

DIGITAL INDIA PROGRAMME: A VEHICLE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract–“If the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government is remembered for laying down national highways, the Narendra Modi government will be known to have laid the digital highway of the country”, communication minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said this while launching the initiatives of E-Governance in New Delhi. Development of rural folks is crucial for socio economic development of country. Poverty reduction is part of a broader development process of the country. This paper intends to find out whether digital India programme is going to help in improving living standards of rural folks

1. DIGITAL INDIA PROGRAMME

Digital India programme was launched by Modi Government with a clear objective of providing efficient and effective delivery of Government services. Digital Infrastructural development and composition, Digital literacy and synthesizing digital ways to provide government services are three important secondary objectives of the programme. The project is expected to be completed by 2019.

It is anticipated that the project will accelerate the development process in rural India by linking remote villages by high speed internet services. Once the villages get connected with Internet, the rural folks can improve their skill and knowledge level, thus will get benefitted with ample job opportunities. It is an ambitious project which will benefit everyone, especially the villagers who hurt paperwork to cover long distances in a variety of reasons and time and money is wasted.

2. THE NINE PILLARS

The dream project of Mr. Narendra Modi is expected to be supported by nine beams namely:

1. Broad Band Connectivity
2. Universal Mobile connectivity
3. Public Internet Access Programme.
4. E-Governance
5. e-Kranti
6. Information for All
7. Electronic Manufacturing
8. IT for Jobs
9. Early Harvest Programmes

In coming section of the paper, we will explore each pillar of the programme to test out how these pillars will impinge the growth curve of rural development in India.

2.1 Broad Band Connectivity

In Broad Band connectivity, it is possible to transmit the voluminous information in a given amount of time, since information can be multiplexed and sent on different channel [1]. Prabhu and Manoo M. analyzed an escalating improvement in rural internet access rate, and thus internet connectivity could be a driver of immense growth in rural India [2]. Empowering rural India with Broad Band Connectivity will help in better information access and thus better service delivery as far as health, education, agriculture area is concerned. The success of various scheme initiated by the government are dependent on speedy implementation of broad band connectivity. The broadband connectivity is presently using Optical fiber network. The Government has proposed to connect 2.5 lakh gram panchayats through broad band connectivity. Since this technology have the advantageous range of about 10 km, this feature can be exploited to provide internet connectivity to the people in villages where homes are sparsely located. Experts of the area feel that the technology, can potentially lead to a growth in broadband connectivity in country [3]. The challenges include political will, investment, technology, bureaucracy and of course uninterrupted power supply which needs to be focused in order to make the project a real success.

2.2. Universal Mobile connectivity

Mobile communication has transformed the economy and daily life of villagers in a drastic way. It can be used to bridge the digital divide across the rural and semi-urban areas, bringing tangible economic benefits and enabling social benefits through

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improved communication. Whether it is health, education or agriculture, the mobile is a viable tool available to provide better service delivery at the right time and at the right place. Even the schools located interiors of the country can be connected with internet with the help of 3G/4G technology, so, that information can be exchanged in quick way. Farmers can check and compare the market price of their crops quickly. The health centers in the villages can save the life of people by taking support of quick health data and rapid diagnosis through mobile connectivity.

But still rural tele-density is low at 45.7 in contrast to 147.3 in urban India. More than 50,000 villages are still need to be connected. The challenges need to be addressed includes availability of low quantum spectrum and government incentives to private operators so that they can focus more on rural areas. Availability of electricity is also one more challenge but that can be handled by solar energy.

2.3 Public Internet Access Programme.

The success of any scheme depends on the how the end users are using it. Most of the government schemes fail due to low connectivity of internet. In order to provide smooth and fast service delivery in rural India, the need is to give proper connectivity to the villages. Apart from connectivity, awareness and application are other reasons to be included for slow speed of Internet access in rural India. It is very important to understand the importance of high speed internet infrastructure. Robust Internet Infrastructure not only extend connectivity to the grass root level, but also generate confidence and develop skill of using the application provided with the help of technology.

We cannot expect the villagers to travel long distance just get benefit of government scheme. The need is to provide the benefits at their doorsteps for which internet access is required in a nearby area. In order to get rid of this problem, Government has decided to use CSC's (Common service centers) as multiservice centers. It has also been decided to use post offices as a multiservice centres, this will not only brings the scheme to the doorstep of the people of gram panchayat but also help in making the scheme popular. Postal department have been given the responsibility of implementing this scheme.

Private players may also help in this regards by providing Mobile Internet access Van's with all equipments which can provide the connectivity at their door steps only.

2.4. E-Governance

“Good use of ICT must obviously have a positive impact on one or more aspects of poverty”. E-governance is sub field of ICT that can be used to for alleviating the powerlessness, vulnerability and fear factor of poverty. Telecom Infrastructure in rural India is inadequate and the poor do not have access to the INTERNET. In many developing countries, the Government alienated from the poor because there is very little contact between the government and them.

It is very important that Government should involve the people in the development process & cross share the information with them. Madhya Pradesh government in its initiatives of e-governance (GYANDOOT) attempts to reach out to poor people through privately run kiosks where they can lodge a complaint, seek information on the prices of agricultural commodities, or apply for some government services. In an attempt Panchmahal district of Gujarat, the district administration has created a portal, which publishes data on rural schemes that can benefit the poor.

Information dissemination through e-Governance is a successful attempt to empower the citizen of India especially the rural India. There are certain other areas also where the implementation can help in eradicating poverty from rural India.

Agricultural and Allied Services In order to sell crops on best possible rates, a real time information system can be provided to the farmer. This type of system will eliminate the role of middleman from the picture.

Education

The biggest hindrance in the development of rural India is inadequate education services. Most of the schools in villages face the problem of scarcity of staff. Moreover, due to corruptions teachers have also developed an attitude of remaining absent from classes. Using technology, students in these villages can be taught by teachers in urban areas. These problems can very easily be tackled by exploiting ICT tools.

Health and Sanitation

Rural India is dependent on health centers & associated staff for delivery of health services. Efficient management and monitoring of these health centers may be possible through employment of unified Information system. Time to Time training of health workers and remote consultation and diagnosis is possible by implementing ICT techniques.

2.5 e-Kranti

The main principles behind e-Kranti is namely ‘Transformation and not Translation’, which means that the use of ICT does not translate the process by its electronic counterpart but it actually transforms the whole process. This transformation leads to the transformation of relations between government and citizens. Thus prima fascia the transformation is a result of ‘Government Process Reengineering (GPR) to be mandatory in every MMP (Mission Mode Project). In case of rural India, transformation of relationship with government will automatically improve, if we remove the alienation of government and people. There are few factors which may help in removing alienation may include:

Robust Infrastructure for the Connectivity at the door step. Cloud services should be used for data storage and access. Use of mobile is the easiest way of providing connectivity to rural folks Tracking system should be employed to provide the status of the request.

Standards should be followed to enable the interoperability among applications.

Still most of the population is illiterate or incapable of reading and writing in English language in villages. Hence web applications should be developed using more local language on its interface to make it more user friendly.

Proper security arrangement of data is a prerequisite before implementing the E-Governance applications.

2.6. Information for All

Information dissemination has a critical role to play as far as the ‘Transformation process’ is concerned. China is one of the best examples whose agricultural sector has transformed through the effective deployment of Information dissemination techniques. Right Information to the right person at the right time is the fundamental principle for the development of rural folks in India. Government of India is trying to focus on the use of social media for information sharing.

According to a study, there are about 180 million internet users from urban areas and 77 millions from the rural places out of total 257 million. It is evident from a report of IMAI (International mobile association of India) that the use of social media among rural folks has doubled in past few years compared to urban areas.

Thus, above desk study reveals that with increased use of mobile telephone, social media can be the best source of information dissemination.

Gramvaani project is one of the example in which social media is used for the development of rural areas.

2.7. Electronic Manufacturing

The objective is to reduce the need importing electronic parts from abroad. Under the purview of “Make in India”, the government has decided to achieve NET ZERO IMPORT by 2020. In order to make India an electronics manufacturing hub, the government has achieved a total investment of Rs 1,20,000 crore in this sector, the government is promoting electronics manufacturing industry in a very big way and giving incentives and providing electronics clusters to investors. [1] In addition to this the government is ensuring an easy availability of electronic product in cheaper cost. These products will be made available at the doorsteps of villagers. This will help in making digital India programme a great success.

2.8. IT for Jobs

It has been decided that DeitY will impart training to one crore students from smaller towns & villages for IT sector jobs over 5 years. Besides this, it will train another three lakh as a part of skill development to run viable businesses delivering IT services. Dream project of our PM DIGITAL INDIA plan is likely to enhance job opportunities in all programmes of engg. directly or indirectly. The plan is expected to create 17 million direct and indirect jobs while reducing Indian import of electronics. Several initiatives are on the way for the growth of electronics and communication industry which in turn will create the jobs.

2.9. Early Harvest Programmes

In order to ensure steady supply to the market and regulate the regular prices, the concept of Agricentre is introduced which is actually a network of Telecenters. With the help of these telecenters information can be provided to the farmers about modern techniques of seeds, soil, & fertilizers.

3. CONCLUSION:

There are number of schemes which government has started for poor and rural people. Out of them some schemes had failed due to the lack of monitoring and proper data collection. Recently, Government has started MNREGA that provide the right to the registered households to demand and receive employment up to 100 days in a year. MNREGA has been listed as one of the flagship programmes of the government for review and it is being reviewed at the highest level in the Government. It is quite clear that the nine pillars of Digital India Programme will not only elevate the standard of living of rural folks but will also have an impact on poverty alleviation. Use of ICT for various programmes expected to increase the reach, minimize the processing cost and reduce the corruption.

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