

E-Governance – A Significant Medium of Rural Development in India

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Abstract: *Amongst the emerging Asian Economies, India is a nation with 70 % of population living in rural areas which casts pressure on Government to focus more on development of Rural India. ICT acts as a provider of major opportunities to rural livelihoods and contributes towards poverty reduction. Productivity of rural areas can be enhanced by usage of ICT. Through various E-Governance initiatives like E-Choupal, Akashganga, Gyandoot, Tata Kissan Kendra, Kissan Call Centres etc., Government of India has ambitious objective of transforming the interaction of citizens with government in an electronic form. Through this, Government can ensure more transparency and better administration. Through this paper an attempt has been made to identify various building blocks that have led to rural development through various ICT initiatives*

Keywords: *digital divide, digital India, e-governance, ICT, rural development ,NeGP, NIC, Gyandoot.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's era Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has brought remarkable change in the lives of people in every respect also enabling government to deliver better services even at remotest corners of the country. Various ICT applications have been designed specifically for the people residing in rural areas of the country. Ministry of Rural Development (India) has taken various initiatives at different levels by way of strengthening the ICT infrastructure to provide opportunities, information and easy access of the rural development Schemes to all citizens in rural India. Such developments have facilitated access to innumerable services and information in a very economical manner in a scenario where the cost of accessing information has been a biggest hurdle for the poor farmers. Through ICT, several e-governance initiatives have been adopted which have ultimately proved to be a major contributor in rural development.

OBJECTIVES

To study different E-governance initiatives in India.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on secondary data and data is procured from published sources like the websites of Ministry of Rural Development, research papers, books and periodicals and newspaper reports.

III. RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Nearly 70% of the country's population lives in rural areas where, for the first time since Independence, the overall growth rate of population has sharply declined, according to the latest Census. Of the 121 crore Indians, 83.3 crore live in rural areas while 37.7 crore stay in urban areas, said the Census of India's 2011 Provisional Population Totals of Rural-Urban Distribution in the country, released by Union Home Secretary RK Singh. "For the first time since Independence, the absolute increase in population is more in urban areas than in rural areas. The rural-urban distribution is 68.84% and 31.16% respectively," Registrar General of India and Census Commissioner C Chandramouli said. The level of urbanization increased from 27.81% in the 2001 Census to 31.16% in the 2011 Census, while the proportion of rural population declined from 72.19% to 68.84%.

"The slowing down of the overall growth rate of population is due to the sharp decline in the growth rate in rural areas, while the growth rate in urban areas remains almost the same," Chandramouli said. However, according to the report, the number of births in rural areas has increased by 9 crore in the last decade. The statistics reveal that while the maximum number of people living in rural areas in a particular state is 15.5 crore in Uttar Pradesh, Mumbai tops the list having the maximum number of people in urban areas at five crore. The data also reflects that 18.62% of the country's rural population lives in Uttar Pradesh and 13.48% urban population lives in Maharashtra.

III. RURAL E-GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES IN INDIA

COMPUTERIZED RURAL INFORMATION SYSTEM PROJECT [CRISP]

CRISP aimed at assisting the District Rural Development Agency [DRDA] in observing the exercise of poverty alleviation programmes through Computer based Information System. So far four versions of CRISP application software packages have been developed. Rural Soft was the fourth version. Rural Information endeavors marked the beginning of E-Governance in India. One such initial effort was Rural soft 2000. Through Rural soft 2000 common man can access all information on government portals and it also enabled government to monitor workings of various agencies. The latest in the series is Rural Soft, which is a scalable solution that helps in web based monitoring of the poverty alleviation schemes. It has been implemented in 15 districts of the country, which have been wired using state-of-the-art VSAT (satellite based) network by the ministry.

NEGP & NIC

For the success of e-governance, Government launched National e-governance plan and with the help of National Informatics Centre set up a central repository for all E-governance initiatives.

NeGP: National E-Governance Plan was launched with the following vision: "Make all Public Services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets and ensure efficiency, transparency and reliability of such services at affordable costs to realize the basic needs of the common man." NeGP came up on May 18, 2006 by Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DEIT) and Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DAR&PG). NeGP was set up with 27 Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) and 8 components. It was specially designed for rural areas and for the easy access of the services provided by NeGP State Wide Area Network (SWAN) and Common Service Centre (CSC) was set up.

NIC: NIC is a part of the Indian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology's. Department of Electronics & Information Technology and came up in 1976. It is a website designed for all the e-governance initiatives taken by government at one place. This includes blocks, districts, state government and central government. The ICT network of NIC is called NICNET.

IV. E-GOVERNANCE PROJECTS IN RURAL INDIA

E-CHOUPAL

India has witnessed massive industrialization in past decade but still agriculture is a dominant occupation in India. The farmers are often exploited by unreasonable intermediaries at every stage involved in the process of selling their produce to the final consumer. Such intermediaries or agents add their profit margin; try to hinder the market information. In order to cater to such problems, the International Business Division of Indian Tobacco Company (ITC-IBD) initiated a step called E-Choupal (which means a village meeting place). Under this initiative various E-Choupals were set up in around 6500 villages by 2012 and each E-Choupal was equipped with a PC, internet connection, printer and Uninterrupted Power Supplies (UPS). Through this the managers at ITC-IBD could fetch cheapest raw materials directly from the farmers and farmers were also able to benefit out of this as there was no intermediary involved. Indian Tobacco Company Ltd. has added 7 new E-Choupals a day and plans to scale up to 20,000 E-Choupals covering 100,000 villages in 15 states, servicing 15 million farmers by 2020.

GYANDOOT

Civil servants consulted various Gram Panchayats in Dhar district in Madhya Pradesh. The project was started in January, 2000 and named as Gyandoot. Gyandoot is very beneficial as it is economical and is owned by rural intranet system that is Soochnalaya, as it helps to fulfill the needs of villagers in the district. Rural youth manage 35 such centres which were established since January, 2000. The unemployed educated youth were trained and they ran the Soochnalaya and are known as Soochaks. They provide various types of services information related to agriculture, education, health, issues related to women, information about market and user fee is charged for all this. They further serve in making application for the services provided by the district headquarter for ownership of land. Soochnalaya are connected with dial-up lines through internet. Above 600 villages and approximately 50% of the total population of a district are covered by the network of 31 such Kiosks.

JAGRITI E-SEWA

In the developing nation like India Jagriti E-Sewa is suitable, applicable, reasonable, accessible and sustainable technology. Sometimes old computers are used. this project is used with the help of Dial up telephone lines. Minimum time period is required to change the whole system in any language. These kiosks are located at the center point of village or at the most renowned places of village so that one kiosk can serve minimum 25,000–30,000 villagers. Each kiosk is on franchise basis where the franchisee is an educated young man or ex- serviceman. Sufficient revenue is to be generated by the franchisee to meet the cost.

AKASHGANGA

ICT is being used by Akashganga to help the milk producers of rural areas by making cooperative societies and procuring milk and assists in maintaining accounts. In Gujarat first model of Dairy Information System Kiosk (DISK) was implemented at Uttarsanda Dairy Cooperative Society. In this society every farmer is having an individual identification card (plastic card). Their identification is updated in PC when farmers come at Raw Milk Receiving Dock (RMRD) counter. As the milk is emptied in the steel drum the weight of milk can be measured and at the same tie it is recorded in the PC. However, one operator is required for filling the cans and a separator operator for measuring fat content. The new technological development includes weighing balance, microprocessor, printer, milk analyzers and a display to carry out these operations

KISSAN CALL CENTRES

There is change in the language after every 50 km in India. These call centres are specially made to respond to the issues raised by the farmers in the vernacular language continuously. This scheme was started during April 2002 by the Department of Agriculture & Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture. the scheme was launched to deliver the farming villagers about the telecom infrastructure. As most of the villagers are not aware of the latest technological development in the country, these centres are specially designed to serve the purpose of creating awareness among the farmers. Toll free numbers are being provided to the farmers, as the services are to be cost free to all the needy ones. So the agriculture department and line departments, SAUs, ICAR organizations are being instructed by the ministry of Agriculture to do the publicity of toll free numbers of KCC. Publicity material includes posters, charts, training and demonstration Programme etc.

TATA KISAN KENDRA (TKK)

In Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab, TATA Chemical Limited launched Tata Kisan Kendra (TKK). Geographic Information Systems (GIS) helps TKK to tracks basic areas related to farming like soil, ground water and weather. The new software named GIS informs about the roads, buildings and rivers. The data is the form of digital maps and provides information regarding socio-economic, administrative and physical set up. With the help of satellite, images are being processed which further helps to detect insect attacks throughout the state and get estimates of crop. Satellite further helps in upgradation of maps and detecting unproductive farming. 48000 villages are to be served by about 800 franchisees and 40 more kiosks.

V. CONCLUSION

Electronic government (e-Government) is one of the most important ways to bridge the digital divide in developing nations like India. Different initiatives by government through the developments in ICT have helped E-governance to take off since the beginning of millennium. Different building blocks like increasing literacy rate in rural areas, the initiatives like Digital India campaign will help in making the rural people more tech savvy encouraging them to get in contact with Indian government through just a click of button. So in a nutshell it can be concluded that increasing digital literacy with the help of technical advancements are leading and will lead to rural development in India.

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