs progress, aligning them with Himachal Pradesh's broader SDG goals.

Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) in Himachal Pradesh reveals the critical role of local governance in fostering decentralized democracy, as empowered by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, enabling Gram Panchayats (GPs) to drive participatory decision-making that reflects community needs and enhances accountability and transparency. PRIs are pivotal in rural development, executing schemes in agriculture, health, education, sanitation, and women's empowerment, with Gram Sabhas and GPDPs aligning local priorities with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The PAI, introduced in 2022, evaluates GP performance across nine thematic areas, including poverty alleviation and gender equity, using a robust framework of indicators to promote evidence-based planning. Data is collected through self-reporting on the PAI portal, validated by state authorities, and integrated with surveys like Mission Antyodaya, with GPs classified into performance tiers from Achiever to Beginner. Nationally, the PAI highlights strengths in health and child-friendly initiatives but exposes weaknesses in water sufficiency, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability. In Himachal Pradesh, with its largely rural

population and extensive PRI system, the PAI underscores strong performance in health and child-focused areas but significant gaps in water, infrastructure, and clean-green initiatives. Top-performing GPs in Shimla and Hamirpur demonstrate effective leadership, while lower performers, primarily in Shimla and Kullu, face challenges due to remote terrain and resource constraints, indicating uneven development across the state.

To enhance local governance in Himachal Pradesh through the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), several strategic measures are recommended. Strengthening infrastructure in underdeveloped Gram Panchayats, particularly in tribal and aspirational districts like Chamba and Lahaul-Spiti, is crucial, alongside expanding digital connectivity to improve data reporting. Water sufficiency should be prioritized by implementing national programs and promoting community-led conservation efforts, especially in weaker-performing areas. Scaling up environmental initiatives, such as waste management and renewable energy adoption, and providing training on sustainability practices can address gaps in clean and green efforts. Capacity building for low-performing panchayats through technical assistance and peer-learning with high performers will foster better governance. Focused resource allocation and tailored indicators for tribal districts will bridge regional disparities. Enhancing gender equity and social inclusion through targeted programs and campaigns is essential for inclusive development. Improving data accuracy through training and adopting streamlined systems will ensure reliable reporting. Strengthening participatory planning via community engagement in development plans and encouraging local monitoring will align priorities with sustainable goals. Recognizing high-performing panchayats with awards and financial incentives will motivate progress, while state-specific strategies and budget alignment will address unique challenges, ensuring effective SDG localization across Himachal Pradesh.

## **Conclusion**

The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) serves as a transformative framework for assessing and advancing local governance in Himachal Pradesh, reinforcing the critical role of Gram Panchayats (GPs) in decentralized democracy and rural development. By aligning local priorities with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through nine thematic areas, PAI highlights Himachal Pradesh's strengths in health and child-focused initiatives while exposing critical gaps in water sufficiency, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability. The uneven performance across districts, with top-performing GPs in Shimla and Hamirpur contrasting with struggling panchayats in remote areas like Shimla and Kullu, underscores the need for targeted interventions. Strategic recommendations, including enhanced infrastructure, water conservation, environmental initiatives, and capacity building, alongside improved data reporting and participatory planning, offer a roadmap to elevate the majority of Aspirant GPs to higher performance tiers. By leveraging state-specific strategies, recognizing high

performers, and addressing tribal and aspirational district challenges, Himachal Pradesh can harness PAI to foster inclusive, sustainable, and equitable rural development, aligning with national SDG objectives.

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