



Digital governance platforms for rural India: A comparative analysis of eGramSwaraj, Audit Online and Gram Manchitra

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Abstract

All doubts and questions regarding the E-governance were disappeared when India passed the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) in May 2006. This act was proposed to make government services easily available to all the citizens even at the grassroots through public delivery channels. To achieve transparency, accountability and real time tracking of development activities in a digital mannervarious platforms have been created, among that eGramSwaraj, Audit Online and Gram Manchitra are taken for the present study. This study aims to review the role of digital platforms such as eGramSwaraj, Audit Online and Gram Manchitra in improving Panchayat-level governance. It focuses on understanding their major functions and contribution to planning, financial management, auditing and local development. This study follows a descriptive review approach based on government reports, government official websites, official documents and existing literature. The collected information was reviewed and presented in a thematic manner to understand the features, implementation status and limitations of these digital initiatives. Review of these platforms indicates that digital technologies are gradually being incorporated into different aspects of Panchayat administration and service delivery. At the same time, their effective implementation depends on factors such as internet connectivity, availability of digital infrastructure, technical knowledge and the capacity of local officials and citizens to use these platforms.

Keywords: eGramSwaraj, Audit Online, Gram Manchitra, E-Governance, National E-Governance Plan

Introduction

The fast growth of information and communication technology (ICT) has changed the way public administration and governance work in a big way especially at the local level. An ideal change is happening towards the digital revolution. In India, a country defined by its enormous population diverse, demographics and complicated administrative institutions, E-governance efforts have emerged as a catalyst for radical change. All doubts and questions regarding the e-governance were disappeared when National e-Governance Plan introduced in May 2006. This act was proposed to make government services easily available to all the citizens even at the grassroots through public delivery channels; while guaranteeing efficiency, transparency and accessibility of such services at low cost and it laid a strong foundation for the implementation of information and communication facilities in government services. This trial forms a unified, closed-loop e-governance ecosystem for the implementation of National e-Governance Plan with 27 Mission Mode Projects and 8 project components.

e-governance is the use of ICT by governmental organizations to change how the government used to work and the Digital India initiative is a major national program which is initiated by the government of India. It functions as a major umbrella initiative under the broader framework of a National e-Governance Plan. To achieve the transparency, accountability and real time tracking of the development activities in a digital mannervarious platforms have been created among that eGramSwaraj, Audit Online and Gram Manchitra are taken for the present study. These three

platforms were selected because it is one of the important initiatives introduced by the Ministry of Panchayat Raj to support Gram panchayats. These platforms support different stages of local governance from planning, implementing, mapping to auditing.

Aim and Objective of the study

Aim: To review the role of digital platforms such as eGramSwaraj, Audit Online and Gram Manchitra in strengthening Panchayat-level governance

Objectives: To understand their major functions, uses and contribution to planning, financial management, auditing and local development.

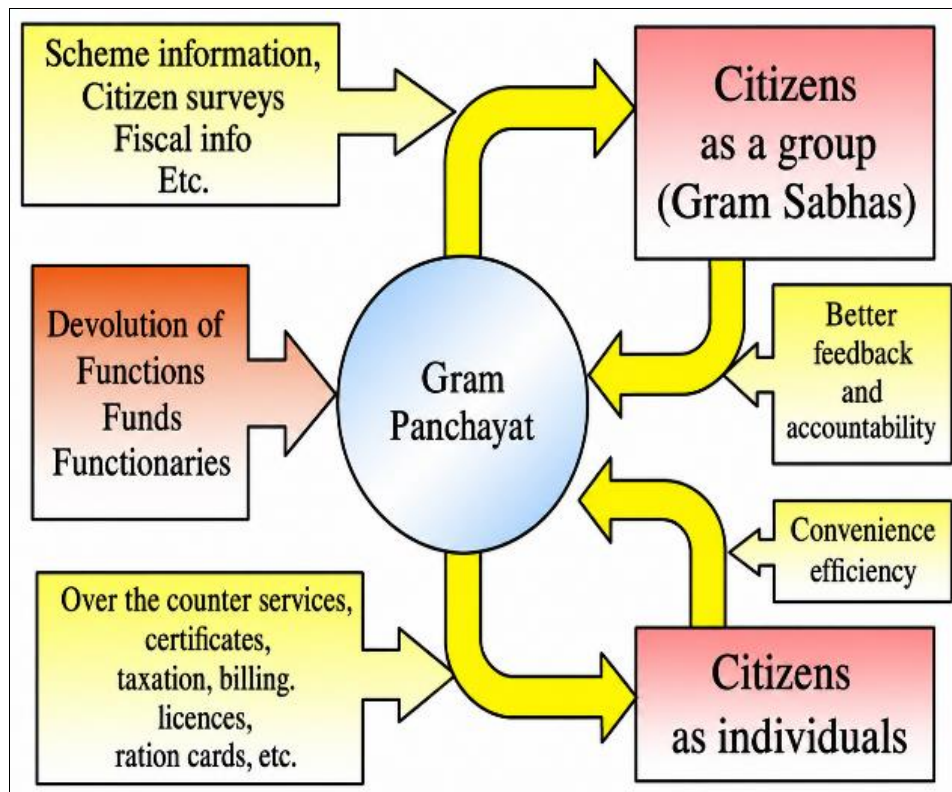
Methodology: This study follows a descriptive review approach, based mainly on government reports, government official websites, official documents and existing literature. The information was reviewed and presented thematically to understand the major features, current status and limitations of these digital initiatives.

ICT and Gram Panchayats

Gram Panchayats, India's lowest tier of rural local self-Government, play a significant role in village administration and development. Recent digital transformation attempts have mainly focused on furnishing these bodies with digital platforms and technology with the aim to improving governance structures, operational effectiveness and service delivery. Multiple digital initiatives have taken place in India during the last couple of decades (Nambiar & Sai

Vijetha, 2022) ^[14]. Strengthening Panchayats is not just about more administrative powers, but also the adoption of digital technology to assist their daily operations. Recognizing the rising importance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in strengthening governance and information exchange, the Government of India announced the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) in 2006. This strategy prioritized the building of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) through the use of digital tools to assist administrative and governance tasks (Rashid & Bansal, 2017) ^[16]. Information and communication technology (ICT), has transformed the way Gram Panchayats conduct their daily operations.

Local governments may use the internet, mobile phones, digital platforms, GIS, and data-based systems to communicate information more readily, keep records better, and organize development initiatives. These technologies also make it easier for citizens to get government services, learn about local programs, and contact with Panchayat officials. Better planning is facilitated by digital technologies, which assist local governments in identifying community needs and making better use of existing resources. They also urge individuals to participate in local governance by expressing their ideas and proposals via internet platforms. As a consequence, ICT has improved Gram Panchayats' ability to respond to the demands of rural people and the general operation of local government (Chinnadurai & Sakthivel, 2024) ^[1].



Source:(Singh et al., 2024) ^[17]

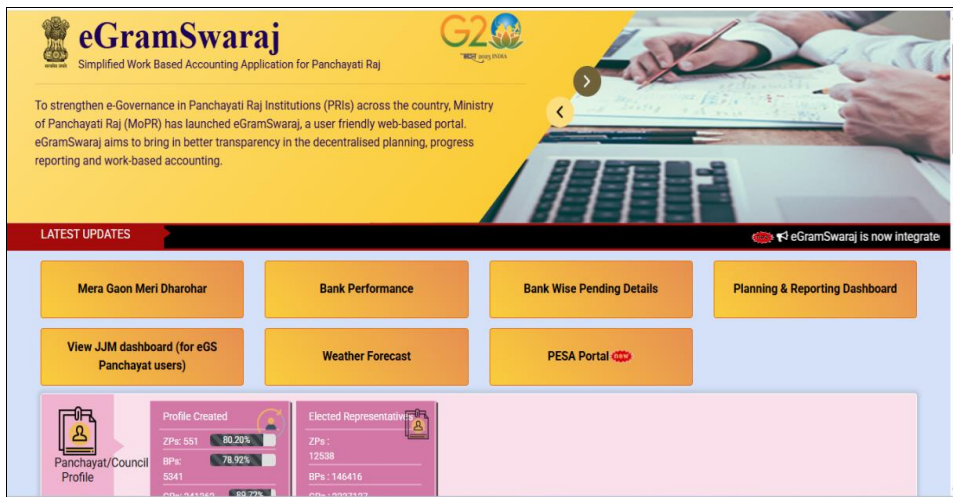
Fig 1: ICT Role in Government

Information and communication technology help in providing better public services. With the help of ICT, people can easily know about the government schemes introduced, current status of the scheme, how much fund allocated and for what purposes. Now all these can be easily accessed by people on the official government portals. Information should not only come from the Government to citizens (top-down), citizen can also be able to convey their opinion on schemes introduced by the government and their grievances should also reached the officials. Technology made it possible. It enables two-way communication through portals. This kind of government portals increase transparency and accountability. When financial details regarding projects and decisions are presented to all eyes, people can monitor all the activities. This can reduce corruption and make representatives more accountable (Ghosh, 2014) ^[2].

eGramSwaraj

The ministry of panchayat raj started the e-panchayat Mission Mode Project (MMP) as part of the digital India program. The goal is to make panchayats more open, accountable and successful as local self-Governments (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2024) ^[8]. The goal of the e-Panchayat Mission Mode Project (MMP) is to improve e-governance in Panchayat Raj Institution (PRIs) throughout the country to make service delivery and government at the local level more open, accountable, efficient and effective. This project is designed to automate the internal workflows and basic functions of panchayats and bring out the increased citizen participation in its functioning. It is adopted across all the states and union territories (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025b) ^[10]. One of the major applications under the e-panchayat mission mode project is eGramSwaraj. It is an online platform and also it is work based and it has wide range of application. It was launched on the occasion of national Panchayati raj day on April

24,2020, a user-friendly web-based portal (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025a) [10].



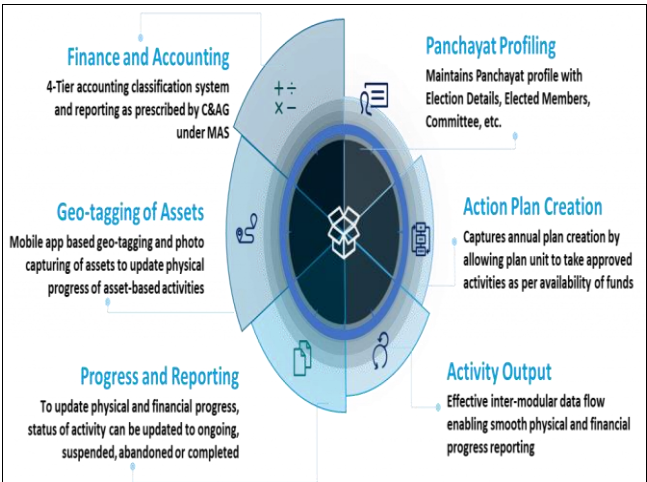
Source:(Ministry of Panchayati Raj, n.d.-b)

Fig 2: Dashboard of eGramSwaraj Portal

Panchayat Raj Ministry has included beneficiary verification as one of the important goals to the peoples plan campaign and provided the online system to show the list of beneficiaries of various central Government schemes on eGramSwaraj. This has been made available to gram Sabha's for public verification which would be a landmark in ensuring accountability. For this purpose, various ministries/departments are integrated with e-gram swaraj application (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, n.d.-c). The eGramSwaraj portal was provided in English initially then the ministry took a huge step towards inclusion by adding AI-powered tools along with the Bhashini which was launched on August 14,2024 by the union minister of Panchayat Raj. This integration with the eGramSwaraj helps to provide services in 22 scheduled languages of India (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025c) [10]. This integration helps to increase active citizen participation, officials and citizens can easily use the portal and understand in their own language.

By combining various aspects of local government in to a single digital system, the eGramSwaraj platform is designed to assist gram panchayats in their overall operations. the first function is the panchayat profiling, it maintains basic information about the gram Panchayat like demographic details, administrative information and available infrastructure. It also helps in preparing action plans by using the information regarding local development needs and their priorities. Following approval of the plans, the platform keeps track of the action and record the

result of the development initiatives. Officials may create reports, following the ongoing projects with the help of those records they can easily analyse the schemes. Another important function of this portal is geo-tagging assets with the help of GPS and GIS technology Roads, schools, water bodies, community halls, street light can be linked with their geographical location.



Source:(Ministry of Panchayati Raj, n.d.-b)

Fig 3: Functions of eGramSwaraj

There are six modules which act as the backbone of eGramSwaraj application. They are:

Table 1:Six Modules of eGramSwaraj

Sl. No	Modules	Key features	Objectives
1	Panchayat profile	- General profile of the gram panchayat - Details of elected members - Employee details	Guide the visitors of the websites to easily identify the elected representatives and employees of the gram panchayat.
2	planning	- Approved activities in the Gram Sabha are entered. - Administration sanction is provided for only those works entered in eGramSwaraj with respect to budget allocation.	To ensure that development works are properly planned, approved and digitally recorded.
3	Progress Reporting	- Reporting of Physical and financial activities in the action plan - Various central/state specific schemes	To track the physical and financial progress of the planned works, transparency in technical and administrative approvals.
4	Accounting	The formats for the preparing of budget and accounts	Accountable digital financial management in

		▪ Adding vendor and employee details ▪ Digital signature verified transactions.	panchayats.
5	Asset directory	▪ It let the users to update the status of an asset whenever there is a change.	Helps to track and update the asset status.
6	User management	▪ System administrators manage and control the user access to the system	To ensure secure and controlled access to the system.

Source:(Ministry of Panchayati Raj, n.d.-b)

State wise Adoption Status of eGramSwaraj for FY 2025^[9]-26

Table 2: Adoption of eGramSwaraj

Sl. No	State Name	Total Number of Village Panchayats & Equivalent	Village Panchayat onboarded on eGramSwaraj-PFMS interface	Village Panchayats & Equivalent with Online Payment	No. of GPDP Uploaded on eGramSwaraj during Plan Year 2025 ^[9] -26
1	Andhra Pradesh	13327	13320	13041	13320
2	Arunachal Pradesh	2108	2108	1541	2089
3	Assam	2663	2198	2118	2117
4	Bihar	8054	8054	8050	8053
5	Chhattisgarh	11692	11688	11390	11651
6	Goa	191	191	119	191
7	Gujarat	14619	14591	13948	13805
8	Haryana	6227	6227	6051	6221
9	Himachal Pradesh	3615	3615	3597	3611
10	Jharkhand	4345	4345	4316	4343
11	Karnataka	5949	5949	5938	5940
12	Kerala	941	941	939	941
13	Madhya Pradesh	23011	23011	22352	22974
14	Maharashtra	28002	27936	26773	27902
15	Manipur	3175	161	113	161
16	Meghalaya	0	0	0	0
17	Mizoram	855	855	817	816
18	Nagaland	1312	984	0	0
19	Odisha	6794	6794	6788	6794
20	Punjab	13236	13235	12551	13229
21	Rajasthan	13128	11185	10835	11174
22	Sikkim	199	199	197	199
23	Tamil Nadu	12482	12482	12443	12392
24	Telangana	12760	12759	12372	12751
25	Tripura	1194	1194	1192	1193
26	Uttar Pradesh	57695	57693	57674	57683
27	Uttarakhand	7812	7810	7347	7777
28	West Bengal	3339	3339	3337	3337
Total		258725	252864	245839	250664

Source:(Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2026b)^[6]

The eGramSwaraj-GeM interface was introduced to make the purchase of goods and services by Panchayats easier and more transparent. Through this system, Panchayats can use the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) to buy the items and services they need, while the transactions are connected with eGramSwaraj. This makes it easier to keep records of purchases and follow the procurement process. It also reduces the need for manual paperwork and helps Panchayats manage their purchases through a digital system. The interface was launched on 24 April 2023 during National Panchayati Raj Day in Rewa, Madhya Pradesh. The pilot programme was successfully implemented in 12 States, with other States also working towards completing the pilot process. Overall, the integration is intended to make Panchayat-level purchasing simpler, more organised and easier to monitor (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, n.d.-c) eGramSwaraj has helped Panchayats move towards a more digital and transparent system of financial management. Through its integration with the Public Financial Management System (PFMS), payments can be made directly to vendors and service providers through digital

channels, making it easier to track transactions. The platform supports Panchayats in preparing development plans, maintaining accounts and managing expenditure without depending heavily on paper records or cash transactions. During 2025–26, around ₹53,342 crore was transferred by Panchayati Raj Institutions through the eGramSwaraj-PFMS system. In the same period, 2,55,254 Gram Panchayats uploaded their development plans, while 2,59,798 PRIs were registered on the platform. Of these, 2,50,807 PRIs made online payments through eGramSwaraj. The platform also had about 1.61 crore registered vendors, showing its extensive use in Panchayat-level financial transactions (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2026a)^[6].

Audit online

Audit Online is a digital platform introduced in 2020 to make the auditing process of government institutions, particularly Panchayats, simpler and more systematic. It allows Panchayat accounts and records to be audited online and helps in maintaining information related to both internal and external audits. The platform covers the audit process at

the district, block and village levels and makes it possible to keep previous audit records, details of auditors and information about the audit teams involved. It also helps officials follow the progress of an audit, record audit observations and monitor the action taken on them. Since the system can be configured according to the audit procedures followed by different States, it can accommodate State-specific audit requirements. Audit Online also provides features for preparing audit schedules, assigning audit teams, sending notifications and generating reports

for further review. Although it was mainly developed for Panchayat-level auditing, the platform can also be used for Urban Local Bodies and other government departments with suitable changes. By bringing different stages of the audit process into a single digital system, Audit Online reduces dependence on paper records, makes follow-up easier and provides a clearer record of how public funds and activities are being reviewed. In this way, the platform supports better monitoring of Panchayat accounts and contributes to improving transparency and accountability in local governance (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, n.d.-a).

Table 3: State wise Audit Report Generated through Audit Online for Audit Period FY 2024 ^{[4]-25}

S. No.	State Name	Total Number of Village Panchayats & Equivalent	Total Number of Audit Report Generated
1	Andhra Pradesh	13328	13175
2	Arunachal Pradesh	2108	1823
3	Assam	2770	2025
4	Bihar	8053	4734
5	Chhattisgarh	11713	11621
6	Goa	191	88
7	Gujarat	14687	14585
8	Haryana	6230	6124
9	Himachal Pradesh	3615	3486
10	Jharkhand	4345	4039
11	Karnataka	5952	5949
12	Kerala	941	828
13	Madhya Pradesh	23011	20085
14	Maharashtra	27953	26705
15	Manipur	3811	0
16	Meghalaya	0	0
17	Mizoram	843	0
18	Nagaland	1330	0
19	Odisha	6794	6784
20	Punjab	13237	13221
21	Rajasthan	11230	11079
22	Sikkim	199	199
23	Tamil Nadu	12525	12517
24	Telangana	12994	12577
25	Tripura	1194	1193
26	Uttar Pradesh	57691	57639
27	Uttarakhand	7787	0
28	West Bengal	3339	3180
Total		257871	233656

Source: (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2026b) ^[6]

Gram Manchitra



Source: (National Informatics Centre, n.d.)

Fig 4: Gram Manchitra Dashboard

Gram Manchitra is a geo-spatial planning application developed to help Gram Panchayats prepare and manage their development plans using maps and location-based information. It was launched on 23 October 2019. This application enables Panchayat officials to understand the availability and location of different resources and facilities within their areas, which can support better planning and decision-making. It is linked with information such as the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC), gap analysis and the resources available to Gram Panchayats. Gram Manchitra also brings together information from different government departments, including data on hospitals, health centres, banks and ATMs, post offices, schools, fair price shops, drinking water sources and assets created under MGNREGS. By bringing these different types of information together on a common platform, the application helps Panchayats identify local needs, understand gaps in basic facilities and plan development activities according to the actual conditions of the area. Thus, the use of geo-spatial technology through Gram Manchitra can support more informed and location-specific planning at the grassroots level (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, n.d.-a).

Challenges

- Low Digital Literacy is one of the important problem existing. A significant portion of the rural population may have low levels of digital literacy, limiting their ability to navigate online platforms, understand complex procedures, and utilize e-governance services effectively.
- Many e-governance platforms are primarily designed in English, which may pose a barrier for rural residents who are more comfortable with regional languages. Language diversity needs to be addressed to ensure inclusivity.
- Limited awareness about available e-governance services and their benefits can lead to low utilization. Adequate awareness campaigns are essential to educate and inform rural communities about the advantages of digital services (Hans *et al.*, 2024)^[3]

Conclusion

Table 4: Comparative Analysis of three platforms

Aspect	eGramSwaraj	Audit Online	Gram Manchitra
Purpose	Planning & governance	Audit	GIS planning
Users	Panchayats	Auditors	Panchayats
Features	GPDP, assets, finances	Audit reports	Spatial planning
Strengths	Integrated platform	Financial oversight	Geographic planning
Limitations	Implementation issues	Limited citizen use	GISexpertise required

Source: Author

Taken together, eGramSwaraj, Audit Online and Gram Manchitra represent important digital initiatives for strengthening Panchayat-level governance. eGramSwaraj supports planning, accounting and online payments, Audit Online facilitates the digital management of audits, and Gram Manchitra uses geo-spatial information to support local-level planning. The review of these platforms indicates that digital technologies are gradually being incorporated into different aspects of Panchayat administration and service delivery. At the same time, their effective implementation may depend on factors such as internet connectivity, availability of digital infrastructure, technical knowledge and the capacity of local officials to use these platforms. However, this review has certain limitations. It is based mainly on information available from government sources and existing literature and does not include primary data from Panchayat officials or rural citizens. Therefore, it does not directly measure the actual level of usage, effectiveness or difficulties experienced by users at the grassroots level. Further studies using field-based data could provide a clearer understanding of how these digital platforms are functioning in practice and how far they are contributing to improved local governance.

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