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INCENTIVISING CONVERGENCE AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL FOR ENHANCED POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

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BACKGROUND

The Government of the Indian State of Tamil Nadu introduced the Pudhumai Penn scheme in March 2022, focusing on increasing the enrolment ratio of girl students from the government schools in higher education (Pudhumai Penn, 2022). The scheme's directed objectives are:

1. To increase Gross Enrolment Ratio of girl students in higher education

2. To reduce early marriage
3. To bridge the gender gap and bring inclusivity in all levels of education

The scheme envisions to attain these objectives by providing a monthly financial incentive of Rs.1000 (which amounts to approximately \$49/£32 based on a purchasing power parity (PPP) conversion factor of 20.42) (PPP conversion factor, 2024). This is provided to all girl students who

TABLE 1 BENEFICIARY ENROLMENT IN PUDHUMAI PENN SCHEME IN THE NAMBIYUR BLOCK OF THE ERODE DISTRICT

INDICATOR	ERODE	NAMBIYUR
Beneficiary %	63%	20%
Number of beneficiaries	3764	96
Number of eligible girl students who passed out from government schools in 2023-2024	5981	475

studied in government schools from class 6 to 12 (ages 11 to 17), up to the uninterrupted completion of their undergraduate degree, diploma and ITI (Industrial Training Institute) courses. However, the effective implementation of this scheme requires the convergence and coordination of three different departments:

1. Social Welfare and Women Empowerment Department, which is the nodal agency to coordinate and oversee enrolment process.
2. School Education Department, which is responsible for the verification of enrolment in government schools from class 6 to 12 through EMIS (Educational Management Information System, a database of the School Education Department).
3. Higher Education Department, which is responsible for the coordination with nodal officers for enrolment of students in the scheme.

The effective implementation of this scheme requires the convergence and coordination of three different departments

As an example, in the case of Nambiyur block in the Erode district of Tamil Nadu as the implementation unit, it is apparent from Table 1 that a large number of eligible girl students in the Nambiyur block are not enrolled in the scheme, possibly due to lack of awareness emerging from the lack of convergence between the departments involved. The enrolment is around 20% in the Nambiyur block, against

63% in the Erode district and around 60% in Tamil Nadu overall.

FOCUS BLOCKS

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Against this background, it is important to note that the Nambiyur block is one of 50 blocks considered under the Focus Blocks Development Programme from the Government of Tamil Nadu aimed at enhancing the grassroots governance and ensuring balanced development across the different regions (particularly at the block level) as announced in the Budget 2023-2024 (FBDP, 2023). The Focus Blocks Development Programme, wherein each selected block is allocated Rs. 5 crores (which amounts to approximately \$2.5/£1.7 million based on a PPP conversion factor of 20.42) for a period of 3 years (PPP conversion factor, 2024). This aims to strengthen block level administration by incentivising convergence and cooperation

between different departments at the block level. It also promotes competition between the selected 50 blocks on the performance of developmental indicators on health and nutrition, social welfare, education, skill development, agriculture and allied services, economic development, and infrastructure.

From a game-theoretic lens, the design of the Focus Blocks Development Programme can be seen to incentivise the selected blocks to enhance their developmental performance as explained in the timeline of the game (Figure 1). The governmental recognition and incentives for high performance incentivises the 50 blocks to *compete* with each other in order to become one among those high performing blocks. However, in turn, this can be attained only with the convergence of different schemes and their effective implementation which requires the *cooperation* of concerned departments to enhance performance. The Focus Blocks

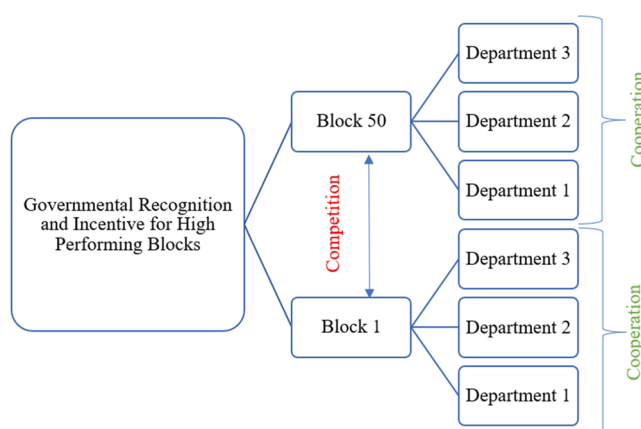


FIGURE 1 GAME TIMELINE IN THE FOCUS BLOCKS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Development Programme is thus leveraged in the context of the Pudhumai Penn scheme to improve the enrolment of girl students in higher education by promoting cooperation between the three departments concerned, namely the Social Welfare and Women Empowerment Department, the School Education Department, and the Higher Education Department in the Nambiyur block in the quest for performing well on the developmental indicators mentioned in the programme against the competing blocks.

incentivises the 50 blocks to compete with each other [...] whilst implementation] requires the cooperation of concerned departments

RESULT

The cooperation between the three departments is operationalised first through the convergence of data from

the Educational Management Information System (EMIS) database of the School Education Department, payment database of the Pudhumai Penn portal and the University Management Information System (UMIS) database of the Higher Education Department. The objective is to ensure the inclusion of non-enrolled, eligible girl students in the scheme by reaching out to them over phone calls which is possible due to the consolidation of databases. In addition to the convergence of databases, the coordination with the nodal officers from the Social Welfare and Women Empowerment Department is essential for administrative easing, faster resolution in appeal process, eligibility verification and bank-Aadhaar seeding (referring to the linking of the bank account with the Aadhaar number – a unique identity number for the residents of India).

Figure 2 shows that there is an apparent improvement in the

enrolment into the Pudhumai Penn scheme in the Nambiyur block from 20% to 88% of the 475 eligible beneficiaries. This is possible with the cooperation of the different, concerned departments within the Nambiyur block responsible for the implementation of the scheme, which in turn is a result of the potential incentives and recognition from the Government of Tamil Nadu in the competition against the remaining 49 blocks as a part of the Focus Blocks Development Programme.

improvement in the enrolment [...] from 20% to 88%

In the Focus Blocks Development Programme's Best Practices Seminar in August 2025, this implementation model of the Pudhumai Penn scheme in the Nambiyur block of the Erode district was selected for presentation under the Social Welfare theme. It was one of the few best practices selected among the 38 districts of Tamil Nadu, mentioning remarkable growth in the Pudhumai Penn scheme in the Nambiyur block of the Erode district. The seminar is a platform for the districts of Tamil Nadu to present best practices and promote successful models with a potential to scale across the state. As a result, a proposal to integrate the three aforementioned databases at the state level under a single online portal is under development to achieve 100% beneficiary enrolment to promote the development of women through higher education.

J. Muthu Kumar is a Young Professional at the District Monitoring Unit, Special Programme Implementation Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, Erode involved in preparing policy briefs, analysing government schemes to identify gaps, and preparing analytical reports on the flagship schemes.

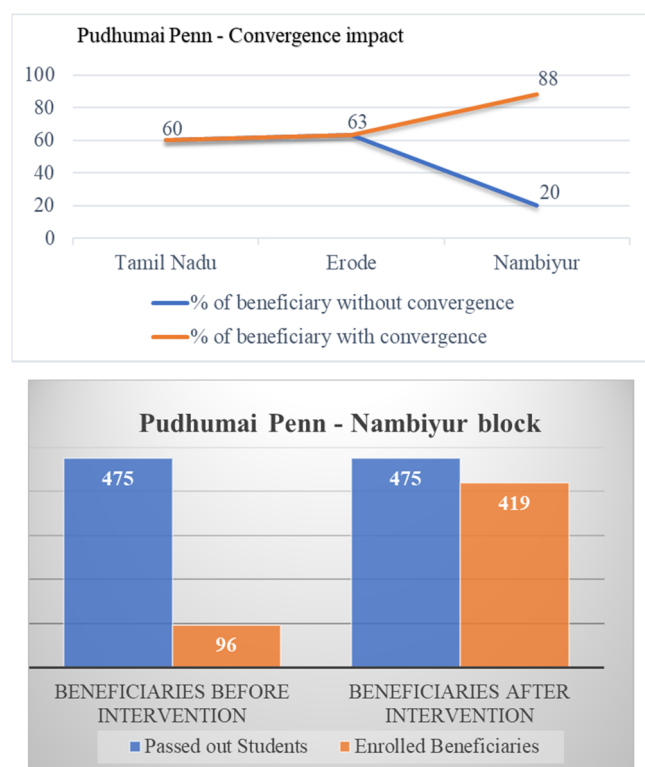


FIGURE 2 IMPROVEMENT IN THE PUDHUMAI PENN SCHEME IMPLEMENTATION AFTER THE FOCUS BLOCKS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME INTERVENTION

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S. Srivatsa Srinivas is an Assistant Professor in the Centre for Mathematical and Computational Economics, School of

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