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GIST OF KURUKSHETRA

MAY
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GIST OF KURUKSHETRA

MAY 2022

1. CONNECTING RURAL HEALTH SERVICES

What is the issue?

- The rural healthcare system serves two-thirds of the country's population.
- Over the years, the Government of India has improved the health of its population, through various initiatives, narrowing the rural-urban and rich-poor divide.
- Yet, disparities remain, and rural healthcare is faced with several challenges.

What is the structure of Rural Healthcare System in India?

- The rural healthcare system is structured in three tiers. They are:
 1. Sub-Centres (SC),
 2. Primary Health Centers (PHC), and
 3. Community Health Centres (CHCs).

What is the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)?

- It was launched in 2005 to provide healthcare services to the rural population.
- The mission envisaged architectural correction of the health system by building accountability to the community, convergence of efforts across departments, targeted interventions, flexible financing, and rigorous monitoring.
- The mission committed to increasing public expenditure on health from 0.9% of GDP to 2-3% of GDP.

What are the core strategies of NRHM?

- Capacity enhancement of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to own, control and manage public health services.
- Developing a health plan for each village through the village health committee of the panchayat.
- Developing and implementing an inter-sectoral district health plan through the district health mission.
- Strengthening effective curative care at rural hospitals and ensuring measurability and accountability through Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS).
- Capacity development for promoting healthy lifestyles and adoption of preventive healthcare.

What are the gaps in rural health services?

- **Shortage of Manpower** - At the PHCs, as of 31 March, 2020 approximately 40% of the Health Assistants post were found vacant.
- Additionally, around 1/4th of the sanctioned posts of doctors were found vacant.

How rural health services can be strengthened?

a. Connecting communities

- Tele-health can be used to increase access to specialist consultations from accessible PHC/CHC.
- For example, ISRO's Village Resource Centre (VRC) provides connectivity to specialty hospitals, thus bringing the services of specialist doctors to remote villages.

- Similarly, the ICMR's, **Arogyasri**, integrates multiple hospitals, mobile medical specialists, and rural mobile units/clinics.

b. Monitoring the Nation's health

- Information from the NFHS, Annual Health Survey, and Rural Health Statistics Report enables the Government to evaluate and course-correct policies.
- NRHM's Management Information Systems (MIS) are intended to monitor the health indices of the population and the functioning of the healthcare system.
- However, it could benefit from rigorous monitoring of fund utilization and engagement of local communities.

c. Revitalizing Trust in Primary Healthcare

- The primary healthcare level serves as the first point of contact for patients and also integrates seamlessly with other levels of the health system.
- However, due to gaps in implementation, many patients first encounter the health system at the secondary or tertiary levels of care.
- Community participation including household visits by health staff, group meetings for education and support on health issues, as well as outreach workers providing health services in the community can go a long way in bolstering community engagement.
- Creating cadres of health professionals from the rural areas to deliver essential and basic health services.
- The Mid-Level Providers who are part of Health and Wellness Centers being operationalized under the Ayushman Bharat programme is one such example.

- This would reduce the burden at the secondary & tertiary levels of care by reducing unnecessary referrals.

d. Supporting Ecosystem for Medi-workers

- Provision of basic facilities like schools, playgrounds, supermarkets, etc in and around the village clusters can provide a significant stimulus to the workforce which is otherwise discouraged to locate themselves in rural areas.
- Alongside competitive salaries, such townships can play an important role in encouraging Indian doctors and specialists to be based in these RURBAN areas and serve the rural population.

e. Focusing on Social Determinants of Health

- There are certain initiatives which also have a critical albeit indirect impact on strengthening access to health services for the rural population.
- For example, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) has provided all weather road connectivity to hospitals and other essential facilities.
- Similarly, schemes which aims to alleviate poverty, deliver education and nutrition services as well as provide suitable economic opportunities play a crucial role directly and indirectly strengthening the linkages between people in rural areas and essential health services.

f. Prioritizing Primary Healthcare

- The 15th Finance commission recommended a strong focus on primary healthcare.
- Thus, it is imperative that budgetary allocations and implementation of schemes like the

National Health Mission, Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) are to be prioritized.

- Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) is one such step which aims to rectify the inequities in the availability of affordable healthcare facilities across the country.

What are the future aspirations?

- The examples of efforts in connecting rural health services are ample across the nation, but they are fragmented with regional successes.
- The National Rural Health Mission through its nationwide purview and with its financial and human resource can identify, adopt and scale such innovative solutions to address the equity gaps in rural areas.

2. BHARATNET: BRINGING BROADBAND TO RURAL INDIA

Why in the news?

- India moves closer to its dream of reliable rural internet connectivity, with more than 1,77,000 Gram Panchayats made service ready under the Bharat Net project.

What is the state of Internet usage in India?

- Internet connectivity in rural India has been increasing at a fast pace, with the rural internet user base growing around three times faster than its urban counterpart.
- According to the Network Readiness Index-2021, India has jumped to 67 rank in 2021 from 88 in 2020.
- According to Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) data for July-September 2021, rural internet subscribers stood at 336.6 million while urban internet subscribers numbered 497.69 million.

- Data consumption through BharatNet optical fibre surpassed 13,000 terabytes (TB) till June 2021.
- This is an increase from 6,000 TB in 2020 and 300-400 TB in July 2019.

What are the measures taken by the Government for mobile and internet services in Rural India?

- The Government of India through various schemes approved under Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF), is providing mobile and internet services in rural areas and areas affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE).

a. Internet services in the areas affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE)

- As per Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), 90 districts falling under 11 States are affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE).
- Under LWE Phase-I scheme, 2,343 mobile towers have been installed in LWE areas across LWE States and are providing services.
- Under LWE Phase-II scheme, 2,542 mobile towers at locations uncovered villages and along with the National Highways:
- CTDP for NER States of Assam (except 2 districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao), Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura for installation of 2,004 mobile towers for provision of mobile services in 2,128 uncovered villages and mobile connectivity along National Highways.
- Scheme for installation of 889 towers for provisioning of mobile services in 1164 uncovered villages and along National Highways in the State of Meghalaya.
- Scheme for installation of 1,533 towers for provisioning of mobile services in 2,374

uncovered villages of Arunachal Pradesh and 2 Districts of Assam, i.e. Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao.

- The projects under the three components are under implementation and as of October 2021, a total of 1,358 towers have been installed, covering 1246 villages and 283 National Highway sites.

b. BharatNet project

- For providing broadband connectivity in all the Gram Panchayats (approx. 2.5 lakh) in the country.
- As part of the BharatNet project, the last mile connectivity is being provided through Wi-Fi or any other suitable broadband technology, including FTTH.
- The time-line for providing connectivity to all villages including GPs in the country under BharatNet was initially August 2023, now extended to 2025.
- The infrastructure created under BharatNet project is a national asset, accessible on a non-discriminatory basis to all service providers, and the same can be utilised for provisioning of broadband/internet services through Wi-Fi Hotspots, Fibre to the Home (FTTH) connections, leased lines, Dark Fibre, backhaul to mobile towers, etc.
- Laying of submarine Optical Fibre Cable (OFC) between Chennai and Andaman & Nicobar Islands for providing connectivity to Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
- The undersea 2,313 km optic fiber-based telecom connectivity between Chennai and Andaman & Nicobar Islands was inaugurated in August 2020.
- The government has approved a proposal for provision of submarine Optical Fiber Cable Connectivity by laying approximately 1,891 km

of submarine cable between Kochi and Lakshadweep Islands.

- The project is under implementation and targeted to be implemented by May 2023.
- Mobile connectivity to cover uncovered villages and along National Highway (NH 223) in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- Mobile connectivity has been enhanced in Lakshadweep Islands by installing ten mobile towers.

How can Public Private Partnership Model be used?

- Request for Proposal (RFP) has been floated for implementing the project for 16 States under PPP model.
- The Union Cabinet has also given in-principle approval for extending village connectivity under BharatNet for all the remaining States/UTs.
- Further, it has approved to extend Optical Fiber connectivity under BharatNet up to all inhabited villages in the country.
- BharatNet PPP Model will bring in the following consumer friendly advantages:
 - Use of innovative technology by the Private Sector Providers for the consumers.
 - High quality of service and service level to consumers.
 - Faster deployment of network and quick connectivity to consumers.
 - Competitive tariffs for services.
 - Variety of services on high-speed broadband including Over the Top (OTT) services and multi-media services as part of packages offered to consumers.

- Access to all online services.

c. Prime Minister's Wi-Fi Access Network Interface (PM-WANI)

- Along with the BharatNet project, the government has approved the proposal to proliferate broadband.
- It is expected that with Public Wi-Fi Broadband, the user experience and Quality of Service for Broadband will be improved significantly.
- This service will be especially useful in rural areas where Public Wi-Fi Hotspots are also being created under BharatNet.
- Proliferation of Public Wi-Fi Hotspots will lead to increased employment for small and micro entrepreneurs, and provide them with an additional source of income.

What is the way forward?

- During the pandemic it was the internet that kept the wheels of the economy moving.
- The above measures indicate that while much has been done to expand rural internet infrastructure, much more needs to be done to bring reliable and accessible internet connectivity to the rural masses such that they do not miss out on the digital revolution.
- The government will also have to address the problem of cost of access to the internet so as to make it affordable enough to bridge the digital divide.

3. DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

What is the issue?

- Women Empowerment can be a significant driver of macroeconomic growth and stability in the present and the future.

- This can be achieved by progressing information and communication technologies through the process of digitalization.
- Considerable digital gender gap still exists in developing nations, as quoted by United Nations Women, preventing women from equally benefiting from the transition.
- A gender digital divide persists irrespective of a country's overall ICT (information and communication technology) access levels, economic performance, income levels, or geographic location," according to an analysis by the EQUALS Research Group, which is led by the United Nations University (UNU).

What is the scope of digital revolution?

- The digital revolution has enormous potential to improve social and economic outcomes, increase productivity and well-being of population worldwide, among other things.
- To close the digital gender gap and reap the benefits of the digital revolution, existing efforts need to be augmented to pay more attention to the social, political, and economic factors that influence the development, design, and use of digital technologies, including emerging data-driven technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning.

What is the role of digital technologies in Women Empowerment?

- Job opportunities in the Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) sector are plentiful, and they include a variety of challenging occupations of various types.
- Using ICTs, men and women, minorities, and disabled individuals have received equal work prospects.
- Digitalization can advance gender equality and women empowerment by providing women

with opportunities to find and share information, access health and educational services, generate income and collaborate with others while also having the ability to have their voices heard.

a. Educational Empowerment

- Women and girls can be given education using computers, the Internet and broadcast media such as radio and television.
- ICTs will be advantageous in promoting women's participation around the world.

b. Health Empowerment

- Health promoters in developing nations, such as India, have employed electronic gadgets to broadcast the public's health-related information on sexual and reproductive rights.
- ICTs offer the ability to deliver locally adapted health information to women through community access points.

c. Political Empowerment

- Women and their organizations have strategically employed ICTs to advance their rights.
- Women's networks are leveraging new technology to amplify marginalized women's voices.
- ICTs can assist in strengthening women's networks for social and political activism, expanding women's engagement in the political process, assisting women officials in their work, and increasing women's access to government and its services.

d. Economic Empowerment

- ICTs contribute to women's economic empowerment by providing chances for women to own and operate ICT projects.

- Additionally, digitalisation enables women to work remotely from their homes while caring for their families.
- ICTs also provide economic opportunities in terms of finance and financial decision-making.
- Digital financial services enable financial inclusion by bridging the gender divide in account ownership and increasing formal financial activities in terms of both volume and value of transactions.

What is the role of digitalization in the Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT)?

- Benefits are transferred into accurately targeted beneficiaries' bank and postal accounts, preferably seeded with Aadhaar.
- The programme also supports in-kind transfers from the government to individual beneficiaries.
- DBT is being used to implement 310 schemes from 54 different ministries and departments.
- Through DBT and other governance reforms, the government has been able to eliminate duplicate/fake beneficiaries and plug leakages, among other things, allowing it to focus on the genuine and deserving beneficiaries instead.

What are the respective Government Schemes?

a. Anganwadi Services

- Improved working conditions for Anganwadi workers have been made possible by revised joint guidelines issued by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Rural Development, and the Panchayati Raj.
- Grants are available under the Swachhta Action Plan for drinking water facilities and toilet facilities, as determined by the AWC, among other things.

b. Supplementary Nutrition

Programme

- The Supplementary Nutrition Programme is being run by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to improve women and children's nutritional status.
- It is part of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme, which is meant to help pregnant women, lactating mothers, and out-of-school adolescent girls who are not in school get the food they need (11-14 years).

c. Scheme for Adolescent Girls (AGs)

- The fundamental objective of the project is to aid, educate, and empower AGs.
- Aims of the initiative include the following, among other things.
 - Students who have dropped out of school are assisted in making a smooth transition back to formal schooling or bridge learning/skill training.
 - They are informed and directed to existing public services such as primary health centres and rural hospitals.
 - Provide opportunities for self-development & empowerment for the AGs.
 - Increase the nutritional and health status of the participants.
- The scheme uses a rapid reporting system (RRS), a role-based management information system (MIS) that records information about the adolescent females who get benefits under the plan.

d. National Creche Scheme

- It is being implemented as a centrally sponsored scheme through states/UTs by the

Ministry of Women and Child Development to provide daycare facilities to children (between the ages of 6 months and six years) of working mothers.

- The scheme provides the following:
 - Sleeping quarters in day-care centres
 - For children under the age of three, early stimulation is recommended, whereas pre-school education is recommended for children from three to six years
 - Nutrients in addition to the primary food source (to be locally sourced)
 - Surveillance of growth
 - Examination of health and immunization.

e. The Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)

- It is a centrally financed programme that aims to create a protective environment for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and other vulnerable children through collaborations between government and civil society organisations.
- The project would establish a child protection data management system, which would allow for the formulation and implementation of effective intervention measures and the monitoring of their outcomes.
- Regular evaluations of the programmes and organisational structures are carried out, and course corrections are implemented.

f. Swadhar Greh Scheme

- Under the scheme, Swadhar Grehs will be established in every district with a capacity of 30 women to meet the primary needs of women in distress who are without any social or

economic support, such as housing, food, clothes, medical treatment, and care.

g. Ujjawala Scheme

- The scheme aims to achieve the following objectives
 - Preventing the trafficking of women and children for commercial sexual exploitation through social mobilisation and participation of local communities, awareness generation programmes, generating public discourse through workshops/seminars and other similar events, as well as any other innovative activity.
 - Rescue of victims and their placement in safe custody by making it easier to locate and rescue them from the location of their exploitation.
 - To aid victims with both immediate and long-term rehabilitation services, it is necessary to address their basic needs, including shelter, food, clothing, medical treatment, counselling, legal support and guidance, and vocational training.
 - Helping victims reintegrate with their families and society.
 - Victims of cross-border crimes to be reunited with their families.

How leveraging digitalization will help in achieving gender equality?

- Digital technologies can open new avenues for women's empowerment.
- Still, technology alone will not be able to address the structural issues that are at the root of the digital gender disparity.

- While addressing persistent assumptions, behaviours, and conventions that lead to discrimination and violence against women, the focus should be on specific legislative actions that promote women and girls' full participation and inclusion in the digital revolution.
- There is no single solution to narrowing the digital divide between men and women.
- Gender inequality is caused by various economic, social, political, and cultural barriers, and effective interventions must be based on evidences related to the specific barriers that exist in different situations.

What is the way forward?

- The government should ensure that new technologies prioritise, safeguard, and promote women's human rights.
- The government must address the gender data gap, both in number and quality while retaining privacy and data safety as top priorities.
- Those who design, develop, and use AI in decision-making must be educated on women's rights-compliant technology.
- Women role models and mentors in STEM must be promoted by policymakers who must address exclusionary policies and terminology.

4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF NATIONAL HIGHWAYS

What is the issue?

- The current development paradigm in India indicates pushing forward economic growth through development of physical infrastructure and development of quality national highways are part of the commitment of inclusive and sustainable growth.

What is the importance of national highways?

- In any country roads act as the arteries through which the blood of development runs. By linking producers to markets, students to school, etc.
- Improved road infrastructure not only increases growth of an economy, it as well ensures the growth to be inclusive and sustainable.
- Developing physical infrastructure like road network and transport facility play significant role in changing socio-economic condition and standard of living of people of a region or country.
- Physical infrastructures like roads have multiplier effect on economic development of the region and standard of living of people.
- In 1941, the Road Development Plan has classified roads into five categories namely, National Highways (NH), State Highways (SH), Major District Roads (MDR), Other District Roads (ODR) and Village Roads (VR).
- Out of them the ODR and VR are being categorized as Rural Roads.
- In the third road development plan (1981-2001) new accessibility criteria for village road were introduced and several approaches for rural road development were suggested (Sarkar, 2007).
- The current development paradigm of India also emphasizes on economic development through building physical infrastructure.

What is the theoretical framework behind roads?

- The development of highways creates impact on lives of people, especially rural people living in proximity in two ways; namely

- direct impact in the form of enhancement of spatial connectivity, which increase mobility of people and freight.
- the reduction of the cost of provision as well as the cost of use of road infrastructure.
- The other indirect effects of highways are generation of developmental externalities generated through forward and backward linkages.
- Development of transport system and economic development are not only interdependent; they share a very dynamic relationship.
- The development of highways tends to change the agricultural practice as well as pattern of settlement in the proximity areas.
- The presence of highway induce farmer to change cropping pattern and to move to more cash crops.
- These developments tend to create changes in the pattern of economic activities, income generation, price evolution, employment conditions in the proximity rural areas.

What is the status of national highways in India?

- The change in socio-economic situation of rural population in proximity of a national highway (NH) has been tested by various research studies.
- It has been found that in developing economies like India, a large public investment project on road infrastructure development, plays crucial role in reducing rural poverty and enhancing socio-economic well-being of the people living in proximity of highways.
- New income opportunities have emerged that are beneficial to local people of surrounding villages.

- It is evident that the proximity of highway has improved educational outcome as the proportion of school going children especially girls found to have increased.
- The proximity of households with highway also found to have impact on access to health.
- The proximity of highway has positive relationship with respect to:
 - demographic characteristics (density of population),
 - proportion of BPL households
 - share of motorised transport,
 - employment in non-farm activities (proportion of non-agricultural workers in total main workers),
 - housing conditions,
 - enrolment of students and also that of girl students,
 - price of land.
- In India there has been constant and consistent increase in construction of highways each year in last few decades.
- The initiation of PM Gati Shakti to develop physical infrastructure is a welcome effort by current government.

Bharatmala Programme

- The grand initiative of connecting large part of India through road connectivity was initiated in 2017 under the Bharatmala Pariyojana scheme.
- It has been conceptualized as India's largest infrastructural programme.
- It is expected to usher in a new age of technology driven highway development in the country through deployment of automatic traffic surveys and satellite mapping and imagery to identify upgradation requirements of corridors.

What is the way forward?

- The highways connectivity in rural areas aids the change in agriculture and the crop pattern and helps to enhance accessibility of education and health as well enhance value of land in proximity areas.
- The improved connectivity can provide impetus shift to livelihood practices and paves more opportunities in non-farm sector employment.

5. TRANSFORMING RURAL CONNECTIVITY

What is the issue?

- Rural connectivity is a necessary but not a sufficient prerequisite for inclusive and sustainable rural development.
- Improved rural connectivity (e.g. roads, phones, internet, and social media) greatly contributes to the creation of an enabling environment for local communities that stimulates entrepreneurship like starting or expanding the existing local businesses.
- Rural connectivity ensures that local communities get more reliable and quicker access to outside products, services, information, and social linkages.
- Some parts of the country such as hilly areas, conflict prone areas and tribal concentrated pockets don't have an all-weather road connection and other crucial infrastructural facilities, which deprive them from benefits of the country's economic growth.

What has been the impact on the livelihoods?

- Improved rural connectivity (e.g. roads, phones, internet, and social media) that stimulates entrepreneurship like starting or expanding the existing local businesses.

- It also enables communities to fully access existing government schemes, programmes and services.
- During the pandemic, rural people working in urban locales chose to return to their villages and small towns of origin due to Lockdowns or mandated closures.
- Rural youth unemployment is a huge challenge which can be addressed by improving the rural connectivity.
- Access to good quality rural infrastructure (including internet) is a crucial factor for rural youth in deciding whether to stay or leave their villages.
- Rural youth are crucial for the future of agriculture.
- Rapid transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture can only be achieved by youth, accompanied by increased connectivity.
- Better rural connectivity with good quality infrastructural facilities will also open opportunities of rural tourism and homestay enterprises.

a. Tablet Didis

- A cadre of Community Resource Persons such as Bank Mitras (Bank Correspondents), Tablet Didis are providing a bouquet of services at the doorstep of BPL families and keeping all the financial activities of SHGs on Management Information Systems (MIS) software respectively.
- Apart from bookkeeping, Tablet Didis show short films on their tablets to families to create awareness about various livelihood avenues, animal husbandry and also on social ills such as child labour, witch hunting, and domestic violence.

b. Leelavati Project

- It seeks to improve the digital and financial literacy of at least 5,00,000 women members across six Indian states, i.e. Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Meghalaya and Assam.
- It is supported by the Japan Social Development Fund (JSDF) and managed by the world Bank.
- The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) under this project train women weavers in Gujarat's Anand district and help them to showcase their products online, create WhatsApp groups of customers, and enable digital payments for purchases.

How the local institutions can be engaged?

- Local institutions, such as Panchayats can play the dual role:
 - regular and continuous engagement with extension agencies in the context of local planning to promote convergence of development activities at the local level.
 - monitoring of services delivery by these extension agencies.
- For instance, by installing a computer in the Panchayat office or any community centre, it can help connecting small and micro entrepreneurs, including SHGs with various government schemes and programmes and also help them to get access to support measures available on IT enabled portals or websites.
- Under the BharatNet initiative, attempts have been made at digitally connecting 2,50,000 Gram Panchayats, there is huge gap in internet penetration which needs to be filled.

The 4P Model:

- The proposed 4P model have been implemented and validated on the ground, i.e. in the villages in the Palghar district of Maharashtra, where internet connectivity has been enabled by Gram Marg.
- In this model, the participation of community is important in maintenance of the network and safety of the devices.
- A village youth is nominated as the Village Level Entrepreneur (VLE) who undergoes training and skill development to maintain and operate the network in the village.
- The VLE is registered with the government's Common Service Centre (CSC) programme to ensure that citizen service centres operate in all Gram Panchayat offices in India.
- The role of each partner has been clearly defined in the model, including a revenue generation model enabling the internet to thrive and grow sustainably.

What is the way forward?

- Rural connectivity programme requires a robust service enterprise framework with public and private stakeholders at the very core.
- There is a need to create a vibrant 4P model i.e. Public-Private-Panchayat Partnerships for inclusive and sustainable rural development through rural connectivity.
- The Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) could be an effective tool to mainstream rural connectivity issues including funding internet connectivity in villages.
- Governments can ease regulatory requirements for alternative business models such as community networks, PPP models;
- Government can create a more enabling environment for investment in underserved areas through incentives such as tax breaks, Corporate Social responsibility (CSR) and crowd funding, etc.



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