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## Health of rural development institutions fragile; lack financial viability: N K Singh

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New Delhi, Oct 31 (PTI) The 15th Finance Commission Chairman N K Singh on Tuesday said the health of rural development institutions, like panchayati raj, remain fragile with financial viability eluding them.

Speaking at the '2nd Rohini Nayyar award for outstanding contribution to rural development by an individual 40 years or under', Singh said the ability of the institutions for projectisation and viability of technical assistance for project preparation remains mired in technical incompetence.

Nayyar, an economist, had retired as the Principal Advisor, Rural Development, in the erstwhile Planning Commission in 2005. She is known for her contributions to the academic literature, policy making, including rural employment guarantee scheme MNREGA, and institution building in the context of rural development in India.

Remembering Nayyar's contribution, Singh said, "What would Rohini have said if she was with us today? How she would questioned the way in which important aspects of the rural development institutions have evolved? "Unfortunately many remain fragile with financial viability continuously eluding them." Singh, a former bureaucrat, also said that the centrepiece of a rural development programme is the health of the urban local bodies, the municipalities and more importantly the framework of panchayati raj institution.

Singh questioned if these institutions have been restructured enough as per the changing requirements of present times.

"The ability of the institutions for projectisation, viability of technical assistance for project preparation remains mired in technical incompetence very often so much so that the meagre financial resources cannot be gainfully utilised both in design and implementation," Singh said.

The 15th Finance Commission in its report had stipulated a compulsory auditing of accounts of such institutions, adoption of uniform practices as well as suggested conditional transfers for three important national programmes, including for health sector.

He said strengthening of rural healthcare institutions was important in the aftermath of Covid pandemic.

The 2nd Rohini Nayyar prize was awarded on Tuesday, coinciding with the 79th birth anniversary of Nayyar, to engineer-turned-social worker Deenanath Rajput for his work on empowering tribal women in Bastar, Chhattisgarh.

Rajput encouraged tribal women to join farming and helped them sell their farm produce, thus benefiting around 6,100 farmers. PTI JD.

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