Local Governance and WaSH Priorities:
A Comparative Analysis of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka & Refelections from Praxis

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Governance, Policy Convergence, and Community Action in WaSH
A Comparative Analysis of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka

Focus : Aligning Ground Realities with Central Mandates (JJM, SBM-G).

Key Theme : Addressing the Governance-Technology Mismatch.

Goal : A Roadmap to 100% Coverage & Functionality.

Sample Villages: Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu (One Panchayat from each states – from Aspirational District / Block)

- Karnataka: Devergonal Village Panchayat, Sorapura Block, Yadgir District
- Kerala: Chinnakanal Village Panchayat, Devikulam Block, Idukki District
- Tamilnadu: Keelkudi Village Panchayat, Thiruchuzi Block, Virudhunagar District

Methodology : Secondary data on financial reports of the Panchayats,
Field visits to capture community aspirations

Executive Summary – The "Scheme-Governance" Mismatch

The Problem:
Achieving 100% WaSH saturation is stalled by a **"Governance-Technology Mismatch,"** not a lack of funds.

The Reality:
States struggle to transition from **"Asset Creation"** (Capex - funded by schemes) to **"Service Delivery"** (Opex - requires local autonomy).

The Gap:
JJM mandates 10% community contribution, but states often bypass this using subsidies, leading to a lack of ownership.

The Verdict:
Policy convergence is required to bridge the gap between Central mandates and state-specific governance cultures.

The Three State Paradigms

Kerala: "The Efficiency Paradox"
   High fiscal devolution and cash reserves.
   Struggles with technical execution and aging infrastructure (Plan Slippage).

Tamil Nadu: "The Dependency Trap"
   High reliance on State-driven schemes (TWAD Board).
   Panchayats lack decision-making power; burdened by high electricity bills.

Karnataka: "The Fragmentation Trap"
   Disconnect between District (Zilla Panchayat) planning and Village needs.

Result: Defunct assets and heavy spending on repairs

Governance Architecture – Central Mandates vs. State Reality

Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) Implementation:

Kerala (Integration):
JJM funds integrated into "People's Plan Campaign." Panchayats use "Plan Funds" for the state share, ensuring local control.

Tamil Nadu (Centralization):
Executed by TWAD Board. Panchayats are "recipients," often unaware of technical specs until handover.

Karnataka (Fragmentation):
Zilla Panchayat creates the roadmap. Targets often mismatch village realities (e.g., taps vs. dried borewells)

The "Operation & Maintanance" Crisis – The Reactive Maintenance Cycle

The Core Issue:
Funds are drained by "fixing broken things" rather than investing in sustainability.

The "Repair Trap" (Karnataka):
> **65% of budget** spent on tube-well repairs.
> Indicates failure of source sustainability schemes (Jaladhare).

The "Energy Trap" (Tamil Nadu):
- High-horsepower pumps lead to massive electricity bills.
- Development funds are diverted to pay power bills (High-Cost Debt)

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The Policy Gap in Maintenance

15th Finance Commission Misinterpretation:
Tied grants are available for "Water & Sanitation".

Gap:
Panchayats interpret this as permission to build *new* assets rather than maintain *old* ones.

Sanitation as the "Poor Cousin":
- Receives only ~7% of the budget compared to water supply.
- Focus remains on "liquid" (drainage) rather than "solid" waste management

Community Institutions – Best Practices

Kerala: Formalized Service Providers:
- **Institution:** Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) & Beneficiary Committees.
- **Mechanism:** "Green Army" collects waste door-to-door.
- **Impact:** Normalized **User Fee (₹50/month)**. This is a "contract" enforcing accountability, not just a donation.
- **Result:** Sustainable "Own Source Revenue" for WaSH

Tamil Nadu: The Informal Workforce
- **Institution:** Self-Help Groups (SHGs) / Kalanjiams.
- **Role:** Informal "Gap-Fillers." They pool money to fix motors when Panchayat funds are stuck.
- **Success:** In Madurai, SHGs formally contract to maintain toilets better than government staff.

Karnataka: At reflected at the field
- **Institution:** Village Water & Sanitation Committees (VWSCs).
- **Status:** Mandatory under JJM but often inactive.
- **Redeeming Feature:** Social Audit Units successfully expose "ghost toilets

Comparative PAI (Panchayat Advancement Index) Scorecard Analysis (2022-23) on the WaSH Theme

Inferences:

- **Keelkudi (TN)** and **Chinnakanal (Kerala)** are in the **"Performer" (Grade B)** category with scores of **62.51** and **64.15** respectively.

- **Devar Gonal (Karnataka)** lags as an **"Aspirant" (Grade C)** wth a score of **50.41**,

Strategic focus to be given as follows:

- **Keelkudi** needs to focus on **Sanitation (53.73)** to move to 'A' grade.
- **Chinnakanal** needs to solve the **Water Sufficiency (49.62)** bottleneck (likely terrain/maintenance issues).
- **Devar Gonal** requires a complete overhaul in **Clean & Green (38.27)** via the proposed "Sanitation Sub-Quota."

Comparative Ranking of Southern States on WaSH Governance

Key Parameter	Kerala	Tamil Nadu	Karnataka
1. Fiscal Decentralization *(Autonomy to plan & spend)*	**Rank: 1 (High)** Panchayats act as "planners" using untied **Plan Funds** to pay for state shares, ensuring high local control.	**Rank: 3 (Low)** Panchayats are often **"check-signers"** for centralized boards (TWAD). Schemes are driven by State mandates rather than local resolution.	**Rank: 2 (Medium)** Suffers from **fragmentation**. District (Zilla Panchayat) plans often override village-level (GPDP) needs, creating a top-heavy structure.
2. O&M Efficiency *(Maintenance of assets)*	**Rank: 1 (Medium)** Better maintenance systems exist, though funds sometimes lapse ("Plan Slippage") due to technical delays.	**Rank: 2 (Low)** Paralyzed by the **"Energy Trap."** High-horsepower pumps lead to massive electricity bills, draining development funds.	**Rank: 3 (Low)** Stuck in a severe **"Repair Trap."** Spends **65% of budget** on tube-well repairs, indicating a failure of source sustainability.

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Comparative Ranking of Southern States on WaSH Governance

Key Parameter	Kerala	Tamil Nadu	Karnataka
3. Sanitation Focus (Solid Waste & Hygiene)	**Rank: 1 (High)** Holistic focus on "Ecological Sanitation" via Haritha Karma Sena. Moves beyond toilets to waste management.	**Rank: 2 (Medium)** Focus remains largely on "liquid" (drainage). However, SHGs are emerging as effective managers of community toilets in some districts.	**Rank: 3 (Low)** Sanitation is a "poor cousin," receiving only ~7% of the budget. Heavy focus on construction targets rather than usage.
4. Community Role (Participation & Ownership)	**Rank: 1 (High)** Formalized role of Beneficiary Committees and the Green Army (HKS) ensures active "skin in the game".	**Rank: 2 (Medium)** Informal but effective. SHGs/Kalanjiams often fill gaps, pooling money to fix motors when the Panchayat fails.	**Rank: 3 (Low)** Bureaucratic. VWSCs (Village Water & Sanitation Committees) often exist only on paper.
5. Financial Sustainability (Revenue Generation)	**Rank: 1 (High)** Sustainable "Own Source Revenue" generated through normalized user fees (₹50/month) for waste collection.	**Rank: 3 (Low)** Deep "freebie culture" prevents water taxation. Panchayats are permanently dependent on State grants for electricity bills	**Rank: 2 (Low)** Heavily grant-dependent and volatile, though recent shifts to granular accounting (2024-25) offer hope for better tracking.

Financial Convergence Strategy – "Green Energy"

- **Goal**   **:** Solving the "Energy Trap" in Tamil Nadu & Karnataka.
- **Strategy**   **:** Converge **PM-KUSUM Component C** (Solarization) with **15th FC Tied Grants**.
- **Mechanism** **:** Use 15th FC funds for capital cost of solar panels.
- **Impact:**
  - Converts monthly liability (bills) into a one-time asset.
  - Frees up to **50% of O&M budget** for sanitation

- **CSR for Innovation (Solving the Tech Gap):**
  - **Problem:** No state funds for "Smart" tech (leak detection).
  - **Solution:** Direct CSR funds to **"Smart Water Management Pilots"** (IoT Flow Meters).
  - **Benefit:** Provides granular data to detect leaks early.

- **Wage-Material Convergence (Solving the Maintenance Trap):**
  Strategy: Combine **MGNREGS** (Labor) with **SBM-G** (Material).
  Action: Use labour for desilting (source sustainability) and SBM-G for technical upgrades.

Strategic Recommendation 1 – Sanitation Sub-Quotas

Rationale: Preventing funds from being monopolized by water supply.
Policy Action: Issue Government Order (GO) for **"Sanitation Sub-Quota"**.
The Rule:

- **30% of 15th FC Tied Grants** must be ring-fenced for Solid Waste Management (SWM).
- Focus on Segregation Sheds and Composting Units, not just drains

Strategic Recommendation 2 – Monetization via User Fees

Shift: Move from "Free Water" to "Service Fee".
Mechanism: Introduce a nominal **"Service & Repair Fee"** (e.g., ₹30-50/month).
Marketing Strategy:

- Market as a **"24/7 Service Assurance Premium"**.
- Guarantee: Payment ensures repair within 24 hours.

Evidence: Kerala's HKS proves communities *will* pay for reliable service

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Strategic Recommendation 3 – Institutionalizing Maintenance

Shift: From "Break-Fix" to **Annual Maintenance Contracts (AMCs)**.
Action: Empower Panchayats to sign AMCs with local **SHG federations**.
Benefits:
- Ensures preventive maintenance (monthly check-ups).
- Provides formal livelihoods for women.
- Ensures local accountability

Summary of Key Interventions

Gap Identified	Proposed Solution	Target State
Energy Trap	Solar Convergence (PM-KUSUM + 15th FC)	TN, KA
Repair Trap	Smart Water Pilots (CSR + IoT)	KA
Maintenance Gap	Formal SHG Contracts (AMCs)	TN, KA
Sanitation Neglect	30% Ring-Fenced Sub-Quota	All
Funding Gap	Service Assurance Premium (User Fee)	All

Conclusion – The Path to 100% Coverage

Vision: Move from "Coverage" (Construction) to "Functionality" (Sustained Usage).

Requirement: A shift in governance culture—empowering Panchayats with fiscal autonomy and technical support.

Call to Action:
- **For Government:** Enforce policy convergence (Green Energy & Sub-Quotas).
- **For Communities:** Institutionalize user fees for service assurance.
- **For Corporates:** Direct CSR to bridge the technology gap.

Thank You

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