



Leveraging Digital Literacy

for Rural Empowerment - a Synergistic Skills Implementation Methodology

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A new scheme, to digitally empower rural inhabitants in India, aims to make rural India a key part of Digital India and boost the country's economic growth.



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India has tremendous potential to emerge as a global leader in social, political, cultural and economic spheres but this can become reality only when it mobilises the majority of its population, which is poor and lives in rural areas. For this to happen, it is important to empower people by making Digital India a reality.

The National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM), as well as subsequent

schemes, are aimed at empowering citizens in rural areas by training them to operate computers or digital access devices. This is a great initiative for central, state and local government policies and programmes to promote and gain acceptability for digitisation and leverage it for overall economic growth.

An eye on digital literacy

Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan (PMGDISHA) is the scheme which aims to make citizens in rural areas across States/UTs, digitally literate, reaching around 40% of rural households by covering one member from every eligible household by **31 March 2019**.

The Scheme would empower citizens in rural areas by training them to operate computers or digital access devices (such as tablets, smart phones etc.); send and receive e-mails; browse the Internet; access government services; search for information and undertake digital payments. This enables them to use Information Technology and related applications, especially digital payments, to actively participate in the process



of nation-building. The Scheme aims to bridge the digital divide, specifically targeting the rural population including the marginalised sections of society such as Scheduled Castes (SC)/Scheduled Tribes (ST); Minorities; Below Poverty Line (BPL), women and differently-abled persons and minorities.

Digital India could become a transformational initiative in global history. It portends a "big bang" for the world economy and, if done correctly, will thrust India into greater focus. But it won't happen unless rural India is an integral part of the transformation. Digital India's critical need is focus on the issues relating to skills training and development for the rural sector.

Making one person in every family digitally literate is one of the integral components of the Prime Minister's vision of Digital India. Digital Telangana is about empowering people by providing Internet connectivity and digital literacy to one person in every family across the state according to the Minister ITE&C, Telangana.

Digital Telangana rests on two pillars, each representing supply and demand. On the supply side, the main aim is to ensure that digital facilities become available to each and every person in the state through laying OFC to each household using water grid trenches, providing 4G and Wi-Fi services and the e-Panchayat scheme (under which a one-stop shop kiosk will be available in each Panchayat).

Similarly, on the demand side, the intention is to make each and every person digitally-empowered so that he/she can make best use of the digital facilities that are being made available on the doorstep. This is being done through a school computer literacy programme, a digital literacy programme and the identification of technological solutions for all government agencies to provide better services to citizens.

Implementation plan

Telangana has always been at the forefront of launching digital initiatives – it has already become the first state in the country to launch an official e-wallet, called T Wallet, for digital payments. Initiatives such as TASK, T-Hub, T-Fiber and T-Sat focus on enhancing demand-driven skills development, building an entrepreneurial ecosystem, internet connectivity to rural areas and making training available through satellite networks. These initiatives are driven by the ideology of growth as a bottom-up phenomenon.

Within this context, this article summarises a synergistic approach piloted in Telangana to implementing the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan (PMGDISHA) programme where, in engineering, students and teachers adopt village(s) around their colleges and train one member in a family on digital literacy. This helps the student to enhance soft skills and the citizen to become oriented in digital literacy. The course duration is 20 hours and it is to be completed within 10 to 30 days.

One person per household (between 14-60 years who is IT-illiterate) is eligible and preference will be given to SC, ST, BPL, Minorities, Women (Anthyodaya card holders) and differently-abled persons. The beneficiary identification is through Aadhaar/ eKYC.

PMGDISHA

Learner Modules

Introduction to Digital Devices; Operating Digital Devices; Introduction to the Internet and Communications using the Internet; Application of the Internet.

Learning Outcomes

G2C Services – caste certificate; domicile certificate; income certificate; UIDAI services; banking and insurance services; IRCTC railway reservations; telephone/data card recharge; election ID printing; electricity bill payment; applications for PAN card and passport; use of digital locker and T-wallet.

Course delivery

The Telangana Academy for Skill and Knowledge (TASK) is coordinating with various polytechnic, engineering and degree colleges, as well as other implementation partners, on implementing digital literacy in rural areas.

The college/s will provide the infrastructure while students are trained by TASK and DISHA teams - these students attempt to make rural citizens digitally literate. The Village Sarpanch/ Village Officer assists in validating the citizen's residency while the State Implementation Agency (Mee-Seva) manages the overall programme in the state and coordinates with the ITE&C department and CSC. The DISHA team is responsible for training the trainers, programme support and final assessments.



Skills on wheels

TASK initiated this programme in four colleges in May 2017, where 100 student volunteers trained around 150 rural citizens. In one year, over 3500 rural citizens, across 23 Gram Panchayats, were enrolled of which 1211 completed the training and 1152 received certification.

Certification agencies, nominated by the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan (PMGDISHA) scheme on national and state levels, will undertake an independent assessment.

Testimonials

There is a lot of positive feedback from rural citizens who have been part of this scheme. Here are just a few of the comments so far.

"Thanks to TASK and the trainers, this digital literacy training has helped us a lot in many ways. We now can pay our electricity bills on time while sitting at home without having to stand in long queues in the hot sun."

"We are independent and we are also taught how to store our important documents and certificates in the Digital Locker!"

Another participant quips, *"I am so happy to be part of this – I have learned so much about digital literacy. I never knew about an email. I can teach all these to my kids, too!"*

It's a very different and enriching experience for the student volunteers. They say that, for a change, it is wonderful and so much fun to be on the other side of the table and teach rural citizens to help them build social and organisational skills.



The Minister sharing perspectives with technology partners and college management



The Minister promoting TASK



The Minister speaking at the World Economic Forum



College management is very happy to be part of this game-changing initiative by the State and Central Governments. They are more than willing to nominate students as volunteers from their colleges to help enhance their skills and provide support to implement this programme. They are proud of the fact that they would adopt a nearby village and make it fully digital.

Opportunities and challenges

There is a need to understand the issues faced by rural India and identify key areas where Digital India can play a pivotal role in accelerating growth in rural areas by making them self-reliant.

Change is always for the better but it is a gradual process. Rural citizens need to be convinced of the benefits of becoming digitally literate. This, in itself, is a herculean task.

But our trainers and student volunteers across colleges are all geared up for this ground-breaking initiative and scheme from the Central Government.

This programme has given strong impetus to digital literacy in the State. Through this skills initiative, TASKs plan to train and provide certification for around 50,000 rural inhabitants over the next few years.



References

www.pmgdisha.in

<http://it.telangana.gov.in>

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