

“Atmanirbhar Bharat- Digital India Programme on Agriculture Farmer’s Income with Special Reference to COVID-19 Pandemic Challenges”

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ABSTRACT: *The vision of digital India programme is to transform India into digitally empowered society and knowledgeable economy. Digital India programme play an important role in rural economy and large percentage of primary sector in developing country like India. In India economic status of farmers is very pathetic especially in rural areas and available opportunities of earning are very less and low in this scenario of outbreak of COVID19 pandemic challenges. This paper reviews concisely the impact of Digital India Programme in order to address in particular opportunities and challenges of Digital India by the agricultural farmers in rural area. It examined the impact of rural empowerment through digital transformation and digital literacy.*

Sustainable growth in productivity and farmers income requires a paradigm shift from input intensive technologies, which have dominated Indian agriculture since the onset of green revolution. This study is carried out with the specific objective of rural economy, skills and knowledge required. The present papers disclose the challenges of earning capacity of farmers and also it focuses on their development in brief.

KEYWORDS: *Digital India Programme, COVID 19 Pandemic, Digital Literacy, Sustainable growth.*

INTRODUCTION:

'AatmaNirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan,' the Prime Minister has declared a Rs. 20 lakh crore economic package to benefit our country recover from the Coronavirus crisis. When India talks about becoming self-sufficient, it does not mean a self-centered system. There is a concern for the happiness, cooperation, and peace of the entire world in India's self-reliance. Digital India is the government of India's flagship programme, with the goal of transforming India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. Digital India is a programme that encompasses several Government Ministries and Departments. It weaves a large number of ideas and thoughts into a single, comprehensive vision, from which each can be implemented as part of a larger goal. Each component stands alone, but is also part of a larger picture. The entire government will be responsible for implementing Digital India, with the Department of Electronics and Information Technology providing overall coordination.

E-governance initiatives in India took a broader dimension in the mid 1990's for wider sectoral application with emphasis on citizen-centric services. The major ICT initiatives of the government included, inter alia, some major projects, such as railway computerization, land record computerization etc., which focused mainly on the development of information system. Later on many states started ambitious individual e-governance projects aimed at providing electronic services to citizen.

Digitalization of Rural India

Agricultural sector represents about 18% of India's GDP and accounts for more than 50% of the total workforce. Rural India is an important part of the country's economy and contributes about 46% of the national income. It is estimated that about 66% of India's population is rural and despite the rapid rise of urbanization, rural India will continue to account for a significant portion of India's population in the next decade(Digitalindia | Digital India Programme | Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology(MeitY) Government of India, n.d.).

Despite the sectors significant contribution, India's agricultural sector is highly dependent on human labour. To bridge the gap, the Indian government has launched the "Digital India" programme one of the major objectives of the programme is to improve digital infrastructure in the country and particularly in rural India.

Double Farmer's Income

Past strategy for development of the agriculture sector in India has focused primarily on raising agricultural output and improving food security. This strategy involved an increase in productivity through better technology and varieties and increased use of quality seed, fertilizer, irrigation and agro chemicals etc.,

The strategy did not explicitly recognise the need to raise farmer's income and did not mention any direct measure to promote farmer's welfare. The experience shows that in some cases, growth in output brings similar increase in farmer's income but in many cases farmer's income did not grow much with increase in output. The net results have been that farmer's income remained low, which is evident from the incidence of poverty among farm households. In this background, the goal set by the Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi to double farmers' income by 2022-2023 is central to promote farmers' welfare, reduce agrarian distress and bring parity between income of farmers and those working in non-agricultural professions.

COVID19 Pandemic

COVID19 is a pandemic which got attention of the whole world within a short period of time line due to its deadly character. Common man's day to day life has been totally disrupted due to outbreak of COVID19. The COVID19 pandemic in India is part of the worldwide pandemic of corona virus disease 2019 (COVID19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS -COV -2). The first case of COVID 19 in India, which originated from China, was reported on 30 January 2020. India currently has the highest number of confirmed cases in world.

Impact of COVID 19 on rural area of India is very devastating and has been suffering a lot. Day to day livelihood of rural people of India has been experiencing a miserable condition.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

ChitlaArathi (2017) Studied that impact of digitalization on rural India and viewed that digital India initiation will prepare India for knowledge based transformation and be available of good governance to citizen.

Ragavendra Nayak (2018) "A Conceptual Study on Digitalization of Banking - Issues and Challenges in Rural India"- Pointed out that implementation of digitalization to rural banking can bridge the gap between rural and urban area as it promotes higher level of investment activities.

GaurdasSarkar(2020) Pandemic COVID 19 and rural economy of India -Pointed out that consideration of regional economic development may act as engine to face challenges and to make India self-reliant through the implementation of decentralised planning.

METHODOLOGY:

The data used for the study is secondary data comprising of official websites, journals, magazines and articles. Since the data is secondary it is more dependable and reliable. The present study covers only the impact of digital India programme in order to know challenges and opportunities of agriculture farmers which helps to enhance income level of farmers during COVID 19 challenge.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

- To understand major government initiative, which helps to digitalization of rural India.
- To know the opportunities available for farmers to economically stable.
- To know the challenges faced by the rural farmers in the process of digitalization.
- To determine possible measure to face COVID 19 pandemic.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

Topical Scope: The topical scope of the present study is confined to the "Atmanirbhar Bharat-Digital India Programme on Agriculture Farmer's Income with Special Reference to COVID19 Pandemic Challenges"

Analytical Scope: The analytical scope of the present study opportunities, challenges of digital India impact on rural economy and measures to overcome COVID19 pandemic challenge.

Initiative under Digitalization of Rural India

1. Bharatnet :

A network of optical fibres is being built to provide broadband access to 2,50,000 gram panchayats. The National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN) is a bold initiative that aims to spark a broadband revolution in rural areas. NOFN was envisioned as an information superhighway, with a robust middle-mile infrastructure providing broadband connectivity to Gram Panchayats.

The entire project is being funded by Universal service Obligation Fund (USOF), which was set up for improving telecom services in rural and remote areas of the country. The objective is to facilitate the delivery of e-governance, e-health, e-education, e-banking, Internet and other services to the rural India.

2. Common Service Centre :

One of the mission mode projects under the digital India programme is the Common Services Centre Scheme. CSCs are centres that will provide villages with e-governance and related services. CSCs serve as access points for citizens in rural and remote areas of the country to essential public utility services, social welfare schemes, healthcare, financial, education, and agriculture services, as well as a variety of B2C services.

3. Universal Access To Mobile:

Aims to provide mobile access to more than 55,600 villages that do not have mobile coverage.

4. Digitalization of Post Offices:

Postal digitization entails establishing centralised data centres, connecting all post offices, and enabling digital payments.

Opportunities for Farmers in Digital India

Digital India provides ample of opportunities for economic development and upliftment of Indian farmers, following are the various fields in which the farmers can enhance their agricultural activities.

1. e-NAM:

Electronic -National Agricultural Market. The government intends to create a centralised electronic platform that will allow farmers to sell their produce to buyers throughout the country.

The National Agricultural Market, also known as eNAM, is an online trading platform in India for agricultural commodities. It aims to connect all two lakh fifty thousand gram panchayats in the country, improve communication in India, and achieve the digital India campaign goal.

2. National Mission on Agricultural Extension and Technology :

The mission's goal is to strengthen agricultural extension so that farmers can receive appropriate technology and improved agronomics practises.

3. Bharat Nirman:

Bharat Nirman is an initiative to build and improve basic rural infrastructure. The goal of this plan is to provide telecommunications facilities to remote areas. It aims to increase rural telecommunications infrastructure by 40%. This initiative is critical to the overall digitalization of rural India.

4. Kisan Call Centre :

The kisan call centre (KCC) scheme was launched as an innovative and modern government scheme for quickly delivering extension information and support to farmers by utilising the vast telecommunications network.

5. Kisan Credit Card:

The union government launched the Kisan Credit Card to encourage digital inclusion of Indian farmers through digital payments. This will aid in the promotion of digital payments among the underserved segments of society and make short-term loans more accessible. Farmers can use this scheme to obtain loans for crop, animal, and fish rearing at a maximum interest rate of 4% on timely repayment.

6. Soil Health Card:

Soil health management falls under the purview of the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture, which aims to make agriculture more productive, sustainable, and climate resilient. It also aids in the implementation of a comprehensive soil health management process.

7. M-Kisan Portal:

M-kisan SMS portal has been conceptualised to provide a quantum leap in coverage of farmers and geographical area in a timely, specific, holistic, and need-based knowledge dissemination among farmers.

CHALLENGES:

The main challenges of farmers for digitalization of farming activities:

- Farming automation and mechanisation are lacking. The farmers' reliance on traders, commission agents, and moneylenders for credit is the most problematic.
- Access to resources and infrastructure is limited. Strong and dependable internet connectivity is not available in many remote rural areas across the country. As a result, attempts to implement smart agriculture techniques in such areas are hampered.
- Market Risk - Market risks include a lack of a market, poor price realisation, high transportation costs, and a lack of bargaining power as a result of the small size of the marketed surplus, resulting in low and unstable farm incomes for producers. Lack of relevant customized information which causes poor decision making in crop selection and price mechanization process by the farmers.
- Inadequate actionable insights into the modern agricultural system and innovative technology to aid decision-making.
- There is a lack of real-time intervention and support. Small farmers' livelihood problems are exacerbated by a variety of production risks such as drought, flood, insufficient input use, poor extension leading to large yield gaps and crop failure, and so on.
- Inadequate risk management tools and profit maximisation mechanisms.
- Inadequate modern farm and farmer data. Millions of data points can be found on a modern, connected agriculture farm. It is difficult to monitor and manage every single data point and reading on a daily/weak basis throughout the growing season.
- Rural people's illiteracy and lack of financial inclusion.
- Failures in technology and the resulting damage, If there is a mechanical failure in the hardware, or if a farming IoT unit or sensor fails, serious crop damage can occur.

Measures to be taken during COVID19 pandemic period to protect rural economy:

- Effective implementation of government programmes to create employment opportunities for people who have relocated to rural areas.
- To direct funds toward research and development in order to investigate new rural production ventures.
- To ensure food security by providing food assistance to the poor.
- To provide financial assistance to encourage rural entrepreneurship.
- Identifying new areas of agricultural production, such as agriculture allied activities, with the potential for long-term market growth.
- To increase agricultural income, implement decentralised agriculture planning.

CONCLUSION:

In 2020, India will have over 700 million internet users, making it one of the largest and fastest growing markets for digital consumers. This significant growth in the digital economy was largely driven by urban consumers. However, as the government pushes for financial inclusion, rural India has begun to embrace the digital economy. According to the TRAI report, rural internet subscribers will account for more than 38% of total internet subscribers in the country by March 2020, up from around 32% in March 2017. One of the major goals of the "Digital India" programme is to improve digital infrastructure in the country, particularly in rural India. To improve digital awareness, the Indian government launched "Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharata Abhiyan" under digital India initiative.

Based on the discussion above, it is clear that Indian farmers have more opportunities through digitalization of farming activities to double their income level, thereby supporting the rural economy, but they are also facing numerous challenges in the implementation process. Due to the outbreak of the COVID19 pandemic, Indian farmers are facing critical problems. To achieve efficiency in today's global market, the country's economic policy environment must be favourable.

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