

Applying Competitive Federalism to Facilitate Policy Implementation for Rural Development at District and Sub-District Levels

The Case of Super Village Challenge in Palwal District, Haryana

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ABSTRACT

Rural development has evolved a lot from its conceptualisation in the early 1950's up to the present times. Yet, there is a growing need to identify the most appropriate mechanism(s) to stimulate economic activity across a broad range of economic sectors in rural areas. Ellis and Biggs argue⁸ that a new paradigm of rural development should emerge by looking at the farm and non-farm activities of rural communities through a multi-occupational or cross sectoral (i.e., public-private-non-profit partnerships/ synergies) approach.

Since the end of 1980s, governments of several developing countries have become more “public-oriented” bodies (i.e., decentralised and less bureaucratic). Thus, traditional approaches such as “large-scale farm development and agricultural modernisation” are changing to people-centered approaches to rural development with a focus on establishing a system to facilitate community participation.¹⁰

As top-down methods have largely been inadequate to address rural change, various academic work(s) reveal that decentralisation offers “sub-national governments and local organisations an increased role in rural development processes¹¹.” Decentralisation has been increasingly seen as an option to unlock the development potential of territories, principally by intensifying the pressure on local governments to work more effectively and respond to the needs and demands of local communities.¹²

But beyond the conventional hierarchical and cooperative models (For example, decentralisation) of governance, states, cities and institutions have also been confronted by competitive federalism models, a concept under which governments compete with their national, regional or local counterparts (i.e., other governments) on various development related parameters. This model (competitive federalism) is markedly different from cooperative models' due to the element of competition. Some examples of such competitive models are the Smart City Challenge in India, Ease of Doing Business rankings, both global and national, NIRF rankings of educational institutions in India, Race to the Top in USA and Saemaul Undong (new village movement) in South Korea.

The Economic survey¹³ of India (2016-17) focused on urbanisation and competitive sub-federalism with respect to cities and districts of the country. The survey recognised that competition between states is becoming a powerful tool of change and progress and that competition should be extended between states and cities, and between cities.

Based on an analytical competitive framework, this paper provides empirical evidence for a successful model of competitive federalism using the example of 'The SUPER (i.e., S-smart, U-unique, P-perfect, E-enterprising, R-role model) Village Challenge' (SVC) in Palwal district, Haryana. SVC, an inter-village competition initiated by the district administration, combined elements of decentralisation and competition to accelerate rural development in 260 gram panchayats (politically elected village administration of the district).

I INTRODUCTION

The primary motivation for project conceptualisation was to push last-mile delivery of several central and state government schemes/initiatives/programs focused on rural development at the village level in a district where several departments were marked by severe staff shortage. For example, during the entire implementation phase of the project, there was no dedicated (i.e., exclusively for Palwal district) district development and panchayat officer (DDPO) and only one Block development and panchayat officer (BDPO) against the requirement of five. Since the issue of staff crunch could not be handled at the district level on an immediate basis, as this typically requires a long procedure of application submissions followed by approvals at multiple levels (i.e., state government, other divisional offices etc.), a mechanism was needed to leverage the existing constraints in a unique way. Thus, on 27 November 2017, the first phase of SVC was launched for all 260 *Gram Panchayats (GPs)* of the district.



Figure 1: Map of Haryana and Palwal district

Case for Palwal Super Village Challenge (SVC)

The case study of Palwal SVC allows us to explain practical benefits, problems and constraints of implementing competitive models of governance, with a special focus on development in rural areas.

Under SVC, a unique competitive framework was developed to encourage village *sarpanches* to focus on a diverse range of development parameters considered critical for the all-round development of the villages. A scientific scoring mechanism was designed to facilitate the competition. For every parameter achieved, the village *sarpanch* needed to make a self-declaration which was followed by an internal verification by the concerned district department. In case, the verification was found fit for the parameter, the village was awarded the corresponding points. Given that self-declaration and verification for other parameters was a continuous process, a dynamic portal had been conceptualised by the district administration to facilitate this. The portal generated leadership rankings which were based on cumulative points scored by the villages at a given point of time.

The competition's overall theory of change rested on a trinity of interests' framework to synchronise efforts of three critical agents for rural development. This included a) village *sarpanches* (politically elected village council heads), b) district nodal officers of departments (administrative heads for government schemes/initiatives) and c) front-line workers in villages of departments (first POCs in villages for last-mile delivery of government schemes).

A real-time gamification model that runs on a dedicated technology platform (www.supervillagepalwal.in) was used to facilitate the entire competition for approximately three months. The first phase of the competition ended on 15 February 2018. To recognise and reward top performing villages, district administration earmarked Rs 1.5 crore from the District-Plan (or D-plan) funds and thus created a mechanism to link a village's funding to its development results.

SVC prioritised specific development areas and for each area a set of clearly defined parameters and tasks were defined. Successful completion of these parameters could help a *GP* earn points and overall performance of participating villages was reflected on a leadership index (under the Performance section on the SVC online platform www.supervillagepalwal.in) that tracked performance of *GPs* across parameters on a real-time basis. This leadership index had no restrictions on access. It is an open digital platform for all.

The competition defined over 20 development parameters for eight development themes that were critical for driving improvements in several flagship central and state initiatives at the village level. These themes were environment, women empowerment, education, digitisation, health, skill development, community engagement and innovation. As the competition had a diverse range of parameters that cut across different departments, each parameter had been mapped to a particular "department champion". For every self-declaration submitted on a parameter by a *sarpanch* the corresponding department champion was notified via SMS and a verification was

scheduled within the next 15 days. Once the verification was completed, the final verdict on the parameter was submitted. For every successful verification recorded, the portal generated points for villages and performances (on village, block and district level) were captured on the leadership dashboard, and since these declarations and verifications were occurring on multiple fronts (i.e. different combination of parameters and villages), the leadership ranking fluctuated throughout the competition and rankings were dynamically reflected on the portal on a real-time basis.

At the time of the competition’s first-phase conclusion (by February 2018), 33 villages were recognised and awarded special grants for their performance and post the project’s district-success, the CM’s Office recommended a state-wide scale-up, by integrating SVC’s operating framework into the inaugural “7Star Village Ratings” program, a new rural development program applicable to over 6,500 villages. SVC was also shortlisted for Prime Minister’s Excellence Awards for Public administration under the “innovations category” and was also considered as a case study by UC Berkeley, USA.



Figure 2: Snapshot of major themes of parameters in SVC

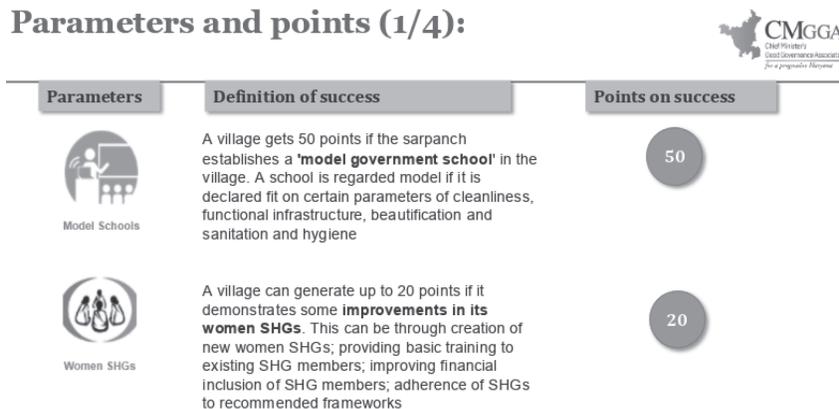


Figure 3: Example of a parameter theme (model schools, women SHGs), task and points



Figure 4: Snapshot enlisting the competition's fundamental working model

In order to operationalise the entire participation and monitoring process in a simple and concurrent (i.e. over 300 users for a given point of time) manner, the portal needed features to facilitate digital data record uploading/maintenance. To ensure this, a log-in facility was created in the portal where *sarpanches* and monitors could use their log-in credentials (dedicated IDs and passwords provided by the district administration) to record data and check performance status on a real-time basis.

Upon entering their log-in credentials, a *sarpanch* could view parameter forms – a statement of condition of the village with respect to the parameters under eight themes. To initiate the process, a *sarpanch* was supposed to make an online self-declaration, whenever he/she felt confident about the village's performance on a particular parameter. Following this, a SMS was sent to the *sarpanch* and concerned parameter nodal officer (district official) to intimate him/her about the process initiation. Within 15 days of a self-declaration, an on-ground inspection was supposed to be conducted by the parameter nodal officer (each parameter had a nodal officer assigned). Post any physical verification, the officers were required to submit observations on the portal (officers also had separate log-in IDs) and if found successful on a parameter, the concerned *GP* (for which the verification occurred) was awarded points digitally through the portal. This process of online declaration and physical verification was a simultaneous process, thus reflecting changes in positioning of *GPs* on the leadership index throughout the course of the competition. The administration conducted special training workshops for *sarpanches* before the launch of the competition and a dedicated room was earmarked in the Mini Secretariat, Palwal to provide timely assistance throughout the competition. All major project team members (including CMGGA, district collector) were available on phone to provide any immediate assistance as well.

The portal could be customised in English or Hindi. The pictures from the Hindi version are shared in this paper, but description for the step is provided in English.

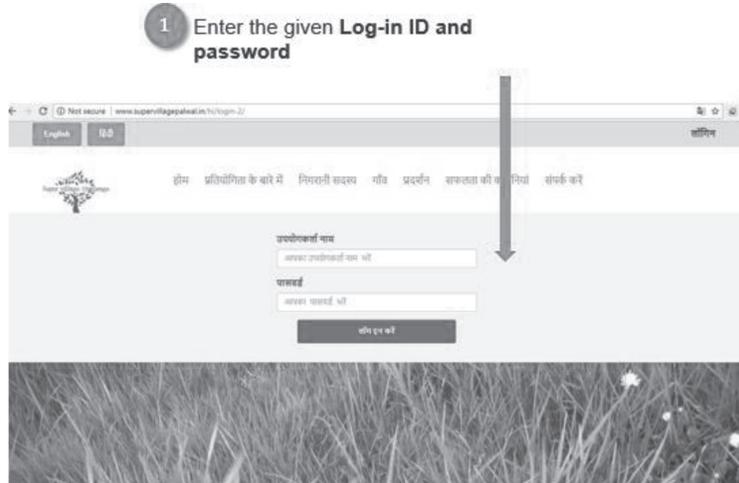


Figure 5: Dedicated window on the portal to enter log-in credentials

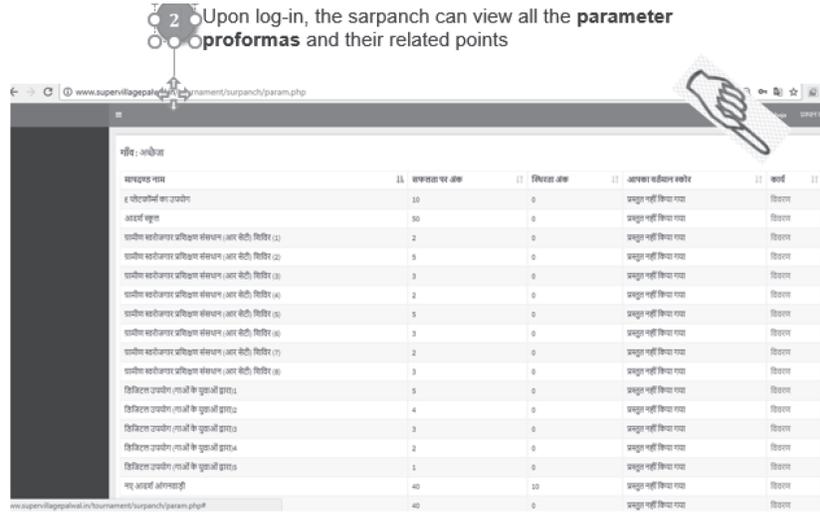


Figure 6: Screen showing list of all parameters

3 For example, the **proforma for 'Model school'** is given , when a sarpanch feels that he/she is fit on a parameter, they can make a **'self declaration'**



Figure 7: Screen showing tasks associated with a parameter and declaration button

4 Click here after submitting 'self declaration' to log-out from the portal



Figure 8: Screen also had a 'log-out' button

- 5 The moment, a sarpanch makes a 'self-declaration', **SMSes are sent to sarpanches and department officer** (mapped to the concerned parameter)

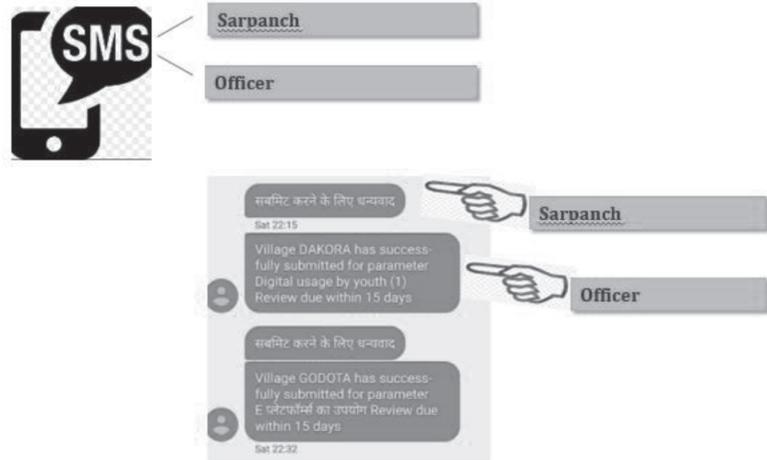


Figure 9: SMS sent after receiving a village's request for parameter verification

- 6 Even the parameter monitor could **Log-in and enter username and password, just as a village sarpanch**

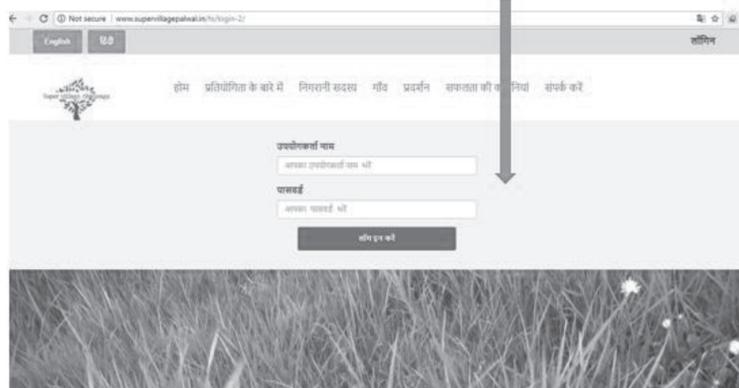


Figure 10: Similar screen pattern (with distinct log-in credentials) for officers

- 7 Just like a sarpanch can view the proforma of a parameter, **an officer can view the submission made by the sarpanch**. Upon clicking 'Pass', the points are awarded to the gram panchayat (GP)
- 8 If a GP fails, then a sarpanch can apply again for the parameter and the same process follows



Figure 11: Officer screen with declaration details and 'Pass/Fail' options

To ensure transparency in operations, digital channels such as Whatsapp groups and social media platforms (dedicated facebook page- <https://www.facebook.com/supervillagepalwal/>) were used to increase information sharing among participants and ensure timely monitoring of progress of works, grievance redressal and timely directions by senior officials to subordinates (picture shared below).

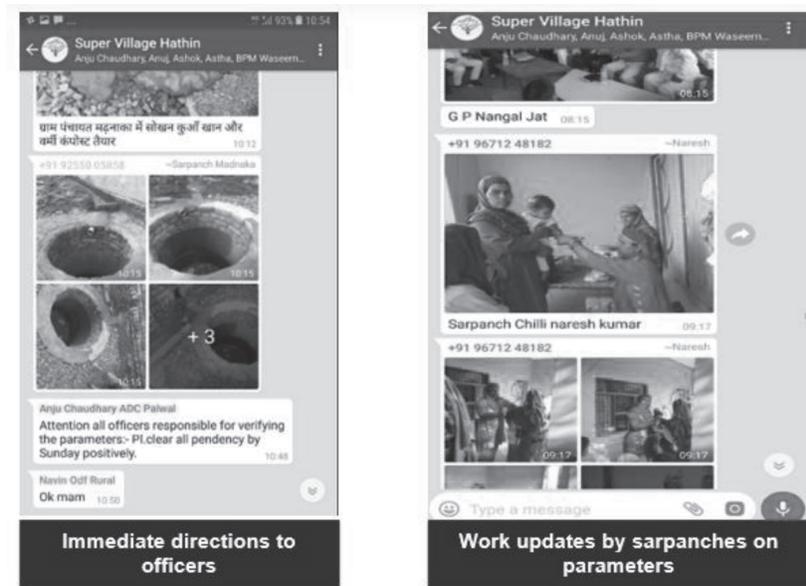


Figure 12: Example of activities on a Whatsapp group for villages of Hathin block

Dedicated 'Whatsapp groups' for each block (i.e. Hodal, Hathin, Palwal, Hassanpur) were created. The members of the group included village *sarpanches*, parameter nodal officers, senior district administration officials (i.e. deputy commissioner/collector, Additional deputy commissioner/collector and Chief Minister's Good Governance Associates of the district). These groups became active channels of dialogue exchange

where work updates, appreciation of efforts, grievance redressal, progress check and other general information related to the competition were shared actively.

To recognise the top-performing *GPs*, the district plan fund or the D-PLAN fund was used to reward top performing *GPs* at block levels (sub-district center) and Rs 1.5 Crore (approx. \$500,000) were earmarked to allocate work orders to facilitate rural development projects in such villages. As per the initial announcement, villages securing the first, second and third spots at the district level were to be awarded work orders worth Rs 15 lakh, Rs 12.5 lakh and Rs 10 lakh, respectively. Whereas the block-level winners were supposed to get work orders worth Rs 10 lakh, Rs 7.5 lakh and Rs 5.5 lakh, respectively. However, due to a large number of tied-spots (i.e. villages ending up at the same score) at the 1st, 2nd, 3rd spots and miniscule difference between some villages ending up at consolation positions, the administration decided to accommodate more *GPs* and decided to reward the 1st, 2nd and 3rd and some consolation positions (i.e. those who missed the 3rd spot in their block by a narrow margin).

This case allows us to explain practical benefits, problems and constraints of competitive models of governance, with a special focus on driving development in rural areas.

Literature Review

Some notable examples of competitive models are The Smart City Challenge in India, Ease of Doing Business Rankings, NIRF rankings of educational institutions in India, Race to the Top in U.S.A, Saemaul Undong (new village movement) in South Korea, etc. Although these are some notable examples where competitive models have been used, there is hardly any conclusive evidence that evaluates the utility of competitive federalism models in the rural development space. The findings from the 2016-17 economic survey¹³ recognise that competition between states is becoming a powerful dynamic of change and progress. The survey argues that cities that are entrusted with responsibilities, empowered with resources, and encumbered by accountability can become effective vehicles for unleashing dynamism so that competitive federalism in India can add, and rely on, competitive sub-federalism.

It argues that dynamism must extend to competition between states and cities and between cities and, hence extending the dynamism-laden competition between states to encompass the cities is what is called competitive sub-federalism. This argument can be applied to the case of Super Village Challenge in Palwal district.

Moreover, the application of competitive federalism models for effective policy implementation and governance has become increasingly popular. Recently, the NITI AAYOG had called for enhancing models of competitive cooperative federalism. Apart from this, in March 2018 a baseline ranking of 115 aspirational districts under the Aspirational Districts Program was released by NITI AAYOG. The idea is to measure progress of districts directly and recognise efforts of district collectors.

These trends show how the need for competitive federalism models has trickled down to various levels of governance. This perhaps is a healthy trend as this embraces the larger idea of decentralisation and takes into consideration varying challenges among the diverse regions, states and districts within India.

However, this extension is currently non-existent in lower levels of governance (i.e. districts, blocks and villages) for rural development. Carl Dahlman in his academic work *A New Paradigm for Rural Development* (2016) suggests that addressing the challenge of rural development is going to require innovative approaches at the local, national and international level and this includes developing multi-sectoral and multi-level and multi-agent strategies that further economic and social development.¹⁴

Given how rural development cuts across different levels of governance in terms of priority, relevance and importance, the case of SVC Palwal, an innovation at the district and sub-district (i.e. blocks and villages) level can be a useful case to explore models focused on sub-federalism.

Research Methodology

Conceptualisation and Theory of Change (TOC):

A severe staff crunch was noticed in the departments focused on rural development in the district. Vacancies in top administrative positions that are critical for driving overall monitoring and coordination in areas of rural development in the district was particularly high. High level of staff crunch was also visible in several departments that run critical government (national or state) initiatives in rural areas. Some of these include the Women and Child Development—supporting early girl child education, immunisation and nutrition), Department of Development and Panchayat—supporting all rural development schemes related to education—supporting elementary education and enrollment initiatives.

Vacancies in important departments that focus on rural development is tabulated below (at the time of project conceptualisation, Sep 2017)

Officer position	Department	Required	Vacancy range* (%)
DDPO (1) and BDPOs (5)	Development and Panchayat	6	80-100
Supervisors	Women and Child Development	44	70-75
District education(DEO) and Block education officers(BEOs)	Education Department	5	80-100

Source: *District administration, Palwal*

*Vacancy is reflected on the basis of presence of dedicated officer (i.e. exclusively for Palwal) for the position. This does not include officers who have additional charge (i.e. officiating capacity for one or more districts). Thus, if an officer is placed under additional charge, it is assumed that the position is not filled completely.

Keeping in mind the last mile delivery of several government schemes (both national and state) aimed at rural development, a need was felt to innovate methods to leverage the existing constraints in a unique way at the district level since the issue of staff shortage could not be fixed immediately (as that involved several state-level administrative approvals, procedures etc.).

Further research and ground-visits to villages presented a useful insight into the dynamics of rural development which helped the core project team (led by CMGGA and deputy commissioner) to conceptualise a Theory of Change (TOC) for the Palwal Super Village Challenge.

It was identified that to push the last mile delivery of any rural development scheme/initiative the efficacy of three agents was critical: a) the village *sarpanch*, b) the district level scheme nodal officer and c) the front-line workers for the department at the village level. For example, the Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) for immunisation, *anganwadi* workers for Women and Child Development (WCD) schemes etc. Hence, a mechanism was needed that could align the interests of the three agents and regulate impact remotely and thus, the overall TOC of the project was rested in this newly developed “trinity of interests” framework.



This framework aimed at synchronising the interests of the agents in such a way that all could strive towards common goals in a concerted manner.

The *sarpanch* in the decentralised system of governance is typically given the legal power to manage the affairs at the village administration. The Haryana *Panchayati Raj* Act, 1994 states that a sarpanch has the general responsibility for the executive and financial administration of the *GP*

Traditionally, his/her involvement by the administration has not been leveraged due to insecurities arising from their political inclinations and influence of the *sarpanches*.

The officers of district administration have their work overstretched due to multiplicity of mandates and responsibilities from time to time. It is difficult for the officers to

fulfill their supervision and monitoring responsibilities. The grassroots worker is constrained by weak infrastructure and lack of financial resources to deliver his duties. High performance is hardly rewarded and dismal performance is not penalised.

Against this backdrop, the foundation of a competitive framework that stands on a trinity where the convergence of interests of the *sarpanches*, monitoring officers of different line departments and representative of the line department doing the grassroots work takes place.

II OPERATING DETAILS OF SUPER VILLAGE CHALLENGE

a. Parameters identification and description:

Through inter-departmental brainstorming sessions certain flagship PM and CM initiatives aimed at strengthening rural development were prioritized. They were focused on cleanliness, solid liquid waste management, environmental protection *Swachh Bharat* mission (clean India campaign), women empowerment (*Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* program—save the girl child initiative), digital literacy (Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan-PMGDISHA scheme), skill development (Rural Self Employment Training Institutes-RSETI scheme) and innovation (in areas of community welfare, technology etc.) at the village level, thus resulting in genesis of the ‘SUPER’ Village Challenge.

A multi-pronged check was maintained while identifying and designing a parameter, thus each parameter had to be: a) easily interpretable (i.e., objectively defined and not open to interpretation) to the *sarpanch* (participant in this case), b) verifiable by the monitor (i.e., data to be checked should be easily available) and c) achievable within a short span of two to three months.

In the competitive framework, eight critical development themes were identified. These were:

1. Education
2. Women empowerment
3. Skill development
4. Community engagement
5. Environmental protection
6. Health
7. Digital literacy amongst the rural youth

8. Innovative projects by village *sarpanches*

For each of the identified category, relevant parameter(s) were developed:

Digital literacy amongst the rural youth:

1. Digital usage by youth (1)- If there is a PMGDISHA center in the village, then the village gets five points.
2. Digital usage by youth (2)- If a PMGDISHA has more than 250 student registrations, then the village gets four points.
3. Digital usage by youth (3)- If a PMGDISHA has up to 200 student registrations, then the village gets three points.
4. Digital usage by youth (4)- If a PMGDISHA has up to 150 student registrations, then the village gets two points.
5. Digital usage by youth (5)- If a PMGDISHA has up to 100 student registrations, then the village gets one point.

e-District Managers (eDMs) are given the target of creating 250 digitally literate individuals in each *GP* of the district by the central government. A student registration sets the foundation for using other digital services in future too thus making the role of eDM important in a village. The village level entrepreneur (VLE) gets a monetary incentive of Rs. 300 paid by each student during registration. With each student registration, the customer base increases for the VLE to avail digital services in the villages itself. *Sarpanch* gets to promote digital literacy and usage amongst the rural population, especially the youth which helps him/her to gain political capital.

Women Empowerment

1. Women SHG (1)- If the number of women SHGs in the village is between one to six, then a village gets two points.
2. Women SHG (2)- If the village has organised more than three OBC RSETI camps, then the village gets five points.
3. Women SHG (3)- If the village has organised up to three OBC RSETI camps, then the village gets three points.
4. Women SHG (4)- If the village has organised up to two OBC RSETI camps, then the village gets two points.
5. Women SHG (5)- If the *GP* has sent more than 20 unemployed youth to the camp, then the village gets five points.
6. Women SHG (6)- If the *GP* has sent up to 15 unemployed youth to the camp, then the village gets three points.
7. Women SHG (7)- If the *GP* has sent up to 10 unemployed youth to the camp, then

the village gets two points.

8. Women SHG (8)- If more than 20 women have participated in the camps, then the village gets three points.

The above parameters act as an incentive for District Project Manager, National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DPM, NRLM) to reflect their performance and achieve targets given to them by higher NLRM authorities. They also help generate awareness about role and importance of women self-help groups (SHG) among the *sarpanches*. *Sarpanch's* sponsorship helps the DPM, NLRM gain trust and credibility among the community members to form SHGs. *Samuh Sevika* also known as, active women, get financial incentives for creating groups and facilitating activities within such groups. Also, it sets the foundation for internalisation of better performing *sevikas* to become community resource persons (CRPs) who can then become professional resource persons (PRPs) helping them move closer towards internalisation in government administration. *Sarpanch* gets an ideal platform to promote financial literacy amongst women to make them self-reliant. This platform also enables the *sarpanch* to gain more social capital among the community members.

Skill development

1. RSETI camps (1) - If all members of the *GP* are aware about the existence of OBC RSETI, then the village gets two points.
2. RSETI camps (2) - If the village has organised more than three OBC RSETI camps, then the village gets five points.
3. RSETI camps (3) - If the village has organised up to three OBC RSETI camps, then the village gets three points.
4. RSETI camps (4) - If the village has organised up to two OBC RSETI camps, then the village gets two points.
5. RSETI camps (5) - If the *GP* has sent more than 20 unemployed youth to the camp, then the village gets five points.
6. RSETI camps (6) - If the *GP* has sent up to 15 unemployed youth to the camp, then the village gets three points.
7. RSETI camps (7) - If the *GP* has sent up to 10 unemployed youth to the camp, then the village gets two points.
8. RSETI camps (8) - If more than 20 women have participated in the camps, then the village gets three points.

The above parameters act as incentive to the OBC RSETI Director as it gives him/her direct access to the youth to spread awareness about RSETI Palwal and its skill development programmes. The faculty member at OBC RSETI is no longer required to bear the burden of mobilising and gathering masses to increase the uptake of skill

development programmes as it is now driven by *sarpanches*. *Sarpanch's* support towards mobilisation of youth helps the faculty member gain respect in the village. *Sarpanch* provides awareness about avenues for entrepreneurship and employment to unemployed youth. This helps to increase his/her popularity.

Community engagement

1. *Vachanalay*s (a community reading room) for men- If a village is able to create a *Vachanalya* for men, then the village gets 30 points.
2. *Vachanalay*s for women- If a village is able to create a *Vachanalya* for men, then the village gets 15 points.

ADC and *Sarpanch* argue that *Vachanalay*s enhances atmosphere of community engagement in the village. It also provides a platform to promote fraternity and civic habits through reading, which helps in the administration of the district.

Environmental protection

1. Polythene free (1)- If the polythene is not available in shops of a village, then the village gets 20 points.
2. Polythene free (2)- If the village is able to demonstrate proper management of polythene at household level, then the village gets 10 points.
3. Polythene free (3)- If all members of the *GP* are aware about the existence of OBC RSETI, then the village gets two points.
4. Soakage pit coverage (1)- If safe disposal of sanitary waste is happening in the village, for example at household or community level, then a village gets 60 points.
5. Soakage pit coverage (2)- If grey water is not visible in the village, then 60 points are awarded.
6. Vermi compost facility- If the village has a vermi-compost, then 20 points are awarded.

APO SBM contends that the above parameters are linked with the expectations of ODF+, which is critical for the success of the SBM. These parameters help the administration to gain the support of *sarpanches* in order to progress on critical parameters of ODF+ such as polythene free villages, soakage pits, etc. *Sarpanches* argue that it creates proper channels for liquid waste management and helps improve ground water levels. Compost, being a manure, is also a source of potential revenue for *sarpanches*. For *Swachta grehi* (motivators), the above parameters are in line with the objectives of SBM. Improvements in these parameters increase his/her chances to get internalised in the govt machinery.

Health

Immunisation for new born children:

If a village is able to achieve 90 per cent or more immunisation coverage for all children aged 0-2 years, then 40 points are awarded. This was measured by the respective medical officers and ground staff of the area responsible for collecting regular updates on immunisation.

New model *anganwadis*:

1. Is there a well-functioning toilet?
2. Does vaccination happen regularly as per the suggested schedule?
3. Is the weighing machine record maintained?
4. Is ration facility operational?
5. Is weight recorded every month?
6. Does the *anganwadi* worker conducts activities with children with everyday?
7. Children with improper health are sent to the concerned CHC/PHC?
8. Regular information sharing regarding health and well-being between ASHA and *anganwadi* workers?
9. Is there a *Gudda Guddi* chart (sex ratio charts) in the *anganwadi*?
10. Is the pregnancy record for the area complete?
11. Is the interior and exterior space clean?
13. Is there a 'Beto Bachao Beti Padhao' logo on the walls?
14. Is the gas connection operational?
15. Is there a signboard?
16. Is the NPC (nutrition program certified) grain kept well in containers?
17. Are the swings used appropriately?
18. Are the 'Purvashala kits' (pre-school education kit) used?
19. Is there a dustbin facility?
20. Is there safe drinking water facility?
21. Do all walls have attractive paintings?
22. Is there proper cemented flooring in the center?

The village *sarpanches* don't always treat the PO/CDPO as important government functionaries. Such parameters help the administration to increase engagement and partnership of *sarpanches* with departments often considered the domain of women. *Sarpanchs'* contention revolve around the argument that the development on such parameters help to improve the image of the *anganwadi* workers in the village. Parents become interested in sending children to the centres. *Anganwadi* worker gets the support of *sarpanches* and it helps to establish their credibility among the villagers. Aesthetic improvement of *anganwadis* attract children. It also helps the *anganwadi* worker to work efficiently and upkeep the centre.

Education

Model School - If a government school achieves a 'yes' on all the questions (listed below), then the village gets 50 points.

1. Is library functional?
2. Is blackboard properly maintained?
3. Is dish TV connection functional in the school?
4. Is the park properly maintained?
5. Is the existing plantation properly maintained?
6. Are the walls of all classrooms and school properly painted?
7. Is running water available in toilets?
8. Is quality drinking water facility available for students?
9. Schools have proper cemented flooring?
10. Are sanitary napkins available for girls? (if applicable)

DEO/BEO maintain that poor infrastructure is a major constraint in government schools. The department is often unable to provide solutions. With the parameters defined above, the department gets extended support from the *sarpanch*. Moreover, improvement of aesthetics and infrastructure in schools helps to retain students. It also increases efficiency of the staff in the school. *Sarpanches* increase their social and political capital by getting a model school certified by the district administration.

Innovative projects by village *sarpanches*

If the village *sarpanch* is able to implement an innovative idea at the village level in the field of education, health, environment, community service or anything else, then the village gets 40 points. The idea submitted by the *sarpanch* will be evaluated on its: a) uniqueness, b) relevance to rural development, c) scalability across all villages.

b. Operating mechanism- declaration and verification:

In order to facilitate the SUPER Village tournament in a transparent manner, district administration conceptualised a Smart Portal (www.supervillagepalwal.in). Online accounts for all 260 GPs in Palwal were created. The portal was officially launched on 27 November 2017.

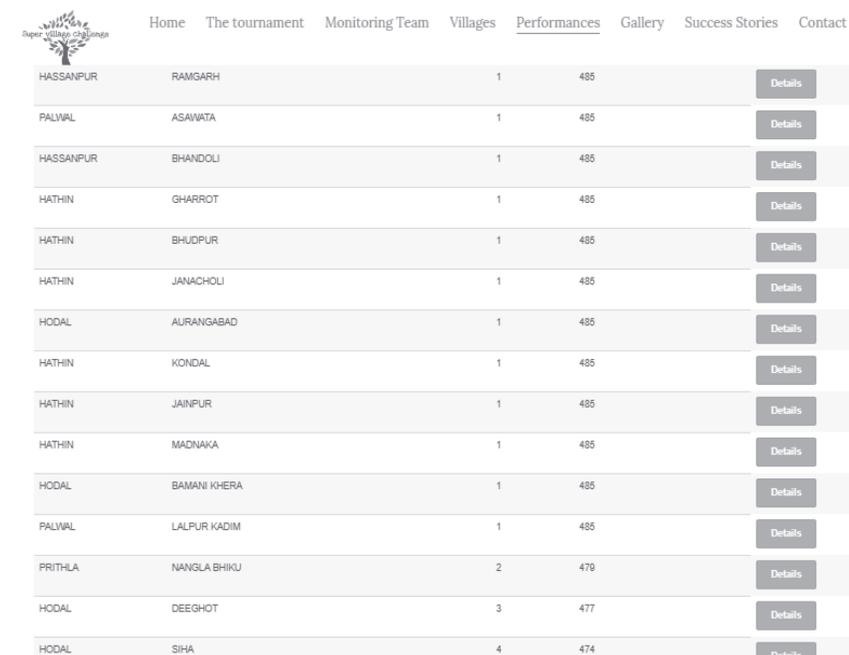
Each village *sarpanch* had a distinct username and password through which he/she could access the online forms that highlighted the targets and the points that can be achieved upon success in each parameter. These online forms (pictures shared in the paper) provided options to *sarpanches* to make self-declarations on each parameter. Once an online declaration was made, an SMS was generated to ensure proper monitoring and transparency. The recipients of these SMSes are the *sarpanches*, monitoring officers in line departments (district level/block level officers appointed for each parameter) and the core team (CMGGA, ADC).

A 15-day time-period was provided to the nodal officer in the department to complete the verification. During the verification, the *sarpanch* used to be present at the site as well. In case the verification was found successful, the department officer had to allot the points for success online on the portal through their respective login IDs and passwords. Department monitors had to enter details of an online form which validates the inspection. Upon clicking Pass, points are awarded to the village according to the parameter.

As soon as the loop for online declaration (by *sarpanch*), on-site inspection (by monitor) and then an online submission of results—either pass or fail (by monitor again) is completed successfully, points were awarded to the concerned GP. However, in case the village failed (i.e. not found successful) on its parameter declaration during inspection, then the village *sarpanch* could apply again and make a fresh declaration, followed by the same process (inspection-result upload by monitor-reflection on performance page). An image is shared below to describe the entire process briefly:



These results were reflected on a performance dashboard that used to fluctuate on a real-time basis. A picture from the final dashboard (achieved after first stage of the competition ended) is shared below:



The screenshot shows a web dashboard for the 'Super Village Challenge'. The navigation menu includes: Home, The tournament, Monitoring Team, Villages, Performances, Gallery, Success Stories, and Contact. The main content is a table listing performance results for 15 different village pairs. Each row includes the village names, a score, a total points value, and a 'Details' button.

Village 1	Village 2	Score	Total Points	Action
HASSANPUR	RAMGARH	1	485	Details
PALWAL	ASAWATA	1	485	Details
HASSANPUR	BHANDOLI	1	485	Details
HATHIN	GHARROT	1	485	Details
HATHIN	BHUDPUR	1	485	Details
HATHIN	JANACHOLI	1	485	Details
HODAL	AURANGABAD	1	485	Details
HATHIN	KONDAL	1	485	Details
HATHIN	JAINPUR	1	485	Details
HATHIN	MADNAKA	1	485	Details
HODAL	BAMANI KHERA	1	485	Details
PALWAL	LALPUR KADIM	1	485	Details
PRITHLA	NANGLA BHIKU	2	479	Details
HODAL	DEEGHOT	3	477	Details
HODAL	SIHA	4	474	Details

While the log-in access to the portal for making self-declarations is restricted (i.e., each *sarpanch* has their own respective log-in ID and password), this leadership dashboard was accessible to the public. This was done to instill a sense of competition among the *sarpanches* and encourage “real-time gamification”.

c. Follow up practices- meetings and special events:

During the first phase of SVC (27 November 2017 to 15 February 2018), numerous meetings were organised at the district and block level by the administration with *sarpanches*. The primary aim of these meetings was to disseminate information about SVC among *sarpanches*, clear doubts (if any) and motivate them to participate enthusiastically. These meetings were led by the CMGGA and several district officials (DC, ADC, BDPO, APO-SBM).

Numerous special events and press conference(s) were organised by the district administration as part of the SVC. These were attended by most of the senior bureaucrats such as the DC, ADC, CMGGA and also by *sarpanches*. Invitation to the *sarpanches* was linked to performance which automatically created an incentive for them. For example, a special dinner was hosted on 5 Jan 2018 at the DC residence to recognise and appreciate efforts of top 100 *sarpanches*. The event was called “TOP 100-100” which was attended by 100 *sarpanches* who were the first to reach 100 points up until 4 January 2018 (1 day before event day). This helped boost participation rapidly as *sarpanches* found a rare opportunity to interact with a delegation of foreign students, professors from foreign universities (i.e. Case Western University and University of Berkeley, USA) and share their experiences.

A table (shared below) mentions some of critical dates, events and the number of participating villages in the events. This table also helps to show how the administration used certain dates/events to strategically increase the participation of the villages in the competition.

Event name	Date	Number of participating villages on the date
Meeting of DC, CMGGA with 60 <i>sarpanches</i> In Mini Secretariat, Palwal	22/12/2017	61
Press conference of DC, ADC, CMGGA with Media personnel. Also attended by incumbent top 15 <i>sarpanches</i>	2/1/2018	137
Dinner of top 100 <i>sarpanches</i> at DC residence and Interaction with foreign delegation from USA	5/1/2018	145
Call of state department to district administration to nominate polythene free villages	14/1/2018	170
Video conference with all Deputy Commissioners of Haryana chaired by Addl. PS to CM	16/1/2018	180
Nomination of Hodal block as 100% Polythene free by District rural development authority	19/1/2018	200+

Until 22 December 2017, which is approximately one month after the official launch of SVC on 27 November 2017, the participation rate of villages was below 30 per cent. However, after the meeting chaired by DC and announcement (made during the meeting) of foreign delegation's visit to Palwal, the participation rate increased. It must also be noted how the administration used the momentum created by SVC to fast track delivery on other rural development initiatives that were going on at the state level. For example, the polythene free requirement (which also happened to be a parameter in SVC) was a critical component of the ODF+ mission too.

Hence, the SVC helped the administration make huge improvements in its district level targets on some critical ongoing state programs on rural development.

III RESULTS

a. Parameter performance:

To measure the impact of the intervention, the administration prepared a baseline and an end-line data sheet that captured the data for all 260 GPs on two occasions across all the parameters: a) at the start of competition and b) at the end of the first phase (i.e., 15th February 2018).

The external study on SVC provided a detailed analysis of the competition and the changes induced by it (Chhibber and Gupta 2018). Overall, the competition had 100 per cent participation, i.e., all 260 GPs had made declaration on at least one parameter. The polythene free parameter was amongst the most popular, evident from the fact that all villages declared themselves polythene free. A key point to note here is that polythene free meant absence of plastic/polythene (at the inner and outer street of the village) and overall visible cleanliness during the time of inspection.

The second most popular parameter was immunisation as approximately 145 villages declared that at least 90 per cent of children in the village had been immunised. The number of children due for immunisation in the district reduced from 5,944 to 1,139.

Encouraging improvements were made in *anganwadi* centres and schools as well. During SVC approximately 70 villages converted at least one *anganwadi* into a model *anganwadi* and similarly, government schools in 82 villages were declared as model schools. Improvements were also visible in the community engagement category. Before SVC had started, there was only one village level *vaachanalya* (community reading room) in the district. However, after the competition of the competition, more than 70 villages started separate *vaachanalyas* for men and women.

On other fronts such as digital literacy, considerable improvements were made. More than 5,500 new registrations were made at PMGDISHA centres during SVC. On women empowerment parameters such as self-help groups (SHGs), substantial improvements were made as an increase of more than 50 per cent and more than 160 new women SHGs were started during the competition.

Some of capital-intensive parameters such as building community soak pits and vermi-compost were completed by relatively fewer villages (32 in number). Almost 50 employment awareness camps that had a cumulative participation of 2,769 were organised to boost the RSETI scheme in 20 villages. Other parameters such as uploading of data on the PRIYASOFT platform saw very low participation from villages.

b. Recognition beyond district at the state and national level:

The inaugural 7Star Village scheme, a state-wide scheme, provides star ratings to villages on 7 development parameters—education and dropouts, peace and harmony, sex ratio, hygiene and sanitation, good governance and social participation. The scheme was launched on 26 January 2018 by Mr Manohar Lal Khattar, Chief Minister of Haryana and Mr OP Dhankar, Minister of Development and Panchayat, Haryana. Although, SVC Palwal and 7star are distinct schemes/initiatives, both have some similar dimensions in parameters of sanitation and hygiene (e.g. emphasis on plastic free/polythene free), good governance (e.g. requirement of digital CSCs etc.) and introduction of a “performance linked” aspect to rural development grants. However, the real-time gamification aspect is unique to Palwal’s SVC and the work done by *GPs* under SVC has had clear gains for the district in the 7star scheme.

This is evident from the fact that the highest rating received by any *GP* under 7star is ‘6star’ and only 3 *GPs* have received such star rating. Interestingly, all the *GPs* namely Janachauli, Nangla Bhiku and Jainpur are from Palwal. Even in the 5star category, Palwal has the highest number of *GPs* (2), while only Rohtak and Charki Dadri have a *GP* each in this category. Similarly, in the 4star category, only 3 districts namely Palwal, Ambala, Fatehabad have two *GPs* each. Although Palwal lacks behind other districts in the number of *GPs* with lower star ratings (i.e. 1star, 2star, 3star), the district dominates when it comes to higher star ratings, which perhaps means that villages gained from the SVC experience. The competition exposed village *sarpanches* to the idea of a multi-dimensional (20+ development parameters across 8 themes) competitive model, and the advanced model of real-time gamification helped them understand the dynamics of a mass-scale competition before the 7star round assessment began in April-May 2018.

Star wise Districts - Level 2

Sr.No	District	0-Star	1-Star	2-Star	3-Star	4-Star	5-Star	6-Star	7-Star
1	AMBALA	1	95	269	41	2	0	0	0
2	BHIWANI	10	13	5	0	0	0	0	0
3	CHARKI DADRI	0	1	0	4	0	1	0	0
4	FARIDABAD	2	6	11	2	1	0	0	0
5	FATEHABAD	0	0	4	8	2	0	0	0
6	GURUGRAM	5	69	103	25	1	0	0	0
7	HISAR	4	13	12	9	1	0	0	0
8	JHAJJAR	18	16	0	0	0	0	0	0
9	JIND	2	7	17	1	0	0	0	0
10	KAITHAL	0	3	11	6	0	0	0	0
11	KARNAL	1	6	50	3	0	0	0	0
12	KURUKSHETRA	6	65	9	1	0	0	0	0
13	MAHENDRAGARH	2	12	2	0	0	0	0	0
14	MEWAT	0	31	2	0	0	0	0	0
15	PALWAL	0	16	1	2	2	2	3	0
16	PANCHKULA	3	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
17	PANIPAT	2	19	9	0	0	0	0	0
18	REWARI	10	1	3	0	0	0	0	0
19	ROHTAK	0	0	18	1	0	1	0	0
20	SIRSA	1	49	8	1	0	0	0	0
21	SONEPAT	0	3	5	2	0	0	0	0
22	YAMUNANAGAR	1	2	25	2	0	0	0	0

While 16 *GPs* fall in the top 7star categories (i.e., 6star, 5star and 4star inclusive), seven *GPs* are from Palwal, which constitutes almost 44 per cent, reflecting the dominant position of the district in the top star category position. Moreover, it is also seen that the top performing villages in 7star also had a top (i.e. 1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th) rank in the first phase of SVC also. A table below shows the rank of such *GPs* in SVC and their corresponding star rating in 7star.

VILLAGE	SVC rank	7Star rating
RAMGARGH	1	4
BHANDOLI	1	5
GHARROT	1	5
JANACHOLI	1	6
JAINPUR	1	6
NANGLA BHIKU	1	6
KARNA	4	4

The efforts of the district administration, Palwal were also recognised by the department of redressal and public grievances (DARPG), as SVC was shortlisted in the ‘Innovations’ category for the Prime Minister’s Excellence Awards for public administration (2018).

IV DISCUSSION

In terms of generating momentum and ensuring active participation of *GPs* SVC worked well. Despite participation being voluntary, the competition witnessed participation by all villages in the district and there was substantial improvement in the overall district's performance on multiple parameters. As there was no other major initiative during this period (i.e., between November 17 to February 18), the progress may be largely attributed to various elements of the SVC. Inducing active participation from all *panchayats* was a great achievement of the program as all 260 *GPs* made a declaration on at least one parameter. This was way beyond the expectations of several officers in the district administration, who pegged an at-best target of 100 *GPs*.

While participation was extremely encouraging, a closer assessment reveals that actual participation may be higher had requirements for sustainability been enforced by the administration. For example, although all 260 *GPs* declared themselves as polythene free but only 68 had participated on this parameter. If we remove these, active participation rate may come down to 192 instead of 260. Hence, the need to ensure high participation and high sustainability at the same time might prove to be a challenging task.

Moreover, a closer look at the data of outcomes on some parameters **by Chhibber and Gupta (2018)** also reveals interesting insights. For example, the new 160 SHGs that were formed were mainly based out of the villages that had them earlier too and thus effectively only 20 new villages had SHGs post SVC.

Participation on straight forward parameters, which administration had anticipated would become popular, such as data upload of village accounts on digital platforms such as PRIYASOFT (Since the *GPs* are supposed to do this regularly) and organisation of RSETI camps (entirely administration sponsored) did not pick popularity at all. Even the conversion of the participation recorded at these RSETI camps to actual new enrolments in training courses was very low (approximately 100 for over 2,700 cumulative participants). Apart from this, capital intensive parameters such as construction of soakage pits and vermi compost pits failed to generate mass support and was performed largely by few (approximately 30) *panchayats* and it represents a meagre 12 per cent of total *GPs* in Palwal.

Further the report submitted by the UC Berkeley team provides several lessons for scaling up an initiative like SVC. First, parameters need to be cost intensive and must have a balance or a fair play footing for all villages. Moreover, while adapting parameters, there is a need to be cognizant of the "head start" advantage—parameters that don't have any such element are likely to be perceived and internalised in an equal and fair

manner by participants. Although, in SVC careful attention was paid to this, some parameters such as PMGDISHA (as a village might already have a center) and immunisation rate (as a village might anyways have a higher immunisation rate due to multiplicity of factors) clearly put some villages in an advantageous situation against others in a competitive set-up. Apart from this, a mechanism to award points for sub-tasks within a parameter must be explored. For example, in the Model School parameter, a *GP* would only get the points if a school complied with all the requirements, this might put an unfair burden on the participant.

Despite this, SVC is an interesting case to argue for exploring more competitive sub-federalism models for rural development. First, SVC through its multi-dimensional nature of parameters comes out as a holistic programme. Second, results were achieved by the district administration with minimal incremental expenditure used from government sources (exchequer). For example, prize money was allocated from the District Plan funds already available with the district administration and the expenditure on other fronts like building of the portal, public events related to SVC was very low. Third, no additional funds were given by the administration to any village for SVC related activities. However, this can make participation difficult for *GPs* that lack adequate funds as they may not be able to stay abreast in the competition against those that have sufficient funds and this can possibly increase the inequalities among *GPs*. However, in future versions of the competition, the feasibility of allowing expedited release of government funds (e.g. *panchayat* funds) for SVC related works may be explored. Fourth, SVC did not require any mega transformative changes or any other administrative reforms. The same set of district and block level officers and frontline staff were mobilised for this initiative.

Thus, the Palwal Super Village challenge experiment helps show why synchronizing the interests of various stakeholders is integral for the implementation of rural development programs, especially in the Indian context where the implementation largely depends on three key stakeholders at the local level—the *sarpanch* and the *panchayat*, senior bureaucracy (DC, ADC, DDO, BDOs etc.) and their sub-ordinate frontline staff. Unless their interests and motivation are aligned, there is likely to be a shortfall in public service delivery.

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