India's Rural Connectivity Revolution

From Policy to Progress

December 27, 2024

Mobile and internet connectivity plays a pivotal role in driving self-independence (**Aatma Nirbharta**) and **empowering women** - two of the government's most vital goals - by unlocking opportunities, bridging gaps, and transforming lives, especially in rural areas. Take the story of Mrs. Reena Kirar, for example. In **Madhya Pradesh**, **Mrs. Reena Kirar** leads the **Girja Devi Jan Kalyan Samiti**, a self-help group (SHG) of women who design and manufacture a variety of products, including dresses, cotton wicks, papads, spices, and incense sticks. For years, their market was limited to the local community, restricting their growth potential. However, their business took a transformative turn when they started using the **Government e-Marketplace (GeM) portal**. Through GeM, they could market their products to a much larger audience, overcoming the constraints of their remote location. Mrs. Kirar says, "It's an excellent platform for reaching more people and properly marketing our products. That's why I like GeM and use it." This digital empowerment has not only increased the group's income but has also boosted their confidence to compete in larger markets, proving that access to digital platforms can be a game-changer for rural entrepreneurs. **The access of digital platforms has been made possible by the government's efforts of extending mobile network and internet coverage to rural and remote areas of our country.**

In the digital era, connectivity serves as a catalyst for socio-economic development, providing access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. The Indian government has launched several initiatives to extend mobile and internet connectivity to the nation's remotest areas, empowering individuals and communities alike. Out of 6,44,131 villages in the country, more than **6,22,804** villages are having **mobile coverage** and out of these, more than **6,14,564** villages are covered with **4G mobile connectivity as on Sep 2024**. Further, under **Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN) Mission of Ministry of Tribal Affairs**, more than 4,543 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) habitations were identified as mobile uncovered and now, out of these **1,136** PVTG habitations have been covered with mobile connectivity. As on Oct 2024, a total of **1,018** mobile towers under various **Digital Bharat Nidhi** funded mobile projects have been sanctioned to provide 4G coverage to PVTG habitations with estimated expenditure of **Rs 1,014 Crore**.

The Indian government's commitment to bridging the digital divide is evident through several key programs:

1. **Digital Bharat Nidhi (earlier, Universal Service Obligation Fund):** Established to ensure equitable access to communication services, DBN has been instrumental in **funding projects** that extend mobile and broadband connectivity to underserved areas. As of December 27, 2024, **8730 mobile towers** have been installed and over **1.99 lakh** villages have

been covered by **Bharat Broadband Network Limited.**

2. **BharatNet Project:** An ambitious project aimed at providing **affordable high-speed internet** access to every Gram Panchayat in the country. This initiative, under the **Ministry of Communications**, seeks to empower rural India, fostering inclusive growth and bridging the gap between urban and rural communities. As of December 27, 2024, over **2.14 lakh** gram panchayats have been connected through BharatNet.

3. **PM-WANI (Wi-Fi Access Network Interface**): Designed to create a network of public Wi-Fi hotspots across India, PM-WANI aims to make affordable and reliable internet access available to citizens, fostering digital participation and economic opportunities. As of December 27, 2024, **247076** Wi-Fi hotspots have been established.

The Indian government has also taken several steps to **protect telecom users**, including the **"Know Your Mobile Connections"** facility on the **Sanchar Saathi** portal, which helps citizens track and report unauthorized connections. **The Telecom Commercial Communications Customer Preference Regulations (TCCCPR), 2018**, allow users to register for the **"Do Not Disturb" (DND)** service to block unsolicited calls and messages. **The Department of Telecommunications (DoT)** has allocated specific number series for telemarketers and banks, while the **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)** uses **Artificial Intelligence** to detect unregistered telemarketers. TRAI also imposes **penalties** on telecom service providers for failing to control unwanted communications.

India's unwavering commitment to expanding mobile and network coverage in rural areas is transforming the socio-economic landscape. Stories like that of Mrs. Reena Kirar underscore the profound impact of digital empowerment, turning villages into vibrant hubs of opportunity. Through strategic initiatives such as DBN, BharatNet, and PM-WANI, the government is not only building infrastructure but also enabling citizens to actively participate in the digital future. The vision of a digitally inclusive India is rapidly becoming a reality, ensuring that every citizen, regardless of location, can thrive in the modern world.

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