



CURRENT AFFAIRS



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SMART GRAM PANCHAYAT PROJECT

THIS ARTICLE COVERS 'DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS' AND THE TOPIC DETAILS OF "SMART GRAM PANCHAYAT PROJECT". THIS TOPIC IS RELEVANT IN THE "POLITY & GOVERNANCE" SECTION OF THE UPSC CSE EXAM.

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The Union Minister of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj recently launched the 'Smart Gramme Panchayat: Revolution towards Digitization of Gram Panchayat' Project at Paprou Gram Panchayat in Begusarai District, Bihar, signifying a significant step forward in rural India's digital empowerment.

ABOUT SMART GRAM PANCHAYAT PROJECT

- The initiative seeks to **expand the Prime Minister's Wi-Fi Access Network Interface (PM-WANI) Service to Gram Panchayats** in Begusarai, representing a significant shift in rural connectivity. Begusarai is at the forefront of digital transformation in Bihar, providing Wi-Fi services to all Gram Panchayats under the PM-WANI Scheme.
- The PM-WANI initiative seeks to provide **Wi-Fi connectivity to all Gramme Panchayats in the district by 2026**.
- The project, financed under the redesigned Rashtriya Gramme Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA), aims to reach 455 Gramme Panchayats spanning 37 Blocks in Begusarai and Rohtas Districts, with execution monitored by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.
- The **focus is on leveraging technology to enhance access to online services in vital sectors** such as health, education, and skills, aiming to elevate the quality of life in rural areas. Beneficiaries include students, farmers, artisans, and Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs).
- The initiative plans to establish robust mechanisms for **Operation & Maintenance (O&M)** to ensure the sustained impact of the project over time. The plan would enable the government to realise its commitment to promoting inclusive growth and empowerment, including the ambitious objective of **transforming 3 crore women into 'Lakshpati Didis'**.
- The overarching goals include **bridging the rural-urban divide**, promoting accountability and efficiency in local self-governance, and empowering communities through digital footprints.

ABOUT PM-WANI

The PM-WANI initiative, **launched by the Department of Telecom (DoT)** in December 2020, serves as a pivotal scheme **aimed at enhancing the proliferation of public WiFi hotspots**. Its primary objective is to establish a robust digital communication infrastructure, particularly in rural areas.

FRAMEWORK:

PM-WANI functions as a framework empowering various entities, including shopkeepers, tea stall owners, or Kirana store proprietors, to establish public Wi-Fi hotspots and offer internet services to customers. **This framework aligns with the National Digital Communications Policy, 2018 (NDCP)**, which emphasizes building a resilient digital communications infrastructure.

SIGNIFICANCE:

To facilitate a conducive environment for local businesses and small establishments to become Wi-Fi providers, PM-WANI exempts last-mile Public Wi-Fi providers from licensing, registration, and fees payable to DoT.

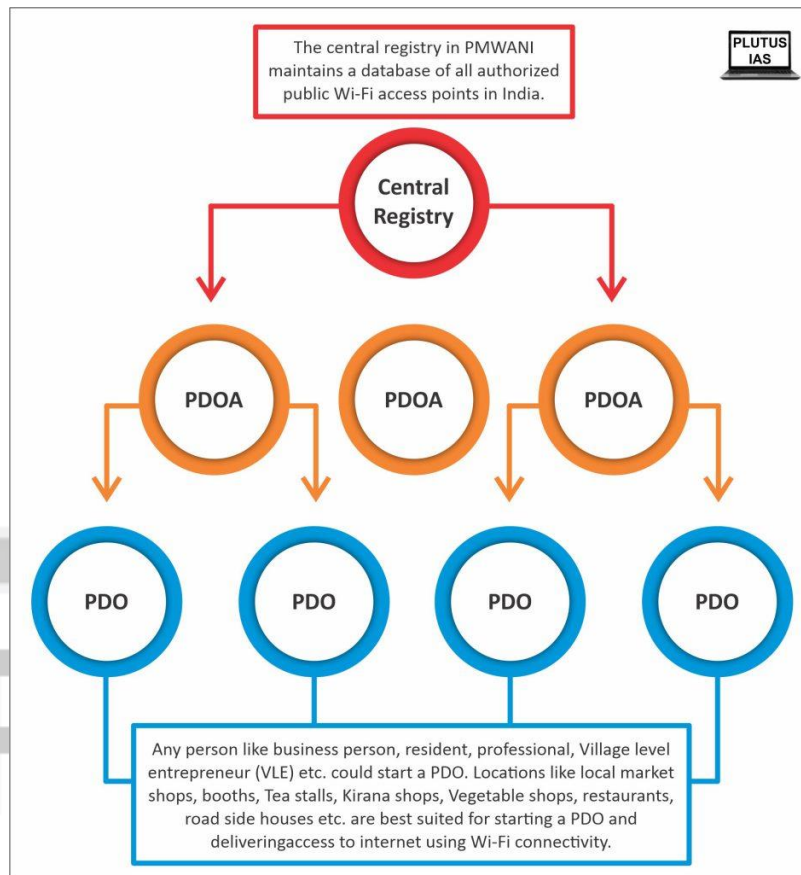
PM-WANI ECOSYSTEM:

The PM-WANI ecosystem comprises **four key elements**:

1. **Public Data Office (PDO)**: Responsible for establishing, maintaining, and operating Wi-Fi hotspots, PDOs procure internet bandwidth from telecom or internet service providers to provide last-mile connectivity.
2. **Public Data Office Aggregator (PDOA)**: This entity **provides PDOs with aggregation services** such as authentication and accounting, allowing them to deliver services to end users more efficiently.
3. **App Provider**: The entity developing applications for user registration, discovering PM-WANI compliant Wi-Fi hotspots, and authenticating potential users.
4. **Central Registry**: The Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DoT) maintains information on App Providers, PDOAs, and PDOs.

BENEFITS OF PM-WANI:

- Expansion of Internet access in rural and remote areas.
- Affordability and convenience compared to high-cost mobile technologies like 5G.
- Stimulating innovation and fostering competition in the internet market.



ABOUT RASHTRIYA GRAM SWARAJ ABHIYAN (RGSA)

The RGSA, initiated by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj in 2018, underwent a revamp and received approval as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, slated for implementation from 2022-23 to 2025-26. This revamped scheme focuses on enhancing the capacity of Elected Representatives (ERs) of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

OBJECTIVES:

The primary goal of the revamped RGSA is to **augment the governance capabilities of Panchayats**, enabling them to effectively contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) falling within the jurisdiction of Panchayats.

TRAINING COMPONENTS:

Under this scheme, it is **mandated to provide basic orientation training for ERs of Panchayats within six months of their election**, along with refresher training within two years. The funding structure for State components follows a 60:40 ratio between Central and States, except for Northeast Hilly States and UT of J & K, where the ratio is 90:10. In other Union Territories, the Central share stands at 100%.

KEY FOCUS AREAS OF RGSA:

- **Strengthening Panchayat-SHG Convergence:** The scheme emphasizes reinforcing the synergy between Panchayats and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and provides training at various levels on e-governance and the Localization of SDGs.

- **Utilization of Emerging Technologies:** RGSA places emphasis on leveraging emerging technologies for interactive capacity building and standardized training methods.
- **Digital Literacy and Leadership Roles:** The scheme is dedicated to capacitating PRIs by imparting knowledge on digital literacy. It enhances leadership roles to align with contemporary governance practices.

PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Q1. Which of the following is/are the aim/aims of the “Digital India” Plan of the Government of India? (UPSC Prelims-2018)

1. Formation of India’s own Internet companies like China did.
2. Establish a policy framework to encourage overseas multinational corporations that collect Big Data to build their large data centres within our national geographical boundaries.
3. Connect many of our villages to the Internet and bring Wi-Fi to many of our schools, public places and major tourist centres.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

ANSWER: B

Q2. The fundamental object of the Panchayati Raj system is to ensure which among the following? (UPSC Prelims-2015)

1. People’s participation in development
2. Political accountability
3. Democratic decentralisation
4. Financial mobilisation

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- A. 1, 2 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 4 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

ANSWER: C

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q1. Discuss the role of Panchayati Raj in promoting grassroots governance. How it contributes to the overall development of rural areas.

Q2. Evaluate the effectiveness of reservation for women in Panchayati Raj institutions as a strategy for women’s empowerment. Discuss the challenges and successes associated with this approach.