

"THE SCOPE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF AGRA DISTRICT"

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Information technology plays a big role in development and in fact is a part of development process. The role of information technology is of special significance for a country like India where rural development is the need of hour. Government of India, therefore, aimed at fostering, promoting, sustaining by all appropriate means the cultivation of Information Technology in all aspects of rural development. There is no aspect of human life, of course that includes agriculture, rural development, health, and energy, industry that is not affected by the information explosion.

To make the presence of Information Technology (IT) in rural development more meaningful, the needs of the rural populace have to be first understood and identified, then questions can be posed about devising instruments, equipment, software and system-solutions, based on a host of technologies. Many a time, technology develops in response to a need. The information needs of the rural population include expert guidance on day-to-day problems like crop planning, pest management, animal husbandry, hand pumps stallation and repairs. Individual information requirements could include job/education opportunities, bank loans and land records. For local level planning, the government/panchayat requirement could include health information including vital events like (birth, death and outbreak of certain diseases),

besides status of different development activities and vital infrastructure like roads, wells and transport.

In consideration with the importance of information technology in rural development the study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To find the status of 'IT' in Agra district
2. To know the various purposes for, which 'IT' is being used
3. To study the scope of 'IT' in future development of rural areas
4. To ascertain advantages of 'IT' and obstacles in the development of 'IT' in rural development.

METHODOLOGY :

The Methodological design adopted for the present study was Exploratory Research Design. Multiphase sampling was used for the selection of rural development department functionaries. The sampling was done at each and every phase, selecting the Agra district twenty four district level rural development department functionaries, eighteen block level rural development department functionaries and finally six village level rural development department functionaries, making the sample of fifty respondents.

The questionnaire was prepared for the study to collect the data from the rural development department functionaries.

After the collection of data, it was tabulated and subjected to statistical analysis i.e. percentage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION :

The functionaries from the rural development departments were using information technologies. The awareness about 'IT' and use of 'IT' is given in the following table.

Table 1.1 Awareness and use of 'IT' in Rural Development Departments

	Number	Percentage
Awareness about 'IT'	45	90
Use Of 'IT'		
Job work/ Data processing	16	32
Telecommunications	47	94
Internet	21	42
Video conferencing	7	14

In Table 1.1, it can be seen that majority of the functionaries i.e. 90 per cent were aware about 'IT'.

Regarding the use of 'IT' in rural development departments majority (94 percent) of the functionaries were using telecommunications in the form of the telephones and faxes, whereas only 42 per cent functionaries were using Internet facility followed by 32 per cent functionaries were using 'IT' for job work or data processing work.

Table 1.2 Facilities required for the use of 'IT' in rural development departments

Facilities Required	Number	Per centage
Building	18	36
Hardware	38	76
Software	41	82
Trained personnel	44	88

In Table 1.2, it can be seen that majority (88 percent) of the functionaries required trained personnel so that 'IT' can be more effectively used in rural development areas. Whereas software were required by 82 percent functionaries followed by 76 per cent functionaries required hardware. Building was required by only 36 per cent functionaries.

Table 2.1 Purpose Of 'IT' Use In Rural Development Departments

Purpose Of 'IT' Use	Number	(%)
To inform about rural problems via telecoms, Internet	15	30
Information exchange at different administrative levels	14	28
Through NIC* via telecom/ Internet at block and district level.	9	18
Information flow from district headquarters and administration level.	7	14

*NIC: National Informatics Center

In Table-2.1, it can be seen that 30 per cent functionaries suggested 'IT' could be used for informing about rural problems via telecoms and Internet whereas 28 per cent functionaries suggested that 'IT' could be used to exchange the information at different administrative levels. Only 18 per cent functionaries suggested that they are using 'IT' via telecom or Internet at district and block level through National Informatics Center, Agra.

Table 3.1 Scope of 'IT' In Rural Development

Scope in rural development	Number	(%)
Development in all rural aspects	8	16
Monitoring of progress issues and reports	20	40
Knowing problems and their solutions	12	24
Providing computer sets/cyber connections	3	6
Knowing about latest techniques	7	14

In Table-3.1, it can be seen that 40 per cent of the functionaries suggested the scope of 'IT' in monitoring of progress issues and reports at the administrative level. Other 24 per cent of the functionaries suggested that 'IT' can have a scope of 'IT' if it can be used for knowing the problems of rural people and communicating them to specialists for having feasible solutions rapidly, whereas other 16 per cent functionaries suggested that 'IT' can be

to those who need it. Lastly all the information centers must be converted into tele-info centers in which all the services of 'IT' should be available which leads to easy access of information.

CONCLUSION :

The investigation was a two way study from the point of view of the status of information technology in rural development departments in Agra district and secondly the scope of information technology in the development of rural areas.

The awareness regarding 'IT' and its aspects among the rural development department functionaries was good but the use of 'IT' for administrative purposes was poor like job work/data processing as well as the use of Internet was low.

The facilities which were required by functionaries were the trained manpower and software for the use of 'IT'. Mainly the services of 'IT' can be used to exchange of information at various administrative levels and to inform about rural problems to higher authorities. 'IT' can have a scope in rural development if it can be used for the rapid solutions of rural problems from the subject matter specialists. But this requires the efforts from the level of planners to make the rural people literate, motivate and make them aware of the use of 'IT'.

The advantages of information technology over personal contacts such as it is more time

saving, economic, allows rapid exchange of information are countered by the obstacles such as weak economy of India, lack of trained personnel, education environment and awareness and improper power supply in rural areas.

SUGGESTIONS :

1. More emphasis should be given in providing training and generating awareness among people regarding the use of information technology.
2. The planners should make provision of the connectivity of 'IT' at each level viz., central to grass root level. It may enhance the coverage of 'IT' in rural areas.
3. The needed departments and areas should be provided better facilities for the proper usage of information technology.
4. Information technology can definitely have a scope if it will be used in knowing the problems of rural people and transmitting them the appropriate solutions fastly and cheaply.
5. The government should start cyber cafes or Information centers at block and village level at minimal cost so that the rural people can afford.
6. The rural development departments must be provided the software so that implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes become not only easy but also rapid.

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