

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL EMPOWERMENT

Article Particulars

Received: 24.10.2017

Accepted: 28.10.2017

Published: 30.10.2017

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Abstract

The Government of India has been initiating plenty of rural development programmes for the betterment of rural people who are generally expecting more from the Government than people in urban and semi-urban areas. Whenever the new Government comes into power, the rural empowerment is an important agenda in its stipulated period of its regime. The reason behind for this is that India is a land of scattered villages where more than 70% of people living in rural community and agriculture and its allied businesses are the only source of income. People in villages should be educated towards the different rural development programmes introduced and implemented by the respective central and state government for their well being. For educating the rural people as a whole in India, Government of India, though introduced and implemented hefty number of social project programmes in Central and State level, may take further effort to ensure rural empowerment in the form of every people get an opportunity to know and use either directly or indirectly or both about Information and Communication of new and existing rural development programmes of Central and State Governments through Information Communication Technology freely by the year 2020.

Keywords: *E-Governance, Agriculture, Education, Rural Changes and Economic-Development.*

Introduction

The Government of India has been initiating plenty of rural development programmes for the betterment of rural people who are generally expecting more from the Government than people in urban and semi-urban areas. Whenever the new Government comes into power, the rural empowerment is an important agenda in its stipulated period of its regime. The reason behind for this is that India is a land of scattered villages where more than 70% of people living in rural community and agriculture and its allied businesses are the only source of income.

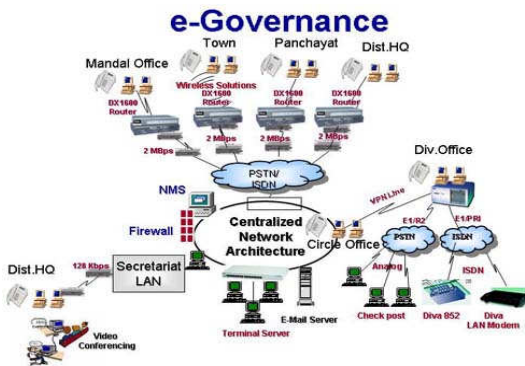
There is an inequitable distribution of information and communication about rural development project programmes introduced and implemented by both union and

state Government between people in urban, semi-urban and rural areas. Knowing the significance of ICTs in rural development in India, various central and state government projects have been introduced and implemented to achieve universal access to ICTs. These projects mainly concentrate on connecting link on the digital divide between the urban and rural areas of India. The urgency to bridge this divide mainly comes from the fact that in India, the rural areas mostly lag behind the urban areas when it comes to education, health, and infrastructure. This leads to inequality of services and opportunities for the rural population which stops them from contributing to the development of the country. This kind of rural isolation can negatively impact growth and in turn, affect the sustainable development of the country. ICTs can help to overcome the various constraints in infrastructure. Through the use of ICTs, people in rural areas can connect easily with the local, regional and national economy. They can make use of the banking facilities and also access the various job opportunities which would otherwise be beyond their reach. ICTs can help to create awareness among the rural public regarding new technologies in agriculture which would help them to contribute to the GDP of the country. Both Central and State Government may take further effort to ensure sustainable rural empowerment in the form of every people get an equal opportunity to know and use Information and Communication of new and existing rural development programmes of Central and State Governments through an effective Information Communication Technology even though union government having an ambitious objective of transforming the citizen-government interaction at all levels to by the electronic mode (e-Governance) by 2020.

Meaning ICT and Rural Empowerment

ICTs are those technologies that can be used to interlink information technology devices such as personal computers with communication technologies such as telephones and their telecommunication networks. Michiels and Van Crowder (2001) have defined ICTs, as a range of electronic technologies which when converged in new configurations are flexible, adaptable, enabling and capable of transforming organizations and redefining social relations. Rural empowerment is about enabling people to develop their individual and collective potential as contributing members of society. In some interpretations, empowerment refers to the capabilities that exist within the organizations, individuals, and communities that strengthen individuals to define their values and capacities to act on these. Empowerment helps to promote the concept of self-help and community capitals that enables the development of community-led service provision that can be more sensitive and responsive to community needs.

ICT- Paves a way for Rural Empowerment Impact on Role of ICT in E-Governance



Electronic governance or e-governance is the application of information and communication technology (ICT) for delivering government services, exchange of information communication transactions, integration of various stand-alone systems and services between government – to – customer (G2C), government – to – business (G2B), government-to-government (G2G) as well as back-office processes and

interactions within the entire government framework. E-governance seeks to achieve Efficiency, Transparency, and Citizen's Participation. Enabling E-governance through ICT contributes to Good Governance, Trust and Accountability, Citizen's Awareness, and empowerment, Citizen's Welfare, Democracy, Nation's Economic growth. ICT is the biggest enabler of change and process reforms made in face of what ICT has achieved in few years.

E-governance services through ICT refer to transactional services that involve local, state or national government. ICTs acts in speeding up the flow of information and knowledge between government and citizens and transforming the way in which governments and citizens interact. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the challenge for all countries is to create and develop a system of governance that promotes supports and sustains human development. Governments in many parts of the world have made huge ICT investments aimed at improving governance processes.

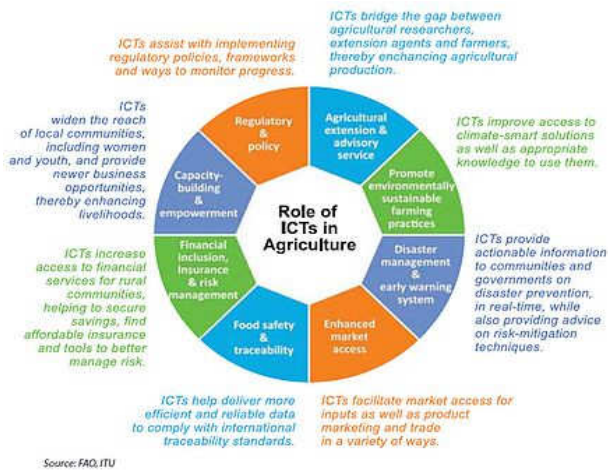
In the present century, the advancements in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are changing the various components of human life. The changes in the ICTs have brought a positive impact in the process of public service delivery and socio-economic structure of communities.

In India, e-Governance applications in the recent past have demonstrated their positive impact in minimizing the processing costs, increase transparency and support economic development by income-generating ventures, increase in agricultural production, and improvements in health and education sectors, all of which promote the overall quality of life of rural people. ICT contributes in providing the transactional services for the rural people with the benefit of time and cost savings in obtaining the public services with efficiency and effectiveness and it also examines changes in agricultural productivity and improved quality of life due to the ICT services. In addition to the above AEPS, GPS etc. are pivotal in ICT services.

The rural ICT applications attempt to offer the services of central agencies (like district administration, cooperative union, and state and central government departments) to the citizens at their village doorsteps. These applications utilize the ICT in offering improved and affordable connectivity and processing solutions. Several Government-Citizen (G-C) e-Government pilot projects have attempted to adopt these technologies to improve the reach, enhance the base, minimize the processing costs, increase transparency, and reduce the cycle times to half.

A large number of rural E-Government applications, developed as pilot projects, were aimed at offering easy access to citizen services and improved processing of government-to-citizen transactions. The idea that the primary and the sheer object of ICT in e-governance and rural development is individual's motivation to collective mobilization for an integrated rural development.

Impact on Role of ICT in Agriculture



The Indian farmer and those who are working for their welfare need to be empowered to face the emerging scenario of complete or partial deregulation and reduction in government protection, opening up of agricultural markets, fluctuations in the agricultural environment and to exploit possible opportunities for exports. The quality of rural life can also be improved by quality information inputs which provide better decision-making abilities. IT can play a major role in facilitating

the process of transformation of rural India to meet these challenges and to remove the fast-growing digital divides. By this study, the authors concludes that the Indian Govt. is being made a remarkable achievements especially in the area of agriculture by giving various facilities to the farmers in which the ICT services is one among which is helping the farmers to understand the modern cultivation methods, availability of agriculture inputs, irrigational sources, availability of pesticide and fertilizers for increasing the production and productivity of crops.

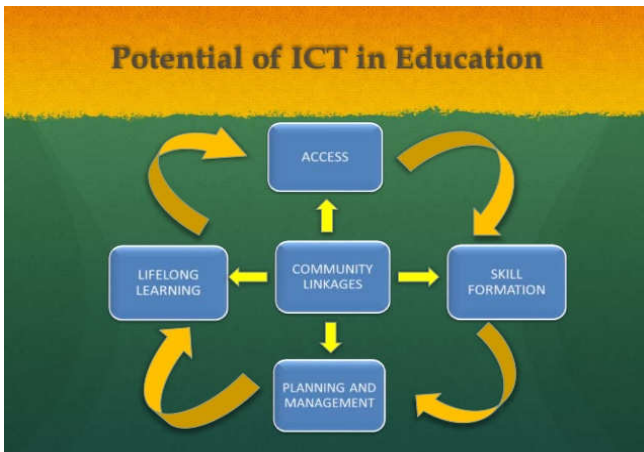
The rapid changes in the field of information technology make it possible to develop and disseminate required electronic services to rural India. The existing bottlenecks in undertaking the tasks need to be addressed immediately. A national strategy needs to be drawn for spearheading IT penetration to rural India. A national coordinating agency with an advisory role can act as a catalyst in the process. No single institution or organization alone can succeed in the task of e-power in farmers

and rural India. At the same time, scattered and half-hearted attempts cannot be successful in meeting the objective. Industries with the major stake in villages, such as fertilizer sector, should come together to provide the initial impetus. The success of any IT based service to rural India hinges on evolving a proper revenue model for the dissemination points. The 'clicks and mortar' rural kiosks should be integrated with the 'bricks and mortar' industry to make them sustainable ventures by making them a business gateway to rural India. The information kiosks can draw revenue from the industry by providing and disseminating required services. Once these dissemination points prove to be economically viable, the IT revolution in rural India will require no crusaders.

Impact on Role of ICT in Education

For India to emerge as a knowledge superpower of the world in the shortest possible time it is imperative to convert our demographic advantage into knowledge powerhouse by nurturing and honing our working population into knowledge or

knowledge enabled working population. Human Resource Development would certainly be the key for it to happen. ICT (information and communication technology) has become within a very short time, one of the basic building blocks of modern society. Many countries now regard in understanding ICT and mastering the basic skills and concepts of ICT as a part of the core of education.



The following are the impact on the role of ICT in Education in India.

The increasing use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has brought changes to teaching and learning at all levels of higher education systems (HES) leading to quality enhancements.

ICT change the concept of learning within the four walls as the introduction of technology learning breaks the boundaries of universities and colleges and offers the learners can learn irrespective of place and time. The individuals can access the data whenever they want and from where ever they may be learning occurs.

The change in professional practice in which teachers are now enabled to design to incorporate the more complex real-world projects by using ICT tools and resources and develops new educational approaches It provides a new concept of a learning environment in the institutions and enhances the quality of education to produce quality products. During the last decade, higher education has gained importance in

India's changing policy landscape as the government realizes that India's strength lies in education. The gap between demand and supply of higher education has necessitated the governments and institutions to formulate the policies for the better use of ICT. And, in order to bridge the gap, it is necessary to evolve the cooperation between the public and private sectors for the successful implementation of ICT in higher education

The evolution of ICT into universities clearly changes the way education is conducted. Not only is it possible to work with distance learning and achieve a closer collaboration between different universities, but also paving the way for a new pedagogical approach where there is unparallel ability to spread knowledge and disseminate information. The pace of change brought about by new technologies has had a significant effect on the way people live, work and play worldwide.

Conclusion

Everything on the basis of the impact of the role of ICT in E-governance, Agriculture and Education only on sustainable rural empowerment in India. Information and Communication technologies are transforming all human activities. ICT is a powerful and productive system which can accelerate economic and social development in rural areas. To empower the rural communities for a sustainable growth, ICTs have been one of the most effective instruments. The following provides a better insight into this fact:

Augmenting the Strength of Rural Governance

With the introduction of ICTs in rural India, there has been a big change in rural governance. It has improved transparency, accountability and administrative efficiency of rural institutions. This has led to not only a better participation of the rural people in the decision-making process but also to an improvement in the efficiency and responsiveness of the rural service delivery. It has facilitated a speedy, transparent, accountable, efficient and effective interaction between the rural citizens. As a consequence, it has not only promoted a better administration but has also saved time and transaction costs of government operations.

Motivating Social Changes

For any kind of developmental process, access to information is of utmost importance. With the growth in ICT, the flow of information and knowledge beyond the border of economic and social status has received an impetus. In this context, ICTs are now widely recognized as a critical tool to tackle development issues in any developing country which ultimately leads to social transformation.

Ensuring the way for Economic Development

The application of ICTs can help to alleviate the living standards of people in remote and rural areas by providing important commercial, social and educational benefits. ICTs can strengthen the livelihood opportunities for rural people by expanding the use of government services. ICT can ensure a better quality of life for the rural poor with improved access markets, health and education. This, in turn, will push rural India towards economic development, job creation, and poverty-alleviation.

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