# Role Of Information Technology (IT) In Rural Development in context of India

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## ABSTRACT

We see the letters IT, everywhere. IT stands for Information Technology. The concepts, methods and applications involved in IT are constantly evolving in our daily lives. The Rural development in India is one of the most important factors for growth of the Indian economy. The present strategy of rural development mainly focuses on poverty alleviation, better livelihood, provision of basic amenities and infrastructure facilities. Even after so many years after independence India have not been able to move to the stage of "developed nation", the nation is still developing. Public administration, governed by bureaucratic structures built on rationale principles, that dominated the twentieth century, has failed to respond to the changing requirements of the present times. Application of IT is a paradigm shift to the traditional approaches that the government has been using past so many decades. With the use of IT, government renders services and information to the public using electronic means.

With the rising awareness amongst the citizens and their better experiences with the private sector– the demand for better services on the part of government departments became more pronounced. The infusion of Information Technology (IT) is playing a prominent role in strengthening such a demand. Combining IT in Rural Development can not only speed up the development process but it can also fill the gaps between the educationally and technologically backward and forward sections of the society. Several e-governance projects have attempted to improve the reach, enhance the base, minimize the processing costs, increasing transparency and reduce the cycle times. The opportunities of IT application in rural development are immense at the same time the government will also be facing some challenges also.

**Keyword**- Information Technology, Rural Development, Transparency.

"Development is neither a simple, nor straightforward linear process. It is a multi-dimensional exercise that seeks to transform society by addressing the entire complex of interwoven strands, living impulses, which are part of an organic whole". (Haqqani 2003: xi)

Information technology or IT has become the buzzword in India these days. One hears about it everywhere– from stock markets to government corridors across the country. Everybody wants to do something connected with IT – be it a school student or a politician. They are looking at IT as the ultimate panacea. The ever- growing media attention on success stories are fuelling this appetite for IT. And within this craze for IT, the focus is on the internet or the World Wide Web. Generally, there is an IT – friendly atmosphere in the country. But, does this craze for IT have any meaning for the silent majority of the country, for those living in rural areas? How can computers be of any use for the people who do not know how to read and write? And even if they can read and write, they can read and write English, which is the predominant language in the IT arena today. Moreover, how many people in this country can afford to have a personal computer or PC? In such a scenario, it may be rather difficult task to answer a question like – what can be the role of IT in villages or in rural development.

One of the major components and driving force of rural development is communication. Conventionally, communication includes electronic media, human communication & now information technology (IT). All forms of communications have dominated the development scene in which its persuasive role has been most dominant within the democratic political framework of the country. Persuasive communication for rural development has been given highest priority for bringing about desirable social and behavioral change among the most vulnerable rural poor and women. Initially, the approach lacked gender sensitivity and empathy of the communicators and development agents who came from urban elite homes. Added to these constraints is political will that still influences the pace and progress of rural development.

The critics of IT have often said that computers can only provide information, transmit it from one place to another and with the advent of the internet, make communication instant. But it can not provide people drinking water, it can not cure their diseases and it can not give them employment. True, a computer is not a magic wand that can solve all our problems in rural areas. Even if we take computer merely as an information tool, it is a great facilitator. The critics forget that villagers also have their own information needs. They need to know about their village, their districts, natural resources around them, about seasons and monsoons, about market rates of different commodities and about government schemes. They also need to know how much money is being allocated for rural development in their area and how much is being spent. And all these so-called bits of information are related intensely to their lives and livelihood. A connected PC is an effective tool to do all this and much more.

Fortunately, India took to IT early compared to many other developing countries. The nationwide network of computers set up by the National Informatics Centre took the PC to every district in the country, making government level interaction and communication faster for planners. The internet has now given us an opportunity to take the PC to every village. It has a definite role to play in rural education, health and agriculture. In the Indian situation, a PC need not be a personal computer. It can be a community computer. In

the day time, it can be used to educate children at primary and middle level in the village school. In the evening, the community computer can turn into a "cyber dhaba" for villagers – where they can access web-sites of their choice and get information that they can use.

A major handicap in mass application of IT in rural areas is that the information content is generally not directly relevant to people for whom it is developed. The contents are written or designed by people who have themselves not lived in rural areas. As a result, these systems have a heavy urban-bias. Such systems, therefore, have limited utility and are commercially unviable. This problem can be overcome by developing relevant content in local languages. Already in some states all official forms can be accessed on the net, village maps and land records are available in many cases and job opportunities for the youth can be found. And lot of this content is available in local languages. This has to spread to more and more states.

It is also a myth that people in rural areas like to have free delivery of information. Experience has shown that if the information has direct relevance to people and has a potential to result in commercial gains, people are willing to pay for such services. In light of this, the IT Task Force has recommended a scheme which would enable the process of large-scale self-employed youngsters across the country to set up and develop contents for information kiosks, particularly for rural areas. It has to be ensured that such schemes have large scale private participation and are not dependent on government funding alone. However, the government can ensure that any one who wants to set up information kiosk at any place in the country is not only freed from all regulations and licenses but also is encouraged through simple and attractive financing schemes.

The community computer can be located in an internet kiosk, which may be at the village pan shop or the bus stand, where people can get information for a small price. The IT Task Force has suggested the concept of a community information centre. We need to look at the concept of "Community information centres", community library Centres and Panchayat Centres across the country in a completely new way with the availability of IT tools and services. These community centres could become hubs of education and awareness as well, and lots just remain places for providing information to people on a mass scale. The convergence of IT tools enables interactive learning along with broadcasting medium such as television and radio. Experience has shown that any exercise for educating people necessarily requires interactivity.

One of the key components of improving socio-economic status of people in villages is to ensure that their products find right kind of markets and reach these markets in minimum time without number of middle men involved in it. The reach of IT in rural areas will provide unique opportunities to producers of rural products, agriculture/agro-processing products, rural handicrafts etc. to have direct access to markets. Internet will enable advertising of rural products produced even in the remotest villages to global markets. The

agriculture extension worker can access latest information on farm technology and products, and disseminate the same to villages.

Health care is yet another area where IT can play a major role in rural areas. Doctor or the paramedic staff at the local PHC or sub-PHC can access latest information about health schemes and seek advice from specialists about diseases or ailments they can not diagnose or treat. The village PC can be used as a surveillance system for diseases, and ultimately as node for tale-medicine.

Currently, a number of experiments are being attempted to take the PC and the Internet to villages. There has been a great amount of enthusiasm among people. Development of relevant content in local languages, availability of computers that can run on low power and sensitization of local government officials towards IT can go a long way in using IT for rural development in near future.

Information Technology has great relevance in today's world. If implemented properly IT can surely bridge the gap between economically and technology backward and forward classes. With the IT boom in India technology is easily accessible to the government machineries with relevantly cheaper and convenient manner. Proper training and implementation of IT programmes in simple way and language which is easily understandable by the rural people can surely bring about revolution in rural development.

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