

TRANSFORMING RURAL INDIA: THE STORY OF TRIUMPH

Nirendra Dev

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Step by step, by every actions and decisions of its government, the government's track record is really unique. Even the ardent critics would believe, the government has hardly lost sight of the real people and their real problems, especially in the villages.

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Right since coming to power, this government had identified a few broad sectors, which are linked to rural infrastructures and also life of the people in the interiors. They are: Rural Roads, Rural Electrification,

Rural Housing, Farmers' Welfare, Farm Irrigation and Agricultural Market. To understand the intricacies, it ought to be necessary what really drives the government's rural development works.

In the words of Prime Minister himself: "It is true that people are moving from our villages with great speed. They want a certain quality of life — good education, healthcare, electricity, Internet and entertainment options". Hence, there is always a need to understand how these people — rural folk — once uprooted from their villages would reside or settle in the city and urban towns. Importantly, how basic necessities will be provided?

To understand these in terms of statistics, according to Census 2011 data, 69 per cent of India's population or around 833 million people, lived in rural areas, against 31 per cent or 377.1 million people, in urban areas. It is projected that by 2050,



the urban population figure would jump to 50 per cent.

Laying emphasis on Roads, came in the greater push for the *Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana* (PMGSY) with a firm strategy to establish a comprehensive rural transport system. A new scheme has been also crafted under the name and style of the *Pradhan Mantri Gramin Parivahan Yojana* (PMGPY). It seeks to improve and regulate transportation facilities in villages. The government believes this could also enhance job opportunities for the rural youth.

In 2014, when this government came to power, there were over 18,000 villages that did not get any form of electricity. Prime Minister called for the electrification of these villages in the next 1000 days from the ramparts of the Red Fort in his first Independence Day speech. Since then, over 5000 villages were electrified in about six-seven months under "*Deendayal Upadhaya Gram Jyoti Yojana*", while by August 2016, 10,079 villages have been electrified. Most of the villages are from states like Assam, Meghalaya, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan.

The government is thus, marching ahead with confidence of achieving 100 per cent village electrification by 1st, May 2018. In the Budget 2017-18, an increased allocation of Rs 4,814 crores has been made under the *Deendayal Upadhaya Gram Jyoti Yojana*.

Rural-Agro Economy:

Notwithstanding the immense potential and agriculture being the mainstay of the people of India, the agro-economy has not seen the expected results. Thus, it was imperative to look at the broad canvas of the farm sector and the need for removal of various natural and even man-made impediments. Depriving farmers the abundant market has been one of the chief demerits. But this was hardly addressed in the last 60 years. A determined effort made by the government towards this endeavour is certainly a game changer. In fact, the government broadly outlined what it called the government's "Nine Pillars" of a "Transformative Agenda" for the economy. And in that, according to Finance Minister, the government has included measures to boost education (especially for poor and rural areas),



increased spending on roads, irrigation and other infrastructure.

It is in this context, the government in the Budget 2016-17 pledged to "double farmer's income in five years. "We have a shared responsibility to spend prudently and wisely for the people, especially for the poor and downtrodden," the FM had outlined.

On April 14, 2016, Prime Minister dedicated to the nation an electronic trading platform, the National Agriculture Market (eNAM). It came on an important day, the birth anniversary of one of the key architects of Indian constitution – Dr B R Ambedkar. The e-NAM trading mechanism proposed to integrate 585 regulated wholesale markets or Agriculture Produce Market Committees (APMCs) under one electronic platform within a couple of years. The eNAM allowed farmers to sell their produce to highest bidders. This has also left its positive impact on rural folks.

The announcement of the New Crop Insurance scheme *Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana* on 13th January, 2016 was another milestone. There has been always a long felt need to bring together at one place all conceptual issues, detailed institutional framework and operational details related to farmers' welfare, risk management of farming community and the crops during drought and floods and other localised risk factors.

The broad policy on drought and natural disasters management prepared by the government had earlier prescribed multifold actions vis-à-vis the disaster mitigation plans, relief measures required for the affected population and the need to integrate these with long term objectives.

The New Crop Insurance scheme must be understood from that perspective. Under the new scheme that would cost government a whopping

expenditure of Rs 8,000-9,000 crore annually, the farmers' premium has been kept at a maximum of 2 per cent for food grains and oilseeds and up to 5 per cent for horticulture and cotton crops. The government move will enhance insurance coverage to more crop area to protect farmers from vagaries of monsoon.

Prior to some of these initiatives in September 2015, in an ambitious bid to transform rural areas to economically, socially and physically sustainable spaces, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister approved the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) with an outlay of Rs. 5142.08 crore. The Mission aims at development of rural growth clusters which have latent potential for growth. These clusters would be developed by provisioning of economic activities, developing skills and local entrepreneurship and provide infrastructure amenities. The Rurban Mission thus aimed at developing a cluster of Smart Villages.

In keeping with the federal structure of Indian constitution, the state governments have been empowered to identify the clusters in accordance with the Framework for Implementation prepared by the Ministry of Rural Development. The clusters are geographically contiguous Gram Panchayats with a population of about 25,000 to 50,000 in plain and coastal areas and a population of 5,000 to 15,000 in desert, hilly or tribal areas. There are provisions of separate approach for selection of clusters in Tribal and Non-Tribal Districts also. The mission aims to create 300 such Rurban growth clusters by 2018-19 across the country.

Development in true sense, especially in rural areas, should focus to catalyse and rewrite the "change" story and trigger actions that would lead to positive outcomes.

The mother of all such actions is people's ability to afford a house of their own. Only a roof of residence overhead can provide ideas to leverage support to the reform process, infuse optimism among the citizenry and instill confidence in them. With these broad goals in mind, on November 20, 2016, Prime Minister launched "Housing for All" in rural areas under which the Government proposes to provide an environmentally 'safe and secure pucca house' to every rural household by 2022.

Named the *Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (Gramin)*, in its first phase, the target is to complete

one crore houses by March 2019. There would be a minimum support of nearly Rs. 1.5 lakh to Rs. 1.6 lakh to a household. There is also a provision of Bank loan up to Rs. 70,000, if the beneficiary so desires. The selection of beneficiaries has been through a completely transparent process using the Socio Economic Census 2011 data and validating it through the Gram Sabha.

In fact, PMAY-Gramin is a major step forward in bringing together Skill India, Digital India, Make In India, even IT/DBT Aadhaar platform and *Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana* (PMJDY). The programme provides for skilling 5 lakh Rural Masons by 2019 and allows over 200 different housing designs across the country based on a detailed study of housing typologies, environmental hazards and the households' requirements.

A large scale use of local materials is envisaged along with a complete home with cooking space, electricity provision, LPG, toilet and bathing area, drinking water etc through convergence.

Mixed Bag:

The government has also undertaken a series of related schemes alongside multi-pronged strategy to change the face of rural India. In the Budget 2016-17, Finance Minister has pledged to undertake *Mission Antyodaya* to bring one crore households out of poverty and to make 50,000 Gram Panchayats poverty free by 2019.

The rural job scheme – MGNREGA has been revamped with adequate funds. While providing at least 100 days employment to every rural household, MGNREGA is now linked to creating "productive assets" to improve farm productivity and incomes. The target of 5 lakh farm ponds and 10 lakh compost pits announced in the last Budget from MGNREGA funds is achieved. Moreover, during 2017-18, another 5 lakh farm ponds will be taken up. This single measure will contribute greatly to drought proofing of Gram Panchayats.

The budget provision of Rs 38,500 crores under MGNREGA in 2016-17 has been increased to Rs 48,000 crores in 2017-18. This is the highest ever allocation for MGNREGA. The initiative to 'geo-tag' all MGNREGA assets and putting them in public domain on internet has established a greater transparency.

The *Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana* (PMGSY) is now being implemented as never before. The pace of construction of PMGSY roads has accelerated to reach 133 km roads per day in 2016-17, as against an average of 73 km during the period 2011-2014. The government has also taken up the task of connecting habitations with more than 100 persons in the left wing extremism affected Blocks.

The government has set a target of achieving 100 per cent village electrification by 1st May, 2018. An increased allocation of Rs 4,814 crores has been made in the Budget 2017-18 under the *Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana*.

The allocations for *Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana- National Rural Livelihood Mission* for promotion of skill development and livelihood opportunities for people in rural areas have been also increased to Rs 4,500 in 2017-18. Not forgetting the cleanliness mission, *Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin)* has made tremendous progress in promoting safe sanitation and ending open defecation. Sanitation coverage in rural India has gone up from 42 per cent in October 2014 to about 60 per cent. Open Defecation Free villages are now being given priority for piped water supply.

Conclusion:

India truly lives in villages. Rural economy, prosperity of Indian villages and self-content requirement of pastoral clusters can only usher in a progressive and modern India. It is the rural work force and Indian agriculturists who can play the pivotal role for the overall development and well being of the country and to stimulate accelerated uplift of living conditions.

But in the ultimate, it ought to be underlined that it will be wrong to visualize a uniform and single pattern of farming or rural development methodology in the entire country. Each region, state and at times, districts and blocks have their unique traditional methodologies of water preservation, farming and rural planning. Each community, social groups and local Gram Panchayats thus, need to be skilled and adequately empowered to utilise local people's farming potentials and the natural resources as a cost effective manner using the locally available resources.

Sikkim's success story of organic farming is a story by itself. Similarly, there are immense potentials

of villagers striving hard to achieve yields according to their own hard work in other states. Given proper guidance and administrative support, even states like Jharkhand are catching up these days. A real rural development measure must, therefore, are to be people-centric and be tailor made based on local conditions.

Some Highlights:

- The Budget 2016-17 presented by the Finance Minister announced the government's commitment to "skill" for about 10 million youth over the next three years.
- A mega scheme has been installed under the name and style of '*Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)*'. In the budget, Finance Minister also announced plans to establish 1,500 multi-skill training institutes across India with Rs.1700 crore investment.
- Government has set a target of achieving 100 per cent village electrification by 1st, May, 2018. An increased allocation of Rs 4,814 crores has been proposed under the *Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana* in Budget 2017-18.
- The total allocation for the rural, agriculture and allied sectors in 2017-18 is Rs 1,87,223 crores, which is 24 per cent higher than the previous year.
- Government proposes to provide safe drinking water to over 28,000 arsenic and fluoride affected habitations by 2020. This will be a sub mission of the *National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP)*.
- For imparting new skills to rural people, mason training will be provided to 5 lakh persons by 2022, with an immediate target of training at least 20,000 persons by 2017-18.
- Prime Minister also has launched an ambitious scheme for rural India to develop around 2,500 'Smart Villages' by 2019 under the *Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY)*. The PM invited all the 800 plus Parliamentarians from both houses to select one village each to develop it as an *Adarsh Gram (Model Village)* by 2016 followed by two more by 2019.

(The writer is Special Correspondent with United News of India (UNI) in New Delhi. Email: nirendelhi@gmail.com)