DIGITAL INDIA- THE GREAT DREAM

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to understand various portals and mobile Apps available for the empowerment of rural folk in India. Digital India programme envisages a digital empowering of the citizens of India i.e. making them digitally literate so that they are enabled to seek better livelihood opportunities and become economically secure. The central and state governments, along with several private agencies are engaged in the digital empowerment of deprived groups. This article begins with the view of the government of India in digital transformation. The next section describes the unique methodology adopted for this study. The section that follows introduces some web portals and mobile applications designed and developed for the benefit of farmers, fishers and the tribes and for the general public and given thereafter is the conclusion.

Key words: Digital India, ICT4D, Rural Development, Rural information System, Digital literacy.

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<http://iaeme.com/Home/issue/IJCET?Volume=10&Issue=3>

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Digital Empowerment of Rural folk

“Under the Digital India programme, the government is also committed to providing access to digital resources for citizens with special needs, such as those with visual or hearing impairments (which may be partial or complete), learning or cognitive disabilities, physical disabilities which hinder operation of ubiquitous access devices such as phones, tablets and computers.”[1] This excerpt from Digital India portal heralds user inclusion as the prime

intention of policy makers. Digitize India Platform, an initiative of Digital India programme has worded its home page thus “Our aim is to achieve the vision of Digital India, where every Indian is digitally empowered and every information is digitally available”[2]. The Digital India programme is a flagship programme of the Government of India with a vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. One of the three vision areas of Digital India programme is the Digital Empowerment of Citizens and it includes universal digital literacy, universally accessible digital resources as major items[3]. Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan is the scheme to make six crore persons in rural areas, across States/UTs, digitally literate, reaching to around 40% of rural households by covering one member from every eligible household by 31st March, 2019. The Scheme aims to bridge the digital divide, specifically targeting the rural population including the marginalized sections of society like Scheduled Castes (SC) / Scheduled Tribes (ST), Minorities, Below Poverty Line (BPL), women and differently-abled persons and minorities.[4] Various portals and Apps developed as part of digital India programme and a few other portals for rural community are presented in this article

2. METHODOLOGY

This research involves web research to find out the portals and mobile apps for the benefit of the rural folk like farmers, fishers, tribal folk etc. The portals and mobile apps are selected based on the claim made in the portal or Apps itself, that the farmer, rural folk, tribe, and the fisherman are among the targeted user groups. The available studies act as route maps in web research to find out the portals and applications. The portals identified are Farmers Portal, agmarkonline, Crop Insurance Portal, pmfby portal, ICAR- Public Interface, agricultural Portal, marinefishsales Portal, trified Portal, Fish Market Intelligence System and Online Reservation System. The mobile applications are Kisan Suvidha, MKisan, Farm-o-pedia, IFFCO KISAN, Krishi App, and eNAM App. These apps are owned by public enterprises. The section follows describe these portals and Apps in detail

Some portals and mobile Apps

Two types of portals and mobile applications are examined in this paper. One is the portals available for farmers, fishers and tribes and the other is the portals available for the general public at large

Portals and apps for farmers

The following section describes the major portals available under government ownership for the benefit of farmers.

<http://www.farmer.gov.in>

“The Farmers Portal along with mKisan Portal aims to serve as a One Stop Shop for all the farmers for accessing information on agricultural activities” (Business Standard, 2015). The following is an excerpt from the ‘*about us*’[5] page of this website “Once in the Farmers’ Portal, a farmer will be able to get all relevant information on specific subjects around his village/block /district or state...”. “...ONE STOP SHOP FOR FARMERS...”. (Business Standard, 2015), the slogan of this portal claims that this portal is a sophisticated portal for the farmer community. Ministry of Agriculture (2013) claims that the farmers’ portal is developed exclusively on the basis of farmers’ perspective. It goes on to say that it receives tens of thousands of hits from farmers every day.

<https://agmarkonline.dmi.gov.in/DMI/>

This is a website of Directorate of Marketing & Inspection, Department of Agriculture & Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Government of India, designed, developed and hosted by National Informatics Centre (NIC). The site has been developed to provide information to the Farmer, Traders, Consumers, Research Institutes, Government Officials and the General Public.[6]

<https://agri-insurance.gov.in>

Crop Insurance Portal is an integrated IT solution developed for giving faster insurance service to farmers. The operational guidelines for Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana describes that “The Government is endeavoring for the integration of all the stakeholders viz. farmers, insurance companies, financial institutions and Government agencies in a single IT platform to ensure better administration, coordination and transparency for getting real time information and monitoring in a phased manner in consultation with the Ministry of Finance and other stakeholders” (Department of Agriculture, 2015).

“This is a stable ... enabling information access to multiple stakeholders viz. Farmers, Govt. Functionaries, Insurance Companies, Intermediaries, Bankers and social & community bodies.”[7] The statement quoted here is excerpted from the *about us* page and it clearly reveals that it is a web application developed to converge multiple users into a single platform. The portal is available in regional languages including Malayalam.

<https://pmfby.gov.in/> Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)

Das (2017) reports the inception of the Central crop insurance portal which integrates farmers and other stakeholders into a single platform and provides online registration for farmers. It has a login page for the farmer also. Cooperation and Farmers Welfare (2017) sees the farmers as one of the targeted users group of the portal as evidenced from the portal “...This will facilitate farmers and other stakeholders to get the relevant information on Internet...”

<http://agmarknet.gov.in/>

The ‘*about us*’ page high lights the objective of this website thus: “...to sensitize and orient farmers to respond to new challenges in agricultural marketing by using IT as a vehicle of extension.”[8] The website policies of agmarknet says: “The site has been developed to provide information to the Farmer, Traders, Consumers, Research Institutes, Government Officials and General Public”[9]. The aforesaid statements clearly reveal that this website is intended for farmers also

ICAR- Public Interface <https://qms.icar.gov.in>

News Bureau (2017) reports, while the launching of ICAR public interface, Shri Radha Mohan Singh, Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, declared that the e-Krishi Samvad (ICAR - Query Management System) is an internet-based interface and is a unique platform through which the farmers can directly approach the subject matter expert through the portal. ICAR- Public Interface has been developed as a public-connect platform for stakeholders in more efficient, quick and simple manner by direct approach. ICAR serves various categories of stakeholders, such as farmers, students, entrepreneurs, researchers and others interested in agricultures and allied sectors[10].

Kissankerala (www.kissankerala.net)

Karshaka Information Systems Services and Networking (KISSAN) is an integrated, multi-modal delivery of agricultural information system, which provides several dynamic and useful information and advisory services for the farming community across Kerala. It is one of the

leading citizen centric e-governance projects of the Department of Agriculture, Govt. of Kerala[11].

<http://agritech.tnau.ac.in>

Prabu (2013) reports the launching of agricultural portal, <http://agritech.tnau.ac.in>, by Tamilnadu Agricultural University for the benefit of the farmer community. This farm technology portal integrates allied sectors including agriculture, horticulture, sericulture, seed sector, marketing, fisheries, forestry and animal husbandry.

Kisan Suvidha

Staff Reporter (2016) reports that the Government of India urges the farmers to download and install Kisan Suvidha App. The excerpts from a post on ‘my GOV’ say “Kisan Suvidha is a mobile app developed to help farmers by providing relevant information to them quickly. The App is designed primarily for farmers keeping their requirements in mind. The App is engineered to provide all information in a common place that a farmer or stakeholder in agriculture sector may require” (my GOV 2018).

m-kisan Application

This app has been designed and developed by in-house IT team of DAC (Department of Agriculture and Cooperation) with the help of C-DAC (Center for Development of Advanced Computing) Pune. It enables farmers and all other stakeholders to obtain advisories and the sending of information by experts and government officials at different levels through mkisan portal without registering in the portal[12].

Farm-o-pedia[13]

The application is a multilingual Android application targeting rural Gujarat and available for download at <https://apps.mgov.gov.in/descp.do?appid=587>. The app is useful for farmers as well as persons related to agriculture. It is available in English and Gujarati languages.

IFFCO KISAN

IFFCO KISAN is an app available for farmers. The app has a Malayalam version as well. It is found to be developed with minimum features. Jagannathan (2011) citing the words of the senior management of the IFFCO Kisan Sanchar Limited, observes that the objective of this venture is to provide needed information to the farmers using innovative voice based technology through the mobile phone. This has an interactive feature called ASKQUERY. It has option to upload photos as well.

Krishi App in Malayalam

This mobile app is found to be a very useful application. It is a cost free application available on ‘Google Play Store’. This is a static application and it does not need internet connection.

e-NAM App

e-NAM is envisaged as a pan-India electronic trading portal which seeks to network the existing markets to create a unified national market for agricultural commodities. The purpose of the mobile App is to facilitate remote bidding by traders and provide access to arrivals and price related information to farmers and other stake holders on their smart phones[14]. Quoting Agriculture Secretary S K Pattanayak, PTI (2018a) reports that farmers are very happy with e-NAM and the government is interested in implementing this system across the country. Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh said on 7th August 2018 in the Lok

Sabha that farmers wishing to join e-NAM platform need to register themselves on e-NAM portal and can sell their produce on e-NAM platform in any e-NAM mandi of their choice. (PTI, 2018b).

Portals for fishers

The researchers could not find many portals and apps exclusively for fishers community in India, neither is much literature available in this context. We are presenting one portal and one mobile App here.

Fish Market Intelligence System (F-MIS)[15]

South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS), a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) working in the Marine Fisheries Sector and the apex body of organizations of small-scale artisanal fish workers launched the market intelligence system which continuously monitors several key wholesale fish markets in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and publishes the market information in this site. This monitoring system is aimed at equipping fishermen organizations to take business decisions on marketing their fish.

www.marinefishsales.com

IANIS (2018) reports the launching of a multi-vendor e-commerce website and a mobile app to help fisher folks to sell their products online directly to the customers eliminating middlemen, who take away a sizeable share of the fishermen's profit. This application was developed under the NICRA-CMFRI project. The Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) was established by the Government of India under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare and National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA) is a network project of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). Referring a CMFRI press release PTI (2018c) reports that CMFRI expects Fishermen and fish farmers who want to sell their catch and fish online may form Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and register with the platform. CMFRI will monitor the vendor profiles, order status and sales.

TRIFED (www.trifed.in): portal for tribe

The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) a national-level apex organization functioning under the administrative control of Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India for socio economic development of tribal groups launched a new venture MFPNET. It is an online network of stakeholders in the trade of Minor Forest Products (MFP) which includes individuals, agencies, institutions etc. interested in MFP. It is to be a one stop destination for information about MFP trade scenario in India. The main objective of establishing this network is to bring in public domain trade information for use by different stakeholders.[16] The above statements make it clear that MFPNET is developed for the benefit of the tribal people and all the stake holders are expected to use the same portal.

CONCLUSION

The web research proves beyond doubt that the information available in the web portals are highly useful for the rural folk namely farmers, fishers, tribes etc. Rheingold suggested phones are no longer simply phones for communication, but it will be desirable, technological consumer products. The App we examined also have feature for the benefit of the rural community. Digital Literacy of the targeted population is the major criterion that decides the usability of the digital products and that should be addressed without delay

KEYNOTES

1. Source : <https://digitalindia.gov.in/content/vision-and-vision-areas#>
2. Source : <https://www.digitizeindia.gov.in/>
3. <https://digitalindia.gov.in/content/vision-and-vision-areas>
4. <https://www.pmgdisha.in/about-pmgdisha>
5. Source: https://www.farmer.gov.in/M_Aboutus.aspx
6. Source: [https://agmarkonline.dmi.gov.in/DMI/pages/home?\\$type=page&\\$page=13](https://agmarkonline.dmi.gov.in/DMI/pages/home?$type=page&$page=13)
7. Source : <https://agri-insurance.gov.in/AboutusLogin.aspx>
8. Source: <http://agmarknet.gov.in/OtherPages/aboutus.aspx>
9. Source: <http://agmarknet.gov.in/OtherPages/aboutus.aspx>
10. Source: <https://qms.icar.gov.in/>
11. Source: <http://www.kissankerala.net/kissan/kissancontents/about.jsp>
12. Source: <https://mkisan.gov.in/downloadmobileapps.aspx>
13. Source: <https://apps.mgov.gov.in/descp.do?appid=587>
14. Source: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=in.gov.enam&hl=en_IN
15. Source: <http://www.siffs.org/FishMarketIntelligenceSystem.html>
16. Source: [http://www.trifed.in/trifed/\(S\(jn4lsm02ks2kh0g5i2r4n5gp\)\)/mfp_network_about.aspx](http://www.trifed.in/trifed/(S(jn4lsm02ks2kh0g5i2r4n5gp))/mfp_network_about.aspx)

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