

Chapter 15

Digital Library And E–Governance: Moving Towards Sustainable Rural Livelihoods

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ABSTRACT

Rural Connectivity is the lifeline of Indian economy. India is a land of diversity with different types of terrain, various agro-climatic conditions, different levels of socio-economic conditions, and varied levels of regional development. At the beginning of the new millennium, 260 million people in the country did not have incomes to access a consumption basket, which defines the poverty line. Sustainable livelihood is a multi-faceted concept. Rural India thus desires to take advantage of “knowledge-intensive” techniques for its sustainable development and sustainable consumption. Grassroots level Information access (Contents) and Grassroots level access to Information (Networking) are the two essential components for grassroots level development strategies through ICT. Community Information and Communication Centres (CICC), as a concept and model, aim to “boost efficiency and enhance market” integration through Internet/ Intranet technologies for sustainable remote/regional development at grassroots level. Libraries can play an important role and participate in community action and enhance their function as proactive catalysts

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of social change. Community Information & Communication Networks in India empower disadvantaged community for effective information & communication, in view of the stated pronouncement of “India to become Knowledge Society”, and also facilitate “social inclusion” of marginalised rural poor to access knowledge and information. There are about 56000 Public Libraries (which include 51000 at village level), 400000 School Libraries, 11000 University/College Libraries, 13000 R&D Libraries, 28 State Libraries, and 526 District Libraries in India. Only 8.4% of the Villages have access to Public Libraries in India. Rural Public Libraries are a part of this revolution and will serve as the backbone for “literacy mission and poverty alleviation”. There are empirical evidences to support that rural digital libraries will sustain Community Information & Communication Centres (e-Community Centres). Granthalaya, a Sanskrit word means ‘Library’. This chapter deals with “e-Granthalaya: a digital agenda of library automation and networking” facilitating “rural digital libraries” and promoting “local contents” through UNICODE and interoperability capabilities of XML. Networked Library environment play an important role in rural revitalization, as libraries have emerged as a sunrise industry due to globalization and liberalization at regional level, and decentralization trends at grassroots level.

VIALE SOCIETY IN A RURAL SPACE: AN EPITOME FOR RURAL LIVELIHOODS

India is a land of diversity with different types of terrain, various agro-climatic conditions, different levels of socio-economic conditions, and varied levels of regional development. There have been concerns about persistent rural poverty, unemployment and inequality, and resulting social tensions at grassroot level in India. The strategies and policies developed by the planners and policymakers, adopted two approaches: one focusing on the overall economic development (through percolation, trickle down and spread effect), and the other poverty alleviation (direct intervention). Though these two approaches reinforce each other, there has been no effect to integrate them. The most important sectors for sustainable national development are Agriculture, Education, Healthcare, Water and Energy.

As per 10th Five Years Plan Document (Planning Commission, Government of India: Five Years Plan, 2002-2007), at the beginning of the new millennium, 260 million people in the country did not have incomes to access a consumption basket, which defines the poverty line. Of these,

75 per cent were in the rural areas. Agricultural wage earners, small and marginal farmers, casual workers engaged in non-agricultural activities, rural women (especially women-headed households), among the others, constitute the bulk of the rural poor. The growing populations need food, clothing, shelter, fuel and fodder for their livestock.

As market oriented economic development proceeds, Indian farmers in rural areas continue to experience great disparity in income compared to other sectors. They revert to natural resources as the most accessible sources of livelihood. Degradation of natural resources is a key threat to socio-economic development, and to global environment (e.g., climate change and loss of biodiversity). After decades of limited success in eliminating rural poverty, new ideas about rural development (i.e. viable society in a rural space, livelihood approach, sustainable livelihood approach, sustainable agricultural and rural livelihood approach, sustainable community concept, Multiple Livelihood Opportunities, etc) are emerging so as to reduce the vulnerability of the rural poor. Poverty Alleviation, Livelihood Opportunities and Gainful Employment are closely linked.

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