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Convergence in Governance

Mains: *GS II – Governance*

Why in News?

Convergence in governance has emerged as an important approach to public policy.

What is Convergence in Governance?

- **Definition** – Convergence means aligning different public programmes and institutional interventions towards a shared outcome.
- Departments may retain their separate mandates, budgets and accountability mechanisms, but their interventions are planned and implemented in a complementary manner.
    - **For instance**, malnutrition cannot be addressed merely by providing supplementary nutrition.
- Maternal healthcare, immunisation, sanitation, safe drinking water, food security and appropriate infant-feeding practices are equally important.
- Therefore, nutritional outcomes require coordinated action across multiple sectors.
- Similarly, improving agricultural incomes may require irrigation, credit, roads, storage, skills, livestock support and market access in addition to agricultural inputs.
- Thus, convergence attempts to overcome the limitations of a department-centric approach and move towards an outcome-centric approach.
- **Convergence Vs Merger** – It is important to distinguish convergence from related concepts.
- A merger combines schemes or institutions into a single administrative structure.
- Convergence does not require such restructuring.
- Individual programmes can continue to function independently while contributing to a common plan.
- Similarly, **saturation** focuses on ensuring that all eligible beneficiaries receive a particular service or benefit.
- Convergence, on the other hand, focuses on whether multiple interventions work together to produce a broader outcome.
- **Collaboration Vs Convergence** – While collaboration involves different actors working together, convergence goes further by linking cooperation with planning, financing, implementation, service delivery and outcome monitoring.
- Therefore, convergence is essentially about ensuring that different pieces of the development puzzle fit together.

What are the different dimensions of convergence?

- **Planning convergence** – Different departments jointly assess local needs and prepare a common development plan.
- **Financial convergence** – Permissible resources from different schemes are aligned to finance complementary components of a shared objective.
- **Administrative convergence** – Departments coordinate responsibilities, timelines, information and implementation.
- **Service convergence** – Citizens receive related services in a coordinated manner instead of approaching multiple unconnected institutions.
- **Data convergence** – Common databases, geographical identifiers and interoperable information systems help identify gaps and monitor outcomes.
- These dimensions reinforce one another. A common plan without financial alignment may remain ineffective, while financial convergence without administrative coordination can lead to duplication or delays.

What are the India's experience with convergence?

- **The Aspirational Districts Programme** – Launched in 2018, it is based on the principle of the **3Cs—convergence, collaboration and competition.**
- It seeks to improve outcomes across health and nutrition, education, agriculture, financial inclusion, skills and infrastructure through coordinated efforts involving different levels of government.
- **The Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana** – It seeks to improve agricultural outcomes by bringing together interventions across multiple departments and schemes, addressing issues such as productivity, crop diversification, irrigation, storage and agricultural credit.
- **The Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana**–National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) provides another example.
- Self-help groups can become platforms through which women access credit, skills, livelihood opportunities, financial services and other government interventions.
- **POSHAN Abhiyaan and Mission Poshan 2.0** – They recognise that nutrition outcomes depend on a combination of supplementary nutrition, Anganwadi services, healthcare, sanitation, immunisation and behavioural change.
- **Panchayat-level planning** – It seeks to strengthen convergence further.
- The idea of a "Single Plan–Multi Funding" approach attempts to align resources from different programmes with locally identified development priorities.

Why is convergence difficult?

- **Different schemes have different rules** – Eligibility criteria, technical standards, procurement procedures and permissible expenditures may vary.
- Convergence cannot simply override these statutory and administrative requirements.
- **Timing and sequencing Issues** – One department may approve its intervention months before another.
- Consequently, an integrated plan on paper may fail if its components are not delivered in the right sequence.
- **Administrative boundaries differ** – A programme may operate at the Gram

Panchayat level, another at the block level and another through a State or district agency.

- Different beneficiary databases and reporting systems can further complicate coordination.
- **Convergence can create diffused accountability** – When several departments are responsible for a single outcome, it may become unclear who should be held accountable when implementation fails.
- Effective convergence therefore requires clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- **Coordination itself has a cost** – Officials already manage multiple schemes, portals, reporting requirements and review meetings.
- If convergence merely creates additional committees and paperwork, it can increase rather than reduce administrative burden.
- **Danger of treating convergence as an accounting exercise** – Merely listing several schemes against a village or district does not constitute meaningful convergence.
- Their interventions must be complementary, properly sequenced and directed towards a measurable outcome.
- **From Scheme-Centric to Outcome-Centric Governance** – The most important shift required is from scheme-wise planning to outcome-wise planning.
- Suppose the objective is to improve women's livelihoods in a village.
- Instead of asking which scheme has available funds, administrators should first identify the constraints faced by women—lack of skills, credit, childcare, transport, workspace, digital access or market linkages.
- Different schemes can then be mapped against these specific gaps.

- Likewise, in nutrition policy, success should not be measured merely by the number of meals distributed or Anganwadi activities conducted.
- The ultimate question should be whether maternal and child nutrition outcomes have improved.
- This approach requires monitoring systems that combine traditional indicators such as expenditure and physical targets with outcome indicators.

What measures would be taken to make convergence effective?

- **Local planning must be strengthened** – Gram Panchayats, blocks and districts should be empowered to identify local gaps and prepare integrated plans within the broader framework of national and State priorities.
- **Roles must be clearly assigned –** Every convergence plan should specify which department will undertake which activity, within what timeline and through which scheme.
- **Funding should be mapped at the planning stage itself** – This can prevent delays caused by searching for financing after activities have already been designed.
- **Common reviews** – It should focus on bottlenecks and outcomes, rather than simply increasing the number of meetings and reports.
- **Digital platforms** – They should facilitate information sharing and monitoring without creating additional compliance burdens.
- Technology should simplify convergence, not become another layer of bureaucracy.

What lies ahead?

- Convergence represents an important evolution in public administration—from managing schemes to solving problems.
- Poverty, malnutrition, unemployment and low agricultural productivity are multidimensional challenges and therefore require multidimensional solutions.
- A single scheme may provide employment, another may create an asset, a third may provide credit and a fourth may deliver healthcare.
- Yet development occurs only when these interventions reach the citizen at the right place, at the right time and in the right sequence.
- The success of convergence should therefore not be measured by the number of schemes brought together, but by the outcomes achieved.
- For India, the real objective is to move from a "department of schemes" approach to a "government of outcomes" approach, where different institutions work together to deliver what citizens ultimately need—better lives, greater opportunities and dignified development.

Reference

The Indian Express| Convergence in Governance