

Kurukshetra Vol. 57 No. 8 June 2009

PROVISION OF URBAN AMENITIES IN RURAL AREAS (PURA)

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PURA can succeed only with the help of all sections i.e. Government, VCOs, Private sector, etc. It will then lead to economic connectivity and prosperity. PURA driven by technology for sustainable rural development will bridge the rural-urban divide. Access to technology is the means to generate employment potential for sustainable rural prosperity.

Rural Development and poverty alleviation programmes are implemented on a decentralized basis throughout the country. The Ministry of Rural Development has been implementing various programmes in the rural areas for which it releases central funds for policy formulation, overall guidance, monitoring and evaluation. Rural development implies both the economic betterment of rural people as well as greater social transformation. In order to provide the rural people with better prospects for economic development, increased participation of them in the rural development programmes, decentralization of planning, better enforcement of land reforms and greater access to credit are envisaged. Connectivity of villages providing economic opportunities to all segments of people is an urgent need. We need to innovate to increase connectivity to the villages.

individuality. The integrated method that will bring prosperity to rural India is called 'Providing Urban Amenities to Rural Areas [PURA]'. The identified areas of intervention and support are:

- ♦ Physical connectivity through quality Roads, Transport and Power;
- ♦ Electronic connectivity through Tele-communication, Internet and IT services;
- ♦ Knowledge connectivity through good education, skill training etc.;
- ♦ Market connectivity;
- ♦ Provision of drinking water supply and up-gradation of existing health facilities.

The scheme PURA aims to meet the gaps in physical and social infrastructure in the identified rural clusters consisting of 10-15 villages around the towns with population of one lakh or less to further their growth potential. As the scheme is for provision of facilities in the rural areas, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India is the Nodal agency for implementing it. The objective is to facilitate Public Private Partnership (PPP) and convergence of different schemes into the PURA Clusters and also evolving a model PURA scheme which can be replicated in clusters throughout the country.

PURA - A Concept:

Former President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam placed an important thought before the Nation for bridging the rural-urban divide and achieving balanced socio-economic development. It is 'Provision of Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (PURA)'. The scheme involves identification of rural clusters with growth potential and creating connectivity that would enable farmers, artisans & rural entrepreneurs to get the best process for their produce Village Knowledge Center (VKC).

There have been many attempts across the country in taking Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to rural areas. Each of the proponents of these efforts is passionately attached to the core idea and continues to pursue it even when it does not make economic sense or when it is proven not scalable or sustainable. Some of these efforts are successful. Village Knowledge Centers (VKC) are the essential component for realizing our goal of graduating to a knowledge society and India's transformation to

10,000 PURA complexes in the country, encompassing 2-3 lakh village panchayats. For providing knowledge connectivity to PURA complexes, VKCs will act as frontline delivery systems.

The VKC should provide the essential data required for the targeted population such as farmers, fishermen, craftsmen, traders, businessmen, entrepreneurs, unemployed youth, and students. It has to be acquired by visiting the village, talking to the rural people, by understanding their requirement and core competence. The main focus of the VKC should be to empower youth to undertake development tasks of villages and establish rural enterprises that will provide large scale employment. So it is essential to skill enable and knowledge enable through academic institutions, industry, banking and marketing institutions. The VKC should act as a facilitator. A low-cost multi-task handheld computer with wireless mobility should be developed and should reach farmers. They should add value with this tool for their benefit to increase their earning capacity. Every VKC should have a computer terminal, wireless connection or broadband / satellite connectivity to connect to the nodal centers for acquisition of information and dissemination of updated real-time data. Villagers residing at the remotest places of the country came into the threshold of global connectivity. The internet enabled VKC is the key to rural empowerment.

PURA - Support to Agricultural:

The PURA area has abundant natural resources and the potential to be a major producer of a wide range of agricultural product supplier in the region. However, constraints to agricultural production and marketing include poor infrastructure, lack of access to capital and low-level agricultural technical efficiency and skills in production, marketing, and business management. The agriculture sector in PURA may need to focus on the following points to improve its productivity:

- ♦ Increasing access to agricultural skills and technology;
- ♦ Increasing access to capital for agricultural enterprises;
- ♦ Increasing the participation of farmers as local stakeholders through capacity building approach.

The PURA targets agricultural producers and entrepreneurs throughout the areas, with a special

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Written by Administrator

Friday, 03 July 2009 13:03 - Last Updated Friday, 26 November 2010 11:27

emphasis on community involvement and the equitable participation of rural women in all project components. Specifically, the project needs to support agriculture and business skills training in sub-sectors such as food products, agricultural technology, forestry, livestock, wildlife, and fisheries.

PURA- An Experience:

The country's first ever PURA project at Maichhara village in Tripura district was launched by Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd (ONGC) to give a fillip to the concept of knowledge-powered rural development. Within a month of its launch the Maichhara cluster comprising five adjacent villages have been provided with urban facilities like low-cost power and knowledge connectivity. Under the ONGC-PURA project four important structural units - 'Bijli Ghar' (Electricity generation room), 'Rashan Seva' (Kitchen facility), 'Samaj Shivr' (Social camp) and 'Gyan Kendra' (Information center) were launched with modern facilities. The project envisages supplying power to the selected five villages under its fold using natural gas. The project also includes building village roads, health care facilities and vocational training centers.

Periyar (Tamil Nadu) PURA model has three Connectivity - i.e. Physical, Electronic and Knowledge - leading to economic connectivity. This has resulted in large scale employment generation and creation of a number of entrepreneurs with the active support of 1150 self-help groups. 200 acres of wasteland has been developed into cultivable land with innovative water management schemes. Villagers are busy in

has empowered villagers through skill-oriented training, provision of finance and provision of market connectivity for their produce.

PURA can succeed only with the help of all sections i.e. Government, NGOs, Private sector, etc. It will then lead to economic connectivity and prosperity. PURA driven by technology for sustainable rural development will bridge the rural-urban divide. Access to technology is the means to generate employment potential for sustainable rural prosperity. It has also to provide employment opportunity to many villagers. If we create a small-scale unit clusters, this will creation of approximately 10-20 enterprises per PURA complexes. This will also generate employment opportunities in service and support sector. This is one way of reducing the employment gap leading to upliftment of the millions of people living below the poverty line.

It is need at least 10000 PURA models all over the country. This movement can be multiplied by thousands of entrepreneurs, educational administrators, small-scale industrialists and bankers with the support of Government and private agencies providing total economic prosperity to rural India by 2020.

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