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Broadband Connectivity In Rural Haryana Issues And Challenges (A Case Study Of Ambala District)

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1. Broadband in Rural Areas

The Broadband connectivity in rural area is a Digital India campaign launched by the Government of India to ensure that Government services are made available to citizens electronically by improved online infrastructure and by increasing Broadband connectivity or by making the countrymen digitally empowered through the Information Technology. It was launched on 2nd July 2015 by the Prime Minister of India. The initiative includes plans to connect rural areas with high-speed Broadband on Optical Fiber Cables using GPON technology.

Because of relatively low population density, topographical barriers and greater geographical distances, the provisioning of Broadband service may be more difficult in some far flung rural areas. Government of India initiated a BharatNet project under which, OFC is being laid upto Gram Panchayats by utilizing the funds collected by USOF in Department of Telecommunications. BharatNet Phase-1 is completed by Bharat Broadband Network Ltd and Broadband Bandwidth and dark fibers to the Broadband service providers are being offered so that they are able to provide Broadband services to the rural citizens living in remote Gram Panchayat. Despite many challenges, some rural communities have found it helpful to develop a

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strategic plan for Broadband deployment that includes creating a comprehensive business proposal to the Broadband Service Providers.

Under the new initiative introduced in February 2017 and christened 'Digital Village', the Indian government aims to bring free Wi-Fi to 1050 villages in the next six months. The *DigiGaon* programme as it is colloquially known, aims to provide telemedicine, education and skills through digital technology. With 2500 crore digital transactions targeted for FY 2018, the project falls under the larger head termed Bharat Net Project with a massive allocation of Rs 10,000 crore.

2. Objectives:

- ❖Provide widespread and non-discriminatory access to quality ICT services at affordable prices to people in rural and remote areas.
- ❖Provide an effective and powerful linkage to the hinterland thereby mainstreaming the population of rural and remote parts of the country.
- ❖Ensure that universal services are provided in an economically efficient manner.
- ❖Ensure that by developing hitherto unconnected areas, the benefits of inclusive growth are reaped by our nation, bringing in its wake rapid socio-economic development and improved standards of living.
- ❖People in rural and remote areas of the country where ICT services are not available due to commercial non-viability on account of various combinations of reasons such as:
    - Sparse population
    - Remoteness of areas

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- Absence of supporting infrastructure (power, road etc.)
- Low income of inhabitants
- Insurgency
- Difficult terrain

It is here that USOF Administration steps in to provide subsidy support thereby incentivizing telecom service providers to venture forth and provide services to such target beneficiaries.

3. Importance of Broadband

1. Countries have realized that Telecommunication and IT infrastructure boosts economic growth.
2. Studies in many countries show that Broadband contributes to the GDP/ development.
3. Many countries have declared Broadband as a fundamental right.
4. Broadband contribute to the development of Science & Technology, social upliftment, help minimize the pollution, economic development and accelerate learning.

4. Implementation Status (Haryana)

Sr. No	Status of Haryana	Details in Nos
1	**District**	22
2	Block	122
3	GP Name (No. of GPs)	5580
4	Wi-Fi (No. of APs)	4893
	No. of FTTH Commercial Connection by BSNL- (Provisioned)	633
	No. of FTTH Commercial Connection by BSNL- (Working)	575

5. Status of Broadband in Ambala District: The statuses of Broadband connectivity are as under:

Sr. No	Block	Wi-Fi(No. of APs)	No. of FTTH Commercial Connection by BSNL- (Provisioned)	No. of FTTH Commercial Connection by BSNL- (Working)
1	AMBALA-I	252	15	15

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2	AMBALA-II	0	4	4
3	BARARA	0	19	19
4	NARAINGARH	0	14	14
5	SAHA	0	5	5
6	SHAHZADPUR	0	11	11

Data up 23.12.2019

6. Key challenges of NOFN/ BharatNet implementation

NOFN was launched in 2011 to connect 2,50,000 gram panchayats through Broadband with the goal of providing these villages with the facilities of e-education, e-health services, delivery of government to citizen services etc. For implementation of NOFN, a special purpose vehicle (SPV), BBNL was created with BSNL, RailTel and GailTel as to be the deployment agency. Pilot project by BBNL in 3 blocks in 3 different states of Tripura, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh was successful in laying down the infrastructure. This convinced 22 more states who agreed to take more pro-active support in project. Leaving apart pilot projects, NOFN faced many challenges and its implementation has been tardy.

1. Delay in getting ROW permissions from PWD, Railway, National Highway Authority & gram Panchayats.
2. Non availability of Trained manpower & suitable machinery with contractors/implementing agencies
3. Lack of coordination between implementing agency and lack of timely fund release by government has obstructed the process largely.
4. Delay in the implementation has to rise in cost by multiple times.

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5. While NOFN is need of the hour as well as core of government's Digital India, there is serious problem in its implementation. Delay, lack of coordination and focus are just increasing the cost of the project and depriving the rural people benefit of its access.
6. Challenges faced in awarding contracts because of various reasons viz. difficult areas (Hilly/Rocky/LWE), limited no of Trenching & laying contractors, Schedule of Rates (SoR) of BSNL, High rates quoted by contractors.
7. No information about utility services like water & drainage piping line in village.

7. Issues

i. Majority of gram panchayat do not have a building available to house necessary equipment needed to provide access to users.
ii. Delayed/no permission from local civic authorities to dig trenches and lay cables has slowed down the pace of work.
iii. Lack of interest shown by private players towards investing in the project.
iv. Laying of underground cable is slow and tardy
v. No proper support by villagers and District Administration
vi. Proper space is not provided by the sarpanch
vii. Electricity problem

8. Outcomes

The availability of a robust and reliable Broadband connectivity is most critical for the successful implementation of some of the key social sector schemes and programmes in rural areas by the Central and State governments on e-

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governance, education, health, employment and financial inclusion. CSC e-governance Services India limited installed Wi-Fi access point in the villages. Some of the villagers are using Wi-Fi services for browsing social sites and filling online forms and email. The Broadband services are paid. The Villagers also getting birth certificate, board mark-sheets and Jeevan Pramaan from CSC centers. The better G2C (Government to Citizens) and C2B (Citizen to Business) interactions will enable better services and socio-economic opportunities for the rural people.

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