

It and Rural Development: A Study on Government Contribution

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Abstract

Information technology has revolutionized the rural masses during the last few months. With the advent of new technological solutions, services provided to the rural people (in terms of various services offered) will result in the overall betterment of the society on one side by enriching the people with updated market information and providing latest technological developmental news and organizations on other side by creating more market opportunities for them and adjustment of the market prices. Rural development will greatly affect the economy of the country. For development of the rural areas proper development of the IT Communication and Infrastructural services are essential along with the utilization of the fiber optic networks. I.T. services need to be developed in reference to the present rural infrastructure. World wide web based services mixed with customer support services should be provided in the rural areas, which can increase the acceptance rate of the services by the rural people. The paper attempts to find the catalytic role of government in enhancing the rural sector by enabling them with IT equipped services.

Keywords

IT Services, Rural Development, Infrastructural Services, Communication.

I. Introduction

Around 65% of the State's population is living in rural areas. Literally and from the social, economic and political perspectives the statement is valid even today. People in rural areas should have the same quality of life as is enjoyed by people living in sub urban and urban areas. Further there are cascading effects of poverty, unemployment, poor and inadequate infrastructure in rural areas on urban centres causing slums and consequential social and economic tensions manifesting in economic deprivation and urban poverty. Hence Rural development which is concerned with economic growth and social justice, improvement in the living standard of the rural people by providing adequate and quality social services and minimum basic needs becomes essential. The present strategy of rural development mainly focuses on poverty alleviation, better livelihood opportunities, provision of basic amenities and infrastructure facilities through innovative programmes of wage and self-employment. The above goals will be achieved by various programme support being implemented creating partnership with communities, non-governmental organizations, community based organizations, institutions, PRIs and industrial establishments, while the Department of Rural Development will provide logistic support both on technical and administrative side for programme implementation. Other aspects that will ultimately lead to transformation of rural life are also being emphasized simultaneously.

The Rural Market of India is showing an impressive growth largely due to changing lifestyle patterns, superior communication network and rapidly changing demand structure of consumers of rural area. With the changing patterns of Rural Market, the

role of I.T. has increased from providing only the Networks to set-up the basis of updated technological programs in the rural area. It is seen that the people living in the rural area have strong purchasing power and have more openness for new technology as compared to the past. Evidence of the increase in purchasing power can be drawn from the statement of Mr. D. Shivakumar (Business Head – Personal Product Division, Hindustan Unilever Limited) who stated that the money acquirable for spending on the FMCG by Rural India is 63,500 Cr., which is much more as compared to Urban India that spends the amount of approximately 49,500 Cr.

II. Focus

It is inspiring to note that, in India there is a growing consciousness of the multiple roles that Information Technology (IT) could play in overall growth of the country. The politicians and policy makers have also emphasized the significance of exploiting the profit of IT for the overall progress of the country. It is a solid view of the Government that if any technology can generate new prospects to link the space between haves and have-nots in society in the current time, it is information communication technology. The policy makers have also realized that IT to improve the lives of the two fifth of the population, which lives below the poverty line, the Government must play a catalytic and enabling role. Besides the central administration, several State Governments have also committed themselves to make strategies, which intentionally plan as extensively as possible to capture the benefits of IT, including the less privileged segments of society. In addition to the Central and State Governments, different civil society organizations are also convinced of the potential role of IT on the socio-economic revolution. A number of initiatives towards harnessing IT for rural development and poverty alleviation have been taken by these bodies. Even the private corporate sector, perhaps in the context of declining world demand, is increasingly looking towards the domestic market as a source of revenue generation.

III. IT and Rural Development

IT has varied applications in it, through which the development of the rural area can be doable accurately. Government had introduced a number of programs through which the people of rural India can come forward and use the IT enabled services and work more systematically. Some of the programs run by the Government are:

A. E-Mitra

This service is launched by the RAJASTHAN Government for the first time for its rural citizens, so that they can deploy the I.T. enabled benefits to its fullest. E- Mitra is Say Government started projects, which soon become highly favourite in the region. In year 2002, two projects came into existence namely; Lok Mitra and Jan Mitra.

B. Drishtee

It is a private company, which was previously titled as Cyber Edge, which has the main work of developing the modules. It is present in Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan. It is generally suited in the Panchayat or in the bazaars. They prepare the module for the poor section of the society who can't comprehend the international language. The modules are designed for the rural and semi-urban areas especially.

C. WI-FI Projects

One of the wi-fi project under which few villages (of UTTAR PRADESH) are connected to world wide web is Digital Gangetic Plan (DGP). Through the use of DGP wireless network connectivity is created, this program helped the people residing in villages of India to have the access of world wide web through which the information on various issues can be collected and used, at the same time the people living in rural India can be updated with the new technological changes and the innovative changes taking place in the national and the international markets.

D. Gyandoot

It was established in Jan in year 2000. It is an e-governance based module designed for the rural citizens. The project was initially initiated by the Government of MADHYA PRADESH. Gyandoot caters the need of the villagers by providing the information related to the prevailing rates of the agro-based commodities and the rate of land.

E. TARAhaat

It was developed by an NGO (non-government organization); with the vision to bring world wide web artefact to the rural India. It is a franchisee based business model that attempts to generate revenues by focusing on the marketing services through the module (especial focus on the local applications).

F. Community Information Centers

The program is designed especially for providing the world wide web access and I.T. Enabled services to the citizens through which the interface between the Government and the Citizens can be setup. These centers connect seven northeast states namely; Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. The center helps to acquire the connectivity at the time of unsuitable environmental conditions. The centers are commonly termed as CIC which are generally situated at the school, college or any governmental office. People can come for the World wide web access, and for accessing the internet, a nominal amount is charged from the people through which the regular expenses of the centers are maintained.

G. Rural E-seva

It was initiated by ANDRA PRADESH Government. It was initially implemented in West Godavari District to deliver e-governance facility. The centers are designed with the view to wage superior governance facilities to the people of the Rural India. E-seva is gaining popularity with passing days as it helps the citizens to avail the benefit of getting the certificates at their doorsteps; which is both resting and reliable.

H. Bhoomi

The KARNATAKA Government for maintaining the records related to the land introduced it. With the introduction of the program, the farmers are free from giving the bribe and are fortified

from the harassment. Framers can easily get the Records of Rights, Tenancy and Crops (RTC).

I. E-choupal

It is designed especially for the farmers of India. Through e-choupal, farmers who are living in the remote area of the country and can't manage to have direct contact with the consumer can come forward to have a direct contact. It provides an e-procurement system through which the farmers can access the latest and updated information (local, national and international) related to different farming practices. It provides real time information and customized knowledge to the farmers through which the farmer can take superior decisions and can have direct contact with the customer, reducing the amount wasted by moving through the distribution channel of intermediary.

J. Aksh

It is mostly active in Northern India, it is a fiber optic telegram company with its core competence in lay down and maintenance of cable. Aksh has the license to lay down the cables in the rural areas. The bandwidth delivered by Aksh supports a massive variety of services (including video interactions) which will lead to increase the level information exchange in between the people living in several areas of rural India.

IV. Use of It In Rural Development

Computer and other information technologies can be used to a great extent in proper distribution of seeds, grains from and to the markets, price monitoring and fertilizer distribution throughout the country are some of the areas where computer based information systems have been fully implemented. These systems are fairly complex in nature using optimization techniques and taking advantage of nationwide computer communication networks. Large irrigation projects which are critical to development in agriculture sector are being closely monitored on an online basis through the use of IT. Lastly the Commerce Sector even in small cities and villages has also been largely benefited from the use of Information Technology. National Centre of Trade Information is in the progress of being implemented, which would facilitate much faster dissemination of trade information and contribute to boosting exports from India thereby helping in reducing the trade deficit and adverse balance of payments positions.

V. Benefits of It In Rural Development

Information technology raises productivity, quality and efficiency. Hence forth it provides competitive advantages in domestic market as well as in the international market. It has the capacity to transform the international social structure. It also changes the complexion of existing employment opportunities by substituting the unskilled and skilled work force with skilled and trained IT professionals. The real benefits of IT lie in its rapid diffusion in the government organizations, which are discussed here one by one. Industries in India have highly from the use of Information Technology through Appropriate Automation Programmes. Prominent among these industries are steel, heavy electricals, locomotives, Textiles, Paper and Pulp, Process, Control etc. The application have gone far beyond inventory management and control. Complete production planning and control systems have been implemented in large number of industries. The systems have been integrated within particular industry as well connected across diverse geographic locations throughout the country using computer communication networks. Computer Aided Design

techniques have been used along with graphics and other modeling tools in many of the industries concerns. The requirements of process control tools are used alongwith appropriate computer communication networks numerous industries in the areas of miming, control and instrumentation, machine tools now have been emmeded IT systems without which the industries can not function. IT has thus directly contributed to increased industrial production.

VI. Suggestions

It is stressed that Internet initiatives for rural and agricultural development must consider the fact that different regions, organizations and communities have different applications and technical needs. In some areas it is possible to have farmers and rural residents as direct Internet users while in other areas the capacity of intermediary organizations (such as extension field officers, NGOs, rural schools, libraries, health clinics, government satellite offices) need to be built up, or assistance given in the establishment and promotion of community information centres linked to the Internet. Successful rural and agricultural Internet communication and information systems have some common elements. Some of the elements include preliminary participatory assessment of communication and information needs with intended users. Awareness building, sensitizing decision makers; commitment to participatory rural and agricultural development; user participation in design, implementation and management of information and communication services and commitment to manage and sustain these services; provision for technical training, user support and outreach within the user community. In our country services provided by the Government are inadequate both in terms of infrastructure, technology and in empowering people with information. To provide information to local rural people through satellite based communication technology according to their needs and demands, Information centre at village level can be established by involving local people in choosing the actual location of center, providing rent free space and electricity and recruiting volunteers. Each centre should contain data on agriculture, health-related information especially for the rural farmers, women and children. A directory of government schemes should be made available to rural families on local prices of agricultural input or produce, cultural/public events in the locality, local transport/traffic details including timing, grain prices, general and crop insurance schemes, hospitals and medical practitioners, as well as information about integrated pest management in various crops. These databases should be in local languages. In addition, interactive CD-ROMs on various issues can be made available. Information demand is different in each village; hence great care should be taken to address the need for location specific information.

VII. Conclusion

The information technology is not a magic stick by which one may go to bring miracle change in the rural masses. It may be one of the essential institutional structure contributing to modernization of agriculture, health, education, social and economic development. As we know development is a process which takes couple of years to change the rural life. Thus information technology will definitely be in a position to change the scenario of rural life and create a better path for rural development. The Information and Communication Technologies can generate new opening to bridge the gap between information haves and information have-nots in the developing countries. The emerging ICT have momentous role to perform in agricultural development. The grappling of

Indian rural market can be transformed only with the deployment of IT. All the services have difference in degree of connectivity, level of service offered and basic organizational structure. It is clearly seen that the range of IT enabled service proportion is increasing at a rapid rate in the rural areas of India. The fact behind it is the increasing interest of the organizations (profitable and non-profitable) to capture the rural markets and the increasing level of the education and market interface of the rural people. IT enabled services are growing at a fast rate and are providing several services to rural people with the common motive of having increase in the connectivity and thus creation of larger market in the rural areas. The increase in the services provided to the rural people (in terms of various services offered) will result in the overall betterment of the society on one side by enriching the people with updated market information and providing latest technological developmental news and organizations on other side by creating more market opportunities for them and adjustment of the market prices. For development of the rural areas proper development of the IT Communication and Infrastructural services are essential along with the utilization of the fiber optic networks. IT services need to be developed in reference to the present rural infrastructure. World wide web based services mixed with customer support services should be provided in the rural areas, which can increase the acceptance rate of the services by the rural people.

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