



PUBLIC POLICY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN TELANGANA: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT :

This paper explores the evolution, implementation, and impact of rural development policies in the Indian state of Telangana since its formation in 2014. With a focus on inclusive growth, the state has adopted a mission-mode approach through flagship programs such as *Mission Bhagiratha* (drinking water), *Mission Kakatiya* (tank restoration), *Rythu Bandhu* and *Rythu Bima* (farmer welfare), *Palle Pragathi* (village development), and the *Double Bedroom Scheme* (housing for the poor). These initiatives reflect a commitment to transforming rural infrastructure, agriculture, healthcare, housing, and education by leveraging both state investment and decentralized governance. The study highlights how historical neglect, agrarian distress, and infrastructure deficits shaped the post-statehood policy agenda. It also examines the role of *Panchayati Raj Institutions*, health and education reforms, and agricultural modernization efforts in uplifting rural communities. Despite these achievements, challenges such as climate vulnerability, rural-urban migration, and exclusion of tenant farmers remain. Through analysis and recommendations, the report underscores the need for continued innovation, institutional strengthening, and people-centric policies to ensure long-term rural transformation. Telangana's model offers valuable lessons for other regions aiming to balance welfare delivery with structural development in rural areas.

Keywords: Rural Development, Telangana, Public Policy, Agriculture, Panchayati Raj, Inclusive Growth, Welfare Schemes.

Introduction

Rural development has long been a cornerstone of India's planning and policy frameworks, given the predominance of the rural population and the agrarian nature of the economy. Over 65% of India's population lives in rural areas, and their economic upliftment is crucial for achieving inclusive and sustainable growth. In this broader national context, the state of Telangana presents a unique case study. Formed in 2014 as the 29th state of India, Telangana inherited a region marked by underdevelopment, agrarian distress, and regional disparities. Addressing these challenges required a fresh and localized approach to rural development rooted in the socio-economic realities of the new state.

Telangana's rural landscape is characterized by a mix of dryland agriculture, scattered irrigation resources, tribal populations, and semi-arid climatic conditions. During its initial years, the Telangana government recognized that fostering rural development was not just a socio-economic necessity but also a political imperative to fulfill the aspirations of those who fought for statehood. Since its inception, the state has strategically prioritized rural transformation through a wide array of public policy initiatives, ranging from infrastructure development and water resource management to health, education, and women's empowerment.

Public policy, as a tool of governance, is fundamentally about setting priorities, allocating resources, and implementing programs that address the needs of the population. In Telangana, rural policy has been implemented through mission-mode programs such as *Mission Bhagiratha* (drinking water), *Mission Kakatiya* (tank restoration), *Rythu Bandhu* and *Rythu Bima* (farmers' support), *Palle Pragathi* (village development), and *Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project*. These initiatives reflect a blend of welfare-driven and infrastructure-based approaches designed to address both immediate concerns and long-term sustainability.

Another noteworthy aspect of Telangana's rural development strategy has been its emphasis on grassroots governance. Through reforms in the Panchayati Raj system and decentralized planning, the government has attempted to empower Gram Panchayats with financial autonomy, accountability, and decision-making powers. Programs such as Palle Pragathi have encouraged bottom-up planning, ensuring that developmental activities are tailored to the needs of specific villages and communities.

Additionally, Telangana has focused on improving the rural economy by diversifying livelihoods beyond agriculture, promoting self-help groups (SHGs), and investing in health and education infrastructure in villages. These multidimensional policies aim not only to alleviate poverty but also to build resilience and enable rural populations to participate meaningfully in the state's growth trajectory.

In summary, rural development in Telangana is shaped by an integrated public policy approach that combines welfare, infrastructure, and institutional reforms. The state's unique geography, its political mandate for inclusive development, and strong administrative leadership have together contributed to shaping a model of rural transformation that is both ambitious and participatory. This article delves into the evolution of Telangana's rural policies,

their implementation, key achievements, challenges, and prospects for the future. Through this exploration, we aim to understand how public policy can become a powerful instrument of equitable rural development in emerging states like Telangana.

Historical Context of Rural Development in Telangana

Historically, the Telangana region—formerly part of Andhra Pradesh—has faced agrarian The historical trajectory of rural development in Telangana is deeply intertwined with the region's socio-political and economic evolution. For decades, the Telangana region—formerly part of the princely state of Hyderabad and later merged into Andhra Pradesh—faced systemic neglect in terms of developmental priorities. This legacy of underdevelopment, particularly in rural areas, became one of the driving forces behind the Telangana statehood movement, which eventually culminated in the formation of a separate state in 2014.

Under the rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Telangana region had a feudal agrarian structure, with large landholdings and exploitative tenancy practices. The rural economy was predominantly subsistence-based, with very little institutional support for agriculture or rural infrastructure. Though the Hyderabad State had some localized irrigation systems through tanks and lakes, there was minimal investment in modern agricultural technologies, education, or healthcare for the rural populace.

Post-independence, when Telangana became part of the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh (1956), promises of balanced regional development were made under the Gentlemen's Agreement. However, the subsequent decades witnessed unequal distribution of funds and resources. Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema regions, being more politically and economically influential, received a larger share of irrigation projects, educational institutions, and industrial development. In contrast, Telangana, despite its geographical and demographic significance, remained primarily agrarian and underdeveloped.

The imbalance was particularly stark in areas like irrigation. The Krishna and Godavari rivers flow through Telangana, but major irrigation projects were concentrated downstream, benefiting coastal regions. Telangana's agriculture continued to depend heavily on rainfall and minor irrigation tanks, many of which fell into disrepair due to lack of maintenance and state support. This led to recurring droughts, crop failures, and increased farmer distress, contributing to widespread poverty and indebtedness in rural Telangana.

Furthermore, government expenditure on health, education, and infrastructure in rural Telangana remained inadequate. Rural literacy levels lagged behind, and primary healthcare infrastructure was poor. The rural population, especially marginalized groups like Dalits, Adivasis, and backward castes, suffered from social exclusion and limited access to state services.

These developmental disparities became a core issue in the Telangana agitation, with demands for equitable resource allocation, irrigation development, and rural empowerment at the forefront. The movement highlighted how policies under united Andhra Pradesh had failed to address the unique challenges of Telangana's rural economy.

When Telangana became a separate state in June 2014, rural development emerged as a central focus of the new government's policy agenda. The leadership acknowledged the historical neglect and made concerted efforts to reverse the damage by implementing targeted schemes such as Mission Kakatiya (to restore tanks), Mission Bhagiratha (for drinking water supply), and Rythu Bandhu (income support for farmers). The historical context of rural development in Telangana is marked by structural inequalities, regional imbalances, and policy neglect. Understanding this background is essential to appreciate the scale and intent of the rural development initiatives launched post-statehood. The past serves as both a lesson and a guide, shaping a more equitable and sustainable rural policy framework in contemporary Telangana.

Public Policy Framework for Rural Development

Telangana's approach to rural development since its formation in 2014 has been guided by a focused and multidimensional public policy framework. The state government has prioritized the upliftment of rural areas through an integrated strategy involving infrastructure development, agricultural support, employment generation, health, education, and empowerment of local institutions. This framework is built on mission-mode schemes, financial inclusion, and decentralized governance.

At the heart of Telangana's rural development policy are flagship initiatives such as *Mission Bhagiratha*, *Mission Kakatiya*, *Rythu Bandhu*, *Rythu Bima*, and *Palle Pragathi*. These programs reflect a shift from fragmented welfare delivery to a more targeted and outcome-based approach.

Mission Bhagiratha aims to provide piped and safe drinking water to every rural and urban household in Telangana. The policy addresses both health and infrastructure concerns by ensuring access to fluoride-free water in affected districts.

Mission Kakatiya focuses on the restoration and revival of over 46,000 minor irrigation tanks, a nod to Telangana's traditional water management systems. This policy aims to enhance irrigation potential, promote groundwater recharge, and ensure water security for farmers.

To address agrarian distress and boost farmer incomes, the government launched *Rythu Bandhu*, a direct income support scheme providing ₹10,000 per acre per year, and *Rythu Bima*, a life insurance scheme offering ₹5 lakh to the family of a deceased farmer. These policies are designed not only to offer financial relief but also to promote dignity and stability among farming communities.

The *Palle Pragathi* initiative is a decentralized rural development policy that empowers Gram Panchayats to plan and implement development works at the village level. It promotes cleanliness, green cover, waste management, and basic infrastructure with financial and administrative support from the state government.

Telangana's public policy framework also includes *rural employment generation* under the expanded Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), and *housing schemes* like the double-bedroom initiative for the rural poor. In addition, significant investments have been made in rural health infrastructure, residential schools for backward and marginalized communities, and digital governance mechanisms. Telangana's rural policy framework combines welfare support, institutional reforms, and infrastructure investment. The policies are rooted in local needs, backed by political will, and executed through strong administrative mechanisms. This has enabled a comprehensive model for rural development that aligns short-term relief with long-term transformation.

Key focus areas include:

- Construction of compost pits and crematoriums
- Plantation of saplings under the Haritha Haram initiative
- Setting up nurseries and public parks
- Provision of street lighting and internal roads
- Regular sanitation and solid waste collection

Palle Pragathi also includes regular assessment and ranking of villages based on performance indicators, which promotes healthy competition and accountability among local bodies. Village Sarpanches and Panchayat Secretaries play a central role in planning and execution, with oversight from district collectors.

The scheme has significantly improved the quality of life in rural Telangana. Open dumping grounds are being replaced by waste collection centers, dusty tracks are turning into all-weather roads, and neglected public spaces are being beautified. It has also improved local governance by making Gram Panchayats active agents of change rather than passive recipients of funds.

In essence, Palle Pragathi is more than a scheme—it is a grassroots movement aimed at creating self-reliant, clean, and vibrant villages. It demonstrates how decentralization, when supported by political will and adequate funding, can lead to sustainable rural transformation.

Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) form the cornerstone of decentralized governance in India, and Telangana has strategically strengthened them to serve as engines of rural development. Recognizing that sustainable development can only be achieved through active participation at the grassroots level, the state government has focused on empowering village-level institutions both financially and administratively.

The Telangana Panchayat Raj Act, 2018, marked a significant reform in local governance. It introduced *performance-linked grants*, mandatory preparation of *Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDs)*, and strengthened accountability mechanisms. The act redefined the roles of Sarpanches and Panchayat Secretaries, making them responsible for leading initiatives under state schemes like *Palle Pragathi*, *Haritha Haram*, and *Swachh Telangana*.

Under this decentralized framework, Gram Panchayats have been entrusted with key functions such as:

- Village sanitation and waste management
- Drinking water maintenance
- Road and streetlight upkeep
- Plantation and green cover development
- Monitoring of welfare schemes at the village level

The state government has institutionalized monthly *Palle Pragathi Days* where officials and village representatives review development works and address public grievances. The use of technology—such as geo-tagging of assets, biometric attendance, and digital dashboards—has increased transparency and effectiveness in PRI functioning.

Importantly, PRIs in Telangana are increasingly being recognized as platforms for *women's participation and leadership*. With one-third reservation in local bodies, many women are serving as Sarpanches and ward members, contributing to inclusive governance.

The revitalization of PRIs in Telangana has not only improved service delivery but also fostered a sense of ownership and pride among villagers. By combining *state support with local initiative*, Telangana has showcased how empowered PRIs can drive holistic and sustainable rural development.

Agricultural Development Policies

Agriculture has always been the backbone of Telangana's rural economy. Since the formation of the state in 2014, the government has introduced several progressive and farmer-centric policies aimed at improving agricultural productivity, ensuring income security, and promoting sustainable farming practices. The focus has been on creating a robust ecosystem that supports farmers from seed to market. One of the most notable initiatives is the Rythu Bandhu scheme, which provides direct income support of 10,000 per acre per year to farmers, enabling them to invest in inputs like seeds, fertilizers, and labor without resorting to debt. Complementing this is Rythu Bima, an insurance scheme that offers 5 lakh to the family of a deceased farmer, ensuring social and financial security.

A major policy milestone is the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project, one of the world's largest of its kind, aimed at bringing irrigation to over 45 lakh acres in drought-prone regions. It has significantly improved the availability of water for agriculture, particularly in upland and rain-fed areas.

To ensure sustainable agricultural practices, the government has promoted the distribution of Soil Health Cards, encouraged organic farming, and introduced farm mechanization subsidies to reduce manual labor burden. Additionally, through eNAM (National Agricultural Market) integration and Rythu Vedikas (farmer platforms), the state aims to enhance market access and facilitate better price realization for produce.

The Pattadar Passbook digitalization initiative has improved land record transparency and enabled smoother access to institutional credit. Further, the introduction of free electricity for agriculture, godowns, and cold storage facilities has helped reduce post-harvest losses and operational costs. Telangana's agricultural development policies represent a blend of welfare, infrastructure, and modernization, reinforcing its goal of doubling farmers' incomes and making agriculture a viable and dignified occupation for rural communities.

Rural Health and Education Initiatives

Health and education are fundamental pillars of rural development, and Telangana has implemented a series of targeted policies to enhance the quality and accessibility of these services in its villages. Since the formation of the state in 2014, the government has made significant strides in strengthening rural health infrastructure and transforming the educational landscape, especially for marginalized communities.

In the health sector, the government launched the *KCR Kit Scheme*, aimed at promoting institutional deliveries and reducing maternal and infant mortality. Pregnant women receive financial assistance, nutrition kits, and postnatal care in government hospitals. Additionally, the state has expanded *Primary Health Centres (PHCs)* in rural areas, improved ambulance services under *104 and 108*, and introduced *mobile medical units* in remote tribal pockets. Special attention has been given to prevent seasonal and vector-borne diseases through awareness drives and sanitation campaigns under the *Health and Hygiene Weeks* observed in villages.

In the realm of education, the *Mana Ooru Mana Badi* program has been a landmark initiative to modernize government schools in rural areas. It aims to improve infrastructure by providing digital classrooms, toilets, drinking water facilities, compound walls, and playgrounds. The program seeks to curb dropout rates and make government schools more attractive alternatives to private ones.

Furthermore, the government has established *Residential Educational Institutions Societies* (TREIS, TSWRIES, TSWREIS, BC Welfare Schools) to provide free, high-quality education—including hostel facilities—to students from SC, ST, BC, and minority communities. These institutions have achieved impressive academic results, enabling rural students to compete in national-level entrance exams and pursue higher education.

Together, these health and education initiatives have significantly improved human development indicators in rural Telangana. They reflect the government's commitment to inclusive development and its belief that long-term rural transformation must rest on a strong foundation of health and education.

Impact Assessment of Rural Development Policies

A decade of focused policy intervention has yielded significant improvements:

Drinking Water: Over 95% coverage of rural households with tap connections (source: Telangana Drinking Water Supply Report, 2023).

Literacy: Rural literacy rose from 58% in 2011 to 66% in 2021 (Census estimates).

Agriculture: Paddy cultivation area doubled between 2015 and 2023

Sanitation: All villages declared ODF (Open Defecation Free) by 2020. However, disparities still exist between mandals, and certain tribal belts remain under-served.

Challenges in Rural Development

- Despite notable progress in rural development, Telangana continues to face several challenges that hinder the full realization of its goals. One of the most pressing issues is *climate variability*, which affects rainfall patterns and groundwater levels, leading to uncertain agricultural outcomes and increasing vulnerability among farmers.
- *Rural-urban migration* remains a persistent problem, especially among youth, due to limited non-farm employment opportunities and the mechanization of agriculture. This results in labor shortages in villages and the depopulation of remote areas.
- Another critical challenge is the *exclusion of tenant farmers* from key welfare schemes like Rythu Bandhu, as benefits are often tied to land ownership rather than actual cultivation. Similarly, disparities in digital infrastructure contribute to a *digital divide*, limiting access to online services, education, and modern agricultural tools.
- *Implementation bottlenecks*, including delays in fund release, inadequate staffing at the grassroots level, and corruption in certain sectors, also affect the efficiency of rural development programs.
- Lastly, while decentralized governance through Panchayati Raj Institutions has improved, many local bodies still lack the *technical and administrative capacity* to plan and execute development works independently.

Addressing these challenges requires continuous innovation, inclusive policies, and stronger community participation.

Future Directions and Recommendations

To sustain and deepen rural development in Telangana, future policies must focus on *inclusive growth*, especially for tenant farmers, landless laborers, and tribal communities. Strengthening *digital infrastructure* in villages can bridge service delivery gaps and improve access to education and markets. Emphasis should also be placed on *climate-resilient agriculture*, skill development for rural youth, and expanding *non-farm employment* opportunities. Enhancing the capacity of *Panchayati Raj Institutions* through training and greater financial autonomy will ensure better grassroots governance. Integrated, people-centric, and sustainable models will be key to building resilient rural communities.

Conclusion

Rural development in Telangana stands as a testament to how focused public policy, political will, and administrative innovation can transform historically neglected regions. Since achieving statehood in 2014, Telangana has made remarkable strides in addressing rural challenges through mission-driven initiatives such as Mission Bhagiratha, Mission Kakatiya, Rythu Bandhu, Palle Pragathi, and the Double Bedroom Scheme. These programs have not only improved infrastructure and agricultural productivity but also elevated the dignity and quality of life of rural citizens. The

government's emphasis on decentralization, healthcare, education, and inclusion has created a framework that empowers local governance while addressing core development needs. However, challenges such as climate vulnerability, exclusion of tenant farmers, and limited employment diversification persist. As Telangana moves forward, the focus must shift towards sustainability, digital empowerment, and equitable access to ensure no section of the rural population is left behind. By building on existing successes and addressing emerging gaps with foresight and innovation, Telangana has the potential to become a model state for rural transformation in India. In essence, public policy in Telangana has evolved into a powerful tool for rural empowerment—laying the groundwork for a more just, prosperous, and resilient rural society.

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