

Monthly newsletter on issues
of sustainable development

DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES

A woman and child sitting at the entrance of their home in Sonebhadra, UP



**Making the Village
Work: Integrated
Development in
Practice**

Content

03

Editorial

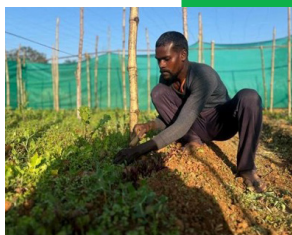


Making the Village Work: Integrated Development in Practice From the Editor's Desk

For years, rural India has seen significant development through various schemes aimed at improving infrastructure and providing funding. Yet, despite this progress, last-mile delivery continues to fall short in many villages. In this editorial, Major Gen Rahul Bhardwaj says the real shift begins when these components align. He argues that then only livelihoods will stabilise, women will take on leadership roles, and migration patterns will show signs of reversal as village clusters start to function more as local, sustainable, and cohesive economies than isolated settlements.

05

Lead



Towards Integrated Villages: Reimagining Rural Development Frameworks

Rural development has long been shaped by fragmented interventions in agriculture, infrastructure, health, and education, often treated as separate domains. Abhishek Sushil John argues in this article for a shift towards integrated village systems—where governance, livelihoods, technology, and sustainability align—to create resilient, self-sustaining communities driven by local participation and holistic, coordinated development.

07

Policy



Beyond the Silo: The Case for Convergence in Integrated Village Development

Rural development in India has often progressed through isolated sectoral interventions, limiting the ability to address the complex realities of village life in a holistic manner. In this policy article, Azeem Rehber examines how integrated village development can enable stronger institutional convergence, deepen community participation, and build more resilient and sustainable rural ecosystems.

09

Ground story



Field Reflection From Rudraprayag: A Ground Story

In this article, Deeksha Thakur highlights the gradual changes in Rudraprayag that may not be immediately apparent. She emphasises that true impact comes from the internal shifts in people—their confidence, openness to opportunities, and the belief that small steps can lead to meaningful change over time.

11

Ground story



Driving Grassroots Change: Sustainable Livelihoods in Sonebhadra through the LIC-HFL HRIDAY Project

This article by Shivam Kesari reflects on grassroots transformation in Sonebhadra through the LIC-HFL HRIDAY Project. He says that by integrating livelihoods, education, healthcare, and natural resource management, the initiative demonstrates how community-led, holistic development can build resilience, improve incomes, and empower individuals—particularly women—to drive sustainable change within their communities.

The views expressed in the articles in this newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily those of Development Alternatives.

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Making the Village Work

Integrated Development in Practice

From the Editor's Desk



A woman farmer from Sonebhadra, UP standing inside a protected cultivation structure

For years, rural India has seen significant development through various schemes aimed at improving infrastructure and providing funding. The scale is undeniable—and so are the results. Since 2019, the Jal Jeevan Mission has provided tap water connections to more than 140 million rural households, boosting national rural coverage from about 17% to over 75% in six years. Similarly, the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) has led to the construction of over 110 million toilets, vastly improving sanitation access across villages. These are not small achievements. But scale alone is no longer the question.

Yet, despite this progress, last-mile delivery continues to fall short in many villages. This is because while services have expanded, they often reach villages in parts. For instance, water systems without source protection, sanitation without waste management, or infrastructure without local ownership. These are not failures in isolation, but rather symptoms of fragmented delivery—each effective individually, but limited in isolation. The real shift begins when these components align.

In Nalagarh and Jhajjar, integrated water and waste management systems are showcasing what convergence looks like in action. Waste is processed rather than simply discarded, and water systems are maintained, not just installed. Villages are noticeably cleaner; more importantly, communities are managing these systems themselves. This shift is not merely environmental; it also involves changes in behaviour and institutions.

In Rudraprayag, integration is shaped by constraint. Fragile ecosystems, climate variability, and limited access to services make isolated interventions ineffective. Here, the need is not for more schemes, but for systems that work together. Water sources are increasingly disrupted by climate variability. Agriculture remains largely subsistence-based, relying on rainfall and small landholdings. Healthcare facilities are often distant and can be inaccessible during landslides. Schools face challenges related to inadequate infrastructure, which negatively impacts both attendance and learning outcomes. Additionally, livelihood opportunities are limited, leading many to view migration as the default choice for survival.

In Sonebhadra, the transformation is most evident through the integration of multiple challenges into a single system. What were once isolated struggles—unsafe drinking water, limited livelihoods, low agricultural productivity, and weak local systems—are now being addressed together. Clean drinking water is provided through community-managed systems like JalTARA, while improved agriculture, including WADI and multi-layer farming, has enhanced productivity. Local enterprises, ranging from chappal-making to poultry and fisheries, have generated stable sources of income. Waste is being repurposed into compost, which is then returned to the land, creating a sustainable loop. What stands out is that women are at the centre of this change; they manage enterprises, oversee systems, and play key roles in decision-making, both within their households and in the wider community.

As these systems begin to reinforce one another, livelihoods stabilise, migration pressures ease, and villages start to function as local economies. Development, in this context, is no longer delivered in fragments; it is being built from within, with each intervention strengthening the others.

These are not isolated successes—they point to a larger shift.

Integrated village development brings together water, sanitation, waste management, education, and local governance into a cohesive system. When these segments are strengthened together, their outcomes begin to reinforce one another. Water availability improves due to conservation efforts, villages remain clean because waste management systems are fully operational, schools become more effective as learning environments improve, and communities grow stronger by participating in these integrated systems.

And as a result, the outcome begins to reflect this shift.



A woman working on a vermicomposting unit in Sonebhadra

The force of this transformation does not stem from external forces; instead, it emerges quietly from within communities. It builds from within. Through communities that are informed, involved, and empowered to manage what shapes their daily lives.

This is the essence of making a village work; it is not about adding more elements but rather about uniting what already exists and strengthening the connections among them. The focus should not be solely on isolated interventions, but on empowering the entire system as a whole.

Because when these segments move together, progress does not simply add up. It multiplies and moves forward.

Together. □

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Towards Integrated Villages: Reimagining Rural Development Frameworks



A farmer working in a multilayer farming unit supported under HRIDAY project in Sonebhadra, UP

Rural development has long been shaped by fragmented interventions in agriculture, infrastructure, health, and education, often treated as separate domains. While these efforts have brought incremental improvements, they often fail to transform the everyday realities of rural communities. As climate change, migration, digital disruption, and economic inequality intensify, the need to rethink rural development has become urgent. In this context, the idea of ‘integrated villages’ offers a way forward by shifting from siloed planning to holistic, systems-based frameworks that recognise the interdependence of social, economic, ecological, and technological factors. In this approach, villages are not passive recipients of policy but dynamic ecosystems capable of resilience and innovation.

Reimagining rural development requires more than expanding schemes; it demands reconfiguring governance, strengthening community participation, and aligning resources across sectors. By combining local knowledge with modern tools and embedding sustainability at the core, integrated villages can enable inclusive and future-ready transformation.

In rural India, the urgency of such a shift is evident. Despite decades of welfare programmes, many villages continue to face persistent challenges, including agrarian distress, water scarcity, unemployment, migration, and limited access to healthcare and education. These issues are deeply interconnected. For instance, declining farm productivity can lead to job losses, which pushes migration, weakens local economies, and reduces participation in community governance. Fragmented policy responses fail to address these linkages effectively. A systems perspective helps overcome this limitation.

Why Integrated Village Systems Matter

Integrated rural development begins by recognising that interventions in one sector affect many others. Water conservation, for example, can simultaneously improve agricultural productivity, support livestock, and enhance climate resilience. Similarly, better roads and digital connectivity can strengthen market access, education, and healthcare delivery. Such multi-dimensional gains highlight the value of coordinated planning. Strengthening local governance is equally critical. Empowered Gram Panchayats can serve as central coordinating bodies, especially when

supported with data, resources, and decision-making authority. Participatory planning ensures that development reflects local priorities rather than top-down assumptions, fostering ownership and accountability.

Technology also plays a transformative role when used thoughtfully. Digital platforms can connect farmers to markets, telemedicine can expand access to healthcare, and online learning tools can support education. However, these benefits depend on parallel investments in digital literacy and infrastructure to ensure meaningful adoption. Diversifying rural livelihoods is another key pillar. Agriculture alone cannot sustain the rural workforce. Promoting agro-processing, small enterprises, renewable energy, and local services can create employment and reduce distress migration. When opportunities exist within villages, migration becomes a choice rather than a necessity.

Key Points

- **Fragmented rural development is limiting impact** - Sector-wise interventions (agriculture, health, education, etc.) fail to address interconnected challenges.
- **Integrated villages offer a systems-based solution** - Holistic planning recognizes linkages between social, economic, ecological, and technological factors.
- **Local governance and participation are critical** - Empowered Gram Panchayats and community-led planning improve accountability and relevance.
- **Technology and livelihoods diversification are key enablers** - Digital tools, non-farm jobs, and enterprises reduce migration and strengthen rural economies.
- **Future transformation depends on coordinated, ecosystem-based development** - Aligning sectors can turn villages into resilient, self-sustaining systems driven by local communities.



Women community members sitting in a group in Sonebhadra, UP

Building Self-Sustaining Rural Economies

Despite numerous policies, implementation gaps remain significant due to fragmented approaches. Increasingly, corporate social responsibility initiatives are addressing this by supporting holistic village development. These efforts integrate sectors such as education, water, health, and livelihoods, treating them as interconnected elements rather than isolated priorities. India's rural transformation depends on moving beyond fragmented schemes towards integrated village ecosystems. When development efforts are aligned, linking water, agriculture, livelihoods, health, and education, villages can evolve into self-sustaining systems. In this vision, rural communities are not merely beneficiaries but active drivers of their own development, contributing meaningfully to inclusive and sustainable growth. □

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Beyond the Silo: The Case for Convergence in Integrated Village Development



School students posing near a wall painting activity Baal Mela conducted under the project in Rudraprayag, Uttarakhand

For decades, rural development in India has been hampered by a programmatic ‘silo’ mindset. Water supply, sanitation, waste management, education, livelihood, and institutional capacity building are often treated as parallel administrative tracks, each governed by its own budget, reporting timeline, and isolated performance metrics. However, the ground reality of rural life is inherently interconnected. A village cannot achieve lasting health outcomes if its water source is unprotected, nor can it sustain physical infrastructure without strengthening local institutions. To achieve genuine, integrated development, policy frameworks must transition from departmentalism towards a model of practical sectoral convergence centred on empowered communities.

The primary obstacle to holistic progress is the deeply embedded practice of sectoral silos. When water supply programmes, such as piped water schemes, are treated separately from liquid waste management planning, the result is often counterproductive. In districts such as eastern Uttar Pradesh, field observations show stagnant greywater accumulating around newly installed taps, creating vector-borne disease hazards. It is neutralising the effectiveness of clean water availability in villages.

Beyond public health, fiscal fragmentation leads to a chaotic ‘layering’ of assets. Without a unified spatial planning framework, it is also seen on the ground that village roads are repeatedly excavated by multiple departments within a single financial year, leading to cost overruns of up to 20-30%. This reflects not just inefficiency, but a systemic absence of coordinated planning. Transitioning towards a converged model requires a shift in how we value local autonomy and resource allocation.

‘Rural development cannot succeed through isolated schemes. Real impact begins when sectors converge into a single, coordinated system. Policies and mechanisms need to be created by the government to enable this convergence. A holistic approach must be the way forward.’

Four priority areas are essential for this transformation:

1. Empowered communities and participatory planning: Convergence begins with the people. Policy must mandate the adoption of a Single Village Development Plan driven by the community itself. When villagers are involved in the planning process, they naturally identify the links between a clean environment and personal health. This participation transforms passive

'beneficiaries' into active stakeholders who take ownership of the assets created, ensuring better maintenance and longevity.

2. Strengthening local institutions: Governance systems must move beyond viewing local bodies as mere implementers of top-down directives. Policy needs to prioritise the 'soft' infrastructure of development: intensive training for local officials in multi-sectoral planning and real-time data management. By strengthening local institutions like the Gram Panchayat, we ensure there is a central coordinator on the ground capable of aligning various state and central schemes into a single, coherent vision.

3. Quality education as a catalyst: Integrated development is impossible without an informed citizenry. Quality education in rural areas must move beyond basic literacy to include life skills, environmental stewardship, and civic rights. When schools become hubs for learning about sustainable water use and waste segregation, children act as change agents, bringing these practices back to their households and ensuring the sustainability of development projects.

4. Boosting the local economy: A converged framework views 'waste' as a misplaced resource. By linking sanitation with the local economy, villages can institutionalise the conversion of organic waste into high-quality compost. This not only cleans the village but also creates local jobs and reduces the financial burden of chemical fertilizers on smallholder farmers and the harm to soil health. A thriving local economy provides the tax base necessary for the village to maintain its own infrastructure, breaking the cycle of dependence on external grants.

'Communities must shift from being passive beneficiaries to active stakeholders, shaping and sustaining their own development.'

Equally important is fostering community ownership as a foundation for sustainable village development. Active community participation in planning, decision-making, and monitoring builds responsibility and accountability. It ensures need-based, culturally appropriate, and well-maintained interventions while strengthening social cohesion and reducing dependency on external support, leading to more inclusive and resilient outcomes.



A woman using agricultural equipment as part of improved farming practices introduced in Rudraprayag, Uttarakhand

Moving towards integrated development is fundamentally a governance imperative rather than a technical one. To sustain this shift, we must adopt convergent monitoring frameworks. Success should no longer be measured by the number of toilets built or pipes laid. Instead, we must track composite outcomes, such as a 'Village Sustainability Index', which accounts for groundwater health, educational retention, and institutional transparency.

'A village becomes resilient only when water, waste, education, and governance function together—not in silos.'

The era of standalone rural schemes is no longer viable given the interconnected nature of rural challenges. The question is no longer whether convergence is needed, but how quickly governance systems can adapt to deliver it. A village is resilient only when its water is clean because its waste is managed, its people are educated, and its community and local leaders are empowered. By fostering this synergy, we ensure that rural development is not just a series of disconnected projects, but a self-sustaining ecosystem of prosperity for the next generation. □

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Field Reflection From Rudraprayag: A Ground Story



Women participants during a SIYB community training in Rudraprayag, Uttarakhand

A year in Rudraprayag may not reveal dramatic changes or immediate results. But these changes are visible in small shifts, in moments easy to overlook without close attention. The pace of the region is not shaped by schemes alone, but by seasons, terrain, and the everyday realities of people's lives. These changes have become more visible as a result of an approach grounded in integrated village development—an objective led by Development Alternatives. This work is being carried out in collaboration with ReNew Power, under the Local Institutions and SDG Actions programme, where interventions across water, livelihoods, sanitation, and institutions are designed to function as a connected system rather than in isolation.

Emerging Voices and Livelihood Shifts

In the early days, meetings often felt quiet. People came, listened, and left. There was a sense of formality, but rarely any exchange. Women, especially, remained on the margins—present, but rarely part of the conversation. Most of their time was consumed by household responsibilities, leaving little space to engage beyond that. Farmers spoke of their work in routine terms, believing farming was something to be managed within limits, not something that would change significantly.

Over time, however, a shift began to emerge. A few voices came forward—hesitant at first, but present. Women's attendance became more regular. They began voicing their opinions—first cautiously, then with more clarity. Conversations expanded beyond listening to include discussions on savings, small business ideas, market linkages, and opportunities. There was a visible shift in how they engaged—not just as participants, but as individuals thinking about their own economic roles.

Exposure to sessions like Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) played a role in this change. These spaces encouraged women to think beyond their immediate surroundings—beyond household boundaries that had long defined their roles. The aspirations were always there, but they often lacked direction or opportunity. Now, there is a growing sense of both. Some women have started small enterprises—poultry farming, goat rearing, and laddoo-making units. These are modest beginnings, but they reflect an important shift. Women are beginning to think about income, financial management, and contributing economically, all the while continuing to balance their household responsibilities.

In the fields, the changes are equally subtle. A farmer trying a new practice, experimenting with a different crop, or choosing to use a shared tool may not stand out immediately. But in a place

where agriculture is closely tied to uncertainty, these decisions reflect a willingness to step slightly beyond what is known. It is not about immediate success, but about opening the possibility of doing things differently.

Key Points

- Change in Rudraprayag is gradual, not immediate or large-scale.
- Progress is built through patience and long-term engagement.
- Relationships and trust play a central role in driving change.
- Real impact lies in internal shifts within people, not just interventions.
- Growing confidence, agency, and willingness to explore opportunities lead to lasting transformation.

Building Systems, Not Isolated Interventions

Schools tell a similar story. A repaired pathway, a functional toilet, or simple hygiene activities begin to change how children engage with their environment. The difference is not only in attendance, but in how children participate and interact. There is a growing sense of comfort and confidence, which often extends into their homes through daily habits and conversations.

Community groups, too, are evolving. Meetings that once followed a fixed routine are slowly becoming spaces for discussion and exchange. There is a gradual shift from listening to speaking, from receiving information to sharing perspectives. Trust builds over time—through repeated interactions, through presence, and through small but consistent efforts.

None of these changes, when seen individually, appears transformative. They are quiet and easy to overlook. But together, they begin to form a pattern. Change here is not immediate or visible in large measures—it is gradual, built through patience and relationships.

Perhaps that is where the real impact lies. Not just in what is implemented, but in what begins to shift within people—their confidence, their willingness to explore opportunities, and their belief that even small steps can lead to meaningful change over time. □

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Driving Grassroots Change: Sustainable Livelihoods in Sonebhadra through the LIC-HFL HRIDAY Project

Working with Development Alternatives on the LIC-HFL HRIDAY Project has been a transformative journey, allowing close engagement with rural communities in Sonebhadra. Implemented across Kon, Chopan, and Robertsganj blocks, the Integrated Village Development programme has adopted a holistic approach to strengthen livelihoods, education, healthcare, and natural resource management.

At the grassroots level, we have supported Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Farmer Interest Groups in building sustainable enterprises through initiatives such as WADI and multi-cropping. These efforts have translated into real change, as seen in Pooja's journey from a home-based tailor to a confident entrepreneur earning ₹5,000 per month. With access to financial tools and institutional support, she has been able to overcome social barriers and strengthen her livelihood.

Similarly, Moharmani's story reflects the power of integrated development. Starting with limited resources, she leveraged SHG platforms, training, and financial linkages to establish poultry farming and tailoring enterprises, achieving a monthly income of ₹18,000. Her growth demonstrates how community institutions and access to credit can unlock rural entrepreneurship.



Bajrangbali SHGs, Pooja with her apparel stitching enterprise.

Beyond livelihoods, interventions in education improved school ecosystems like established hand-wash stations, student libraries, sports kits, and kitchen gardens, and by strengthening School Management Committees, promoting activity-based learning, and improving infrastructure. Healthcare access was enhanced through rural clinics, awareness sessions, and tele-consultation services. Natural resource management initiatives, including check dams and plantations, improved water availability and agricultural productivity, while safe drinking water solutions reduced health risks.

These interconnected efforts highlight that sustainable development goes beyond isolated interventions. By building community capacity and ownership, the Integrated Village Development project has enabled long-term resilience. My experience reaffirms that when development is participatory and integrated, it not only improves incomes but also empowers individuals like Pooja and Moharmani to lead change within their communities. □



Meeting with FIG farmers for improved practices and higher incomes

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बुंदेली आइडल 2026

बुंदेलखंड की लोक
प्रतिभाओं का महोत्सव



नेवारी

20 जून 2026



अपना रेडियो अपनी बातें



लोक संस्कृति, संगीत और
प्रतिभा का शानदार मंच
आइए बनें इस सांस्कृतिक
उत्सव का हिस्सा

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